

# The God Who Is Beauty

*Beauty as a Divine Name in  
Thomas Aquinas  
and Dionysius the Areopagite*

Brendan Thomas Sammon



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James Clarke & Co

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*The God Who is Beauty*

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# The God Who Is Beauty

*Beauty as a Divine Name in Thomas Aquinas  
and Dionysius the Areopagite*

Brendan Thomas Sammon



James Clarke & Co

*For Chiara, Liam, and Raffaele*  
*The greatest beauty I have ever known*

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## Introduction

In the beginning was beauty, and beauty was with God, and beauty was God. If the tradition of divine names, which (in its Christian form) originates with Dionysius the Areopagite and includes among its ranks Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, and others, is correct in identifying God with the name beauty, then repurposing the prologue to John's Gospel in this way seems hardly controversial. For if beauty is a divine name then not only is it fitting to say God is beautiful, but it is equally fitting to say that *God is beauty itself*. However, like most arguments from fittingness—that is to say, arguments whose veracity derives from the congruency, proportion, or harmony between the various elements of a proposition or idea rather than from some categorically higher, or univocally determinate, logical necessity<sup>1</sup>—the simplicity of its utterance stands in stark contrast to the complexity of its intelligible content.

It is the aim of the present work is to explore what it means to say that beauty is a divine name. Although this aim may at first appear rather modest, it unleashes a multitude of dimensions involving both beauty as an “object” of theological inquiry as well as the nature of a divine name. These dimensions both in themselves and in their relation to each other provoke some important questions that will help to order the content in an introductory fashion.

The initial, and perhaps most significant, question to be asked is why explore this issue at all? A few different responses suggest themselves, each contributing to the overall trajectory of the present work. Firstly, although there is a multitude of studies on beauty there are none that examine it as one of the divine names. When one considers the fact that the divine names tradition is a primary conduit through which beauty enters the Christian theological tradition, the lack of such a study ought to be startling. The majority of studies on beauty have been undertaken in the field of philosophical discourse, with varying outcomes as to what beauty is depending on the fundamental disposition of the one undertaking the study.

1. On theological arguments from fittingness, see esp. Narcisse, *Les Raisons De Dieu*, 566–79.

## Introduction

However, insofar as these studies treat beauty as an object of philosophical inquiry, they necessarily treat it as a naturally occurring phenomenon detached from any essential bond with the divine. As the present work hopes to illustrate, such a treatment can only ever render an incomplete portrait of beauty.

A second reason for examining beauty as a divine name concerns the burgeoning field of theological aesthetics. “Theological aesthetics” identifies a young, and so broad, mode of theological discourse, too broad to be reducible to one overarching definition. Some, like Richard Viladesau, maintain that theological aesthetics in the most general terms involves both approaching “the aesthetic from the point of view of a “fundamental” theology,” and also “the use by theology of the language, methods, and contents of the aesthetic realm.”<sup>2</sup> That is to say, what he calls a “theopoesis”—the “art of making theological discourse affecting and beautiful”—is relevant, if not essential, to every mode of theology.<sup>3</sup> Others, like Alejandro García-Rivera, find in theological aesthetics a moment in which theology can synthesize its vast tradition with concrete particularities like culture or poetry in order to illuminate the objects of its inquiry.<sup>4</sup> In this sense, theological aesthetics involves an attempt to bring clarity to the relation between beautiful things and beauty itself, that is to say, “between Beauty’s divine origins and its appropriation by the human heart.”<sup>5</sup> Still others, like David Hart, find in beauty a means by which the content of Christianity derived from the living event of Jesus Christ may be conceived as a powerful rhetoric of peace to challenge the rhetoric of violence that marks so much contemporary discourse be it theological, philosophical, political, or otherwise.<sup>6</sup> The infinite beauty of God, which surpasses all sublimity and totality and which takes concrete form in the person of Jesus Christ, is an offering of “a peace that enters history always as rhetoric, as persuasion, as a gift that can be received only as a gift.”<sup>7</sup> Theological aesthetics, in this sense, is the most appropriate and fitting form for theological discourse insofar as it identifies the ceaseless union of theology with the rhetoric and persuasion of Christ’s beauty. These and other configurations of

2. Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics*, ix, 38.

3. *Ibid.*, 38.

4. See, e.g., García-Rivera, *Community of the Beautiful*.

5. *Ibid.*, 11.

6. Hart, *Beauty of the Infinite*.

7. *Ibid.*, 413.

theological aesthetics illustrate the variety that appears almost inevitable when the theological enterprise aligns itself with beauty.

Despite such variance, however, one prominent feature of every configuration of theological aesthetics, which has particular relevance for the present project, stands out: theological aesthetics aspires to do theology from the perspective of an alliance between beauty and reason. It is such an alliance that one finds at the very heart of the project of theological aesthetics as undertaken by Hans Urs von Balthasar, a figure who could validly be considered the father of contemporary theological aesthetics. In the first volume of his massive trilogy, Balthasar explains the importance of choosing a first word for any theological enterprise, and it is an explanation worth quoting at length:

Whoever confronts the whole truth . . . desires to choose as his first word one which he will not have to take back, one which he will not afterwards have to correct with violence, but one which is broad enough to foster and include all words to follow, and clear enough to penetrate all others with its light. . . . [It] is a word with which the philosophical person does not begin, but rather concludes. It is a word that has never possessed a permanent place or an authentic voice in the concert of the exact sciences, and, when it *is* chosen as a subject for discussion, appears to betray in him who chooses it an idle amateur among such very busy experts. It is, finally, a word from which religion, and theology in particular, have taken their leave and distanced themselves in modern times by a vigorous drawing of boundaries. . . . Beauty is the word that shall be our first.<sup>8</sup>

In the context of von Balthasar's project, a project to which almost every form of contemporary theological aesthetics owes a debt of gratitude, beauty is not simply an object to be theologically explored. Rather, calling to mind echoes of the prologue of John's Gospel, beauty is the first word—one might even say that for von Balthasar, in the beginning was the Word and the Word was beauty. Appropriating beauty as the first word of the theological enterprise serves to embed theological reasoning firmly in the depths of that modality and power of being referred to with the name beauty. Beauty is not only to be sought and explored, but it becomes the energy that fuels theological mindfulness. Of course stating the matter in this rather vague and enigmatic way does little to explain precisely what it means, and one must engage von Balthasar's monumental effort

8. Von Balthasar, *Glory of the Lord* [hereafter *GOTL*], 1:17–18.

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to acquire such an understanding of how it works itself out in his project. However, the present project aspires to contribute in its own way to better understanding the importance that beauty provides to theological discourse both as an object of theological enquiry and as an energy that fuels theological mindfulness and gives shape to theology as a unique *Denkform*. It is hoped that by the end of this book, the reader will acquire more clarity about how theology may more effectively engage beauty as a way to energize its own spiritual, contemplative, and cognitive aspirations.

There is another aspect of von Balthasar's contention cited above that is worth noting especially as it relates to contemporary theological aesthetics. He speaks of the distance that has arisen between theology and beauty in the modern era. And while his own project may have closed this distance in some respects, there remains within much contemporary thought be it philosophical, theological, or otherwise, a continuing momentum away from beauty toward the "aesthetic" (however the latter may be conceived). Although the origins of the displacement of beauty by the aesthetic are many and complex, it is possible to emphasize the influence of two seminal works: Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten's *Aesthetica* (1750), and Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (1790). Baumgarten, whose work sets the foundation for the new "science" of aesthetics, identifies beauty with the perfection of sensible cognition: *Aesthetices finis est perfectio cognitionis sensitivae, qua talis. Haec autem est pulcritudo*.<sup>9</sup> This begins a slow migration of beauty away from the realm of the intellect and more deeply into the realm of the senses, a migration that is itself exacerbated by the already growing division within modernity of intellect and sense, mind and body, thought and things. In his third *Critique*, Kant relegates beauty to the realm of nature. He defines it exclusively with respect to that which conforms to the human faculty of presentation and representation,<sup>10</sup> and replaces its once transcendental status with his configuration of the sublime. Of course, his configuration of the sublime taps into a tradition that dates back as far as the second-century figure Longinus who is believed to have written the first account of the sublime. Nevertheless, after Kant's third *Critique*, the sublime as a philosophical theme acquires more influence than it previously held.<sup>11</sup> And its influence, in many ways, fills the void left by the demotion of beauty. But the sublime is a theme that

9. Baumgarten, *Aesthetica*, pt. 1, ch. 1, §14. To my knowledge, there is currently no critical edition or English translation.

10. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, bk. 2, §23.

11. See, e.g., Shaw, *Sublime*. Axelsson, *Sublime*.

is perhaps best treated at another time. Suffice it to say, the Baumgarten-Kantian heritage, wherein beauty is identified in some form or another as the result of a judgment of taste upon some phenomena, comes to mark the whole of the modern project of aesthetics.

By the time aesthetics becomes recognized as an independent branch of academic discourse, it has eclipsed beauty despite the fact that “the aesthetic” remains a rather vague reference. In his 2004 Presidential Address to the American Society for Aesthetics, to cite as one bit of evidence, Kendall Walton calls aesthetics a “strange field and in some ways a confused one,” whose “confusion is that of an adolescent trying to find itself.”<sup>12</sup> Walton proceeds to explain that despite the confusion surrounding whatever it is that the name “aesthetics” signifies, one thing is certain: the “aesthetic” has for most replaced beauty.<sup>13</sup> For many in the various other fields (philosophy, sociology, history, anthropology, etc.), beauty is left behind as a vestige of a primitive past to make room for the aesthetic.<sup>14</sup> This signals a remarkable shift in the development of Western thought that in many ways parallels the shift of philosophical focus from being to thought within certain dominant modes of modern philosophical enquiry. And if the “aesthetic” in itself remains rather confused and without a solid identity, what might that mean for a mode of theology that aspires to appropriate it for its purposes? It is the hope of the present project to minimize any confusion that might shadow various configurations of theological aesthetics, not by reestablishing beauty’s superiority over the aesthetic, but by reawakening contemporary consciousness to the necessity of beauty’s role that has long shaped the origins of Western thought in all human thinking and being. It is hoped that by illuminating the way that beauty is understood in its association with the divine, space may continue to be opened to begin to rethink its importance for the theological task today.

In this sense, the present project views itself as contributing, not only to the broad work of theology in general, but also to all enterprises that identify themselves as theological aesthetics. Nevertheless, an important distinction must be noted. The division between the aesthetic and beauty that arises with the modern period and endures today bears itself out as a distinction within theological aesthetics, not unlike the distinction between knowing and being that acquires more emphasis in modern philosophy. On the one hand, there are those modes of theological aesthetics that,

12. Walton, “Aesthetics,” 147.

13. *Ibid.*, 149. Cf. also Nehamas, *Only a Promise of Happiness*, 10.

14. E.g., Dufrene, *Phénoménologie de l'expérience esthétique*.

## Introduction

conceding the primacy of the aesthetic over beauty, configure the theological task in dialogue with the “arts” as that term is understood today. This approach to theological aesthetics in general does not dismiss questions of beauty, but rather casts them within the context of artistic agencies and works. This approach contends that the various mysteries that theology investigates may be illuminated by applying strategies, grammars, ways of thinking, ways of perceiving, ways of performing, etc. that derive from the many modes of artistic expression and experience.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, there are those modes of theological aesthetics that emphasize the role and significance of beauty as a primary component of the theological enterprise. Throughout the Western intellectual tradition, from the ancient Greeks well up until the high middle ages, beauty is understood as both spiritual and material, as that mode of being that gives form, as the power of being to entice the intellect through formal proportion and symmetry into being’s own ontological depths. For these reasons and others, there is a ready-made fittingness between beauty and Christian theology: deriving as it does from the person of Jesus Christ—the very incarnation of the perfect proportion and symmetry between the material and the spiritual—Christian theology sees in beauty a powerful ally as it attempts to engage and illuminate the many mysteries that come to constitute its object. A similar perspective motivates contemporary practitioners of theological aesthetics who emphasize the place and significance of beauty. Quite naturally, with few exceptions, this mode of theological aesthetics also tends to embody a strong metaphysical dimension. However, because the term “metaphysics” names diverse modes of mindfulness that—*pace* Heidegger—cannot be subsumed under one characterization, it is configured in varying ways within this second mode of theological aesthetics. For example, the way that metaphysics factors into the Balthasarian project—as the history of Western philosophy’s narrative(s) of being—differs in many significant respects from the way it factors into Hart’s project, which configures metaphysics as the rhetorical power of Christ’s beauty. Nevertheless, both may validly be considered metaphysical insofar as they, and other such configurations of theological aesthetics, attempt to examine the relation between the natural and the supernatural, the physical and the “beyond” physical, the finite and the infinite, or the created and the Creating. In sum, then, within this intra-theological aesthetic distinction between the aesthetic and beauty, the present project sees itself as between the two insofar as it examines beauty as a divine name. A divine

15. See, e.g., Begbie, *Beholding the Glory*; Viladesau, *Theology and the Arts*.

name, as will be explained further on, is conceived as a communication of God's very self into the created order; it is a divine perfection that enters into the formal constitution of created entities. Examining beauty in this sense, then, has obvious resonances with the second mode of theological aesthetics that includes a strong metaphysical dimension. But it also holds relevance for the first mode insofar as it enables a more complete portrait of the foundations upon which all arts situate themselves, and the ends to which all arts, consciously or unconsciously, are striving.

A second question is why Dionysius and why Aquinas? The reasons for examining the issue of beauty as a divine name in Dionysius the Areopagite are straightforward: within the history of Christian theology, this enigmatic figure is the first to enlist beauty within the tradition of the divine names. To be sure, he is not the first to include the divine names in his theological synthesis; given its place in later Neoplatonism, the divine names as a theological trope influences a great number of Greek Fathers. Until the *Corpus Dionysiacum* makes its appearance in the sixth century, however, beauty is not included among the divine names as used by Christian theologians. Examining the historical contours of this matter may enable a more complete picture of the Dionysian project, both in itself and in its relation to its influences, textual sources, and historical context. And a more complete picture of Dionysius may contribute to further understanding the thinkers of the middle ages upon whom his influence cannot be overstated. In this respect, Aquinas serves not only as a representative of the scholastic embodiment of the Dionysian project, but also as one of Dionysius's most notable collaborators. More than any other figure including Aristotle, Dionysius exercises the most influence upon Thomas at least if frequency of citation is the determining criteria. Understandably, some would point to the number of commentaries Thomas wrote, and perhaps the esteem given to Aristotle as "the philosopher," rather than frequency of citation in order to emphasize his Aristotelian influence. But even if such a point is valid, it does not merit the degree to which Aristotle has eclipsed Dionysius in the history of Thomistic commentary and scholarship. Examining the issue of beauty as a divine name in Aquinas serves to contribute to a more complete portrait of the Angelic Doctor as well as a more complete portrait of the commentary tradition that he generates and the influence that he exercises upon a host of philosophical and theological thought.

With all the preceding in mind, the present work proceeds as follows. It is divided into three primary parts, each addressing distinct phases

## *Introduction*

of the development of beauty's association with the divine. Part 1, which consists of the first two chapters, examines the origins of the association between beauty and the divine as those origins are conceived and expressed in ancient Greek thought. Chapter 1 examines the work of Plato and Aristotle, both of whom bear tremendous importance to the Western understanding of beauty in general and the relation between beauty and the divine in particular. However, what emerges from this study is that despite their every effort, neither thinker is ultimately able to overcome the ambiguity inherent to beauty. In fact, it is in large part thanks to their remarkable philosophical skills that this ambiguity is revealed. It is an ambiguity that derives from the fact that beauty is somehow both a fully spiritual phenomenon, but somehow essentially bound up with the transient, material order. Both philosophers provide their most significant contributions not only in terms of the positive content of beauty they discover, but more so in drawing out the complex contours of beauty's inherent ambiguity. Chapter 2 then examines the issue as it is taken up into Neoplatonic projects of Plotinus and Proclus. Like Plato and Aristotle, both Neoplatonists contribute significant ideas to understanding the positive content of beauty. And also like Plato and Aristotle, Plotinus and Proclus continue to throw light on the inherent ambiguity within beauty's association with the supreme principle, in this case the One Good. One subtle difference, however, between these Neoplatonists and their philosophical predecessors that will be drawn out in this second chapter is the way in which the more spiritual or religious dimension of Neoplatonism enables it to somewhat relieve beauty's ambiguity by crystalizing the ambiguity itself into a paradigmatic middle. In other words, the more spiritual or religious dimension allows Neoplatonism to recognize ambiguity itself as thought's mystical "other" rather than having to philosophically resolve it. But crystalizing the ambiguity is not so much an act of overcoming it as it is a concession to it. The fundamental argument in this first part is that despite their remarkable efforts, the great minds of Greek thought are simply unable to find a way to mediate the spiritual dimension of beauty with its essential bond to the material, transient order.

Part 2 examines the way in which the Dionysian phenomenon establishes the foundations for understanding the identity between beauty and God. Chapter 3 begins the examination by exploring the so-called tradition of the divine names. It is a tradition that Dionysius refers to in the opening chapter of his treatise, but that he never mentions again anywhere in his corpus. The obvious foundation that many scholars believe

constitutes this tradition is the Neoplatonic configuration especially as it is worked out in Proclus. Given the historical context in which Dionysius is believed to have lived and studied, the important Procline influence cannot be overlooked. However, a close examination of the Dionysian treatise reveals several important differences between the way he understands the tradition of the divine names and the way that tradition appears throughout Neoplatonism. One must look, therefore, to the biblical tradition that, by Dionysius's own declaration, provides the central foundation for his whole corpus. It will be the task of the third chapter to examine the ways in which both traditions factor into the Dionysian understanding of the divine names.

Chapters 4 and 5 proceed with an examination of beauty as it is found in the Dionysian treatise *On the Divine Names*. A primary feature of beauty in the Dionysian account is that it refers both to God as he is in himself and God as he is in his communicative self-disclosure. How exactly Dionysius comes to this association is not definitively clear, but evidence can be acquired from the way in which he develops Neoplatonic thought. It is believed that one particularly original move made by Dionysius is to unite the One and the *nous* of Neoplatonism into two dimensions of the one Judeo-Christian Godhead: the One becomes aligned with God as he is in himself, while *nous* becomes aligned with God as he is in his self-communicative disclosure. The present work argues that when the addition of beauty to the tradition of the divine names is read alongside this other original development, one may speak of a coincidence of originality with respect to beauty as a divine name. Beauty associated with God as he is in himself is primarily configured as a transcendental plenitude and provides the content for chapter 4, while beauty associated with God as he is in his self-communicative disclosure is primarily configured as a principle of determination and provides the content for chapter 5.

Finally, part 2 is brought to a conclusion with chapter 6, which examines the relation between the Dionysian God who is beauty and the Neoplatonic One. This issue becomes important given the widespread view among twentieth-century scholars that the Dionysian God is little more than the Neoplatonic One disguised in Christian garments. As this chapter argues, however, when one considers the association between beauty and God in Dionysius, it becomes evidently clear that the Areopagite is far removed from viewing God as the Neoplatonic One.

Part 3 then examines the issue of beauty as a divine name as it appears in Thomas's commentary on the Dionysian text. In order to establish

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some important foundational points for the examination, however, the first two chapters of part 3 consider some historical developments: chapter 7 examines the journey that the *Corpus Dionysiacum* undergoes as it travels to the Latin West and eventually arrives at the University of Paris, while chapter 8 examines the journey that beauty's association with the divine undergoes as it is passed on through the various thinkers, traditions, and schools of thought. Chapter 9 then examines beauty as a divine name in Thomas's teacher Albertus Magnus, through whom the Dionysian spirit is primarily passed on to Thomas. Although there are many similarities between Albert and Thomas, the differences serve to not only distinguish Thomas from his teacher but also to illuminate Thomas's own thought more clearly.

Building upon these historical developments, the final three chapters contain a specific examination of Thomas's treatment of beauty in his *Commentary on the Divine Names*. As of the writing of the present work, there are no extant English or French translations of the commentary, a fact which in many ways may account for the incomplete, if not insufficient, portrait of Thomas's views of beauty. The argument that runs throughout these final three chapters is that beauty for Thomas is primarily a theological phenomenon deriving as it does from the Dionysian tradition of the divine names. Chapter 10 provides a close reading of how Thomas understands the nature of a divine name as this notion appears throughout the commentary. What comes to light from this reading is that, although expressing himself through a scholastic idiom that may appear to suggest otherwise, Thomas does not veer very far from the Dionysian understanding that a divine name is in between God in himself and God in his self-communication. Chapter 11 then examines the various ways in which Thomas understands beauty as he encounters it within the pages of the Dionysian text, while chapter 12 examines the way that Thomas develops his doctrine of beauty as a divine name in his later work. The focus in chapter 12 will be on the *Summa Theologiae*, though other important works will be taken into consideration.

Most fundamentally, the present work is an examination and exposition of a relation and relations. The primary relation concerns that between beauty and God, but this relation is such that it embodies several others: the relation between the material and the spiritual, between the created and the Creating, between nature and that which transcends nature, between various created entities, between thought and being, between faith and reason, and even, though in a very subtle way, between grace and

nature. Such relations within relations is a fitting orientation from which to begin an exploration of beauty as a divine name.

PART ONE

# I

## Beauty and the Divine in Ancient Greek

### Philosophy

#### *Plato and Aristotle*

THE ROOTS OF THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN BEAUTY AND THE DIVINE reach well into the soil of ancient Greek philosophy. This chapter examines this association as it is considered in the thought of the two greatest representatives of that epoch, namely Plato and Aristotle. For both thinkers, beauty is a phenomenon deemed worthy of philosophical inquiry. However, as this chapter will argue, despite every effort to philosophically examine beauty, neither Plato nor Aristotle is able to resolve the tension between beauty as a transcendental, spiritual phenomenon and beauty as manifest in concrete, material forms. Nevertheless, it is precisely their inability to overcome this tension that constitutes their contribution to the issue of beauty as a divine name. For both philosophers, the relationship between beauty and the divine is best characterized as one of ambiguity, but an ambiguity with complex contours. In attempting a philosophical consideration of beauty and its association with the divine, both Plato and Aristotle succeed precisely where they appear to fail. In being unable to discern unequivocally how to identify beauty and the divine they bring to light some of the most significant layers of difficulty involved in such an enterprise. This illuminating ambiguity becomes the treasure they bequeath to posterity.

This chapter begins by examining how Plato configures the association between beauty and the divine. The examination looks to four primary texts where this association is most explicit: the *Hippias Major*, the *Symposium*, the *Phaedrus*, and the *Timeaus*. When read together, each of these texts constitute an important dimension of what is a much broader Platonic vision of beauty's relation to the divine. These four texts are ordered according to the way in which Plato's treatment reflects its own sort

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of anagogy: from beauty in itself, to beauty as a principle, to beauty as transcendent, to beauty as cosmological. It is within this transcending trajectory where the ambiguity of Plato's association of beauty with the divine becomes most visible.

The second part of the chapter examines the issue within the work of Aristotle. The approach taken is most fundamentally a metaphysical one in which the relation between beauty and the divine is discerned from his metaphysical accounts of origination and teleology. In an effort to avoid any anachronisms that may result from looking at Aristotelian beauty from within some putative Aristotelian "aesthetic," this chapter contends that the most accurate and valid approach is to examine beauty insofar as it is treated as a metaphysical theme. Hence, the primary text to be evaluated is his *Metaphysics*, though other texts are also considered. When Aristotle's metaphysics of beauty is set alongside Plato's, a shared ambiguity with respect to beauty's relation to the divine becomes evident. But where Plato's ambiguity can be cast within a trajectory toward transcendence, Aristotle's ambiguity can be seen within his trajectory toward the immanence of form. Together, both thinkers draw out several of the problematic contours of how beauty relates to the divine and consequently set the stage wherein these problematic dimensions may be overcome.

## Plato

Beauty holds an esteemed place among those phenomena Plato finds worthy of philosophical inquiry. So much is this the case that his various accounts depicting philosophical inquiry into the phenomenon of beauty often leave the sympathetic reader with a sense that in beauty Plato sees something of the divine. Such a seeing, however, remains rather cloudy, and the reader hoping to discern the contours of how Plato understands the relation between beauty and the divine must overcome a few obstacles.

First, contrary to what one might expect from a thinker concerned with Socratic elenchus, Plato does not provide a systematic, or "definitional," elaboration of beauty in any one dialogue. The treatment of justice in the *Gorgias*, or of wisdom in the *Philebus*, for instance, might naturally lead one to assume that perhaps Plato might apply a similar kind of treatment to beauty. It is an assumption that at first appears confirmed by the contents of the *Hippias Major*. Only rather than uncovering the essential qualities of beauty, in this dialogue Plato instead provides evidence of beauty's recalcitrance to certain modes of rational inquiry. And so,

unlike justice or wisdom, beauty remains beyond the discursive limits of definition and determination even as it provokes the activity of discursive thought. In other dialogues where beauty is given a prominent place, most significantly the *Symposium*, the *Phaedrus*, and the *Timeaus*, it is a theme that continues to be philosophically treated though in a much less direct way. Without any specific definition of beauty, a unique challenge is posed to the examination of how beauty relates to the divine in Plato.

This situation generates a second obstacle, which concerns the question of how to begin and sustain such an examination. More to the point, what sort of organizing principle might facilitate reading the association between beauty and the divine given the preceding observations? While it is true that beauty in some form or another permeates the whole of the Platonic corpus, influencing other themes in a variety of ways,<sup>1</sup> it is principally conceived as a manifestation of a transcendent intelligence that calls all other intelligences to itself by giving the power to name.<sup>2</sup> Beginning from this preliminary elaboration of beauty the question becomes how to exegetically organize those dialogues in which Plato treats beauty.

Recently, Drew Hyland has recognized the dialectical interplay of the discursive and the non-discursive that seems native to Plato's account of beauty. In order to manage this dialectic within the scope of Plato's work, he proposes a taxonomy that orders Plato's dialogues according to the extent to which a given theme acts as the *focus* of the dialogue.<sup>3</sup> Thus, there are dialogues that address a theme "focally" with the goal of defining the topic in question, and dialogues that address a theme "focally" where the goal is *not* to arrive at a formal definition. But there are also dialogues that treat a given theme "non-focally," or only indirectly. And there are dialogues that are silent on a given theme in both an absolute sense (no dialogue, for example, treats the theme of the historical process) and a "striking" sense in which the silence invites one to think about the absence. Within this taxonomy, the examination of beauty as manifestation of a divine intelligence follows a revealing trajectory in its treatment from

1. For an illuminating account of beauty in the whole of Plato, we would direct the reader to the third volume of von Balthasar's *Glory of the Lord*, 155–231, where he expounds the ways in which the whole of the Platonic corpus bears witness to a theology of glory or revelation. While von Balthasar's work has not been a primary influence on the present study, its contribution to the general climate of any theology of beauty cannot be overstated.

2. Cf. *Cratylus* 416b–e, in which an etymological analysis of *καλόν* reveals its link with a naming intelligence.

3. Hyland, *Plato and the Question of Beauty*, 1–6.

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the *Hippias Major* to the *Symposium* to the *Phaedrus* to the *Timeaus*. The *Hippias Major* contains the most focal treatment of beauty though with the intention of not arriving at a definition, while the *Symposium* treats beauty somewhat indirectly in terms of its relationship with love. The *Phaedrus* treats beauty in a more non-focal, existential context as a way to penetrate its enigmatic content and efficacy. The *Timeaus* can then be read as an origin/final end account of how the beauty of the world manifests the power of the divine intelligence. It is upon this trajectory that the dialectic at play in Platonic beauty between what is beyond discursive reasoning and what gives itself over to discursive thought, and thus the complexity of the relation between beauty and the divine, may be best recognized.

### *The Hippias Major*

The question around which the *Hippias Major* revolves concerns the nature of beauty: “What must beauty by itself be in order to explain why we apply the word to beautiful things?” (288a).<sup>4</sup> After Hippias attempts to answer this question, each time providing particular examples of beautiful things, Socrates clarifies, “I am asking, sir, what is beauty itself?” (292d). Hippias’s sophistry is, in part, what is on trial here. The rather myopic responses it causes Hippias to bring forth all fall short of the fundamental desire of Socrates’ inquiry. Particular things that are beautiful announce the universal beauty, and it is primarily the latter that interests Plato’s teacher.

The results of the dialogue penetrate the intelligibility of beauty by drawing out beauty’s resistance to the efforts of normal, discursive thought. Hippias provides a few different, though sophistic, responses to determine the nature of beauty *per se*. He first agrees with Socrates’s suggestion that the “appropriate” (τὸ πρέπον) is what makes all things beautiful. Not only does *Hippias* affirm this but, when pressed, he contends that it is what makes all things beautiful both insofar as they *appear* beautiful and insofar as they *are* beautiful.<sup>5</sup> Socrates refutes this by contending that if the same thing, namely the “appropriate,” was cause of both the being and the appearance of beauty, then there could be no disagreement among persons and peoples regarding what is beautiful—for “the same cause could never

4. References to the *Hippias Major* will be parenthetically noted in the main body. For excerpts from the *Hippias Major*, *Symposium*, *Phaedrus*, and *Timaeus*, the Greek text used is from Plato, *Platonis Opera*, ed. Burnet.

5. *Hippias Major* 294c: ἀλλὰ τὸ πρέπον, ὃ Σώκρατες, καὶ εἶναι καὶ φαίνεσθαι ποιεῖ καλὰ παρόν.

make things both appear and be either beautiful or anything else.”<sup>6</sup> If it were true that something made things both to appear and to be beautiful, then it would be impossible for beautiful things to fail to appear beautiful to all. With this remark Plato introduces the tension that arises between beauty’s appearance available to judgment and the common nature that all such judgments affirm; that is to say, the tension between surface (appearance) and depth (being). If both of these aspects derive univocally from the same cause (the appropriate, e.g.) then this distinction, so essential to Platonic ontology, would collapse.<sup>7</sup> Entities, then, would lose their power to refer to a world more real than the one that appears and, simultaneously, the world as it is would be taken as the fullness of reality. Plato’s rejection of the “appropriate” as that which accounts for both beauty’s appearance and its being, or its surface and its depth, is a tacit rejection of subsuming beauty under a broader univocal principle.

The “useful” (*χρήσιμον*) is posited next as a possible definition, especially for the way it resolves this tension by synthesizing beauty’s nature in the form of a *telos* with its particular appearance.<sup>8</sup> Usefulness unites appearance with end without reducing one to the other. Hence “powerful” is introduced as synonymous with “useful.” A thing is useful insofar as its manifest form embodies its natural end, that is to say, insofar as it has the power to achieve its natural purpose. Usefulness and power, however, are equally applicable to those things that bring about something evil and ugly, and for this reason cannot be the essence of beauty.

Perhaps, suggests Socrates, the beautiful is defined as that which is “profitable” or “beneficial” (*ωφέλιμα*), since all things that are beautiful, whether bodies, rules of life or wisdom, share in common the fact that they benefit the one affected by their beauty.<sup>9</sup> The question as to whether the “beneficial” identifies the essence of beauty derives from the previous inquiry. Although beauty is ultimately not identified with usefulness or power, insofar as these are all ordered toward the good there is a valid association between them on account of this ordering. The consequences of such an ordering is the benefit provided, and so it appears plausible to suggest this as the essence of beauty. Beauty’s beneficence derives from the fact that it produces or causes the good. But this definition subordinates

6. *Hippias Major* 294e: φαίνεσθαι δὲ καὶ [ποιεῖν] εἶναι οὐ μόνον καλὰ οὐκ ἂν ποτε δύναίτο τὸ αὐτό, ἀλλ’ οὐδὲ ἄλλο ὅτιοῦν.

7. Cf. *Republic* VI, 507bc; *Timaeus* 51d.

8. *Hippias Major* 295c: τοῦτο γὰρ δὴ ἔστω ἡμῖν καλόν, ὃ ἂν χρήσιμον ᾖ.

9. *Hippias Major* 296e: οὕτω δὴ καὶ τὰ καλὰ σώματα καὶ τὰ καλὰ νόμιμα καὶ ἡ σοφία καὶ ἡ νυνδὴ ἐλέγομεν πάντα καλὰ ἔστιν, ὅτι ὠφέλιμα.

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the good to beauty thus rupturing their alleged unity. There are a number of occasions elsewhere in his corpus where Plato insists on this unity, though the specific contours of this unity remains complex.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, their unity becomes the reason why beauty cannot be defined as the “beneficial.” Plato insists that, given the necessary difference between cause and effect, if beauty is said to cause the good it would follow that beauty is not good nor the good beautiful.

Finally, the two consider to what extent the pleasure that comes through sight and hearing can be validly proffered as a definition for beauty,<sup>11</sup> and conclude that because this would implicate a dependency on the sensible world, it cannot be a valid definition of beauty in itself. Whatever beauty might be, it cannot be exhausted by the senses given its immense appeal to intellectual inquiry.

Following Hyland’s taxonomy, this can be read as a dialogue in which beauty is a “focal” theme rather than one that merely uses beauty in the service of a more general issue like predication or linguistic analysis. One of the principal points being made, it seems, is that beauty is intelligible in a way that exceeds the limitations that are associated with definition. It might even be suggested that, in the views expressed in the *Hippias Major*, beauty exceeds in its fullness the very structure of discursive thought altogether (*dianoia*)—not, to be sure, in such a way as to exclude discursion but rather in such a way as to exceed it while including it. It might be said that the dialogue establishes Plato’s insight that beauty is excessively inclusive of discursive thought.

Hippias’s sophistry is significant for this interpretation. Throughout his writings, Plato characterizes sophists as thinkers whose overblown confidence in their ability to acquire knowledge inhibits their minds from seeing that which exceeds their own conceptual and discursive limitations.<sup>12</sup> Reared in that tradition introduced by its earliest and greatest advocate, Protagoras, sophistry holds as its fundamental principle that man is the measure of all things. In ways that anticipate modernity’s autonomous knower, the sophist reduces the richness of thought to self-determination. Indeed many of Plato’s dialogues can be read as an effort to open sophistic self-determinate knowing to the realm of poetic imagination, where an

10. See, *inter alia*, *Lysis* 216d; *Gorgias* 474c–475a; *Timaeus* 87c; *Philebus* 65a (in *Plato: The Collected Dialogues*).

11. *Hippias Major* 298a: τὸ καλὸν ἐστὶ τὸ δι’ ἀκοῆς τε καὶ δι’ ὄψεως ἡδύ

12. Cf. *Republic* VI, 493bc.

excess of otherness enraptures and energizes thought.<sup>13</sup> As a representative of such sophistry, Hippias is simply incapable of grasping the fullness of beauty. As that which inspires the activity of discursive thought precisely by being in excess of it, an inspiration so demonstrated by the very content of the *Hippias Major*, beauty cannot be captured in its boundaries.<sup>14</sup>

Beauty appears to present Plato with a problem akin to what he encounters in poetry. Plato is clear that poetry forbids discursive thinking, and for this reason he believes it justifiable to forbid poetry in the city except the hymns to the gods and the praises of good men.<sup>15</sup> Plato admits, however, that poetry also induces delight, pleasure and even love, watering the pains and pleasures of the soul. Certain forms of poetry, then, are deemed acceptable, even valuable.

The tension in Plato's views of poetry and how this plays out in human thinking is perhaps instructive for his views on beauty. Beauty is a phenomenon in excess of definition and discursive thought. At the same time, because it appears in real, concrete things, beauty continually and attractively offers itself as an object of inquiry. It therefore somehow appeals to the discursive impulse within reason. What sort of phenomenon, Plato seems to ask in the *Hippias Major*, could be so present and so elusive at the very same time, capable of attracting intellectual curiosity with such vigor only to leave the inquiring intellect unrequited in its desire for determination? Plato's answer: a phenomenon whose complexity goes beyond the *Denkform* associated with discursive thought and penetrates to the fullness of existence, to the core of a way of life; a phenomenon the investigation of which carries the inquiring intellect beyond its normal means of analysis to a dimension where failure may be indicative of transcendent success; a phenomenon whose complexity burdens reason

13. For the best example of such a reading, see Desmond, *Art, Origin, and Otherness*, ch. 1. As Desmond notes, associating the name "Plato" with a philosophical imagination may at first seem odd, "since Plato is taken as the implacable foe of the poets. But," he proceeds to ask, "who has endowed the philosophical tradition more richly with its philosophical images, such as the Cave, the Sun, the winged soul, and so on? Do not these images present some of the imaginative universals of philosophy itself, to which thinkers return again and again, and not because they are deficient in speculative reason but because something offers itself for thought that is in excess of the concept?" (19–20).

14. Stanelly Rosen argues for a similar understanding with respect to *logos* in *Plato's Republic*, 264–65: "Logos itself cannot be simply discursive; if it were the Ideas would be linguistic entities and the whole significance of the metaphor of the sun would be lost."

15. *Rep.* X, 605b; Cf. Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, 18–20.

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with the weight of non-discursive—or perhaps “trans-discursive,” or “overly-discursive”—intelligibility. As an intelligibility that immerses and overwhelms thought, beauty, it seems, bears a closer kinship with *noesis* than *dianoia*; it is the surplus or excess of intelligible content that prompts the energy of discursion, definition and determination. But in prompting, nurturing, and energizing discursive thought, beauty bears a significant even indelible relation to *dianoia*. Or, perhaps, beauty corresponds to the always-arriving unity of *noesis* and *dianoia*. In any case, with respect to the text of Plato these remain speculative claims. What can be confirmed, and what appears certain in the dialogue, is that beauty is elusive to the kind of reasoning that not only dominates the sophistic mind but also permeates all self-sufficient thinking. Plato thus ends his inquiry with Socrates coming to fuller realization of the proverb, “all that is beautiful is difficult.”<sup>16</sup>

### *The Symposium*

Rather than approaching the theme of beauty in search of definition, in the *Symposium* Plato treats beauty as a transcendental, and at times “divine,” phenomenon whose intelligibility is sought more properly through love rather than discursive knowledge. By reading the *Symposium* in its relation to the more “beauty-focal” *Hippias Major* and the “beauty-non-focal” *Phaedrus*, it can be viewed as a dialogue that continues the search for the intelligibility of beauty especially insofar as beauty relates to love and the divine order. This reading stands in contrast with those scholars who presuppose some determinate understanding of beauty and use it to interpret the dialogue’s account of *eros*.<sup>17</sup> When situated alongside the *Hippias Major* and the *Phaedrus*, it becomes clear that Plato makes no such presuppositions about beauty.

The focal point of this dialogue is a song of praise to the “god of love” (177c). Love is praised in a variety of ways, each one relevant to the overall portrait of this “god.” Phaedrus opens the symphony of praise extolling love as “a great god, wonderful alike to the gods and to mankind”;<sup>18</sup> as “ancient source of all our highest goods”;<sup>19</sup> as that which alone “will make

16. *Hippias Major* 304e: ἐγὼ οὖν μοι δοκῶ, ὦ Ἰππία, ὠφελῆσθαι ἀπὸ τῆς ἀμφοτέρων ὑμῶν ὁμιλίας: τὴν γὰρ παροιμίαν ὅτι ποτὲ λέγει, τὸ “χαλεπὰ τὰ καλὰ,” δοκῶ μοι εἰδέναι.

17. See, e.g., Strauss, *On Plato’s Symposium*, ch. 9.

18. *Symposium* 178a: ὅτι μέγας θεὸς εἶη ὁ Ἔρως καὶ θαυμαστός ἐν ἀνθρώποις τε καὶ θεοῖς.

19. *Symposium* 178c: πρεσβύτατος δὲ ὢν μεγίστων ἀγαθῶν ἡμῖν αἰτίος ἐστίν.

a man offer his life for another's";<sup>20</sup> and as "the oldest and most glorious of the gods, the great giver of all goodness and happiness to men, alike to the living and the dead."<sup>21</sup> Given the general and broad nature of Phaedrus's song of praise, as well as its position in the order of speeches, it fills the role of an introduction with little concern for relevant distinctions. Pausanias, whose account immediately follows, begins the process of distinction adding that one must differentiate between earthly love, which is more sensible, material and "shallow," and heavenly love, which is of a more vigorous and intellectual bent. Amidst this distinction, Pausanias adds that love "is neither good nor bad, but only insofar as it leads to either good or bad behavior."<sup>22</sup> This distinction calls to mind the distinction between appearance and being, or surface and depth, elaborated in the *Hippias Major*. It is no surprise, then, that this is precisely where beauty enters the discussion as it is brought into a constitutive association with the two kinds of love insofar as they correspond to consequent behavior. Love in its earthly form is, in part, constituted by an attraction rooted in transient beauty that, deriving from worldly things, passes away with the decay of the material adornment. In contrast, the love of one whose "heart is touched by moral beauties is constant all his life, for he has become one with what will never fade."<sup>23</sup>

Eryximachus, who begins his account where Pausanias breaks off, agrees with the fact that love attracts the soul to human beauty (186a), but adds that it also attracts the soul to many things besides this. All such attractions are brought together under the names of "harmony and rhythm" (187c). It is at this point where Plato makes a reference to what is the earliest and most widely recognized attribute of beauty, namely, symmetry.<sup>24</sup> The association between love and symmetry in this passage leads to the conclusion that, while the two types of love (i.e., material and spiritual) appear to be in conflict, they relate to each other through mutual moderation. This is because in every instance of love, they appear together (187e). Love, as Eryximachus recognizes, is a single reality with a diver-

20. *Symposium* 179bc: καὶ μὴν ὑπεραποθνήσκειν γε μόνου ἐθέλουσιν οἱ ἐρῶντες.

21. *Symposium* 180bc: οὕτω δὴ ἔγωγέ φημι ἔρωτα θεῶν καὶ πρεσβύτατον καὶ τιμιώτατον καὶ κυριώτατον εἶναι εἰς ἀρετῆς καὶ εὐδαιμονίας κτῆσιν ἀνθρώποις καὶ ζῶσι καὶ τελευτήσασιν.

22. *Symposium* 183e: ὅπερ ἐξ ἀρχῆς ἐλέχθη οὔτε καλὸν εἶναι αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτὸ οὔτε αἰσχρόν, ἀλλὰ καλῶς μὲν πραττόμενον καλόν, αἰσχροῦς δὲ αἰσχρόν.

23. *Symposium* 183e: ὁ δὲ τοῦ ἦθους χρηστοῦ ὄντος ἐραστῆς διὰ βίου μένει, ἅτε μονίμῳ συνταχεῖς.

24. Cf. Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics*, 1:12–89.

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sity of modalities, anticipating what with Plotinus would later become an explicit identification of beauty. At this point in the dialogue, however, the association between love and beauty has not yet become explicit. Rather, it remains implicit, though discernable within a trajectory of transcendence; as it is examined in the dialogue's order of speeches, love becomes more and more opened to its relationship with beauty as it "ascends" into beauty's transcendent depths.

This ascent is taken further when Aristophanes begins his song of praise. There are two notable features of his account. First, he opens by asserting that "mankind has never had any conception of the power of Love, for if we had known him as he really is, surely we should have raised the mightiest temples and altars, and offered the most splendid sacrifices, in his honor and not—as in fact we do—utterly neglect him."<sup>25</sup> The language, which appears exaggerated ("never," "utterly neglect"), draws out the contrast between love as it is in itself, that is to say in the fullness of its nature, and the human capacity to conceive it (*ἡσθησθαι*).<sup>26</sup> In this way, Aristophanes's account of love, at least in this aspect, bears remarkable similarity to the *Hippias Major's* conclusion about beauty. In both cases, the failure of human thought (*dianoia*) does not prevent certain aspects of the phenomenon in question from communicating its intelligibility. In the same way that the point of the *Hippias Major* is not to demonstrate the complete lack of intelligibility in beauty, so neither ought Aristophanes' assertion be taken as a denial that love is intelligible. Rather, love's intelligibility exceeds discursive reason (*dianoia*) in a way that the intelligibility of the absolute exceeds the discursion of the mathematician (Rep. VI, 509b—511c). Indeed, as Plato's entire corpus demonstrates, one's pursuit of such objects requires the drama and narrative structure of myth; that is to say, a dialectical method in which discursive reason engages more concrete phenomena.<sup>27</sup> Aristophanes consequently appeals to the concrete drama of religious narrative and myth as he continues his song of praise.

25. *Symposium* 189c: ἐμοὶ γὰρ δοκοῦσιν ἄνθρωποι παντάπασι τὴν τοῦ ἔρωτος δύναμιν οὐκ ἡσθησθαι, ἐπεὶ αἰσθανόμενοι γε μέγιστ' ἂν αὐτοῦ ἱερὰ κατασκευάσαι καὶ βωμούς, καὶ θυσίας ἂν ποιεῖν μεγίστας, οὐχ ὥσπερ νῦν τούτων οὐδὲν γίγνεται περὶ αὐτόν, δέον πάντων μάλιστα γίγνεσθαι. Here, we follow the translation of Joyce from *Plato: The Collected Dialogues*.

26. The word *ἡσθησθαι* is defined as "perception by the senses" but also "perception by the mind, understanding." It is the latter definition that appears to have influenced Joyce's translation as "conception."

27. Cf. Desjardins, *Plato and the Good*, 82, who describes this in the following way: "Just as our empirical claims at level 2 (*pistis*) are tested against their sensory perceptual 'reflections' at level 1 (*eikasia*), so must our conceptual claims at level 3

Second, Aristophanes' religious narrative provides an account of the origins of the sexes in order to make the point that love derives from an original anthropic union: "So you see, gentlemen, how far back we can trace our innate love for one another, and how this love is always trying to reintegrate our former nature, to make two into one, and to bridge the gulf between one human being and another?"<sup>28</sup> This is the original state of wholeness that Plato associates both with the origins of love as well as the final goal to which all love is striving (193a). The origins of love reach back further than discursive reason alone can carry the intellect, and its finality extends further than discursive reason alone can extend itself. Consequently narrative and myth, modes of discourse embodying a mode of mind that is more extensive than discursive reason alone, are utilized as a strategy for examining the matter.

Agathon's penultimate account is the account of a poet, a fact with significant relevance for examining beauty. In his speech, Agathon continues to develop love within this transcendent trajectory, or ascent into beauty's transcendent depths. Since he shifts the focus somewhat to praising love first for what it is and second for what it gives or does, Agathon is viewed by some scholars as a figure representing the attempt to clarify the essence of love before making inferences about what it does.<sup>29</sup> It is within this relation between essence and act where Agathon's speech becomes most significant and where it becomes most difficult with respect to beauty. Agathon takes a final step in bringing love and beauty together when he declares that although all the gods are blessed, love is the most blessed since it is the loveliest (195b), the youngest (195c, 196a), capable of kindling in the souls of others a poetic fire (196e). Beauty in this sense is constitutive of the *essence* of love; it is "love's loveliness," as it were (196b). He also asserts that the very actions of the gods are governed by the birth of a love of beauty (197bc). That is to say, beauty provokes or inspires a love that constitutes the actions of divinity. Beauty in this sense is constitutive of the *act* of love, insofar as it is the object of love's activity. In other

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(*dianoia*) be constantly tested against their empirical 'reflections' at level 2 (*pistis*). As Socrates demonstrates—for example, at that important juncture in the fourth book of the *Republic*—when he insists that we test our theoretic definition of justice, checking it first against the test case of the individual, then against ordinary empirical judgment (*Rep.* VI, 434d; 442d; 443b)."

28. *Symposium* 191d: ἔστι δὴ οὖν ἐκ τόσου ὁ ἔρως ἔμφυτος ἀλλήλων τοῖς ἀνθρώποις καὶ τῆς ἀρχαίας φύσεως συναγωγεὺς καὶ ἐπιχειρῶν ποιῆσαι ἓν ἐκ δυοῖν καὶ ἰάσασθαι τὴν φύσιν τὴν ἀνθρωπίνην.

29. See, e.g., Sheffield, *Plato's Symposium*, 35ff.

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words, the essence of love is beauty and love itself pursues beauty, which is to say that love desires what love itself is and what love itself already possesses essentially. Socrates initiates his account by exploiting the apparent contradiction in this perspective; if a thing is desired, it cannot be possessed, and if possessed, it cannot be desired. Rather than conceding this equivocation, Socrates uses it to inaugurate an account of his encounter with Diotima, who not only brings him to clarity on the issues pertaining to love but “elevates” his thinking into a mode of mindfulness in which discursive reason is opened to an otherness that exceeds it.

The fundamental issue in Socrates’ account of his encounter with Diotima relevant to the present purpose is the “final revelation” (τὰ δὲ τέλεια καὶ ἐποπτικά) that identifies beauty with the final goal of love, and hence as a divine principle (210a–212c). Socrates begins by explaining Diotima’s teaching that there is a mode of thinking or discourse (*logos*) that recognizes what is “between” (μεταξύ) the terms of various dyads—beautiful and ugly, learned and ignorant, mortal and immortal etc. (202a–e). Scholarly treatment of this feature of Diotima’s tutelage tends to emphasize its spatial dimension as “middle” with the result that the μεταξύ is reified as merely an object of inquiry.<sup>30</sup> Given the fact that this feature appears at the beginning of Diotima’s account, it suggests that it serves a propaedeutic purpose and so intends to reveal a *mode of thinking* rather than merely an object of inquiry. It is by virtue of this revelation that Socrates is able to recognize how love, rather than naming a univocal phenomenon, is in fact a spirit “halfway between mortal and immortal,”<sup>31</sup> which, as such, establishes a mediating power that constitutes the very power of all relation (203a). With this mediating power in place, Diotima proceeds to narrate the parental origins of love. Need (Πενία), in an effort to mitigate her own poverty, conjugated with Resource (Πόρος) and begot Love, indicating how love mediates the plenitude of resource beyond the material world to the longing of human need.<sup>32</sup> Because love’s birth occurs on the same day that Aphrodite is begotten, “he was born to love the beautiful since Aphrodite herself is beautiful.”<sup>33</sup> Given his genealogical bond with need, love is characterized by Diotima as “harsh and arid,” “barefoot and homeless,” “sleeping on the naked earth,” “always partaking of his mother’s

30. See, e.g., Scott and Welton, *Erotic Wisdom*, 91–95.

31. *Symposium* 202e: μεταξύ ἐστὶ θεοῦ τε καὶ θνητοῦ.

32. Cf. Beierwaltes, “Love of Beauty and the Love of God,” 293–313.

33. *Symposium* 203c: καὶ ἅμα φύσει ἐραστῆς ὧν περὶ τὸ καλὸν καὶ τῆς Ἀφροδίτης καλῆς οὔσης.

poverty” (203d), a characterization that contrasts sharply with the common Greek view of a divine and noble love. But by virtue of his relation to his father Resource, love brings his father’s resourcefulness to his own designs upon the beautiful and the good (203d). Love’s energy is a power that works within the ebb and flow of plenitude and poverty, resource and need (204a), bringing into manifest form the transcendent beauty and good. Through love, so Plato suggests, the transcendence of the good and the beautiful are capable of acquiring concrete form.

Having established all this, Diotima confirms Socrates’ original assertion that love is indeed the love of what is beautiful (204d) but proceeds to inquire precisely what it is that the lover of the beautiful is longing for. Socrates replies, “To make the beautiful his own” (204d). It is at this point where Diotima introduces the way in which a single phenomenon, like love, poetry or beauty, although unified under one name, can signify a plurality of aspects (205bc). Only under this mode of what might be called “analogous” thinking, where identity and difference coexist in a symmetric bond, Plato suggests, can love’s relation to beauty be comprehended; for only when love itself is understood as a *μεταξύ* can the beauty that calls to it be recognized in *both* the concrete, material entity *and* its final, absolute nature. The “final revelation” consists in expositing an analogical ascent through the various beautiful things of the world to beauty in its supreme form:

And turning his eyes toward the open sea of beauty, he will find in such contemplation the seed of the most fruitful discourse and the loftiest thought, and reap a golden harvest of philosophy, until, confirmed and strengthened, he will come upon one single form of knowledge, the knowledge of beauty I am about to speak of.

And here, she said, you must follow me as closely as you can.

Whoever has been initiated so far in the mysteries of Love and has viewed all these aspects of the beautiful in due succession, is at last drawing near the final revelation. And now, Socrates, there bursts upon him that wondrous vision which is the very soul of the beauty he has toiled so long for. It is an everlasting loveliness which neither comes nor goes, which neither flowers nor fades, for such beauty is the same on every hand, the same then as now, here as there, this way as that way, the same to every worshiper as it is to every other.

Nor will his vision of the beautiful take the form of a face, or of hands, or of anything that is of the flesh. It will be neither words, nor knowledge, nor a something that exists in something

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else, such as a living creature, or the earth, or the heavens, or anything that is—but subsisting of itself and by itself in an eternal oneness, while every lovely thing partakes of it in such sort that, however much the parts may wax and wane, it will be neither more nor less, but still the same inviolable whole.<sup>34</sup>

The relation between love and the supreme beauty that attracts and energizes it is here established. Beauty arouses desire beyond the interests that desire takes in the world of material things, uplifting it beyond the material to a more spiritual encounter with beauty. Charles Kahn has suggested that this metaphysical dimension of desire, where beauty stimulates love's anagogical ascent, marks a novel development in Plato.<sup>35</sup> Such an observation is correct when cast within the *Symposium's* relation to the *Hippias Major* since the latter text, in restricting itself to discursive examination, discovered no such metaphysical anagogy. This fact affirms that, in applying love as a *logos* of the μεταξὺ, the *Symposium* views it as a strategy of metaphysical anagogy used to illuminate the intelligibility of beauty. But the metaphysical component of this observation also calls into question the relation in Plato between beauty and being. Some scholars, including Hans Urs von Balthasar, see in this ascent—from beautiful bodies, to beautiful souls, to the beautiful in itself—Plato's belief that beauty is coextensive with being, and so the grounds upon which one may affirm

34. *Symposium* 210d—211b: ἀλλ' ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ πέλαγος τετραμμένος τοῦ καλοῦ καὶ θεωρῶν πολλοὺς καὶ καλοὺς λόγους καὶ μεγαλοπρεπεῖς τίκτη καὶ διανοήματα ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ ἀφθόνῳ, ἕως ἂν ἐνταῦθα ῥωσθεῖς καὶ αὐξήθεις κατὶδὴ τινὰ ἐπιστήμημιν μίαν τοιαύτην, ἣ ἐστὶ καλοῦ τοιοῦδε. πειρῶ δέ μοι, ἔφη, τὸν νοῦν προσέχειν ὡς οἶόν τε μάλιστα. ὃς γὰρ ἂν μέχρη ἐνταῦθα πρὸς τὰ ἐρωτικά παιδαγωγηθῆ, θεώμενος ἐφεξῆς τε καὶ ὀρθῶς τὰ καλὰ, πρὸς τέλος ἦδη ἰὼν τῶν ἐρωτικῶν ἐξαίφνης κατόψεται τι θαυμαστὸν τὴν φύσιν καλόν, τοῦτο ἐκεῖνο, ὃ Σώκρατες, οὐ δὴ ἔνεκεν καὶ οἱ ἔμπροσθεν πάντες πόνοι ἦσαν, πρῶτον μὲν αἰεὶ ὄν καὶ οὔτε γιγνώμενον οὔτε ἀπολλύμενον, οὔτε αὐξανόμενον οὔτε φθίνον, ἔπειτα οὐ τῆ μὲν καλόν, τῆ δ' αἰσχρόν, οὐδὲ τοτὲ μὲν, τοτὲ δὲ οὐ, οὐδὲ πρὸς μὲν τὸ καλόν, πρὸς δὲ τὸ αἰσχρόν, οὐδ' ἔνθα μὲν καλόν, ἔνθα δὲ αἰσχρόν, ὡς τισὶ μὲν ὄν καλόν, τισὶ δὲ αἰσχρόν: οὐδ' αὖ φαντασθήσεται αὐτῷ τὸ καλὸν οἷον πρόσωπόν τι οὐδὲ χεῖρες οὐδὲ ἄλλο οὐδὲν ὧν σώμα μετέχει, οὐδὲ τις λόγος οὐδὲ τις ἐπιστήμη, οὐδὲ που ὄν ἐν ἑτέρῳ τινι, οἷον ἐν ζῳῳ ἢ ἐν γῆ ἢ ἐν οὐρανῷ ἢ ἐν τῷ ἄλλῳ, ἀλλ' αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτὸ μεθ' αὐτοῦ μονοειδὲς αἰεὶ ὄν, τὰ δὲ ἄλλα πάντα καλὰ ἐκείνου μετέχοντα τρόπον τινὰ τοιοῦτον, οἷον γιγνομένων τε τῶν ἄλλων καὶ ἀπολλυμένων μηδὲν ἐκεῖνο μήτε τι πλέον μήτε ἔλαττον γίγνεσθαι μηδὲ πάσχειν μηδέν. Translation M. Joyce.

35. Kahn, *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue*, 268: "What is new in the theory of the *Symposium* . . . is the idea that the emotional storm of physical passion aroused by such beauty contains within itself a metaphysical element, that is to say, an aspiration that transcends the limit of the human condition and that cannot possibly be satisfied in the way that hunger and thirst can be satisfied."

in Plato the view that beauty is a transcendental property of being.<sup>36</sup> Despite the anachronism such a suggestion contains with respect to any strict doctrine of the *transcendentalia*, it does serve to draw attention to the way Plato conceives the relation between beauty and being within the context of love's mediation. In order to perceive the relation between beauty in itself and beauty insofar as it appears in concrete beings, one must turn to the energy of love in one's encounter with the everyday commonplace in all its manifest forms. Reasoning that relies on its own discursive methods is not enough but requires the energy of desire that constitutes love. Love provides a way beyond the limits of discursive reason (*dianoia*) and instead taps into a *logos* of the *μεταξὺ*, enabling the vision of beauty to appear unified as it is loved in between its material concretions.

### *The Phaedrus*

The concrete, existential dimension of this relation is elaborated in the *Phaedrus*, a dialogue that treats beauty somewhat indirectly in a non-focal way. The *Symposium* illustrates how love involves a search that is prompted, energized, and mysteriously guided by the otherness of a transcendental offering, which, in the "final revelation" is named beauty. In the *Phaedrus*, Plato describes this transcendental offering in more existential tones and, in order to emphasize its distinction from more common modes of thought, names it *mania*—that "heaven sent madness" that communicates and bestows "all blessings."<sup>37</sup> This is the madness of an excess or plenitude that touches the lover through beauty.<sup>38</sup>

Emphasizing the sense of transcendent otherness implicated in *mania*, Joseph Pieper has read the *Phaedrus* as a way to critique certain epistemological theories that assume an autonomous knower.<sup>39</sup> Pieper stresses beauty's relation to knowledge and contends that *mania* is a communication of beauty insofar as it communicates the "greatest blessings," and as such is "heaven-sent."<sup>40</sup> When the *Phaedrus* is read in the context of beauty and its relation to the divine in sequence with the *Hippias Major*

36. Von Balthasar, *GOTL*, 4:202.

37. *Phaedrus* 244b.

38. Cf. *Phaedrus* 249de.

39. Pieper sees in the *Phaedrus* a critique of secular humanism's understanding of the autonomous knower. See his "Divine Madness," originally published as "Göttlicher Wahnsinn," *Eine Platon-Interpretation*.

40. *Phaedrus* 244bc.

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and the *Symposium*, this contention illuminates several salient features of beauty as it relates to the divine.

As Socrates proceeds to explain, this divine communication of *mania* occurs in four modes. The first is a *mania* associated with prophecy, which is proclaimed the greatest of the arts.<sup>41</sup> This mode of mania, Socrates proclaims, “comes from the gods” and “is more beautiful than sanity, which is of human origin.”<sup>42</sup> Read within the context of both the *Hippias Major* and the *Symposium*, Plato’s association between prophetic mania and beauty suggests something important about beauty’s relation to human knowledge. As Pieper explains it:

Man is constituted in such a way that, on the one hand, he needs to be forced, through inspiration, out of the self-sufficiency of his thinking—through an event, therefore, that lies beyond his disposing power, an event that comes to him only in the form of something unpredictable. On the other hand, it is precisely in this loss of rational sovereignty that man gains a wealth, above all, of intuition, light, truth, and insight into reality, all of which would otherwise remain beyond his reach.<sup>43</sup>

Following in the trajectory set by the *Hippias Major* and the *Symposium*, the *Phaedrus* indicates that, as a communication of beauty, *mania* gives something that exceeds the limits of discursive reason and as such interrupts the normal course of human thought. This ought not be read as a declaration for a simple dualism between madness and reason, or the excess of given being and the limitations of human cognition; Diotima’s lesson of the *μεταξύ* ought to chasten such a conclusion. It rather means that this *mania*, this mysterious otherness that attracts the momentum of mind, descends upon reason and intoxicates it with its own irresistible energy resulting in a mode of mind beyond normal discursion.

A second mode in which *mania* communicates itself concerns the liberation from various affliction and maladies.<sup>44</sup> This is the “*cathartic mania*” that, appearing among the sick, inspires prayer and worship, establishing the means of purification. Despite the ambiguity that surrounds

41. *Phaedrus* 244c.

42. *Phaedrus* 244c: τὸσφ κάλλιον ματυροῦσιν οἱ παλαιοὶ μανίαν σωφροσύνης τῇ ἐκ θεοῦ τῆς παρ’ ἀνθρώπων γιγνομένης.

43. Pieper, “*Divine Madness*,” 17. The relation between beauty and knowledge will be significant in Aquinas’s commentary on the *Divine Names*, especially for the way in which it relates beauty to the good and the true. Its treatment by Plato here will be helpful in examining the contours of Thomas’s treatment later on.

44. *Phaedrus* 244e.

this form of *mania*, and the difficulty it has posed to students of Plato throughout history, Plato's fundamental point is discernible in light of the foregoing trajectory: there are afflictions that burden the human person, both in mind and body, from which she is unable to liberate herself by means of rational technique and discursive abstraction.<sup>45</sup> Beauty, according to Plato, is a vision of true being and so a profoundly spiritual phenomenon. At the same time, more than justice, truth, or even goodness, beauty shows itself most clearly as that which is the most manifest to the senses.<sup>46</sup> This double aspect is part of beauty's unique power. *Mania* as cathartic, tapping into both aspects of beauty (the spiritual and corporeal), mediates this substantive truth of eternal being to the physical senses and as such reorders the disorder that erupted on account of sickness.

*Mania* communicates itself, thirdly, insofar as it takes hold of "a gentle and pure soul, arouses it and inspires it to songs and other poetry, and thus by adorning countless deeds of the ancients nurtures later generations."<sup>47</sup> Guided by the Muses, this mode of *mania* results in a poetic inspiration and so could be called, as Pieper explains, poetic *mania*. It is, nevertheless, important to distinguish Plato's praise of poetry here and his condemnation of it in the *Republic* (esp. book 10). One can then see that this presents no real problem since Plato distinguishes between divinely inspired poets (e.g., *Meno*, 81b) and those who rely on human skill and technique. Because they allow themselves to be open to the *mania* that seizes, possesses, and inspires, the former exemplify a mode of mindfulness that is the locus of a true poetics while the latter, in relying upon human skill, and so relying on the mere shadow images of real things, advances a kind of displaced poetics.<sup>48</sup> Based on this contrast, poetics is not so much about a grammatical form or mode of discourse than it is about a kind of trans-discursive way of thinking that not only keeps open the doors to the transcendent but

45. Cf. Pieper, "Divine Madness," 24ff. Pieper arrives at the same interpretation through an application of the findings of modern psychoanalysis.

46. *Phaedrus* 250b-e.

47. *Phaedrus* 245a: τρίτη δὲ ἀπὸ Μουσῶν κατοκωχῆ τε καὶ μανία λαβουσα ἀπαλὴν καὶ ἄβατον ψυχὴν, ἐγείρουσα καὶ ἐκβακχεύουσα κατὰ τε ᾠδὰς καὶ κατὰ τὴν ἄλλην ποίησιν, μυρία τῶν παλαιῶν ἔργα κοσμουσα τοὺς ἐπιγιγνομένους παιδεύει.

48. *Phaedrus* 245a: ὃς δ' ἂν ἄνευ μανίας Μουσῶν ἐπὶ ποιητικὰς θύρας ἀφίκηται, πεισθεὶς ὡς ἄρα ἐκ τέχνης ἰκανὸς ποιητὴς ἐσόμενος, ἀτελεὶς αὐτὸς τε καὶ ἡ ποίησις ὑπὸ τῆς τῶν μαινομένων ἢ του σωφρονουντος ἠφανίσθη. "But if any man come to the gates of poetry without the madness of the Muses, persuaded that skill alone will make him a good poet, then shall he and his works of sanity with him be brought to naught by the poetry of madness, and behold, their place is nowhere to be found." Translated by R. Hackforth.

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that carries one through them. Unlike modes of mindfulness that seem to narrow the natural human desire for knowledge, poetic mindfulness, with its respect for the mystery and the ambiguity of the unknown, engenders deeper wonder at the excess of otherness that marks the origins of knowledge. As Plato appears to suggest, poetic mindfulness is marked with a double energy. On the one hand, it extends itself beyond the limits of discursive reason, immersing itself in its own transcendent otherness. On the other hand, it returns to the realm of discursive reason in order to give expression to what was beheld in its act of transcending.<sup>49</sup>

The fourth and final mode by which *mania* communicates itself, which is “the best of all forms of divine possession, both in itself and in its sources, both for him that has it and for him that shares therein,”<sup>50</sup> signifies the beautiful insofar as it consummates the desire of those who love beauty, transforming them into lovers. This fourth mode, in Socrates’ words, is the “sum and substance of all our discourse,”<sup>51</sup> and so includes what is given in the first three modes.<sup>52</sup> This fourth mode, *erotic mania*, is a unified synthesis of the first three, embracing their distinct features in the unity of its identity.

As Plato explains, in order to understand the relationship between this mode of *mania* and the erotic response what is first required is an accurate appraisal of the soul.<sup>53</sup> For Plato all soul is immortal (245c), subsistent, intrinsically possessing the source of its own motion (245e), having no beginning and no end (246a). Consequently, the soul remains mysteriously and intimately connected to the primordial conditions of its existence, namely, that which truly is (247c, 248c). Harkening back to the mythical narrative of love’s origins and end presented by Aristophanes in the *Symposium*, this primordial condition is also the true *telos* of human existence and so the object of both reminiscence and desire.<sup>54</sup> Like love itself, the soul is a “spirit in between,” whose desire for beauty marks her conditions of “true being.”

This condition of “true being” manifests itself through a plurality of visions—truth, temperance, justice, goodness, etc. As Plato explains, prior

49. Cf. Desmond, *Art, Origins, and Otherness*, 40–49.

50. *Phaedrus* 249d: ἄρα αὐτῆ πασῶν τῶν ἐνθουσιάσεων ἀρίστη τε καὶ ἐξ ἀρίστων τῶν τε ἔχοντι καὶ τῶν κοινωνούντι αὐτῆς γίγνεται.

51. *Phaedrus* 249e: ἔστι δὴ οὖν δεῦρο ὁ πᾶς ἦκων λόγος περὶ τῆς τετάρτης μανίας.

52. Pieper, “Divine Madness,” 38.

53. *Phaedrus*, 250a and following.

54. Pieper, “Divine Madness,” 42.

to “coming to earth” the soul contemplates these true visions, which, when recalled in existence, are the objects of remembrance. But only beauty, which is the brightest of these visions (250d), gives itself to sensuality and cognition and so provides to the lover of beauty the capacity to “reconnect” fully with the true being that constitutes the primordial conditions of existence. As Pieper explains it,

We may encounter various concretions of goodness, justice and truth, but such experiences do not have the power to enrapture us; they do not transport us beyond the here and now. Beauty alone can accomplish this; only the encounter with beauty evokes remembrance and yearning, prompting in the one so touched the desire to get away from the course of all those things that usually absorb the mind.<sup>55</sup>

Platonic *mania*, as a transcendent power to transform, communicates a surplus of being that ruptures the divisions even of time. Past and future overwhelm the present moment elevating the mind beyond the limitations of the here and now. Beauty’s association with *mania* means that, even more than the concretions of other transcendent phenomena, beauty shares this power to interrupt the normal course of a daily routine, liberating the mind from its otherwise quotidian preoccupations.

The *Phaedrus* represents a more concrete expression of the dialectic within beauty between the discursive and the “trans-” or “overly-discursive” by means of a new dialectic between the given *mania*—as a commingling of the first three modes of *mania* (prophetic, cathartic, and poetic)—and the resulting erotic response. As Socrates’ account in the *Symposium* suggests, the erotic response can indeed involve both the presence of beauty as possessed and the lack of beauty as desired without necessarily collapsing into a contradiction. But as Diotima makes clear, such a collapse is only avoided when *eros*, love, is understood as a *logos* of the μεταξὺ, conceived from a conjugal union of need and resource. Consequently, the *Phaedrus* can be read as an account in which the *mania* of resource is mediated by the power of *eros* to energize or actualize the many desires of need. In such a reading, the *mania* of resource identifies beauty as a transcendent abundance of intelligible content that draws the intellect beyond itself ever higher into beauty’s depth of intelligibility.

Each of the preceding three texts provides important elements for understanding Plato’s vision of the relationship between beauty and the divine. The subtle correspondence between beauty, resource and *mania*

55. Ibid., 42.

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along with the conception of love as a mediating *logos* of the *μεταξύ* establishes a significant foundation for the way in which beauty and its relation to the divine will eventually be conceived by Plato's posterity. This includes the eventual appropriation of beauty to the status of a divine name in Dionysius. For Plato, beauty as *mania* and resource is a plenitude of intelligibility that exceeds the human capacity to determine it through discursive reason alone. Engaging its intelligibility, therefore, requires a *logos* of the *μεταξύ* that, standing beyond the *logos* of discursive reason, can be found in the poetic and in the phenomenon of love. At the same time, since beauty appears in every concrete form it elicits desire and inspires love, prompting the first steps of union that, although always beyond it, will include discursive reason. An examination of the *Timeaus* will bring these into association with origination and finality.

### *The Timeaus*

From the *Hippias Major* to the *Symposium* to the *Phaedrus*, there is a discernable movement in Plato's treatment of beauty. The *Hippias Major* attempts to treat it as a focused object of inquiry only to conclude on the difficulty involved in such a task. The *Symposium* treats beauty in its association with love, which, configured as a "middle-logos," enables the illumination of beauty in both concrete, worldly entities as well as in its transcendental depths. In this way, the *Symposium* itself serves as a "middle" between the *Hippias Major* and the *Phaedrus*, the latter of which treats beauty as a transcendental fullness or plenitude that is existentially encountered through the various ways in which *mania* breaks into the world of experience. The movement discernable within these three texts is one in which the limits of discursive reason (*Hippias Major*) are opened through the energy, or "middle-logos," of love (*Symposium*) to beauty's transcendental plenitude that erupts into everyday experience (*Phaedrus*). Within this movement, the *Timaeus* can be read as a text in which beauty is treated entirely as a transcendent phenomenon performing a pivotal role in the generation of the cosmos.

When one examines the *Timaeus* to discern the Platonic view of beauty's association with the divine, one notices two fundamental features. First, it is clear that beauty is present from the beginning as a formative power of generation. Beauty is associated with the Uniform Eternity as well as the demiurgic will that generates out of this Uniform Eternity. Second, it remains unclear exactly where Plato locates beauty as such—a

fact that ought not come as a surprise given the difficulty of beauty that Plato recognizes in his other dialogues. At times it seems to be identifiable as the Eternal itself, while at other times it seems to identify the first manifestation of the Eternal.

Timaeus opens his account by drawing out the ontological tension between being (τὸ ὄν) and becoming (τὸ γιγνόμενον). Given its uniformity and stasis, the former is apprehensible by thought, while the latter, coming into and falling out of existence, is only apprehensible through “unreasonable sensation.”<sup>56</sup> Within this context, Timaeus introduces a principle of causality predicated on the fact that for anything to acquire becoming it must be dependent on a prior cause. This causal principle is expressed in what can best be described as aesthetic imagery:

But when the artificer [ὁ δημιουργός] of any object, in forming its shape and quality, keeps his gaze fixed on that which is uniform, using a model of this kind, that object, executed in this way, must of necessity be beautiful; but whenever he gazes at that which has come into existence and uses a created model, the object thus executed is not beautiful.<sup>57</sup>

Given its place in Timaeus’s narrative, this statement assumes the role of a principle that sets the stage of the remainder of the account. Indeed, for later Neoplatonism (as will be examined in the following chapter) the link between beauty and the demiurgic gaze on the eternal paradigm expressed in this passage becomes axiomatic. Generation arises through a demiurge whose own position, it seems, is somewhere in between the uniform stasis of being and the pure flux of becoming. If the demiurge generates by gazing at the Uniform, then what is generated must *of necessity* be beautiful (καλὸν ἐξ ἀνάγκης). Here, the archetype rather than the producer is the guarantor of beauty’s manifestation. Should the producer, that is to say the demiurge, gaze at anything other than the Uniform, what is generated is not beautiful. Further on, Timaeus reaffirms this fact:

Now if it is the case that this Cosmos is beautiful and its Constructor good, it is plain that he fixed his gaze on the Eternal; but

56. *Timaeus* 28a: τὸ μὲν δὴ νοήσει μετὰ λόγου περιληπτόν, αἰεὶ κατὰ ταῦτ’ ὄν, τὸ δ’ αὖ δόξει μετ’ αἰσθήσεως ἀλόγου δοξαστόν, γιγνόμενον καὶ ἀπολλύμενον, ὄντως δὲ οὐδέποτε ὄν.

57. *Timaeus* 28a: ὅτουμὲν οὖν ἂν ὁ δημιουργός πρὸς τὸ κατὰ ταῦτ’ ἔχον βλέπων αἰεὶ, τοιοῦτ’ ἂν τι προσχρῶμενος παραδείγματι, τὴν ἰδέαν καὶ δύναμιν αὐτοῦ ἀπεργάζηται, καλὸν ἐξ ἀνάγκης οὕτως ἀποτελεῖσθαι πᾶν: οὐ δ’ ἂν εἰς γεγονός, γεννητῶ παραδείγματι προσχρῶμενος, οὐ καλόν. Translation by R. G. Bury.

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if otherwise (which is an impious supposition), his gaze was on that which has come into existence. But it is clear to everyone that his gaze was on the Eternal; for the Cosmos is the most beautiful of all that has come into existence, and He the best of all Causes.<sup>58</sup>

In this passage, the argument appears to proceed from effect to cause and back to hyperbolized “cause and effect.” The fact that the cosmos is indeed beautiful serves as evidence that not only is the demiurge good, but that his gaze is on the Eternal. This fact then elevates the cosmos to the most beautiful of all existing things and the demiurge to the best of all causes. As Timaeus states further on, “For Him who is most good it neither was nor is permissible to perform any action save what is most beautiful.”<sup>59</sup> With tones reminiscent of Plato’s ontology, Timaeus asserts “nothing that resembles the imperfect could ever become beautiful.”<sup>60</sup> That imperfect things may possess beauty can only ever be a reflection of the Eternal within their ontological structure. Or to put it another way, a thing only possesses beauty by virtue of the Eternal within it.

As the above passages suggest, the association between beauty and the Eternal, or Uniform—what could be considered Plato’s “divine” principle—is not without ambiguity. On the one hand, the fact that there is a *necessary* relation between the beauty of what the demiurge generates and the Eternal, Uniform archetype upon which he sets his gaze suggests that this Eternal, Uniform archetype could indeed be identifiable with beauty. The beauty of what the demiurge generates is exclusive to the proper archetype, for without gazing at the archetype the generated cosmos would not be beautiful. On the other hand, the fact that beauty only arises by means of the *demiurgic mediation* indicates that beauty could be more associated with the demiurge than with the Uniform, Eternal archetype. In this case, beauty, as Plotinus will later come to explain, is the first born from the One rather than the One itself. Adding to the ambiguity, there are passages suggesting that the original “stuff” out of which the demiurge brings order is in a state of chaotic disorder rather than unformed beauty.<sup>61</sup> Beauty, in this sense, derives from the demiurgic power to instill within

58. *Timaeus* 29a: εἰ μὲν δὴ καλὸς ἐστὶν ὃδε ὁ κόσμος ὃ τε δημιουργὸς ἀγαθός, δῆλον ὡς πρὸς τὸ αἰδίον ἔβλεπεν: εἰ δὲ ὁ μὴδ' εἰπεῖν τινὶ θέμις, πρὸς γεγονός. παντὶ δῆσαφές ὅτι πρὸς τὸ αἰδίον: ὁ μὲν γὰρ κάλλιστος τῶν γεγονότων, ὁ δ' ἄριστος τῶν αἰτιῶν.

59. *Timaeus* 30b: θέμις δ' οὐτ' ἢ οὐτ' ἐστὶν τῷ ἀρίστῳ δρᾶν ἄλλοπλῆν τὸ κάλλιστον.

60. *Timaeus* 30c: ἀτελεῖ γὰρ εἰκότος οὐδέν ποτ' ἂν γένοιτο καλόν.

61. *Timaeus* 30a.

the chaotic disorder the Uniform, Eternal archetype; that is to say, beauty derives from comingling the disorder with order, the chaos with the Uniform, Eternal archetype.

Further still, in other passages the cosmos is described as a “Living Creature” that “embraces and contains within itself all the intelligible Living Creatures,”<sup>62</sup> which is the “most beautiful of all and in all ways most perfect.”<sup>63</sup> In this sense, beauty is identified with the ontological plenitude of being rather than the transcendent uniformity or eternity out of which being is generated. Plato describes in more detail further on when he explains the intentions of the demiurge:

And these were his intentions: first, that it (the cosmos) might be, as far as possible, a Living Creature, perfect and whole, with all its parts perfect; and next, that it might be One, inasmuch as there was nothing left over out of which another like Creature might come into existence; and further that he might be secure from age and ailment. . . . Wherefore, because of this reasoning, he fashioned it to be one, single whole, compounded of all wholes, perfect and ageless and unailing.<sup>64</sup>

Timaeus proceeds to explain how this plenitude of ontological “stuff” was wrought in the shape of a sphere, since such a shape is most self-similar and, as he asserts, the similar is infinitely more beautiful than the dissimilar. What the passage suggests, then, is that beauty derives from within the cosmic emergence out of its archetype, rather than being wholly possessed in the archetype or wholly donated to the cosmos. Beauty’s ontological constitution is as a plenitude of being, but there is an anagogical dimension to beauty deriving from its indelible association with its archetypal Model. Beauty is realized in degrees in direct proportion to its similarity with the archetypal Model.<sup>65</sup> Inasmuch as there remain forms unrealized in the ontological plenitude of the cosmos, it remains at a distance from its archetypal Model and hence of a lesser beauty. But in this distance, beauty reveals its anagogical power to uplift the soul into its higher dimension where it resides more fully in the archetypal Model.

62. *Timaeus* 30cd: τὰ γὰρ δὴ νοητὰ ζῶα πάντα ἐκεῖνο ἐν ἑαυτῷ περιλαβὸν ἔχει.

63. *Timaeus* 30cd: καλλίστῳ καὶ κατὰ πάντα τελέῳ μάλιστα.

64. *Timaeus* 32b–33b: τὰδε διανοηθεῖς, πρῶτον μὲν ἵνα ὄλον ὅτι μάλιστα ζῶον τέλειον ἐκ τελέων τῶν μερῶν εἴη, πρὸς δὲ τούτοις ἔν, ἅτε οὐχ ὑπολειμμένων ἐξ ἧν ἄλλοτιοῦτον γένοιτ’ ἂν, ἔτι δὲ ἵν’ ἀγήρων καὶ ἄνοσον ᾗ . . . διὰ δὴ τὴν αἰτίαν καὶ τὸν λογισμὸν τόνδε ἓνα ὄλον ὄλων ἐξ ἀπάντωντέλειον καὶ ἀγήρων καὶ ἄνοσον.

65. *Timaeus* 39e–40a.

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This anagogical dimension of beauty is not an obvious feature of Plato's cosmogony. It can be discerned, however, from the way in which Plato aligns two types of knowing with the two aspects of beauty—the beauty of the Uniform Eternity (or archetypal Model), and the beauty of the cosmos. The two corresponding modes of knowledge are, as Plato explains later on in his narrative, *νοῦς* and *δόξα ἀληθής*.<sup>66</sup> The latter pertains to the world of sensible cognition and arises through persuasion, is non-rational (*ἄλογον*), subject to alteration through persuasion, and universal to all. In contrast, the former (*νοῦς*) pertains to the self-subsisting forms imperceptible to the senses and arises through teaching, always dwells with true reasoning, is immovable by persuasion, and available only to the gods and a small class of people. It is through *νοῦς* that the human intellect participates in that cosmological energy that, together with necessity, generates the cosmic origins.<sup>67</sup> The *νοῦς* persuades necessity to conduct itself to the best possible end, endowing every generated entity with both a necessary cause and a divine cause.<sup>68</sup> Insofar as *νοῦς* endows necessity with a share in its beauty and goodness, it provides to necessity and all things generated a discerning power that illuminates the way back to the divine. In other words, for Plato's cosmogony, beauty serves as the power by which *νοῦς* provides to necessity an anagogical ordering so that the intellectual forms that are generated may “seek the necessary for the sake of the divine.”<sup>69</sup>

Although the *Timaeus* employs several themes pertaining to beauty—symmetry, anagogy, adornment, attraction—the dominant feature of beauty's association with the divine remains its ambiguity of place and purpose. This ambiguity testifies to beauty's place in between the Uniform, Eternal archetype itself and the generated cosmos, since it does not seem to belong exclusively to either. As the following section attempts to demonstrate, this ambiguity is far from resolved by Plato's greatest student.

## Aristotle

The examination of the relation between beauty and the divine in Aristotle is beset with difficulties because, in contrast with his configuration of the divine, his treatment of beauty is limited to elliptical statements throughout his corpus. This situation provides a few different options for

66. *Timaeus* 51de.

67. *Timaeus* 47c–48a.

68. *Timaeus* 68e.

69. *Timaeus* 69a: τὸ δὲ ἀναγκαῖον ἐκείνων χάριν. Translation Bury.

approaching the issue in Aristotle. One may approach the Aristotelian corpus from within the idiom of modern aesthetics, focusing primarily on art rather than beauty. Or one may examine his thought only in a general way, interpreting it as an extension of Platonic thought and so as a discourse on the “glory of nature.”<sup>70</sup> One may also examine his treatment of beauty from a metaphysical perspective that attempts to locate his comments on beauty in relation to the broader themes he pursues. Neither beauty nor art could be considered preferred themes among scholars interested in Aristotle.<sup>71</sup> The handful that have expressed interest by and large focus on art over beauty and follow the first option above. However, the third method is not only most suitable to Aristotle’s context, but most effective for establishing how beauty relates to the divine in his thought.

To what extent, if at all, can a Platonic *logos* of the *μεταξὺ* be found in Aristotle’s approach to beauty? Aristotle famously parted ways with his teacher on several fronts, most notably the Platonic forms and its subsequent doctrine of participation. Aristotle’s judgment over Plato’s doctrine of beauty, however, is not so clear. There are passages where Aristotle maintains elements of Plato’s view of beauty, such as beauty’s transcendental status, viewing it as a reality independent of human experience

70. This is the approach taken by von Balthasar, *GOTL*, 4:220–30. It is odd that in such a monumental work like this that, unlike Plato and Plotinus, Aristotle receives no personalized heading or in depth treatment.

71. Although there are number of studies on Aristotle’s *Poetics*, because it is a treatise concerned with the linguistic and grammatical dimensions of poetry, they cannot be considered studies on Aristotle’s views of beauty. To my knowledge, not a single monograph exists that examines beauty in Aristotle, much less the relation between beauty and the divine. To acquire any substance on the matter, one is forced to defer to studies whose subject matter is a broader account of mathematics, aesthetic theory or an even broader account of philosophy itself. Perhaps the most substantial work that deals with beauty in Aristotle is Cleary, *Aristotle & Mathematics*, which treats beauty as it arises in concert with the metaphysics of mathematics. Other broader examples include Carrit, *Theory of Beauty*, published almost a century ago, containing seventeen pages in which Aristotle’s views of beauty are considered (75–92), while Copleston, *History of Philosophy*, vol. 1, first published in 1946, contains a twelve-page section on Aristotle’s aesthetics (359–71) in which one finds a page and a half specifically on beauty. Within the various histories of aesthetics (Bosanquet, Everett and Kuhn, Tatarkiewicz) one can find sections on beauty in Aristotle, though, with the exception of Tatarkiewicz, it is usually subsumed under the agenda of modern aesthetics. A few articles, written more than fifty years ago, are perhaps notable for having examined this issue, though again not in and of itself: Else, “Aristotle on the Beauty of Tragedy,” 179–204; Marshall, “Art and Aesthetic in Aristotle,” 228–31.

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or measure,<sup>72</sup> and enduring beyond the transience of time.<sup>73</sup> But there is also evidence that suggests a gradual development within the timeline of Aristotle's writings away from Plato's more spiritual emphasis on beauty in favor of a more material determination. There is also evidence that suggests Aristotle was at a loss on how to philosophically, that is to say "scientifically," approach beauty.

As with Plato's treatment, the outstanding feature of beauty as it relates to the divine in Aristotle is its ambiguity which, rather than diminishing his contribution to this issue, provides important insights. As Plato illustrates in the *Hippias Major*, the failure of discursive thought with respect to beauty can serve to illuminate beauty in many ways. Aristotle, perhaps among all ancient philosophers, could be considered the great champion of discursive reason. His inquiry into beauty, then, provides invaluable insight especially where it becomes ambiguous. Moreover, Aristotle uses the term *καλόν* in varying, though not unrelated, ways. Aristotle inherits the history of the term *καλόν*, which involves a gradual movement from describing physical attributes to identifying more spiritual qualities.<sup>74</sup> In Aristotle's ethical thinking, *καλόν* serves as the motive and source of obligation for morally good conduct. Such use indicates the association in Aristotle between beauty and goodness, but it also draws out a distinction: as motive and source of obligation for conduct to acquire the good, *καλόν* remains distinct from the good as such. As Owens explains, *καλόν* signifies that aspect of the good that conforms, through symmetry and proportion, to the receiving intellect; it is the intelligibility of the good that facilitates the will's attraction to what is right.<sup>75</sup> So although it is not incorrect to emphasize the unity of the good and the beautiful in *καλόν*, as Owens does, it is incomplete to neglect the distinction that *καλόν* illuminates. It is an important distinction to bear in mind when examining Aristotle's contribution to the issue of beauty as a divine name in Dionysius and Aquinas.

Aristotle's relevance for Dionysian thought flows through the Platonic academy, and his influence upon the Neoplatonism that permeates the Academy cannot be doubted. From as early as Plotinus and continuing through his posterity in Neoplatonism, the works of Aristotle are synthesized alongside those of Plato. Porphyry writes his *Isagoge*, a well-known introduction to Aristotle's *Categories*. Iamblichus, who is also highly

72. *Metaphysics* 1062b 15–1063a 5.

73. *Nicomachean Ethics* 1123a 9–10.

74. Owens, "KALON in the Aristotelian Ethics," 261ff.

75. *Ibid.*, 271.

influenced by Pythagoreanism and studies Aristotle as an introduction to Plato (especially his *Logic* and *Physics*), writes commentaries on Aristotle's *Categories*, *De Interpretatione*, the *Prior Analytics* and *De Anima*.<sup>76</sup> In a similar way, Proclus is reared philosophically in Aristotle before he travels to Athens to study Plato. Under Plutarch, he reads Aristotle's *De Anima* along with Plato's *Phaedo*, and when he studies with Syrianus, he reads "all of Aristotle's treatises on logic, ethics, politics and physics and on the science which rises above these, theology."<sup>77</sup> Lucas Siorvanes even refers to Proclus's writings on Aristotle's *Physics* and *De Caelo* as "study manuals."<sup>78</sup> This becomes especially significant in light of Proclus's influence on the Areopagite's corpus. Given Neoplatonism's religious contours, such an incorporation of Aristotelian thought suggests that there is something in Aristotle that is hospitable to the more spiritual dimensions than conventional wisdom tends to recognize. The extent to which this observation is true can be discerned through an examination of beauty in Aristotle. The following examination looks primarily to Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, where some of the most significant and revealing statements about beauty can be found as it relates to both the final cause and the origin.<sup>79</sup>

The scholarly literature on Aristotle's metaphysics, both as it signifies a science of being and as it signifies the specific work, is obviously abundant. Yet none of it gives significant attention to the various enigmatic statements about beauty.<sup>80</sup> In order to examine the issue in the context of beauty's development as a divine name, beauty must be brought into relation with the final cause and the origin as Aristotle conceives them.

76. Cf. Iamblichus, *In Platonis Dialogos Commentararium Fragmenta*, 15.

77. Marinus of Samaria, *Life of Proclus*, 27–28.

78. Siorvanes, *Proclus*, 318.

79. References to the *Metaphysics* will be parenthetically placed in the main text. When citations are given, the Greek used comes from Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, ed. W. D. Ross.

80. Owens's influential study *Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian Metaphysics*, for example, makes over fifty references to the good and goodness but only five references to beauty and the beautiful. Still, his work remains profitable in a number of ways. As noted already, Cleary's *Aristotle & Mathematics* contains a number of significant sections that attend to beauty as it arises in concert with the metaphysics of mathematics in Aristotle. His work will also prove helpful in our examination.

## *Beauty and the Final Cause*

The most well-known correspondence between beauty and the final cause in Aristotle occurs early on in book 1 (984b 11–14) where he contends that, because the goodness and beauty in a thing's being and becoming could not be accounted for by any natural element, philosophy is compelled to look beyond these for a higher cause. Nor does he allow the nobility of goodness and beauty to be accounted for by spontaneity and chance. Far more amenable, Aristotle asserts, is the explanation put forth by Anaxagoras and Hermotimus of Clazomenae, which posits an internal principle as the cause of thing's beauty. Although multiple interpretations of this passage are possible,<sup>81</sup> the fundamental point is that beauty is such that the conditions for its appearance cannot be explained or determined by the natural elements or the principles derived from them. In tones reminiscent of Plato's account of beauty in the *Hippias Major*, beauty, for Aristotle, drives thought beyond its engagement with the world of naturally occurring elements to the realization that causality must not only extend beyond these but must, in some way, be endowed with finality and purpose.

This idea reappears in a different context in book 12, chapter 7, where Aristotle considers movement in the context of the eternal mover. After demonstrating how the first heaven must be eternal and that there must also be something that moves it, he concludes that there must be something that moves without being moved (1072a 23). Aristotle identifies this “something” as both the object of desire and the object of thought, which in the primary instance are the same—namely, the “good” (1072a 26). This “good” is divided between the “apparent” and the “real.” Reflecting an analogical dynamic, the former first elicits desire while the latter carries this desire further into the realm of thought. It is only after this line of inquiry appears complete that Aristotle throws in, as it were, a final addition: “But the beautiful, also, and that which is in itself desirable are in the same column.”<sup>82</sup>

81. For two such interpretations, see Charles, “Aristotle on Hypothetical Necessity and Irreducibility,” 46–47.

82. *Metaphysics* 1072a 35: ἀλλὰ μὴν καὶ τὸ καλὸν καὶ τὸ δι' αὐτὸ αἰρετὸν ἐν τῇ αὐτῇ συστοιχίᾳ. It should be noted that some translations (e.g., Hugh Tredennick) render *καλὸν* as “good” rather than “beautiful.” As we noted above, to understand Aristotle's views of beauty it is crucial to take into account the distinction of this term. In our view, translating it as “good” creates the problem of explaining why Aristotle, a thinker meticulously concerned with words, definitions, and precision would use two words to express the same meaning. It seems more likely that his use of *καλὸν*, especially in

It is noteworthy that Aristotle does not express this as a strict definition either here in the *Metaphysics* or when it appears again later in his *Rhetoric*, though some suggest that the latter does fit the formula of a definition.<sup>83</sup> There Aristotle writes: “Beauty (or the Morally Beautiful) is that which is both desirable for its own sake and also worthy of praise.”<sup>84</sup> Here, however, Aristotle is referring to the particular kind of beauty associated with human action. Consequently, it cannot be legitimately taken as a definition of beauty *as such*, especially given the importance that definition holds in Aristotle’s understanding of discursive reasoning.<sup>85</sup> The Platonic thesis that beauty, although attractive as an object of philosophical inquiry, remains enigmatic and elusive, recalcitrant to the reductions of determination and definition may be looming in the background. Aristotle’s efforts are not in vain, since along with his statement in the *Metaphysics* noted above, they establish the preliminary foundation for his view of beauty: *beauty is marked by that which is desired for its own sake, beyond any sort of utility or extrinsic end.*

The remaining line of inquiry in the passage in question (*Metaphysics* XII, ch. 7) affirms this conclusion. Under consideration is the nature of the final cause, and there is evidence that points to the influence of Plato’s thesis that absolute beauty is the ultimate principle of unity as final and unifying.<sup>86</sup> Aristotle distinguishes two meanings here of “final cause”: (1) as that being for whose good an action is done, and (2) that at which an action aims. He explains that the former does not exist among unchangeable entities, but the latter does. From this he concludes: “The final cause, then, produces motion as being loved, but all other things move by being moved.”<sup>87</sup>

The indication is that the final cause moves all other things by being loved and so derives from the second meaning of final causality above, which itself is proffered to demonstrate how final causality relates to unchangeable entities. Such a conclusion resonates with echoes from the *Symposium*, hinting at the possible correspondence between beauty and the final cause in Aristotle. Moreover, the distinction between the two

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light of the word’s historical usage, would signify beauty as other to the good as some other translations (e.g., W. D. Ross) have recognized.

83. Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics*, 1:150.

84. *Rhetoric* I, 9 (1366a 33): καλὸν μὲν οὖν ἔστιν ὃ ἂν δι’ αὐτὸ αἰρετὸν ὄν ἐπαινετὸν ᾗ.

85. Cf. Kal, *On Intuition and Discursive Reasoning in Aristotle*, ch. 8.

86. *Symposium* 210a.

87. *Metaphysics* 1072b 5: κινεῖ δὴ ὡς ἐρώμενον, κινούμενα δὲ τὰλλα κινεῖ.

## Part One

meanings of “final cause” is quite relevant. The first describes the final cause as an *extrinsic acquisition*: the action is done in order to acquire the good of the being that is the final cause. In contrast, the second bears a more *intrinsic quality*: that at which an action aims. This extrinsic/intrinsic interpretation can be more fully verified by examining some of Aristotle’s prior considerations from the *Metaphysics*.

Earlier in book 9, chapter 6, Aristotle distinguishes between a movement and an actuality. Aristotle states that an actuality is “that movement in which the end is present.”<sup>88</sup> Examples he gives include the power of sight, a power in which “at the same time we are seeing,” we “have seen” whatever it is we are seeing, or the power of understanding, in which when “we are understanding,” we “have understood” or when “we are knowing,” we “have known” the object of knowledge.<sup>89</sup> Such powers are distinguished by the fact that with regard to the processes in question—seeing, understanding, knowing—there is no interval between the process itself and the end. That at which the action “aims” is inherent within the process itself. Or to put it otherwise, an actuality does not admit of degrees, is realized in each moment of time when it occurs, and exists wholly at each moment of the time it occurs. Consequently, Aristotle refers to it as an *actuality* rather than a *movement*. This is not the case with regard to processes such as “making thin,” “learning,” “walking,” or “building.” In these processes, the end product, which is an extrinsic good sought after (e.g., a house or a destination) always remains ahead of the action itself until the action ceases and the process is complete. Aristotle refers to these as “movements” or more specifically “incomplete movements” because the end sought after is not in the action itself. A movement is a change that admits degrees, is realized in and through time, and does not exist at once.

This distinction between “movement” and “actuality” is key to understanding Aristotle’s references to beauty in the passage under consideration (XII, chapter 7), as well as how beauty relates to the final cause and therefore to God. The final cause produces motion as being loved, which is to say elicits an *actuality* in all things moved by love. When read in the context of the above consideration love, as Aristotle understands it, is an action that is done for its own sake. It therefore moves all things even unchangeable entities by being an object of desire. Aristotle begins to configure the final cause as something that not only harbors in itself the aforementioned attribute of beauty—namely, that which is desired for

88. *Metaphysics* 1048b 22: ἀλλ’ ἐκεῖνη ἐνυπάρχει τὸ τέλος καὶ [ἡ] πράξις.

89. *Metaphysics* 1048b 23–24.

its own sake—but that, through love, dispenses this as a constitutional attribute to other entities.

That which is desired above all is also that which is the most intelligible. In Aristotle's unmoved mover thesis objects of desire and intelligible objects are identical with respect to "the firsts" for each class of objects.<sup>90</sup> Since desire for the beautiful arises from an encounter with it, the beautiful is prior to the desire for it in a way that intelligibility precedes inquiry. Beauty that elicits desire and intelligibility that moves the intellect to inquiry are found united in Aristotle's prime mover.

As Aristotle continues his examination, he proceeds to explain the various kinds of motion and the fact that these are what the first mover produces (1072b 10). Because there is motion at all, "the first mover exists of necessity; and in this, in necessity, (its mode of being exists) beautifully (*καλως*), and it is in this sense a first principle."<sup>91</sup> There are undeniable echoes of Plato's *Timaeus* in this assertion, especially considering the relation between beauty and necessity that both recognize. The fact that the word *καλως* has been often translated as "good"<sup>92</sup> exemplifies the tendency among scholars of Aristotle to neglect the role that beauty performs in his overall understanding of the good and of "being." As Owens has made clear with respect to Aristotle's use of *ousia*, the linguistic-interpretive dimensions of Aristotle's thought are crucial to understanding the various themes that he treats.<sup>93</sup> As noted above, Owens's own research into

90. Cleary, *Aristotle & Mathematics*, 397.

91. *Metaphysics* 1072b 12: ἐπεὶ δὲ ἔστι τι κινουῦν αὐτὸ ἀκίνητον ὄν, ἐνεργεία ὄν, τοῦτο οὐκ ἐνδέχεται ἄλλως ἔχειν ουδαμῶς. φορὰ γὰρ ἡ πρώτη τῶν μεταβολῶν, ταύτης δὲ ἡ κύκλω: ταύτην δὲ τοῦτο κινεῖ. ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἄρα ἐστὶν ὄν: καὶ ἡ ἀνάγκη, καλῶς, καὶ οὕτως ἀρχή.

92. E.g., both Tredennick and Ross translate *καλως* in the above passage as "good." But we would point out that in order to render this word as "good" one not only has to opt for a secondary meaning of *καλως*, one also has to alter the adverbial form. The adverbial forms of "good"—as either goodly, well, or rightly—simply do not convey the sense of the text. Rather, "beautifully," or following Cleary, "nobly," are the only adverbial forms that really makes sense in the context given. Moreover, Liddel and Scott (*Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon*) explain that the adverbial use of *καλως* is translated as "rightly" most often when used in a moral context, which is not the case with this passage.

93. Owens, *Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian Metaphysics*, 137: "The Stagarite's formulations may have been sufficiently clear to the 'hearers' trained to the technique of the Lyceum. But at the present distance of time and culture, the abrupt style aggravates the task of retaining the correct and proportional signification of an Aristotelian term. A merely secondary or faulty meaning may become irrevocably associated with the translating word. Yet unless the fundamental and primary meaning of the term is first isolated and made clearly recognizable in the English equivalent, the implications

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Aristotle's use of *καλόν* illuminates the significance that the term conveys with respect to the symmetry or proportion that mediates the good to the receiving intellect. In order for this distinction to be recognized a different identifier becomes necessary. Simply calling it "good," in other words, remains incomplete. In any case, given the historical usage of the term and its association with beauty, these observations at the very least justify calling into question occasions when this term is translated as "good." Evidence found internal to Aristotle's text may also serve to confirm this position.

First, in explaining the relationship between the necessary and the good, Aristotle implies the primordality of the former over the latter: the necessary is "that without which the good is impossible."<sup>94</sup> This is a reiteration of what appears earlier in chapter 5 (1015a 20). In this earlier passage, Aristotle contrasts the necessary with "the movement which accords with purpose and reasoning" a movement which suggests, through purpose and reasoning, an extrinsic quality. In other words, the necessary is not a movement toward an end outside itself, which is why Aristotle identifies it with the simple, the eternal, and that which is without compulsion (1015b 10–15). Although it is difficult to draw any determinate conclusions from this it does suggest that Aristotle saw something distinct from the good in the final cause that he described with the name "necessary." And because the name "necessary" indicates an actuality free from any extrinsic compulsion it harbors the end in itself. It is, therefore, an actuality desired for its own sake and so corresponds to Aristotle's characterization of the beautiful.

Second, as Aristotle continues to elaborate the nature of this first principle, the progression of his thought indicates the presence of his aforementioned characterization of beauty as *that which is desired for its own sake*. He states that the actuality of the first principle is not only "the heavens and the world of nature," but "also pleasure" (1072b 15–20). Because the first principle is thus, actualities in which the end is present such as those noted above—thinking, understanding, perceiving—are most pleasant. They are desired for their own sake since they intrinsically harbor their own finality, and therefore embody this attribute of beauty.

At this point, Aristotle turns to thought and the activity of thinking until he arrives at his well-known characterization of God as "thought

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and philosophical direction of the Stagarite's thought may become irretrievably lost."

94. *Metaphysics* 1072b 13: τὸ γὰρ ἀναγκαῖον τοσαυταχῶς, τὸ μὲν βίαι· ὅτι παρὰ τὴν ὀρμήν, τὸ δὲ οὐ οὐκ ἄνευ τὸ εὔ, τὸ δὲ μὴ ἐνδεχόμενον ἄλλως ἄλλ· ἀπλῶς.

thinking itself.” This is a characterization in which beauty as *that which is desired for its own sake* plays a constitutive role. While thinking is an actuality, it actualizes itself in degrees: “thinking in itself deals with that which is best in itself, and that which is thinking in the fullest sense with that which is best in the fullest sense.”<sup>95</sup> As noted above, thought is an actuality that is occasioned by an object. But as this process occurs, and thought and its object become united in the thinking act itself (1072b 20), there is still a passive moment of receptivity that marks this as a lower form of thought. Thought “receives itself” as it were in the external object, which as such is not the highest object that can be thought. Aristotle explains that the divine element within thinking is the *possession* of thought rather than the *reception* of it. But for possession of thought to occur, thought itself must be the object that is thought. So if, in Aristotle’s view, thought *per se* is an actuality that harbors its own intrinsic end and is consequently desired and done for its own sake, all the more is the “thought that thinks itself.” Aristotle’s explanation as regards God expresses these features:

If, then, God is always in that good state in which we sometimes are, this compels our wonder; and if in a better, this compels it yet more. And God is in a better state. And life also belongs to God; for the actuality of thought is life, and God is that actuality; and God’s self-dependent actuality is life most good and eternal. We say therefore that God is a living being, eternal, most good, so that life and duration continuous and eternal belong to God; for this is God.<sup>96</sup>

To what extent does this description of God correspond to beauty as Aristotle understood it? God is identified here as an “actuality” that is “life most good and eternal”; the end is in itself and it is desired for its own sake. As this applies to thought, the divine mind must have “thought itself” as its object of thinking. Otherwise its power to think is determined by some extrinsic and hence accidental entity desired for that entity’s sake:

Clearly, then, it thinks that which is most divine and estimable, and does not change; for the change would be for the worse,

95. *Metaphysics* 1072b 17: ἡ δὲ νόησις ἡ καθ’ αὐτὴν τοῦ καθ’ αὐτὸ ἀρίστου, καὶ ἡ μάλιστα τοῦ μάλιστα.

96. *Metaphysics* 1072b 24–30: εἰ οὖν οὕτως εὖ ἔχει, ὡς ἡμεῖς ποτέ, ὁ θεὸς αἰεὶ θαυμαστόν: εἰ δὲ μᾶλλον, ἔτι θαυμασιώτερον. ἔχει δὲ ὡδε. καὶ ζωὴ δὲ γε ὑπάρχει: ἡ γὰρ νοῦ ἐνέργεια ζωὴ, ἐκεῖνος δὲ ἡ ἐνέργεια: ἐνέργεια δὲ ἡ καθ’ αὐτὴν ἐκείνου ζωὴ ἀρίστη καὶ αἰδῖος. φημὲν δὴ τὸν θεὸν εἶναι ζῶιον αἰδῖον ἀρίστον, ὥστε ζωὴ καὶ αἰὼν συνεχῆς καὶ αἰδῖος ὑπάρχει τῷ θεῷ: τοῦτο γὰρ ὁ θεός. Translation by Ross. Aristotle elaborates this notion more fully at 1074b 15–1075a 10.

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and anything of this kind would immediately imply some sort of motion. Therefore if Mind is not thinking but a potentiality, it is reasonable to suppose that the continuity of its thinking is laborious; clearly there must be something else which is more excellent than Mind; i.e. the object of thought; for both thought and the act of thinking will belong even to the thinker of the worst thoughts. Therefore if this is to be avoided (as it is, since it is better not to see some things than to see them), thinking cannot be the supreme good. Therefore Mind thinks itself, if it is that which is best; and its thinking is a thinking of thinking.<sup>97</sup>

The fact that Aristotle no longer makes reference to the name beauty in these instances invites speculation. Perhaps he thinks beauty is too mystical or religious a name. Or perhaps, since this text is earlier than the *Rhetoric* where his characterization of beauty appears more specifically developed, the elaborations here are the inchoate origins of that later characterization. Elsewhere in the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle acknowledges that a science such as mathematics may “say a great deal about beauty even if it does not expressly mention it” (1078a 35). It would not be surprising, then, that he might at times do something similar. Nevertheless, in the concluding thought of this particular chapter, beauty does in fact return in name. Aristotle refutes quite firmly the view of the Pythagoreans and Speusippus who hold that the supreme beauty and goodness are not present in the beginning since they are effects rather than causes; that is to say that the flower is more perfect, and hence more complete and beautiful than the seed (1072b 30). As Aristotle explains, however, all effects derive from being that is prior, first and complete in itself; all seeds come from a more perfect flower. This more complete, perfect and prior being is identified here with beauty.

Aristotle concludes this passage by reiterating the existence of a final cause, only now he does so by invoking the name “substance” rather than “goodness,” “cause,” or “God.” It is possible to attribute this to his penchant for a scientific foundation rather than a mystical or religious one. Nevertheless, there remains an influence of beauty, not only based upon its appearance *in name* at the beginning and again at the end of the

97. *Metaphysics* 1074b 25–30: δῆλον τοίνυν ὅτι τὸ θειώτατον καὶ τιμιώτατον νοεῖ, καὶ οὐ μεταβάλλει: εἰς χεῖρον γὰρ ἢ μεταβολή, καὶ κίνησις τις ἤδη τὸ τοιοῦτον. πρῶτον μὲν οὖν εἰ μὴ νόησις ἐστὶν ἀλλὰ δύναμις, εὐλογον ἐπίπονον εἶναι τὸ συνεχές αὐτῷ τῆς νοήσεως: ἔπειτα δῆλον ὅτι ἄλλο τι ἂν εἴη τὸ τιμιώτερον ἢ ὁ νοῦς, τὸ νοούμενον. καὶ γὰρ τὸ νοεῖν καὶ ἡ νόησις ὑπάρξει καὶ τὸ χεῖριστον νοοῦντι, ὥστ' εἰ φευκτὸν τοῦτο καὶ γὰρ μὴ ὄρᾶν ἔνια κρεῖττον ἢ ὄρᾶν, οὐκ ἂν εἴη τὸ ἄριστον ἢ νόησις. αὐτὸν ἄρα νοεῖ, εἴπερ ἐστὶ τὸ κράτιστον, καὶ ἔστιν ἡ νόησις νοήσεως νόησις. Translation Tredennick.

passage considered, but upon its presence *in content* throughout. That this presence appears in name only at the beginning and end, and only in content in the middle, suggests an ambiguity surrounding Aristotle's thoughts regarding the subject and it is an ambiguity found not only here. As the following section makes clear, Aristotle seems to hit a roadblock with respect to beauty.

### *Beauty and the Origin*

The second significant passage on beauty from the *Metaphysics* is found in book 5, chapter 1, which will be joined to book 13, chapter 3 for reasons that will become clear. In the first chapter of book 5 Aristotle sets out to define a “beginning.” He provides six different senses in which a beginning can be understood—as regards nature, element, thought, will, essence, or final cause—and each of these reflects either an intrinsic or extrinsic relation to that which, on account of it, begins. Discerning what is common in all six, Aristotle reduces these to three broader classifications: “It is common then to all beginnings,” he writes, “to be the first point from which a thing either is, or comes to be, or is known.”<sup>98</sup> From these three classifications, he derives two broader groupings: “but of these some are immanent in the thing and others are outside,”<sup>99</sup> referring to the extrinsic or intrinsic origination of entities. If the analysis in the previous section is correct, then these ought to correspond to the good and the beautiful respectively. In fact, this is precisely how Aristotle concludes this examination: “for the good and the beautiful are the beginning both of the knowledge and of the movement of many things.”<sup>100</sup> His choice to assert that “many things” (πολλῶν) rather than “all things” begin in the good and the beautiful may betray an unwillingness to assent to such a strong conviction while still acknowledging, with a reverent nod to Plato, the primary significance of the good and the beautiful.

Chapter 3 of book 13 offers a contrast to this lack of conviction, and it is precisely here where Aristotle seems to hit a sort of roadblock. The overall theme of this book involves a consideration of immaterial substance, which, based upon his own historical analysis, includes either

98. *Metaphysics* 1013a 18: πασῶν μὲν οὖν κοινὸν τῶν ἀρχῶν τὸ πρῶτον εἶναι ὅθεν ἢ ἔστιν ἢ γίγνεται ἢ γινώσκεται.

99. *Metaphysics* 1013a 18: διὸ ἢ τε φύσις ἀρχὴ καὶ τὸ στοιχεῖον καὶ ἡ διάνοια καὶ ἡ προαίρεσις καὶ οὐσία καὶ τὸ οὐ ἕνεκα.

100. *Metaphysics* 1013a 23: πολλῶν γὰρ καὶ τοῦ γνῶναι καὶ τῆς κινήσεως ἀρχὴ τὰγαθὸν καὶ τὸ καλόν.

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mathematical objects or the ideas (1076a 17–20; 1058b 2). His consideration of mathematical objects comes first and, in a way similar to those passages noted above, his line of inquiry arrives at the good and the beautiful. Only here, he draws a distinction between the two and emphasizes the causal efficacy of the beautiful. It will be helpful to examine this passage in the context of the following question: why does a discussion of the existence of mathematical objects lead to an analysis of the beautiful as a causal principle?

The answer that is found in Aristotle himself is that both the objects of mathematics and the beautiful share significant attributes in common. He does not identify these attributes specifically, but a closer look at mathematical objects provides a possible starting point. Aristotle's position on mathematical objects may be defined with reference to the Platonic tradition of configuring mathematical objects and the soul as intermediaries.<sup>101</sup> Given the context of the passage under consideration (along with Plato's conclusions), it may be stated that both mathematical objects and beauty harbor a "middleness" that oscillates between the sensible and the supersensible, or the material and the immaterial, calling to mind the *μεταξύ* spoken of by Diotima. A second attribute is that, just as the *Hippias Major* concluded about beauty, Aristotle maintains that mathematical objects do not admit of definition.<sup>102</sup> Moreover, neither beauty nor mathematics admit of teleological explanations; beauty because it is desired for its own sake, which is to say it is the goal or end of the very activities that an appeal to beauty renders intelligible, and mathematics because its objects are abstracted from the teleological process of nature.<sup>103</sup>

For Aristotle, the objects of mathematics derive from being insofar as being is quantifiable, which is to say insofar as being has order, symmetry, and proportion. Mathematical objects possess a unique mode of existence in that they exist neither entirely in sensible entities nor entirely separate from them (1076b 10–15). Rather the objects of mathematics exist somehow in between the sensible and the intellectual. In a way similar to how mobility can be an object of inquiry without implicating the material object in which it appears, mathematical objects are communicated by sensible entities (1077b 17–31) but separated from these by the intellect in its encounter with them (1077b 31–34). Considered in its similarity to

101. Cf. Cleary, *Aristotle & Mathematics*, 424.

102. *Metaphysics* VII 10, 1036a 1–8. Cf. Anderson, "Aristotle and Aquinas."

103. Cf. Aristotle, *Parts of Animals*, bk. I, ch. 1, 641b11–13 (in *Basic Works of Aristotle*); *Metaphysics* XIII 1078a 31–b6. Cf. Crubeliier, "Aporiai 1–2," 53.

mathematics, beauty is conceived by Aristotle in terms of the way in which it provides the determinations of symmetry, proportion and order to being, linking beauty in significant ways to the order of knowing.

It is at the end of this particular passage under consideration where Aristotle comes close to expressing his findings in terms of a *logos* of the *μεταξύ* when he explains the relationship between mathematics and the beautiful, though his line of reasoning is not exactly clear. He begins with the subjects of geometry, then moves to the recognition of the two forms of being (completely real and potentially material 1078a 30), and arrives at the following assertion about the good and the beautiful:

Now since the good and the beautiful are different (for the former always implies conduct as its subject, while the beautiful is found also in motionless things), those who assert that the mathematical sciences say nothing of the beautiful or the good are in error. For these sciences say and prove a great deal about them; if they do not expressly mention them, but prove attributes which are their results or their definitions, it is not true to say that they tell us nothing about them.<sup>104</sup>

Despite the difficulty of understanding this passage, however, important implications may be drawn out. One such implication, indicated by the causal use of *ἐπεὶ*, is that because the good and the beautiful are different, the latter can be and is treated also by the mathematical sciences. This implication is underscored by a contrast passage in the *Nichomachean Ethics* where Aristotle explains how human action, in the ethical context of the good, cannot be determined with mathematical exactitude.<sup>105</sup> Aristotle proceeds to describe the way mathematics treats the beautiful, and in so doing, he provides another aspect of the way he conceives beauty. Not only is it that which is desired for its own sake, which includes elements of the good, here Aristotle explains its primary attributes: order (*τάξις*), symmetry (*συμμετρία*), and definiteness (*ὠρισμένον*). Each of these attributes, Aristotle explains, is treated in a special degree by mathematics. Aristotle does not mean that a mathematician proves something is beautiful but rather that beauty is a characteristic feature of these proofs (a point that

104. *Metaphysics* 1078a 32–37: ἐπεὶ δὲ τὸ ἀγαθὸν καὶ τὸ καλὸν ἕτερον τὸ μὲν γὰρ αἰεὶ ἐν πράξει, τὸ δὲ καλὸν καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἀκινήτοις, οἱ φάσκοντες οὐδὲν λέγειν τὰς μαθηματικὰς ἐπιστήμας περὶ καλοῦ ἢ ἀγαθοῦ ψεύδονται. λέγουσι γὰρ καὶ δεικνύουσι μάλιστα: οὐ γὰρ εἰ μὴ ὀνομάζουσι τὰ δ' ἔργα καὶ τοὺς λόγους δεικνύουσιν, οὐ λέγουσι περὶ αὐτῶν. Translation Ross.

105. *Nichomachean Ethics* 1094b 11–27.

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is corroborated by many contemporary mathematicians and physicists).<sup>106</sup> And since these attributes are required for things to appear, that is, to be rendered visible to the intellect and the eyes, Aristotle appropriates a causal power to them. It is from all this that he concludes beauty is a causal principle (1078b 4), which mathematics must treat “in some sense” (τρόπον τινά) as a cause.

It is at this point where a sort of roadblock occurs. His final sentiment in this whole line of inquiry involves an apparent promise to continue speaking about beauty and its causal elements: “But we shall speak more plainly elsewhere about these matters.”<sup>107</sup> As most translations note, this is an unfulfilled promise. Some translations express a degree of ambiguity concerning its fulfillment stating “there is no *obvious* fulfillment.”<sup>108</sup> Such a statement leaves open the possibility that some later text, perhaps the *Poetics*, is Aristotle’s attempt to explore beauty and consequently to make good on his promise in the *Metaphysics*. But as already noted, the contents of the *Poetics* do not justify such an assertion. It may be the case that Aristotle made good on his promise to treat beauty in one of his lost dialogues. But again, without any evidence to confirm such a possibility, no direct conclusion may be drawn.

When presented with the evidence that is available, it appears the most that can be said is that the absence of a treatise on beauty, after a promise to treat it at length, suggests an ambiguity surrounding Aristotle’s conception of beauty that grows stronger with his own development. This ambiguity is detectable from the tension within Aristotle’s own observations of beauty in his later *Nicomachean Ethics*, *Poetics* and *Rhetoric*. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, for example, Aristotle characterizes beauty as that which is most enduring (1123a 9–10) and so indicates a more immaterial sense to beauty. At the same time he explains that beauty “implies a good size body, and little people may be neat and well-proportioned but cannot be beautiful.”<sup>109</sup> It appears that the more spiritual attributes of beauty give way to those that are more “scientifically determinate” in the development of Aristotle’s corpus. Size as an essential attribute of beauty

106. Cleary, *Aristotle & Mathematics*, 341. As John Polkinghorne explains in *Science and the Trinity*, 63: “In fundamental physics it is an actual technique of discovery to look for equations that have about them the unmistakable character of mathematical beauty.”

107. *Metaphysics* 1078b 5: μᾶλλον δὲ γνωρίμως ἐν ἄλλοις περὶ αὐτῶν ἐροῦμεν.

108. E.g., Tredennick’s translation.

109. *Rhetoric* 1123b 6 (in *Basic Works of Aristotle*): ὡσπερ καὶ τὸ κάλλος ἐν μεγάλῳ σώματι, οἱ μικροὶ δ’ ἀστεῖοι καὶ σύμμετροι, καλοὶ δοῦ.

appears again in the *Poetics*: “To be beautiful, a living creature, and every whole made up of parts, must not only present a certain order in its arrangement of parts, but also be of a certain definite magnitude.”<sup>110</sup> And again more in detail:

Beauty is a matter of size and order, and therefore impossible either (1) in a very minute creature, since our perception becomes indistinct as it approaches instantaneity; or (2) in a creature of vast size—one say 1,000 miles long—as in that case, instead of the object being seen all at once, the unity and wholeness of it is lost to the beholder.<sup>111</sup>

Aristotle’s assertion seems at least to imply the dependency of beauty upon human perception, an assertion that appears to contradict his refutation of the Protagoran view, noted earlier, that man is the measure of all things.<sup>112</sup> One also finds this idea that beauty depends upon human perception in the *Rhetoric* where it is explained in the context of writing and comprehension.<sup>113</sup> Aristotle contrasts a continuous style, which has no end in itself, with one more beautiful and pleasant because it has the beginning and end in itself and is thus limited for the perception of the intellect. Perhaps more than anywhere else, there is here a combination of Aristotle’s two primary attributes of beauty: the communication of an end desired in itself requires the limitations incumbent upon human perception. There is a sense in which any end desired in itself is unbound insofar as it remains an end being sought—that is to say, insofar as it is the end that itself limits, it is in itself unlimited. And, it is worth noting, in the *Politics* Aristotle asserts that introducing order into the unlimited is a divine power, and it is such a power that holds the universe together. He immediately follows this observation by explaining how beauty is realized in number and magnitude. Hence, that which is most beautiful is that which combines magnitude with good order.<sup>114</sup> Without somehow conforming itself to the limitations of the intellect, the end could never be desired for itself.

110. *Poetics* 1450b 35 (in *Basic Works of Aristotle*): ἔτι δ’ ἐπει τὸ καλὸν καὶ ζῶιον καὶ ἅπαν πρᾶγμα ὃ συνέστηκεν ἐκ τινῶν οὐ μόνον ταῦτα τεταγμένα δεῖ ἔχειν ἀλλὰ καὶ μέγεθος ὑπάρχειν μὴ τὸ τυχόν.

111. *Poetics* 1451a: τὸ γὰρ καλὸν ἐν μεγέθει καὶ τάξει ἐστίν, διὸ οὔτε πάμμικρον ἂν τι γένοιτο καλὸν ζῶιον συγγεῖται γὰρ ἢ θεωρία ἐγγὺς τοῦ ἀναισθήτου χρόνου γινομένη οὔτε παμμέγεθες οὐ γὰρ ἅμα ἢ θεωρία γίνεται ἀλλ’ οἴχεται τοῖς θεωροῦσι τὸ ἐν καὶ τὸ ὅλον ἐκ τῆς θεωρίας οἷον εἰ μυρίων σταδίων εἴη ζῶιον.

112. *Metaphysics* 1062b 15–1063a 5.

113. *Rhetoric* III, ch. 9, 1409a.

114. Aristotle, *Politics* bk. VII, 4.

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Based upon all this it appears valid to contend that in Aristotle there is a discernable ambiguity surrounding his treatment of beauty. Like mathematics, beauty is both intelligible in ways that exceed the capacity of discursive reason but capable of some conformity to discursive thought. That he believes beauty is an object of knowledge and contemplation is unquestionable. But so too is there indication that Aristotle holds beauty to be almost entirely intuitive. When asked why beauty delights us and why we spend time with the beautiful, Aristotle's response is simple: "That," he says, "is a blind man's question."<sup>115</sup> As Aristotle seems to indicate—or at least Aristotle as understood by this biographer of the philosophers<sup>116</sup>—the value and delight of beauty are self-evident and thus intuitive. In this regard, beauty is not a thing to be reflected upon by the systems of discursive thought; rather they are to be enjoyed.

Aristotle's metaphysics is an "epoch-making" event in the history of natural theology, Gilson observes, because "the long delayed conjunction of the first philosophical principle with the notion of god became at least an accomplished fact."<sup>117</sup> This Aristotelian conjunction is signified by a few different names; the prime mover, the unmoved mover, pure act, thought thinking itself. Although he never explicitly identifies beauty with god, there is a noteworthy correspondence in terms of content, especially in regards to his recognition that beauty concerns *that which is desired for its own sake*. In any case, part of Aristotle's contribution to the issue of beauty as a divine name must include the conjunction between god and a first principle of philosophy, extending the Platonic insight that thought harbors a degree of porosity with the transcendent realm beyond it. For beauty to be conceived as a divine name, this porosity is a necessary step in the process. But along with establishing this porosity, Aristotle also fortifies the correspondence between beauty and intelligibility by recognizing in the association between beauty and mathematics the way that being is ordered, symmetrical and determinate.

115. Laertius Diogenes V, 1, 20 *On Aristotle*, cited in Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics*, 1: 153, 165.

116. Some modern scholars find little of philosophical value in Laertius Diogenes. Werner Jaeger, for example, has referred to him as an "ignoramus" in *Paideia*, 330n2.

117. Gilson, *God and Philosophy*, 32.

## **Conclusion**

For the two greatest representatives of ancient Greek philosophy, beauty is a phenomenon best characterized by its ambiguous, enigmatic content. For while clearly both philosophers identify the divine with the good, characterized as it is by that which all things desire and so always beyond concrete manifest forms, beauty seems recalcitrant to such identification. It is a recalcitrance that derives from the fact that beauty is bound up with its concrete, material manifestations. Both thinkers recognize the transcendent, immaterial beauty to which these concrete, material forms refer. However, a unique difficulty arises when they attempt to mediate this transcendent, immaterial aspect with the more concrete, material forms. What principle could they have used for such a mediation? From its earliest origins, especially in Parmenides and Heraclitus, Greek philosophy tended to either subsume difference within identity, or sacrifice identity for the sake of difference. The difficulty of beauty that reveals itself with Plato's and Aristotle's attempts to subject it to rational inquiry concerns primarily the perennial tension between the identity of transcendental, spiritual beauty and the differences that arise with its concrete, material manifestations. Although Plato and Aristotle do not unequivocally overcome this tension, their success and contribution to the issue of how beauty relates to the divine comes from the extent to which their remarkable thinking draws out the ambiguity within the tension. Only when such an ambiguity is more fully brought to conscious thought can it then be more fully confronted. Plato and Aristotle certainly set the stage for their posterity to do just that.

## 2

### Beauty and the Divine in Neoplatonism

#### *Plotinus and Proclus*

THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN BEAUTY AND THE DIVINE IN PLATO AND ARISTOTLE, as chapter 1 sought to demonstrate, is never without ambiguity. Both figures find something in the phenomenon of beauty that they recognize as being an otherworldly quality. At the same time, both understand the indispensable relation that beauty has to the concrete, material, forms in which it appears. The ambiguity of the association seems to derive from the inability to finally mediate between the transcendent, spiritual dimension of beauty with the material forms in which it appears. One of the two poles tends to be elevated as the more real, while the other tends to be minimized in its real content.

As the thought of Plato and Aristotle undergoes development within the centuries that follow, it begins to accrue a more spiritual, religious, constitution in the form of Neoplatonism. This chapter examines how the Neoplatonic development impacts the association between beauty and the divine. The two figures to be examined are Plotinus and Proclus. Not only are these arguably the two most renowned Neoplatonists, but they span the whole development of Neoplatonism. Plotinus, who is often considered the father of Neoplatonism, stands as the origin of this more religious mode of Platonic thinking, while Proclus stands as the last great Neoplatonist. This is not to say that other prominent figures like Amelius, Porphyry, Iamblichus, or Syrianus have nothing to offer in this respect. Rather, insofar as Proclus marks the intersection of Neoplatonism and the Dionysian tradition he also becomes a passageway for these other figures.

## Plotinus

From its earliest origins, Platonism in the Academy undergoes a slow and complex development into what eventually becomes Neoplatonism.<sup>1</sup> If the Neoplatonic advance of Greek thought is constituted in part by the presence of a more conscious spiritual impulse, Plotinus's treatment of beauty is one indication. In ways that go beyond both Plato and Aristotle, Plotinus gives explicit philosophical treatment of the phenomenon of beauty. Consequently, the secondary literature devoted to this theme is abundant, ranging from collections of essays,<sup>2</sup> to chapters in monographs,<sup>3</sup> to entire monographs themselves.<sup>4</sup> Despite this, among scholars there is relatively little consensus on the status, meaning and substance of beauty in Plotinus. Some scholars contend that Plotinus equates the One, the Good and the Beautiful,<sup>5</sup> while others insist that beauty is derived from the One which, though equated with the Good, is clearly distinguished from Beauty.<sup>6</sup> This issue will be addressed in more detail later on as well as in chapter 6, which will examine the difference between Dionysius's God and the Neoplatonic One as it is formulated by Plotinus. For the present purposes, however, it will be helpful to explicate some of the more fundamental elements of Plotinian beauty.

Plotinus's *Enneads* is a work that among other components embodies one of the first explicit philosophies of beauty. There are two obvious sections in the *Enneads* where beauty is addressed: 1.6, which discusses simply "beauty," and 5.8, which moves toward beauty's more intellectual

1. On the development of Platonism in the early and middle academies, see esp. the work of Dillon: *inter alia*, *Middle Platonists; Great Tradition; Heirs of Plato*.

2. E.g., Alexandrakis and Moutafaks, *Neoplatonism and Western Aesthetics*, essays by Narbonne, Sen, Quinn, Schroeder, Hubler, and Vassilopoulou are specifically devoted to Plotinus, while many others include his thought as a primary foundation.

3. E.g., Rist, *Plotinus*, ch. 5; Corrigan, *Reading Plotinus*, ch. 4; Cooper, *Aesthetics*, ch. 4.

4. E.g., Miles, *Plotinus on Body and Beauty*.

5. See Inge, *Philosophy of Plotinus*, 124ff. Inge recognizes a linguistic difficulty in Plotinus' references to beauty (*καλλοσύνη*) and beautiful (*καλόν*) and suggests that the former is in fact identical with the One, while the latter is used to signify spiritual beauty. See also Stern-Gillet, "Le Principe Du Beau Chez Plotin," 38–63, and Gay, "Four Medieval Views of Creation," 243–73, both of whom argue that Plotinus does indeed identify beauty and the One.

6. Rist, *Plotinus*, 53–65. Rist contends that Inge's examination "oversimplifies" the matter (56) and merely "states the problem rather than solves it" (53).

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dimension.<sup>7</sup> *Enneads* 3.8 is also relevant as a section that discusses contemplation and the One, exploring the method of encounter with the beautiful.<sup>8</sup> Since Plotinus identifies beauty most properly with the Intellectual-principle (*nous*), other relevant sections include those areas where he discusses this principle. Beyond these more explicit areas of the text, however, beauty makes its presence known throughout in more indirect ways. So much is this the case that without a proper understanding of Plotinus's views of beauty one risks misreading him on many other issues.

The most important aspect of Plotinian beauty, if also its most enigmatic, is its proper identification with the Intellectual-principle, or *nous* (6.7.18, etc.). To his credit, Plotinus' own methodology does not begin with this more spiritual dimension. Rather, his examination of beauty as *nous* is consequent upon an examination of how beauty is encountered in material forms (1.6). The senses provide his initial point of departure into beauty, from which point he echoes the *Hippias Major* and asks a number of questions that culminate in his desire to discover a principle that can account for the beauty that is shared among all beautiful things (1.6.1). He cites the traditional response: symmetry of parts is what makes all these beautiful bodies beautiful. But something about this view is lacking for Plotinus, for against it he argues that if it were accurate "nothing single or simple" could be beautiful, nor could the parts of a whole but only the whole itself. In other words, beauty cannot be so exclusive: "But if the whole is beautiful the parts must be beautiful too; a beautiful whole can certainly not be composed of ugly parts; all the parts must have beauty."<sup>9</sup> Beauty penetrates beyond the whole *qua* whole saturating the parts that constitute that whole with the very same beauty (5.8.8). Beauty can multiply itself without dividing itself, giving itself ceaselessly without diminishment. He makes this point explicitly in his example of how art, through sculpture for example, provides beauty to a stone by introducing form into what was formless. In so doing, there is only increase in beauty itself: "For the beauty in the art did not come into the stone, but that beauty stays in the art and another comes from it into the stone which is derived from

7. Throughout this section, references to the *Enneads* will occur in parenthetical form in the main body. Where a citation is made, the original Greek will be provided in a footnote. The Greek text used comes from P. Henry and H.-R. Schwyzer, *Plotini opera*. Editions that have been consulted include the Armstrong translation in the Loeb edition, along with translation composed by MacKenna and Page.

8. Balthasar, *GOTL*, 4:308.

9. 1.6.1: καίτοι δεῖ, εἶπερ ὅλον, καὶ τὰ μέρη καλὰ εἶναι· οὐ γὰρ δὴ ἐξ αἰσχυρῶν, ἀλλὰ πάντα κατειληφέναι τὸ κάλλος.

it and less than it.”<sup>10</sup> Through the artistic act, the beauty that is native to art distributes itself in novel modalities as it is made to inform a material substrate. Much in the same way that light shines brighter or increases its luminosity when it glows from multiple sources, so too does beauty increase itself in beautifying entities more and more. Beauty is like a fire that grows as it increases its presence without ever relinquishing its original presence in the source. In this sense, beauty corresponds more closely with spiritual qualities.

And so, if light, or even more abstract entities like laws, branches of knowledge, and especially virtues are accurately called beautiful “surely we must say that being beautiful is something else over and above good proportion, and good proportion is beautiful because of something else.”<sup>11</sup> Symmetry and good proportion cannot be identified as beauty itself since they bespeak a more primordial “something else.” Rather, for Plotinus the principle that accounts for the primary beauty in bodies is the presence of *nous*, which is a presence intuitively known and of which the soul may speak as if “it already understood it” “welcoming it and adapting itself to it” (1.6.2). Following both Plato and Aristotle, Plotinus explains that the presence of *nous* in any beautiful thing—a presence that makes the thing to be beautiful—is the presence of an intelligibility that exceeds the normal productions or processes of discursive reason (6.6.7).<sup>12</sup> In fact, when the soul encounters something beautiful, it is “thrilled” and “delighted” to be put back in touch with that “higher kind of reality in the realm of being” (1.6.2). Through the beauty of material entities, the soul “returns to

10. 5.8.1: Ἦν ἄρα ἐν τῇ τέχνῃ τὸ κάλλος τοῦτο ἄμεινον πολλῶ· οὐ γὰρ ἐκεῖνο ἦλθεν εἰς τὸν λίθον τὸ ἐν τῇ τέχνῃ, ἀλλ’ ἐκεῖνο μὲν μένει, ἄλλο δὲ ἀπ’ ἐκείνης ἔλαττον ἐκείνου.

11. 1.6.1: Ὅταν δὲ δῆ καὶ τῆς αὐτῆς συμμετρίας μενούσης ὅτε μὲνκαλὸν τὸ αὐτὸ πρόσωπον, ὅτε δὲ μὴ φαίνεται, πῶς οὐκ ἄλλο δεῖ ἐπὶ τῷ συμμετρῷ λέγειν τὸ καλὸν εἶναι, καὶ τὸ σύμμετρον καλὸν εἶναι δι’ ἄλλο.

12. 6.6.7: αὐτὴ γὰρ νοῦ φύσις· ἐπεὶ καὶ ψυχὴ οὕτω μιμεῖται καὶ ἡ λεγομένη φύσις, καθ’ ἣν καὶ ὑφ’ ἧς ἕκαστα γεννᾶται ἄλλο ἄλλοι, αὐτῆς ὁμοῦ ἑαυτῇ οὐσης. As MacKenna and Page translate this: “This is the very nature of the Intellectual-Principle as we may know from soul which reproduces it and from what we call Nature under which and by which the things of process are brought into their disjointed being while that Nature itself remains indissolubly one.” Admittedly, there is no direct reference to discursive reason. However, the contrast between thinking the one nature within which all things are held and the soul’s use of the intellectual principle, which includes a “reproduction” (μιμεῖται) and the bringing into disjointed being the “things of process” (ἕκαστα γεννᾶται), can be read in terms of a contrast between an intelligibility that exceeds the productions and processes of discursive thought (i.e., something like *nous*) even while entering into discursive thought.

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itself and remembers itself and its own possessions” insofar as these dwell in the *nous*.

In recognizing this kinship, Plotinus does not yet arrive at the principle he seeks. But his previous analysis does enable him to inquire as to the symmetry between this higher realm and the beauty of the material entities here “below”: “But how are both the things in that world and the things in this beautiful?”<sup>13</sup> His answer—“by participation in form”—appears to be little more than a Platonic echo. But it is precisely in beauty where Plotinus goes beyond Platonic participation and thus avoids the problem that Aristotle criticizes in this regard. Briefly put, Aristotle argues that the Platonic doctrine of participation not only assumes a “separate” existence of the forms themselves, but also tends to emphasize a transcendental ground of a thing’s essence to the neglect of its intrinsic, immanent essential grounding.<sup>14</sup> Whether or not Aristotle’s criticism is an accurate appraisal of Plato is debatable.<sup>15</sup> In any case, Plotinus gets beyond it insofar as beauty serves as an exemplary power that is both extrinsically given as a transcendental ground and intrinsically generated as an immanent formative power, giving itself through the formal vehicles of both art and nature to parts and to wholes alike (1.6.2). This giving of itself is not a one-time donation but an ongoing process that is manifest in the coming-to-unity of the thing (5.8.9). The form, as the conduit of beauty’s unitive power, “approaches and composes that which is to come into being from many parts into a single ordered whole. It brings it into a completed unity and makes it one by agreement of its parts.”<sup>16</sup> Beauty is the “reaching out” as it were of the divine formative power into that which is not yet completed in its unity. As an entity receives this unifying form, it becomes more and more beautiful. “So then the beautiful body comes into being,” concludes Plotinus, “by sharing in a formative power which comes from the divine forms.”<sup>17</sup> All of this points to the way in which *nous*, as the proper locus of beauty, is a plenitude of formative power and intelligibility. As Pierre Hadot has remarked, Plotinus is “directly” in the Aristotelian tradition in presenting the union of the soul with the divine intellect “as an experience

13. 1.6.2: Τίς οὖν ὁμοιότης τοῖς τῆδε πρὸς τὰ ἐκεῖ καλά; καὶ γάρ, εἰ ὁμοιότης, ὅμοια μὲν ἔστω· πῶς δὲ καλὰ κάκεινα καὶ ταῦτα.

14. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1079b.

15. Cf. Copleston’s analysis of Aristotle’s critique in *History of Philosophy*, 1:294–95.

16. 1.6.2: Προσιδὸν οὖν τὸ εἶδος τὸ μὲν ἐκ πολλῶν ἐσόμενον μερῶν ἐν συνθέσει συντάξεται καὶ εἰς μίαν συντέλειαν ἤγαγε καὶ ἐν τῇ ὁμολογίᾳ πεποιήκεν, ἐπεὶ περ ἐν ἧν αὐτὸ ἐν τε ἔδει τὸ μορφούμενον εἶναι ὡς δυνατόν αὐτῷ ἐκ πολλῶν ὄντι.

17. 1.6.2: Οὕτω μὲν δὴ τὸ καλὸν σῶμα γίνεταί λόγου ἀπὸ θεῖων ἐλθόντος κοινωνία.

that transcends the normal activity of reason.”<sup>18</sup> As the realm of the higher intellect, *nous* is the locus of this union because it is the reservoir of all being and thus harbors an intelligibility that exceeds the determinations required for all discursive thought. It is a plenitude of intelligible content insofar as it is constituted by all intelligibility that was, is, and will be. It is this plenitude of intelligible content that distills itself through the activity of discursive reason.

It is the intelligible plenitude of *nous* that accounts for its release into the diversity of forms (6.7.2). These forms take root in the world of things as material entities in order to serve as a first impression of beauty. But as communications of a higher beauty, they are meant to serve as “doorways” toward this higher realm (4.8.6). A few different principles emerge from this component of Plotinian beauty.

First, *nous* is a unity-in-plurality, a “many and one” whose unity is multiplicity (4.8.3; 6.2.21; 6.5.6; etc.) and as such is identified with the all and with being (5.1.4). The unity of *nous* is secured insofar as, in its act of intellection, it is turned to the One whose overflow was the cause of the emanation of *nous* from the One:

This we may say is the first act of generation: the One, perfect because it seeks nothing, has nothing, and needs nothing, overflows, as it were, and its superabundance makes something other than itself. This, when it has come into being, turns back upon the One and is filled, and becomes Intellect by looking towards it.<sup>19</sup>

By ceasing its own emanating momentum as it turns back to the One from which it overflowed, it secures its being. But in so doing, it generates its gaze upon the One, through which it becomes Intellect, *nous* (5.2.1). *Nous* is a plurality not only because now it has being and intellection as an “accidental duality” (5.3.11) but because it is the “very seeing of the One” (5.1.7). This act of seeing, in coming from the One, is unique insofar as in this act of seeing—*nous*—vision and envisioned are a unity (5.3.8), “though a unity which is the potentiality of all existence” (5.1.7). As having something of both the unifying source and the plural manifestations, *nous* is therefore identified with beauty: “And first we must posit beauty which is also the good; from this immediately comes *nous*, which is beauty, and

18. Hadot, “Neoplatonist Spirituality,” 239.

19. 5.2.1: και πρώτη οἷον γέννησις αὐτῆ· ὃν γὰρ τέλειον τῷ μηδὲν ζητεῖν μηδὲ ἔχειν μηδὲ δεῖσθαι οἷον ὑπερρρῦναι καὶ τὸ ὑπερπλήρες αὐτοῦ πεποιήκεν ἄλλο· τὸ δὲ γενόμενον εἰς αὐτὸ ἐπεστράφη καὶ ἐπληρώθη καὶ ἐγένετο πρὸς αὐτὸ βλέπον καὶ νοῦς οὗτος.

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soul is given beauty by *nous*.<sup>20</sup> There is a doubleness that shadows the Plotinian notion of *nous* as a hypostasis in itself. In its emergence from the One it cannot but maintain a porosity toward it, but in being emanated from a One that cannot have relation with anything whatsoever it becomes absolutely other to the One. Absolute otherness and porosity are placed in a tensile unity in the beauty of *nous*. Hence there is an ambiguity in *nous*'s relation to the One that accounts for the various interpretation of the relation between beauty and the One, which will be addressed later.

Second, the relationship between *nous* and soul reveals two interrelations: the relation between beauty and pedagogy, and the relation between beauty and ontological hierarchy. Both of these relationships are captured in Plotinus' account of anagogy (ascent) found in the passage "On Dialectic" (1.3). In this account, Plotinus employs three typological figures to represent the various levels, methods and features involved in the upward journey into the Good: the musician, the lover and the metaphysician. These figures, derived from Plato's *Phaedrus* according to some,<sup>21</sup> each represent differing rapports and responses to the beauty that draws them upward. Similar to Plato's more existential account of beauty in the *Phaedrus*, here in Plotinus's threefold typology beauty can be viewed also as a mode of "spiritual discipline."<sup>22</sup>

The musician, described as the one who is led by beauty insofar as beauty appears in sounds and rhythms and forms, is "easily moved and excited by beauty, but not quite capable of being moved by beauty in itself."<sup>23</sup> Consequently, this figure must be taught to arrive at the principles that give rise to these many beautiful things by recognizing in these

20. 1.6.6: Καὶ τὸ πρῶτον θετέον τὴν καλλονήν, ὅπερ καὶ τὰ γαθόν. ἀφ' οὗ νοῦς εὐθύς τὸ καλόν. ψυχὴ δὲ νῶι καλόν. It is worth noting the use of ἀπο in the aspirated form ἀφ' οὗ signifies the idea "from" as origination rather than movement "away" from something. In this case, the beauty of intellect is derived from the mode in which beauty resides alongside the good.

21. A. H. Armstrong, for example, adapts the direct quotation from the *Phaedrus* 248d 1–4: "Who has seen most things, and in the first birth enters into a human child who is going to be a philosopher, a musician or a lover." MacKenna and Page, in contrast, make no mention of Plato, though it should be noted that, as Armstrong himself notes, "The English translation by Stephen MacKenna and B. S. Page . . . is of much scholarly value and will always hold the affection of some readers because of its noble esoteric-majestic style. My debt to it is considerable, but I have had a better critical text at my disposal and have tried to give a plainer version and one closer to the Greek" (*Plotinus Ennead I*, xxxii).

22. Miles, *Plotinus on Body and Beauty*, 43–49.

23. 1.3.1: Θετέον δὴ αὐτὸν εὐκίνητον καὶ ἐπτοημένον μὲν πρὸς τὸ καλόν, ἀδυνατώτερον δὲ παρ' αὐτοῦ κινεῖσθαι.

beautiful things the more universal, intelligible beauty he truly desires. The musician's inherent kinship with beauty is so powerful that Plotinus emphatically recommends "inserting" the doctrines of philosophy into the musician in order to enable a "firm confidence" in the beauty he "possesses without knowing it."<sup>24</sup> According to this recommendation, one's love of beauty facilitates a sort of cognitive receptivity to philosophical truths akin to the way faith enables a reception of divine doctrine. Here not only is beauty's pedagogical power implemented on a prosyletic level, but it also suggests a degree of continuity with the Aristotelian recognition of beauty's order toward knowledge.

The lover is distinguished by the fact that he has a memory of beauty in itself, albeit a somewhat displaced memory, which arouses a more urgent desire in him and which causes him to be overwhelmed by visible beauties (1.3.2). The lover, then, differs from the musician in two significant ways. First, insofar as the lover, through his displaced memory of beauty as such, is closer to the intelligible realm of beauty he represents a phase to which the musician may proceed. Second, the musician's "faith in beauty," brought about through implanted philosophical doctrines, opens in the lover to a greater kind of knowledge and so marks a higher phase. Plotinus explains that the lover should be nurtured in his passionate love of things by expanding this love beyond any single "particular body." His account resonates with tones from the *Symposium*. "Led by the course of reasoning," the lover should be taught to consider all bodies in order to comprehend beauty as such, which would open him to comprehending the higher, "better" manifestations of beauty in ways of life, laws, arts, sciences and virtues. "But from virtues he can at once ascend to intellect, to being; and there he must go the higher way."<sup>25</sup> The distinction of this second level of ascent illuminates a hierarchical structure beginning to take shape as a mode of pedagogy.

The third figure, the philosopher or metaphysician, is by nature ready to respond to beauty as such and so has no need of withdraw from the particular beauties in the world (1.3.3). He is one who by virtue of his nature has already begun to ascend and only needs a guide to free his will, enabling his will to "catch up" with what is already happening in his nature. Plotinus recommends mathematics as the first "guide" to train the metaphysician in "philosophical thought and accustom him to

24. The phrase is *καὶ λόγους τοὺς φιλοσοφίας ἐνθετέον*, which means literally "one must insert the teachings/doctrines of philosophy."

25. 1.3.2: *Ἀπὸ δὲ τῶν ἀρετῶν ἤδη ἀναβαίνειν ἐπὶ νοῦν, ἐπὶ τὸ ὄν· κακεῖ βαδιστέον τὴν ἄνω πορείαν*. Translation Armstrong.

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firm confidence in the existence of the immaterial.”<sup>26</sup> Echoing an enduring philosophical point, Plotinus observes that although the philosopher is already by nature virtuous, he still stands in need of perfecting his virtuous character through ongoing study where mathematics will facilitate the learning of dialectic. It is at this point where the intrinsic dialectic of beauty comes into the foreground.

Following Plato, Plotinus views dialectic as the “purest part of intelligence and wisdom,” and the “most valuable of our mental abilities,” concerned as it is with both real being (and so concerned with wisdom) and that which is beyond being (and so concerned with intelligence) (1.3.5). Both of these are features that correspond to beauty. In his account of beauty found at 1.6, Plotinus asks the lovers of beauty a number of questions regarding the many forms of beauty, questions designed to establish the foundation of beauty as such: “We love and delight in these qualities, but why do we call them beautiful?”<sup>27</sup> His answer identifies beauty with real being: “They exist and appear to us and he who sees them cannot possibly say anything else except that they are what really exists. What does “really exists” mean? That they exist as beauties.”<sup>28</sup> If beauty is indeed the *nous* (5.8.9), in which being resides in a more pure plenitude of unity in plurality, then as Plotinus explains, its mode of being is hyper real. Beauty is the fuller source of all being and so more real in its existing. It therefore touches the mind through a similarly more real mode of knowledge corresponding to wisdom. As Plotinus later echoes, there is an identity between true wisdom and real being: “The value of real being comes from wisdom, and it is because it comes from wisdom that it is true being.”<sup>29</sup> This association between beauty, being, and wisdom grounds an important feature of the dialectic of beauty. In an encounter with a beautiful thing, the percipient is put in touch with that which “really exists.” Through this real existent, the plenitude of intelligibility that constitutes beauty (as *nous*) is experienced as wisdom, which becomes a conduit for beauty (5.9.2.). In turn, the received wisdom enables a better vision of being, that is to say, a clearer capacity to see beauty.

26. 1.3.3: Τὰ μὲν δὴ μαθήματα δοτέον πρὸς συνεισμὸν κατανοήσεως καὶ πίστεως ἀσωμάτου.

27. 1.6.5: Ταῦτα οὖν ἀγάμενοι καὶ φιλοῦντες πῶς αὐτὰ λέγομεν καλά.

28. 1.6.5: Ἔστι μὲν γὰρ καὶ φαίνεται καὶ οὐ μήποτε ὁ ἰδὼν ἄλλο τι φῆῃ ἢ τὰ ὄντως ὄντα ταῦτα εἶναι. Τί ὄντα ὄντως; Ἡ καλά.

29. 5.8.5: Ἡ ἄρα ἀληθινὴ σοφία οὐσία, καὶ ἡ ἀληθινὴ οὐσία σοφία, καὶ ἡ ἀξία καὶ τῆ οὐσία παρὰ τῆς σοφίας, καί, ὅτι παρὰ τῆς σοφίας, οὐσία ἀληθής.

What this brings to light is how Plotinus understands the various levels of being not only as they emanate from the One (descent), but as the soul ascends through them in its striving after the Good. The various grades of soul and degrees of being, when illuminated by the beauty at their origin, provide a vision that Plotinus likens to a symphony where the differing tones and shapes of instruments all contribute to the unity of sound emanating forth (3.5.17). And although he goes so far as to insist that each level is directly dependent on the preceding level (e.g., 5.8.7) his idea that beauty, as wisdom and intellect, emanates in various degrees enables Dionysius to transform this vision so as to conceive creation in terms of hierarchical pedagogy. The Dionysian vision is one in which the plurality of being, manifest as metaphysical inequality, allows each individual entity to participate in the pedagogy of the one, simple, whole (hierarchy) as each ascends higher in the community. But more will be said on that in later chapters. What is important is to recognize the way in which the Plotinian ontology, as a unity-in-plurality ascending toward simplicity, establishes a foundation for the later Dionysian advance.

Ascent through the ontological hierarchy for Plotinus involves not only pursuing knowledge of being itself but also relinquishing the kind of knowledge associated with this lower part of soul in order to give way to the intellect as an act of love. Hadot rightly associates this element in Plotinus with Diotima's account in the *Symposium*.<sup>30</sup> Despite this, however, Plotinus does not hesitate to contribute his own distinctions. Contrary to Plato's view of the one world soul, Plotinus holds that there are two: the higher stands near the *nous* and has no immediate contact with the material world; the lower, as the "real soul" of the phenomenal world, is called "nature." Soul recapitulates this scheme insofar as, like *nous* itself, soul is a "pluralized unity" (6.2.5) and a "one and many" (6.2.6). In the soul's act of knowing, there is a twofold power of intellection that corresponds to the two directions inherent within this soul schematic: vertical and horizontal, or what might be called, in more Aristotelian/scholastic parlance, *transcendental* and *predicamental* respectively.

The first involves the act of the soul in its encounter with nature, i.e., knowledge on the horizontal, *predicamental* level, the level of categorical predicates. This kind of knowing is energized by the presence of beauty in the soul, which almost spontaneously attunes the soul to the ideal-forms in things (1.6.3). On this level the soul finds itself in the many as it gathers the various forms of things into the unity of the intellect. In this way,

30. See, e.g., Hadot, "Neoplatonist Spirituality," 233.

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beauty serves as a sort of “canon of accuracy” for judging the forms it encounters in its cognitive activity. Through beauty, this judgment involves recognizing how every external manifestation of beauty is *beauty as such* in a dispersed state. When the soul sees beauty “mastering” shapeless matter through the activity of form the soul enacts its own beautifying operation by gathering dispersed things into a unity and taking them into the soul’s interior (1.6.3). It then “presents” this unity to “that which is within”—i.e., *nous*—as something “fitting it and dear to it.” This interior turn initiates the activity of contemplation, which in Plotinus holds a primary position in the entire scheme of reality (3.8.7). *Nous* acquires its being and intellection in turning back and gazing upon the One from whose overflow it receives its substantive content. In gathering the dispersed forms of beauty into its one intellectual act, the soul on this horizontal, predicamental level recapitulates the activity of *nous*. This is the first principle engaging in the act of contemplation, and as a consequence all other things aspire to this state as to a goal (3.8.7). The whole of being, for Plotinus, participates in this act of contemplation even though each particular entity performs its contemplative act in differing ways (3.8.5). But in all cases, the goal of contemplation is unification between knower and object known (3.8.6).<sup>31</sup> In the case of the soul, the act of cognition elevates it beyond the “nature” part of the world soul into its interior dimension where it encounters its greater proximity to *nous*. There it is confronted by the dual powers in the *nous*: “intellectual seeing” as knowing its own content, and “intellectual being” as loving what is beyond itself (6.7.35).

The second kind of intellection, the transcendental move toward unity, is initiated by loving what is beyond itself (the second power of *nous*) insofar as through love, the soul opens itself to the transcendence of *nous* allowing *nous* to act upon the soul itself. In Plotinus’ view, *nous* is as present in the human being as soul, and it is toward *nous* that the soul is ever striving (1.1.13). But this striving is limited by the intellect’s first act—grasping intellectually its own content—since this act does not equip the soul with its energy of transcendence. It is only when the soul opens itself to the intellectual act of love, understood as substantial union, that it fully acquires the unity it seeks. As Plotinus himself explains it:

This, then, is so: But, as contemplation ascends from nature to soul, and soul to intellect, and the contemplations become always more intimate and united to the contemplators, and in the soul of the good and wise man the objects known tend

31. Cf. von Balthasar, *GOTL*, 4:280–313.

to become identical with the knowing subjects, since they are pressing on towards the intellect, it is clear that in intellect both are one, not by becoming akin, as in the best soul, but substantially, and because thinking and being are the same.<sup>32</sup>

It is important to note that although throughout his account Plotinus makes a number of distinctions, it would be a mistake to see these distinct steps, processes and components as separate or to understand this as a simple linear sequence. Rather, given the identification of *nous* with beauty, and given beauty's capacity to be one and many, to be whole and part, the various aspects of ascent reflect a similar sort of dynamic wherein the quest for knowledge one phase does not displace another but holds them in harmony. Again, Plotinus explains:

For it is either knowledge of the Good or physical contact with the Good that is the strongest, and by strongest we mean according to what is learned, not in terms of looking towards it but of perceiving and understanding it first. For analogies, abstractions and knowledge of those things derived from it instruct anyone progressing. . . . Here, we put aside all the learning; disciplined to this pitch, established in beauty, *the quester holds knowledge still of the ground he rests on* but, suddenly, swept beyond it all by the very crest of the wave of Intellect surging beneath, he is lifted and sees, *never knowing how*; the vision floods the eyes with light, but it is not a light showing some other object, the light is itself the vision.<sup>33</sup>

In this summary of the ascent of knowledge, Plotinus explains how one continues to grasp the original “foundations” of knowledge even though that one is “swept beyond it” in a way that is not known. What suddenly

32. 3.8.8: Ταῦτα μὲν οὕτω. Τῆς δὲ θεωρίας ἀναβαινούσης ἐκ τῆς φύσεως ἐπὶ ψυχὴν καὶ ἀπὸ ταύτης εἰς νοῦν καὶ αἰεὶ οἰκειότερων τῶν θεωριῶν γιγνομένων καὶ ἐνουμένων τοῖς θεωροῦσι καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς σπουδαίας ψυχῆς πρὸς τὸ αὐτὸ τῷ ὑποκειμένῳ ἰόντων τῶν ἐγνωσμένων ἅτε εἰς νοῦν σπευδόντων, ἐπὶ τούτου δηλονότι ἦδη ἐν ἄμφω οὐκ οἰκειώσει, ὥσπερ ἐπὶ τῆς ψυχῆς τῆς ἀρίστης, ἀλλ' οὐσία καὶ τῷ ταῦτον τὸ εἶναι καὶ τὸ νοεῖν εἶναι. Translation Armstrong.

33. 6.7.36: Ἔστι γὰρ ἢ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ εἴτε γνώσεως εἴτε ἐπαφῆς μέγιστον, καὶ μέγιστόν φησι τοῦτ' εἶναι μάθημα, οὐ τὸ πρὸς αὐτὸ ἰδεῖν μάθημα λέγων, ἀλλὰ περὶ αὐτοῦ μαθεῖν τι πρότερον. Διδάσκουσι μὲν οὖν ἀναλογίαι τε καὶ ἀφαιρέσεις καὶ γνώσεις τῶν ἐξ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀναβασμοὶ τινες, . . . Ἐνθα δὲ ἔασας τις πᾶν μάθημα, καὶ μέχρι τοῦ παιδαγωγηθεὶς καὶ ἐν καλῷ ἰδρυθεὶς, ἐν ᾧ μὲν ἔστι, μέχρι τούτου νοεῖ, ἐξενεχθεὶς δὲ τῷ αὐτοῦ τοῦ νοῦ οἶον κύματι καὶ ὑποῦ ὑπ' αὐτοῦ οἶον οἰδῆσαντος ἀρθεὶς εἰσείδεν ἐξαιφνης οὐκ ἰδὼν ὅπως, ἀλλ' ἢ θέα πλήσασα φωτὸς τὰ ὄμματα οὐ δι' αὐτοῦ πεποίηκεν ἄλλο ὄραν, ἀλλ' αὐτὸ τὸ φῶς τὸ ὄραμα ἦν.

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becomes the object of knowledge is the very light that enables knowledge of any object at all. Beauty, in this regard, overwhelms the intellect such that where it once served as a medium enabling a union between knower and known, it now unifies itself with the knower. Beauty is in this regard the conditions for intelligibility itself.

### Continuous Ambiguity: Beauty and the One in Plotinus

One of the primary themes to emerge out of the preceding analyses of Plato and Aristotle concerned the ambiguity that shadows their approaches to the association between beauty and the divine. Although Plotinus sharpens the focus upon beauty as an object of inquiry the result appears to be a heightening of this ambiguity rather than a tempering of it. Like Plato, Plotinus connects beauty to the divine in terms of the personal ascent through love. Like Aristotle, Plotinus emphasizes the intellectual components of this while configuring *nous* as that which is desired for its own sake. But at the same time, Plotinus' doctrine of the One introduces substantial complications with respect to beauty. The relationship between the One and beauty has sparked and continues to spark debate among scholars of Plotinus, and its significance for Dionysius' appropriation of beauty as a divine name cannot be overstated.

One position advanced by many scholars identifies the way in which Plotinus is explicit in his insistence that, although the One is identifiable with the good, it cannot be identifiable with beauty. Such is the position of Werner Beierwaltes<sup>34</sup> and, as noted at the beginning of the chapter, by Rist whose examination of the issue is perhaps the most illuminating to date. There are a number of places throughout his *Enneads* where Plotinus expresses this point. At 5.5.12, for example, Plotinus explains how beauty orients itself to “those already in some degree knowing and awakened” and is often accompanied by a “painful appearance,” while the good, in establishing an entity's “natural tendency” has an inherent presence even to “those asleep” and is always with them. Consequently, the love of beauty is later than the love of good and requires a “more sophisticated understanding.” Using this reasoning from experience Plotinus concludes, “beauty is shown to be secondary because this passionate love for it is secondary and is felt by those who are already conscious. But the more ancient, unperceived desire of the good proclaims that the good itself is more ancient and

34. See, e.g., Beierwaltes, “Love of Beauty and the Love of God,” 300.

prior to beauty.”<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, Plotinus contends that since the beautiful needs the good while the good has no need for the beautiful, the good is the “older, not in time but by degree of reality” and has a power that is therefore higher and earlier than beauty. Finally, the difference between the good and the beautiful corresponds to the difference between reality and appearance: for while the good satisfies only within the sphere of the real, the beautiful can satisfy in appearance regardless of whether or not it is real.

Despite those definitive assertions throughout the *Enneads* that sharply distinguish the One from beauty, there are enough passages to suggest that Plotinus did leave open the possibility for some sort of identification between them, causing other scholars, such as Inge, to affirm the identification.<sup>36</sup> A passage cited above exemplifies this fact: “And first we must posit beauty which is also the good; from this immediately comes *nous*, which is beauty, and soul is given beauty by *nous*.”<sup>37</sup> As noted above, this and other passages<sup>38</sup> led Inge to conclude that the linguistic distinction between *καλλονή* (beauty) and *καλόν* (beautiful) corresponds to different kinds of beauty, the former of which he identifies as appropriate to the One. Even Rist’s analysis, which in the end refutes Inge and which concludes that Plotinus denies beauty to the One, cannot avoid acknowledging some kind of identification between the One and beauty: “The Beauty of the One,” he writes, “is that unique Beauty which is the power to create beautiful Beings.”<sup>39</sup> The tension that results from a One conceived as absolute removal in transcendental isolation (5.5.13) and the necessary relativity implicated in its giving birth to *nous* burrows its way into the Neoplatonic view of beauty.

Despite this, however, Plotinus introduces several significant dimensions of beauty that contribute to the later Dionysian vision. Prior to Plotinus, beauty was almost exclusively associated with a symmetry of parts, a

35. 5.5.12: Δεύτερος ὢν οὗτος ὁ ἔρωσ καὶ ἤδη συνιέντων μᾶλλον δεύτερον μνηύει τὸ καλὸν εἶναι· ἡ δὲ ἀρχαιοτέρα τούτου καὶ ἀναίσθητος ἔφεσις ἀρχαιότερόν φησι καὶ τὰγαθὸν εἶναι καὶ πρότερον τούτου. Translation Armstrong.

36. Inge, *Philosophy of Plotinus*, 124ff. Stern-Gillet, “Le Principe Du Beau Chez Plotin: Réflexions sur “Enneads” and Gay, “Four Medieval Views of Creation.”

37. 1.6.6: Καὶ τὸ πρῶτον θετέον τὴν καλλονήν, ὅπερ καὶ τὰγαθόν· ἀφ’ οὗ νοῦς εὐθύς τὸ καλόν· ψυχὴ δὲ νῶ καλόν·

38. In particular 1.6.7; 6.2.18; 6.7.32. Rist, *Plotinus*, 56–57, includes analysis of some other passages where there appears to be an identification between beauty of some kind and the One: 4.4.1; 6.9.4; 6.9.9; 6.7.40.

39. Rist, *Plotinus*, 60. Rist cites *Enneads* 6.7.33.

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harmonious coming together of components into a whole. With Plotinus, however, beauty also comes to identify the simplicity that remains ever in excess of its manifestation as symmetry. To his credit, Plotinus does not allow his newly discovered attribute of simplicity to cause him to reject beauty as symmetry. Rather the two come together as beauty is identified with the unity in plurality that constitutes *nous*. As a unity in plurality, *nous* is a plenitude of intelligible content, an attribute which it derives from casting its gaze upon the One. It is a gaze that not only establishes its very being as *nous*, but that inspires it to imitate the One by emanating soul. Manifesting itself as a hierarchy—an ordering activity of anagogical ascent—soul recapitulates the ontological plenitude of *nous* insofar as it accounts for a multitude of diverse forms. Though ontologically unequal, each form is ordered toward *nous* by what could be considered a hierarchical act that gathers the formal plurality into a unity. Hence the hierarchical act of being is bound up with Plotinus's account of beauty. All these dimensions coalesce in Dionysius's eventual appropriation of the name beauty to the one God. Prior to this, however, it exercises significant influence upon the lineage of Neoplatonism that eventually bequeaths to Dionysius this Plotinian inheritance. No figure is as integral to this bequest as Proclus.

## Proclus

The outstanding feature of Proclus's understanding of beauty's association with the supreme principle (the One, the Good) is a greater willingness to push their relationship closer toward identity. To be sure, he never arrives at a final and unequivocal identification between beauty and the One, or the Good, but his development of the relation eventually equips Dionysius with important ideas that allow him to take the final and definitive step of naming God beauty.

By the time Proclus takes over the helm of the Platonic Academy in Athens, Neoplatonism had oriented itself beyond the rational inquiry associated with traditional philosophy and assumed the status of what Saffrey has called a "scientific theology."<sup>40</sup> Prior to Proclus in the Greek tradition, the sources of this mode of theology are myths interpreted allegorically, cultic acts, and Oracular interpretations. Through a complex development between the second and fifth century, the living sources of (non-Christian) theology are more and more drawn from the rational

40. Saffrey, "Neoplatonist Spirituality II," 250.

work of the philosopher.<sup>41</sup> This may in part be influenced by an emerging Christian consciousness, which locates the source of truth in the living person of Jesus Christ. A growing rivalry with the burgeoning Christian Church also may provoke Neoplatonic philosophers to open themselves more and more to discovering their principles in oracular-type revelations. Suffice it to say, by the time Proclus begins his career as a teacher the Chaldean Oracles enter into the foundations of Neoplatonic philosophy, transforming the day-to-day life of the philosopher into something more personally pietistic. Not only is this due to the Platonic and Oracular content of their sources but also, as Brisson points out, on account of the Neoplatonic “need for the degraded human soul to have recourse to supernatural means.”<sup>42</sup> Consequently, Plato is elevated to an almost god-like status and, much like Christ for the Church, communicates beyond the grave. “After this,” Saffrey explains, “any reading of Plato becomes a *lectio divina*.”<sup>43</sup> As Brisson notes in affirmation of this, these readings of Plato are allotted a nature similar to that of their leader, Plato, who is now viewed as a sacred figure.<sup>44</sup>

When read in this context, it is not surprising to find Proclus pushing open the limits of inquiry into beauty now as a theological theme. Most of what he writes concerning the relation between beauty and the supreme principle—i.e., the One or the Good, which is not the only god but rather the first god—follows the path laid down by his predecessors, most significantly Plato and Plotinus. Any nuances Proclus introduces can be attributed for the most part to the more spiritual/religious context of his fifth-century Neoplatonism and, by extension, the relationship that this Neoplatonism has with the early Church.<sup>45</sup>

Although Proclus’s literary productivity is formidable, the primary text where his association between beauty and the One can be concisely discerned is in his *On the Theology of Plato*, though important supplemental texts include his *Commentary on First Alcibiades*, and his *Commentary on the Timeaus*.<sup>46</sup> It is well known that among Neoplatonists from

41. Cf. Saffrey, “Neoplatonist Spirituality II,” 251.

42. Brisson, *How Philosophers Saved Myths*, 94.

43. Saffrey, “Neoplatonist Spirituality II,” 254.

44. Brisson, *How Philosophers Saved Myths*, 88.

45. For a more developed account of this context, see Burns, “Proclus and the Theurgic Liturgy of Pseudo-Dionysius,” 111–32; Fowden, *Egyptian Hermes*.

46. References for the Greek will cite from the following: *Theologia Platonica* [hereafter *Pl. Theo.*]; *In Platonis Alcibiadem I* [hereafter *In Alc. I*]; *In Platonis Timeaum commentaria* [hereafter *In Tim.*].

## Part One

the fourth century on, none devote more time and energy to developing the Plotinian notion of *eros*. As Beierwaltes explains this, *eros* in Proclus's view is the eternal longing that moves every existing thing more and more toward the One, a longing that is itself somehow the very presence of the One in those existing entities.<sup>47</sup> For this reason, Proclus sees in *eros* both a theological and an ontological significance, which functions to bring everything back to divine beauty. It does this by being both a cosmic, exterior movement and an inner motive power of thought.<sup>48</sup>

Beauty in Proclus is a bipartite phenomenon. On the one hand, for Proclus beauty is conceived much like the Plotinian *nous* as a separately existing, intelligible structure. It is still not identifiable as the One, since any such identification would compromise the One's absolute transcendence. Nevertheless, it is a primary emanation from the one, a fullness of intelligibility, proceeding to all consequent progressions.<sup>49</sup> On the other hand, beauty is understood as an active cause that beautifies, which is to say it is the origin of order and symmetry, relation, and unity.<sup>50</sup> Beauty is the most intense being of form itself and so serves as the origin of all formation; it is "the form of form."<sup>51</sup> With Proclus, then, the distinction between beauty in itself as an intelligible structure and beauty in its causal efficacy becomes more emphasized than in Plotinus. Nevertheless, these two dimensions are not unified and appropriated to the *hyparxis*, or the One—a feature that distinguishes the Procline view from that of Dionysius (as will be seen later).

Throughout the *Theology of Plato*, Proclus examines beauty in its relation to other hypostatic emanations. The question regarding the association between beauty and the gods is first explicitly raised in book 1, chapter 22.<sup>52</sup> Proclus proceeds in a way similar to what will be seen with Dionysius: he first examines the good, which he then follows with wisdom before arriving specifically at beauty. A brief examination of how Proclus considers these phenomena is indispensable to his understanding of beauty's relation to the divine.

47. Beierwaltes, "Love of Beauty and the Love of God," 304–5.

48. Cf. *In Alc.* I, 51.15ff; 52.10ff; *Pl. Theo.* 1.25.

49. *Pl. Theo.* 1.25.

50. *Pl. Theo.* 3.11, 18, 22.

51. *Pl. Theo.* 3.18: τὸ δὲ κάλλος, καθ' ὅσον ἐστὶν εἶδος εἰδῶν.

52. *Pl. Theo.* 1.22: Τί οὖν ἂν εἶη τὸ ἀγαθὸν τὸ τῶν θεῶν καὶ τίς ἡ σοφία καὶ τί τὸ κάλλος; Some translations identify this passage as ch. 21 rather than ch. 22. See, e.g., the Thomas Taylor translation of Proclus, *On the Theology of Plato*.

Following the doctrines laid out in the *Philebus*, Proclus explains that the principal elements of the good are the desirable, the sufficient, and the perfect. It is desirable because the good must convert all things to itself, it is sufficient because in turning all things to itself it must fill them, and it is perfect because it must fill all things completely without diminution.<sup>53</sup> He then proceeds to make a distinction: the desirable must not be mistaken for what is extended in the sensible qualities of things as objects of the appetite. This, he exclaims, is “apparent beauty” (τοιούτον γὰρ τὸ φαινόμενον καλόν).<sup>54</sup> The point Proclus makes distinguishes the good and its extension to all recipients from any delimited or determined form the good might eventually take through the mode of beauty. As an object of desire, the good as such is ineffable (ἄρρητον) but not because it is bereft of expressible content. Rather, extending itself to all beings prior to all knowledge,<sup>55</sup> it is a fullness of intelligible content without itself being intelligible; that is to say, the good as source of all is beyond intelligible. This is grounded in the fact that it provides to all things the very substance of their being insofar as it converts all beings to itself in order to fill them with its perfective content. Precisely because it is beyond intelligible as a fullness of intelligibility, it must “unfold” its “characteristic peculiarity” similar to how light disseminates itself:

But if it be requisite to summarily unfold the characteristic peculiarity of the desirable, as the supplier of light proceeds by his rays into secondary natures, converts the eye to himself, causes it to be solar-form, and to resemble himself, and through a different similitude conjoins it with its own fulgid splendor, thus also I think the desirable of the Gods (i.e., the Good) allures and draws upwards all things to the Gods in an ineffable manner by its own proper illuminations, being everywhere present to all things, and not deserting any order whatever of beings.<sup>56</sup>

53. *Pl. Theo.* 1.22: Ἐν δέ γε τῷ Φιλήβῳ στοιχεῖα παραδίδωσιν ἡμῖν ὁ Πλάτων τῆς τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ φύσεως τρία τὰ κυριώτατα, τὸ ἐφετόν, τὸ ἰκανόν, τὸ τέλειον· δεῖ γὰρ αὐτὸ καὶ πρὸς ἑαυτὸ πάντα ἐπιστρέφειν, καὶ πληροῦν, καὶ κατὰ μηδὲν ἐλλείπειν μηδὲ ἐλαττοῦν τὴν αὐτοῦ περιουσίαν.

54. *Pl. Theo.* 1.22: Τὸ μὲν τοίνυν ἐφετόν μὴ τοιοῦτον νοεῖτω τις οἷον ἐν τοῖς αἰσθητοῖς προτείνεται πολλάκις ὀρεκτόν, ἄγονον ὑπάρχον καὶ ἀνερέργητον τοιοῦτον γὰρ τὸ φαινόμενον καλόν.

55. *Pl. Theo.* 1.22: ἄρρητον γὰρ ἐστὶ καὶ πρὸ γνώσεως πάσης ἐπὶ πάντα διατείνει τὰ ὄντα. Πάντα γὰρ ἐφέται τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ καὶ ἐπέστραπται πρὸς ἐκεῖνο, τὰ μὲν μᾶλλον, τὰ δὲ ἥττον.

56. *Pl. Theo.* 1.22: Ἄλλ' εἰ δεῖ συνελόντα φάναι τὴν ιδιότητα τοῦ ἐφετοῦ· καθάπερ ὁ τοῦ φωτὸς χορηγὸς ταῖς ἀκτῖσι πρόεισιν εἰς τὰ δεύτερα καὶ πρὸς ἑαυτὸν ἐπιστρέφει τὰ

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The ineffability of the good as desirable is rendered “expressible” and somehow “knowable”—which is to say does not become an obstacle to expression or knowledge—through a process whereby it presents itself through different modalities. In itself, its presence is only “knowable” by being desired in an almost unknowable way; that is to say, its knowability is only discernable through negation, through an absence of knowable content. For as Proclus points out just a bit further along in his text, “All beings aspire after this desirable” even though it remains “unknown and incomprehensible.”<sup>57</sup> How can that which remains unknowable and incomprehensible nevertheless continue to provoke desire at the deepest level? Perhaps it is better to say that it is desired precisely in its being hyper-knowable, a phrase which does not appear in Proclus but that resonates with Dionysius’s interpretation and developments. This will be examined in more detail later, but it is worth noting here how Dionysius’s own developments of this matter, though original in many respects, are not far from the Procline teaching. As Proclus continues to explain, it is on account of the unknown transcendence of the good that all other beings are caused to “dance around it,” becoming impregnated with its power and even prophetic with respect to it.<sup>58</sup> And precisely because the good remains unknown and ineffable, it sustains all desire for itself unceasingly. It is present to and moves about all things by being exempt from them and remaining incomprehensible. The good as that which is ceaselessly desired must therefore be forever beyond the grasp of all who aspire after it but must simultaneously present itself as provocation, motivation, and inspiration.

This is the point at which the good manifests its manifold modality as both the sufficient and the perfect. Insofar as the good extends the gifts of the gods to all things it is sufficient; that is to say, it is a never-failing superplentitude, infinitely generative of its own goodness.<sup>59</sup> And it is by virtue of its sufficiency that it stabilizes all divine natures enabling the good to progress and multiply itself without end. By providing stabilizing sufficiency to

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ὄμματα καὶ ἡλιοειδῆ ποιεῖ καὶ ἑαυτῷ παραπλήσια καὶ διὰ τῆς ἑτερομοιότητος συνάπτει ταῖς ἑαυτοῦ μαρμαρυγαῖς, οὕτως οἶμαι καὶ τὸ ἐφετὸν τῶν θεῶν ἀνέλκει πάντα καὶ ἀνασπᾷ πρὸς τοὺς θεοὺς ἀρρήτως ταῖς οἰκείαις ἐλλάμψεσι, πανταχοῦ παρὸν πᾶσι καὶ μηδ’ ἡντινοῦν ἀπολείπον τάξιν τῶν ὄντων. Translation Taylor. Cf. also *Pl. Theo.* 2.7.

57. *Pl. Theo.* 1.22: ἀγνωστον γὰρ ὃν ποθεῖ τὰ ὄντα τὸ ἐφετὸν τοῦτο, καὶ ἄληπτον.

58. *Pl. Theo.* 1.22: Μήτε οὖν γνῶναι μήτε ἐλεῖν ὃ ποθεῖ δυνάμενα περὶ αὐτὸ πάντα χορεύει, καὶ ὠδίνει μὲν αὐτὸ καὶ οἶον ἀπομαντεύεται, τὴν δὲ ἔφεσιν ἀκατάληκτον ἔχει καὶ ἄπυστον.

59. *Pl. Theo.* 2.7.

all desires, it reveals itself as perfect, which modality, as Proclus himself proclaims, is a result of the mingling of the desirable and the sufficient.<sup>60</sup> Once the good, which in itself is ineffable and unknowable, communicates itself through the powers of desire, sufficiency, and perfection, it proceeds as a second hypostasis that Proclus identifies with Wisdom, the topic of his following chapter.

Proclus's text at this point is interesting for two reasons. First, it is interesting because it proceeds to configure wisdom in an ontological way as a fullness of intelligible content. Second, because as will be seen later on, where Proclus examines wisdom as the second emanation from the good Dionysius will instead opt for the name light.<sup>61</sup> What this indicates is that Dionysian light is in many ways shaped by Procline wisdom, which Proclus also refers to as truth.<sup>62</sup> Undoubtedly, Dionysius grafts the Procline notion of wisdom/truth onto the more fundamental biblical notions of these, but this will be explored in more detail in later chapters. For Proclus, wisdom is the *hyparxis* (originary source) of the gods' intelligence, not unlike the role that *nous* plays for Plotinus. As such—that is to say, as a *hyparxis* for divine intelligence—it can be distinguished from divine intelligence itself: where intelligence is intellectual knowledge, the wisdom of the gods is ineffable knowledge as pure possession of all intelligibility and intelligibles.<sup>63</sup> There is no discursion or investigation among the gods because their wisdom is identical to all that may be investigated; it is, one might say, the fullness of all investigative and discursible content. Proclus even goes so far at this point to distinguish the imperfection of the philosophical, given its desire to acquire knowledge, from wisdom that has everything present and desires nothing.<sup>64</sup>

From all the preceding, Proclus deduces a triadic genus in wisdom. Suggesting its ontological configuration, it is firstly full of being and truth.

60. *Pl. Theo.* 1.22: Τὸ δὲ αὖ τρίτον, τὸ τέλειον, ἐπιστρεπτικόν ἐστι τῶν ὄλων καὶ συναγωγὸν ἐπὶ τὰ αἴτια κατὰ κύκλον, οὐ μὲν τὸ θεῖον, οὐ δὲ τὸ νοερόν, οὐ δὲ τὸ ψυχικόν, οὐ δὲ τὸ φυσικόν· πάντα γὰρ μετέχει τῆς ἐπιστροφῆς, ἐπεὶ καὶ τὸ ἄπειρον τῆς προόδου διὰ ταύτης ἐπὶ τὰς ἀρχὰς αἰθις ἀνακαλεῖται. Καὶ ἔστι σύμμικτον τὸ τέλειον ἐκ τοῦ ἐφετοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἱκανοῦ. Πᾶν γὰρ τὸ τοιοῦτον ὀρεκτόν ἐστι καὶ γεννητικὸν τῶν ὁμοίων.

61. In light of this, it is perhaps worth noting that elsewhere in his *Platonic Theology* (e.g., 3.2) Proclus explains that it is through light that every true being is most similar to the good, acquiring the form of the good through participation in light.

62. *Pl. Theo.* 1.25.

63. *Pl. Theo.* 1.23.

64. *Pl. Theo.* 1.23: Οὐκοῦν τὸ μὲν φιλόσοφον ἀτελές ἐστι καὶ ἐνδεές τῆς ἀληθείας, τὸ δὲ σοφὸν πλήρες καὶ ἀνεκδές, καὶ πᾶν ὃ βούλεται παρὸν ἔχει, καὶ οὐδὲν ποθοῦν ἀλλ' ἐφετόν καὶ ὀρεκτόν τῷ φιλοσόφῳ προκειμένον.

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For this reason, it is generative of intellectual truth though it remains in itself beyond the intellectual truth it generates. All such generated intellectual truth would be truth that is acquired. In contrast, the truth as possessed in fullness, i.e., wisdom, remains superior. Second, wisdom is perfective of intellectual natures insofar as it is the fullness of the intelligibility that all intellectual natures desire. Any completion brought about in an intellectual nature happens by virtue of wisdom acquiescing to the expressed longing of the recipient intellect. Third, wisdom is itself a stable power, being a fullness of divine goodness.<sup>65</sup>

With the preceding foundation in place, Proclus proceeds to examine the beautiful, what it is and how it primarily subsists in the gods. He begins by referencing conventional ideas on beauty: “It [i.e., the beautiful] is said therefore to be boniform beauty, and intelligible beauty, to be more ancient than intellectual beauty, and to be beauty itself, and the cause of beauty to all beings; and all such like epithets. And it is rightly said.”<sup>66</sup> This is a rather convoluted reference lumping together several features of what is traditionally said of the beautiful. This indicates the way in which, following the wisdom of the *Hippias Major*, beauty as such defies definitive determination. And although it remains difficult to say exactly what the beautiful is, Proclus proceeds to draw a firm distinction. Immediately following the previous citation, he writes “But it is separate not only from the beauty which is apparent in corporeal masses, from the symmetry which is in these from physical elegance, and intellectual splendor, but also from the second and third progressions in the Gods.”<sup>67</sup> One wonders how within such a separation from every possible concrete manifestation of beauty the beautiful could ever be known at all. The most that can be said, apparently, is that any loveliness of the Gods derives from this unknown and unknowable summit of all beauty. Just as there is a first goodness that

65. *Pl. Theo.* 1.23: Δῆλον οὖν ἐκ τούτων ὅτι τριαδικόν ἐστι τὸ τῆς σοφίας γένος, πλήρες μὲν ὄν τοῦ ὄντος καὶ τῆς ἀληθείας, γεννητικὸν δὲ τῆς νοεράς ἀληθείας, τελειωτικὸν δὲ τῶν κατ’ ἐνέργειαν νοερῶν καὶ αὐτὸ κατὰ δύναμιν ἐστῶς. Ταῦτα τοίνυν καὶ τῆ τῶν θεῶν σοφία προσήκειν ὑπολάβωμεν· καὶ γὰρ ἐκεῖνη τῆς μὲν ἀγαθότητός ἐστι τῆς θείας πλήρης, γεννᾷ δὲ τὴν θεϊαν ἀλήθειαν, τελειοῖ δὲ πάντα τὰ μεθ’ ἑαυτήν.

66. *Pl. Theo.* 1.24: Λέγεται μὲν οὖν ἀγαθοειδὲς εἶναι κάλλος, καὶ νοητὸν κάλλος, καὶ πρεσβύτερον τῆς νοεράς καλλονῆς, καὶ αὐτοκαλλονῆ, καὶ τῶν ὄντων ἀπάντων αἰτία καλλοποιός, καὶ πάντα τὰ τοιαῦτα, καὶ ὀρθῶς λέγεται. Translation Taylor.

67. *Pl. Theo.* 1.24: Χωριστὸν δὲ ἐστὶν οὐ μόνον τῶν ἐν τοῖς σωματικοῖς ὄγκοις φαινομένων καλῶν οὐδὲ τῆς ἐν τούτοις συμμετρίας ἢ τῆς ψυχικῆς εὐαρμοστίας ἢ τοῦ νοεροῦ φέγγους, ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτῶν τῶν δευτέρων καὶ τρίτων ἐν τοῖς θεοῖς προόδων τὸ πρῶτιστον καὶ ἐνιαῖον κάλλος. Translation Taylor.

makes all things good, and a first wisdom that accounts for all knowledge, so too is there a first beauty by which all things are beautiful:

Therefore, just as through the first goodness all the Gods are made good, and through intelligible wisdom they have an ineffable knowledge established above intellect, thus also, I think, through the highest beauty, everything divine is lovely. For from there all the Gods derive beauty, and being filled with it, fill the natures that follow themselves exciting all things, agitating them into a love for themselves through a Bacchic fury, and from above pouring out onto all things the divine effluxion of beauty.<sup>68</sup>

Already some important features of Procline beauty may be established from this passage. The highest beauty is ultimately, like the highest good and wisdom, unknown and unknowable. However, that there is such a highest beauty at all can only be inferred based upon the beautiful manifestations it brings about, even though there ultimately can be no direct connection between them. Even divine beauty is, therefore, derivative upon this ineffable source of beauty, which fills the gods with their loveliness and grants to them the power to then fill all things that come after them with itself.<sup>69</sup> It is difficult under such conditions to deny that the highest beauty for Proclus is predicated upon an idealism; that is to say, its very existence (if such a word may even validly be applied to it) depends on the link between the beautiful forms in the world, the beauty of the gods, and the beauty that holds them together. This link is supplied only by *the idea* inferred from the intellect, since it cannot be acquired through any existing thing.

So where, one might ask, does such an idea for Proclus originate? His text follows with an explanation, in which two sources may be recognized—sources that indicate the religious, or spiritual, dimension that has accrued to inquiries into beauty among Neoplatonists by the late fifth century. The first source can be discerned by the fact that since the gods are united to each other, and since they rejoice with each other, admire each other, and communicate with each other, and because they do not abandon the order that allows this to occur, there must be some power

68. *Pl. Theo.* 1.24: "Ὡσπερ οὖν διὰ τὴν πρωτίστην ἀγαθότητα πάντες ἀγαθοειδεῖς οἱ θεοί, καὶ διὰ τὴν νοητὴν σοφίαν γνώσιν ἔχουσιν ἄρρητον καὶ ὑπὲρ νοῦν ἰδρυμένην, οὕτως οἶμαι καὶ διὰ τὴν ἀκρότητα τοῦ κάλλους ἐράσμιόν ἐστι τὸ θεῖον πᾶν. Ἐκείθεν γὰρ ἐποχετεύονται πάντες οἱ θεοί τὸ κάλλος καὶ πληρούμενοι τὰ μεθ' ἑαυτοῦς πληροῦσιν, ἀνεγείροντες πάντα καὶ ἐκβαρκεύοντες περὶ τὸν ἑαυτῶν ἔρωτα καὶ ἐπαντλοῦντες ἄνωθεν τοῖς πᾶσιν τὴν ἔνθεον ἀπορορῶν τοῦ κάλλου.

69. Cf. *In Tim.* 1.26; 1.42; 1.45.

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external to each that allows for such a condition and bond. For Proclus, beauty is this external power, “the supplier of divine joy, kinship, and friendship.”<sup>70</sup> Beauty, in this sense, identifies a presence that accounts for divine interactivity, which is putatively ontological relative to the gods, though logical relative to knowledge of them. In other words, there is a logical necessity among a plurality of entities—in this case the gods—that they be held together by a more primordial unity. For Proclus, this more primordial unity holding the gods together in their divine bonds of joy and kinship, that is to say the ontological source of their community, is nothing other than beauty.<sup>71</sup>

His second source for this beauty is found in the texts of Plato that, as noted above, are elevated in Neoplatonism to the status of revealed knowledge. Proclus points to the *Symposium*, where Plato denominates the beautiful as τὸ ἀβρόν, (graceful, delicate, pretty), τέλειον (perfect), and μακαριστόν (most blessed), and the *Phaedrus* where Plato calls the beautiful τὸ φανόν (the light, the splendid). Proclus’s point, it seems, in using these Platonic attributes to explain beauty is to demonstrate the way in which these modalities indicate the presence of, or make known, that which is beyond expression. “These two things therefore,” writes Proclus, “are to be acquired for the manifestation of beauty.”<sup>72</sup> Can this statement be read as a prototype of the “necessary conditions” argument that will arise later among the scholastics? Most famously, Aquinas contends that there are three necessary conditions for beauty’s manifest presence (a point that will be explored later on). Is it possible that here Proclus can be read as establishing two necessary conditions? Perhaps an argument could be made but it seems that the connection at this point is too loosely based. Nevertheless, Proclus’s approach here employs Platonic texts as a means by which certain attributes may become indications of the pres-

70. *Pl. Theo.* 1.24: “Ἔστι μὲν οὖν, ὡς τὸ ὄλον εἰπεῖν, τοιοῦτον τὸ θεῖον κάλλος, τῆς θείας εὐφροσύνης χορηγὸν καὶ τῆς οἰκειότητος καὶ τῆς φιλίας.

71. Cf. *In Tim.* 2.13–14. Note in particular: Ἐν δὴ τούτοις ὁ μὲν δεσμός ὡς εἰκόνα παρεχόμενος ἑαυτὸν τῆς ἐνώσεως τῆς θείας παραλαμβάνεται καὶ τῆς κοινωνίας τῶν δυνάμεων, καθ’ ἣν μετ’ ἀλλήλων ποιεῖται τὰ ἀπογεννήσεις τὰ νοερά τῶν ὄλων αἰτία, τὸ δὲ κάλλος ὡς ἐνοποιὸν ἔχον καὶ συνδετικὴν οὐσίαν τε καὶ δύναμιν ἀναφαίνεται· καὶ γὰρ τὸ καλῶς συνίστασθαι καὶ τὸ δεσμῶν δὲ κάλλιστος τούτου μοι δοκεῖ σημαντικὰ ὑπάρχειν ἀμφοτέρω: “In what is here said, a bond is assumed as affording an image of divine union, and the communion of powers, according to which the intellectual causes of wholes effect their generation. But beauty appears to be assumed, as having a uniting and binding essence and power. For the words, ‘to cohere in a beautiful manner, and the most beautiful of bonds,’ appear to me to be significant of this.” Translation Taylor.

72. *Pl. Theo.* 1.24: Δύο μὲν οὖν ταῦτα τοῦ κάλλους εἰλήφθω γνωρίσματα.

ence of the highest beauty, attributes without which this beauty remains unknown and unknowable. What is certain is that the Procline approach does recognize how the ineffability of supreme beauty requires a diversity of modalities in order for knowledge of its presence to be perceived.

To these two attributes, Proclus adds a third also derived from Plato, namely, *ἐρασμιώτατον* (the most lovely).<sup>73</sup> Here is perhaps where one may pinpoint Proclus's unique contribution to the examination of beauty. Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus already gesture toward the consanguinity between beauty and love, but they do not give it the same emphasis as Proclus. Love in the Procline account is the energy that holds together the phases of Neoplatonic procession, which is most fundamentally a theory of cosmic generation. One can detect the sequence of *monos-prodos-epistrophe* in his account of beauty and love:

Because, therefore, beauty converts and moves all things to itself, causes them to energize enthusiastically, and recalls them through love, it is the object of love, being the leader of the whole amatory series, walking on the extremities of its feet, and exciting all things to itself through desire and astonishment. But again, because it extends plenitudes from itself to secondary natures, in conjunction with joy and divine facility, alluring, inflaming, and elevating all things, and from on high pouring illuminations on them, it is graceful (delicate, pretty), and is said to be so by Plato. And because it bounds this triad, and covers as with a veil the ineffable union of the Gods, swims as it were on the light of forms, causes intelligible light to shine forth and announces the occult nature of goodness, it is denominated splendid, lucid, and manifest.<sup>74</sup>

Here, beauty is described as a power that not only fills all things with a divine joy, but also uplifts these things into the divine joy by enflaming them with that very joy itself. Beauty provides the power of the emanating

73. *Pl. Theo.* 1.24; *In Alc.* I, 29.

74. *Pl. Theo.* 1.24: Διότι μὲν οὖν ἐπιστρέφει πάντα πρὸς ἑαυτὸ καὶ κινεῖ καὶ ἐνθουσιᾶν ποιεῖ καὶ ἀνακαλεῖται δι' ἔρωτος, ἐραστὸν ἐστὶ τὸ κάλλος, πάσης ἡγεμονοῦν τῆς ἐρωτικῆς σειρᾶς καὶ ἐπ' ἄκροις τοῖς ποσὶ βεβηκὸς καὶ ἐφ' ἑαυτὸ πάντα διὰ πόθου καὶ ἐκπλήξεως ἀνεγεῖρον. Διότι δὲ αὖ μετ' εὐφροσύνης καὶ τῆς θείας ῥαστώνης ἐπορεύει τοῖς δευτέροις τὰς ἀφ' ἑαυτοῦ πληρώσεις, κηλοῦν πάντα καὶ θέλγον καὶ μετεωρίζον τὰ ἀγόμενα καὶ ἐποχετευόμενα τὰς ἐκεῖθεν ἐλλάμψεις, ἄβρόν ἐστὶ τε καὶ λέγεται παρὰ τοῦ Πλάτωνος. Διότι γε μὴν συμπεραίνει τὴν τριάδα ταύτην καὶ προκύπτει τῆς ἀρρήτου τῶν θεῶν ἐνώσεως καὶ οἷον ἐπινῆχεται τῷ φωτὶ τῶν εἰδῶν καὶ τὸ νοητὸν φῶς ἐκλάμπει καὶ ἐξαγγέλλει τὸ τῆς ἀγαθότητος κρύφιον, λαμπρὸν τε καὶ στυλπνὸν καὶ ἐκφανὲς ἐπονομάζεται. Translation Taylor. Cf. also *In Alc.* I, 30.

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entity to return to the source it seeks, which is nothing but the joy shared between the Gods. Beauty also has the task of hiding this divine joy so as to eternally provoke the desire for it. It is also the power that shines out of the divine, announcing the “occult nature of goodness,” which is why beauty is synonymous with the splendid, the lucid, and the manifest. In this way, as Proclus explains further on, divine beauty “is established in the highest forms, is the luminous precursor of divine light, and is the first thing that is apparent to ascending souls, being more splendid and more lovely to view and to embrace than every luminous essence, and when it appears it is received with astonishment.”<sup>75</sup> Beauty has a power to come closer to the receiving intellect than other modalities of the good. Relative to the percipient, beauty serves a kind of doorway into divine light, through which the intellect is uplifted more fully into the divine good. Although in Dionysius’s *Divine Names* text, this order will be reversed as he considers the relations as they flow from God to creatures, the idea is similar: that beauty is a more manifest mode or intense presence of divine light, which is itself a more manifest mode or intense presence of the divine goodness.

Where Proclus’s appeal to a Christian like Dionysius is perhaps most visible is the way in which Proclus configures love as a form of beauty itself. In other words, love is the form that beauty takes in the desiring intellect. It is “the cause which congregates all secondary natures to divine beauty, which familiarizes them to it and is the source of their being filled with it and their derivation from it.”<sup>76</sup> Based on the preceding, the account of love here ought not be taken as a distinct hypostasis that stands outside of beauty. Rather, it is better understood as beauty itself received and enacted as a motive agent working in conjunction with its beautiful source—especially in light of the fact that beauty brings about an intimacy or fellowship with the whole of divinity.<sup>77</sup> Beauty, as noted earlier, is the very substance of the inter-divine communications and friendship. As this

75. *Pl. Theo.* 1.24: τὸ δὲ αὐτὸ κάλλος ἐπ’ ἄκροις ἴδρυται τοῖς εἶδεσι καὶ προλάμπει τὸ θεῖον φῶς καὶ τοῖς ἀνιοῦσι πρῶτον ἐκφαίνεται, παντὸς φωσφόρου στιλπνότερον καὶ ἐρασμιώτερον ἰδεῖν καὶ περιπτύχασθαι καὶ μετ’ ἐκπλήξεως ἐκφαινόμενον λαβεῖν. Cf. *In Alc.* I, 64.

76. *Pl. Theo.* 1.25: Πρὸς μὲν οὖν τὸ θεῖον κάλλος τὸ συναγόν τὰ δεύτερα πάντα καὶ οἰκειοῦν καὶ τῆς πληρώσεως αἴτιον καὶ τῆς ἐκείθεν ἐποχετείας, δῆλον οἶμαι παντί, καὶ τοῦ Πλάτωνος πολλάκις λέγοντος, ὡς οὐδὲν ἄλλο ἐστὶν ἢ ὁ ἔρως, ὃς δὴ καὶ θεοὺς αἰετὸς δευτέρους τοῖς πρὸ ἑαυτῶν καὶ τὰ κρείττονα γένη καὶ ψυχῶν τὰς ἀρίστας συνάπτει κατὰ τὸ καλόν.

77. *In Alc.* I, 29: ἡ δὲ συναφὴ πρὸς τὸ θεῖον κάλλος καὶ δι’ ἐκείνου πρὸς τὸ θεῖον ἅπαν οἰκειότης.

beauty is dispensed to lower orders of beings, it accounts also for the care and concern among human beings themselves.<sup>78</sup> It is through love, then, that beauty begins to take on the appearance of a hierarchical ordering—a feature of beauty’s relation to the divine that is not explicit in Proclus, but that becomes so with Dionysius.

## **Continuous Ambiguity: Beauty and the One Good in Proclus**

The challenges that beauty poses to the efforts of certain modes of rational inquiry are evident from the earliest origins of Greek philosophy. These challenges are only exacerbated when beauty is brought into association with the supreme principle. From Plato, to Aristotle, to Plotinus, the association between beauty and the supreme principle is never without ambiguity. In Proclus, this ambiguity is not only recognized as such, but explicitly acknowledged: “For neither is the beautiful, nor wisdom, nor anything else among beings, so credible and stable to all things, and so exempt from all ambiguity, divisible apprehension and motion, as the good.”<sup>79</sup> It would be difficult to find a clearer admission that those phenomena that have a more discernable presence in the natural world, among which the good is alone exempt, suffer a loss of credibility and stability as a result. In Proclus, the transcendence of the good renders the variety of forms in the world as if they were nothing by comparison.<sup>80</sup> And in such a context, it is difficult to deny that beauty struggles against the suspicion put on it by virtue of its association with transience, materiality, and temporality.

No doubt, the Procline configuration of beauty with respect to the supreme principle derives from the assumed incompatibility between the many and the one.<sup>81</sup> Whether or not Neoplatonism ever escapes the burden put upon it by this Parmenidean problematic, its residue remains evident with respect to beauty. As a cosmogenic myth of how the many derive from the One, the *Timeaus* contained within its content various ways of addressing this complexity, especially insofar as it concerns the One-

78. Cf. *In Alc.* I, 32, 33, 38, 41, 45.

79. *Pl. Theo.* 1.25: Οὔτε γὰρ τὸ καλὸν οὔτε τὸ σοφὸν οὔτε ἄλλο τῶν ὄντων οὐδὲν οὔτω πιστόν ἐστιν ἅπασιν τοῖς οὔσι καὶ ἀσφαλὲς καὶ πάσης ἀμφιβολίας καὶ διηρημένης ἐπιβολῆς καὶ κινήσεως ἐξηρημένον ὡς τὸ ἀγαθόν.

80. *Pl. Theo.* 1.25: καὶ ψυχὴ τὴν τοῦ νοῦ ποικιλίαν καὶ τὴν τῶν εἰδῶν ἀγλαΐαν οὐδὲν εἶναι τίθεται πρὸς τὴν τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ τῶν ὄλων ὑπεροχὴν.

81. Cf. *Pl. Theo.* 2.1, 2.

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ness and many-ness of beauty. If one looks to Proclus's *Commentary on the Timeaus*, one finds a clearer picture of how this last of the Neoplatonists continues to advance the ambiguity that permeates beauty's relation to the supreme principle, even if he comes much closer than his predecessors to identifying the two.

The analysis of the *Timeaus* set forth in chapter 1 above sought to draw out how beauty's place in Plato's cosmogony is ambiguously centered in between the Eternal, Uniform Archetype and the concrete cosmos generated by the demiurgic gaze. Building upon important Plotinian ideas—especially the way in which beauty as such is identified as a unity-in-plurality—Proclus is able to examine the ambiguous place of beauty in the Platonic cosmogony with greater precision.<sup>82</sup> The result, which at times almost appears to employ Trinitarian grammar, does not overcome the ambiguity entirely though it does resolve some of the tension therein.

With Neoplatonism's absorption of a more religious, spiritual dimension, the Platonic distinction between an eternal realm of truly existing beings comprehended by intelligence in conjunction with reasoning, on the one hand, and the generated world (cosmos) of transient beings apprehended by opinion in conjunction with irrational sense, on the other hand, becomes a theological principle. As Proclus plainly states, this distinction becomes the first order in the axioms, from which distinction flow all other axioms.<sup>83</sup> Chief among these are (1) that the cosmos is generated; (2) that since the cosmos is generated, it has an effective cause; (3) that the cosmos is beautiful; (4) that since the cosmos is beautiful, it was generated according to an eternal paradigm.<sup>84</sup> These axioms, Proclus explains, contribute to the discovery both that there is a demiurgic cause of the cosmos whose generative act derives from his gazing at the paradigm,

82. One finds this incorporation of Plotinian unity-in-plurality early on at 1.128–29 when Proclus explains what Plato means by “most beautiful deeds” and “most beautiful polities”: *κάλλιστα δὲ ἔργα τὴν κατὰ τῶν Ἀτλαντίνων νίκην. καλλίστας δὲ πολιτείας, οὐχ ὅτι πολλὰς μετέλλαξεν, ἀλλ' ὅτι καὶ τὴν μίαν πολιτείαν πολλῶν πολιτειῶν εἴποι ἂν τις ἀριθμὸν, ὡσπερ καὶ τὸν ἕνα κόσμον πολλῶν κόσμων συνεκτικόν. εἰ γὰρ καὶ ἡ ἐκάστου ζωῆ πολιτεία τίς ἐστίν, ἡ δὲ κοινὴ ζωὴ πολλῶν ἐστὶ τῶν μερικῶν ζώων κοινωνία, πολλῶν ἂν εἴη πολιτειῶν καθ' ἓν τὸ καλὸν ἔνωσις:* “By the most beautiful deeds he means the victory over the Atlantics. But by the most beautiful polities he does not intend to signify that they changed many of them, but he says this because one polity may be called the number of many polities; just as one world is connective of many worlds. For if the life of each individual is a certain polity, but the common life is the communion of many partial lives, the one polity will consist of many polities, the beauty of it depending on its union.” Translation Taylor. Cf. also *In Tim.* 1.149.

83. *In Tim.* 1.236.

84. *In Tim.* 1.264–65.

as well as knowledge of the fact that the paradigm is itself eternal rather than generated.

For from there being an effective cause it follows that there is also a paradigm, either pre-existing in the maker himself, or external to him, and either superior, or inferior to, or of the same rank with him. For universally that which makes, being extended to a certain form, makes that which it wishes to insert in the thing made. This therefore follows. It is necessary however to find that which is next in order, viz. whether the mundane paradigm is eternal, or generated. But to this the proposed axioms contribute: and the whole of what is said will be truly consentaneous to itself. If the all is generated, there is a Demiurgus of it; if there is a Demiurgus of the all, there is also a paradigm. And if indeed that which is generated is beautiful, it was generated on account of an eternal paradigm.<sup>85</sup>

From these axiomatic assertions, Proclus narrates the origins of the cosmos in the following way. The eternal One, which is also the Good, is ineffable and remains forever beyond all relation, including that of the generated cosmos. From this it follows that because the cosmos is in fact generated, it must be generated from a demiurge. But even this demiurge cannot have a relation to the One/Good. Instead, the demiurge generates the cosmos by gazing at the eternal paradigm of the all as it subsists in the One/Good, a gaze which never fully sees the One/Good. Proclus concludes:

The cosmos, therefore, has both a demiurgic and paradigmatic cause. And as in the first axioms there were two hypotheses, namely, what perpetual being is and what generated being is, and two other in the second axioms, namely, every generated thing has a cause and that which is without a cause is not generated; thus also in these, there are two common conceptions: that which is generated on account of an intelligible paradigm

85. *In Tim.* 1.264: ἔπεται γὰρ τῷ εἶναι ποιητικὸν αἴτιον τὸ εἶναι καὶ παράδειγμα, ἢ ἐν αὐτῷ τῷ ποιῶντι προϋπάρχον, ἢ ἐκτὸς αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἢ κρείττον τοῦ ποιούντος, ἢ καταδεέστερον, ἢ ὁμοταγὲς αὐτῷ· πάντως γὰρ τὸ ποιῶν εἰς τι εἶδος ἀποτεινόμενον, ὁ βούλεται ἐνθεῖναι τῷ ποιουμένῳ, ποιεῖ. τοῦτο μὲν οὖν ἔπεται. δεῖ δὲ καὶ τὸ ἐξῆς εὐρεῖν, εἴτε αἰδιὸν ἔστι τὸ παράδειγμα τὸ κοσμικόν, εἴτε γενητόν. πρὸς δὲ τοῦτο συντελεῖ ἡμῖν τὰ προκείμενα ἀξιώματα. σύμπαξ δὲ ὁ λόγος οὕτως ἂν εἴη πρὸς ἑαυτὸν ἀκόλουθος· εἰ ἔστι γιγνόμενον, ἔστιν αὐτοῦ δημιουργός· εἰ ἔστι δημιουργός τοῦ παντός, ἔστι καὶ παράδειγμα· καὶ εἰ μὲν καλόν ἔστι τὸ γιγνόμενον, πρὸς τὸ αἰεὶ ὄν παράδειγμα γέγονεν, εἰ δὲ μὴ καλόν, πρὸς τὸ γεγονός· ὥστε καὶ συνεχῆ γίγνεσθαι τοιοῦτον συλλογισμόν· ὁ κόσμος γέγονε.

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is beautiful, that which is generated on account of a generated paradigm is not beautiful.<sup>86</sup>

What begins to emerge from the schematic established here by Proclus is that beauty as such is fundamentally derivative. He explicitly asserts in a few other passages that beauty remains secondary or subordinate to the Good.<sup>87</sup> Yet he is equally clear that the Demiurge is not the generator of beauty. Rather, beauty is in the paradigm at which the Demiurge casts his gaze in his generative act.<sup>88</sup> Consequently, the highest beauty as such derives from the symbiosis between the paradigm and the Demiurge, that is to say, from the Demiurgic gaze insofar as that gaze identifies the energy between the Demiurge and the paradigm. For in this gaze the Demiurge receives the eternal paradigm as such and so receives the beauty identical with it.<sup>89</sup> But the Demiurge, as a mediator, cannot generate at once the whole of that at which he gazes. And for this reason, the universe can be both beautiful and not beautiful on account of its inherent limitations with respect to its capacity to receive the Demiurgic production.<sup>90</sup>

86. *In Tim.* 1.265: ὁ ἄρα κόσμος δημιουργικὸν ἔχει καὶ παραδειγματικὸν αἴτιον. καὶ ὥσπερ ἐπὶ τῶν πρώτων ἀξιωματῶν δύο ἦσαν ὑποθέσεις, τί τὸ ὄν αἰεὶ καὶ τί τὸ γιγνόμενον, καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν δευτέρων ἄλλαι δύο, πᾶν τὸ γιγνόμενον αἴτιον ἔχει, τὸ μὴ ἔχον αἴτιον οὐκ ἔστι γενητὸν, οὕτω δὴ καὶ ἐπὶ τούτων δύο εἰσὶν ἔννοιαι κοιναί, τὸ πρὸς νοητὸν γεγονὸς καλὸν ἔστι, τὸ πρὸς γενητὸν γεγονὸς οὐ καλὸν ἔστιν.

87. Cf. *In Tim.* 2.294; 3.10.

88. *In Tim.* 1.268–71.

89. *In Tim.* 1.270. Note in particular: δεῖ δὲ κάκεινο θαυμάζειν τοῦ Πλάτωνος, ὅπως οὐκ εἶπε τὸ πρὸς αἰώνιον παράδειγμα γεγονὸς καλὸν, ἀλλὰ τὸ ὑπὸ τοῦ δημιουργοῦ βλέποντος πρὸς ἐκεῖνο γεγονὸς εἶναι κάλλιστον, ἐπεὶ καὶ τὸ πλημμελὲς καὶ τὸ ἄτακτον γενητὸν ὄν—ὄρατὸν γὰρ καὶ αἰσθητὸν· πᾶν δὲ τὸ τοιοῦτον γενητὸν καὶ γέγονεν, ὡς ἐρεῖ προϊῶν [28 BC 31 B]—ἀπὸ τοῦ νοητοῦ δεξάμενον εἰδῶν τινα ἴχνη πρὸ τῆς δημιουργίας καὶ οὐκ ἔστι κάλλιστον, εἰ καὶ καλὸν πῆ ἔστιν ὡς πρὸς τὸ ἀνείδεον τῆς ὕλης. οὐχ ἀπλῶς οὖν τὸ πρὸς αἰδὶον παράδειγμα γεγονὸς καλὸν, οἷον ἐκεῖνο τὸ ἄτακτον καὶ πλημμελὲς, ἀλλ' ὅπερ ὑπὸ τοῦ δημιουργήσαντος γέγονεν εἰς ἐκεῖνο βλέποντος. ἐκεῖνου γὰρ ὁ δημιουργὸς ἀπῆν, τὸ δὲ νοητὸν πρὸ τοῦ δημιουργοῦ καὶ τοῦτο κατέλαμπεν: "It is also necessary to admire this in Plato, that he does not say that what is generated on account of an eternal paradigm is beautiful, but that what is generated by the Demiurgus who looks to it is most beautiful; since that which is confused and disordered is generated, for it is visible and sensible. But everything of this kind is and was generated, as he says further on, receiving from the intelligible certain vestiges of forms prior to fabrication, and is not most beautiful, though it is in a certain respect beautiful, as with reference to the formless nature of matter. Hence that which is generated on account of an eternal paradigm, such for instance as that disorderly and confused nature, is not beautiful simply, but that which was generated by the Demiurgus looking to it." Translation Taylor.

90. Cf. *In Tim.* 1.397.

What can be deduced, then, from the Procline development of the Platonic cosmogony is the establishment of a paradigmatic middle between the eternal One/Good and the Demiurgic producer of the cosmos. And it is the establishment of this middle that both maintains the inherited ambiguity, insofar as that middle becomes axiomatic and inferred (though not without plausibility), and overcomes the tension of the ambiguity by crystalizing it in the form of this middle. Certainly for the Neoplatonist of the fifth or sixth century, there would be no ambiguity—at least not internally to the theo-logic of Neoplatonism itself. As the first and highest deity, the One/Good could have no relation to anything that derives from it. Its absolute transcendence over all things applies to anything and everything, especially those things—like beauty—that seem inseparable from their material manifestations. In establishing an eternal paradigm in between the One/Good and the Demiurge Proclus renders the latter as the supplier of beauty adorning the cosmos.<sup>91</sup> In this way, the Demiurge gazes at a beauty that is intelligible through his gaze while simultaneously being porous to the One/Good beyond it. And out of this Proclus derives a Neoplatonic “trinity”: the Good as the cause of union; the paradigm as the cause of beauty; and the Demiurge as the cause of form.<sup>92</sup>

Following in the tradition of Plotinus, Proclus establishes beauty as a divine name insofar as it now becomes understood as an eternal paradigm, as that within the One/Good delimited by the Demiurgic gaze. Like the other lesser deities, however, it only ever identifies what is derived from the first god. In this sense the ambiguity remains insofar as beauty in the Neoplatonic theological synthesis is unable to finally unite the various manifestations of divinity. And, this being the case, it could plausibly be argued that there remains an infinite distance even between beauty and the One/Good, not only by virtue of what the One/Good is, but by virtue of beauty’s embrace of the transient, material cosmos.

## Conclusion

It is not difficult to understand why both Platonic and Neoplatonic thought attracts so many of the great minds in the early Church. From Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Didymus the Blind to the Cappadocian Fathers Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory Nazianzen, and Basil of Caesarea, to the Latin Fathers Hilary of Poitiers, Ambrose of Milan, and Augustine, the

91. Cf. *In Tim.* 1.269.

92. *In Tim.* 1.269.

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ideas of Greek philosophy provide to Christian thinkers a grammar and way of thinking that proves to be a ready-made vehicle for expressing the radically new vision of reality they encounter in Christ. And perhaps there is no dimension of thought, no object of inquiry, no human experience or event that more vividly captures the absorption of Greek thought into the newly awakened Christian theological synthesis as beauty.

The Greek understanding of beauty furnishes the ancient world with a vision of reality that—at least in its *theoreia*—was being wooed by an as yet unknown glory; so much so that Clement of Alexandria would elevate Greek philosophy, in its relation to the God of Jesus Christ, to a status analogous to the Jewish Law. Beauty as the call that being makes upon the intellect, ever uplifting it more profoundly into its intensive depths; as being's very power to appear to vision and intellect alike, the power woven into the very fabric of being enabling it to take determinate forms; as the symmetry that erupts and sustains the energy of thought as thought engages with the riches of being outside of itself—in all these ways and more, Greek philosophical inquiry into the intelligibility of beauty, like the first opening of newborn's eyes, marks the first step in the process of opening the world to the conditions wherein divine glory might enter.

But the Greek world could only go so far with beauty, as the preceding chapters have sought to demonstrate. For all its efforts, Greek philosophy was simply unable to discern a way to mediate the One and the many, the spiritual and the material, the transcendent and the immanent, the infinite and the finite. Even Plato's *logos* of the *μεταξύ*, for all its capability of thinking the middle, remains a latent philosophical treasure only ever indirectly or unconsciously influencing the great thinkers of the Western tradition.<sup>93</sup> For the ancient world, beauty and the way of thinking it generates through its alliance with reason struggle against an order continually attempting to break out of the trappings of equivocity. As a consequence, beauty ends up suspended in an unmediated middle, that is to say, a middle that no matter how between it is pushed never finally overcomes the equivocal conditions in which it is suspended. Within this suspension, beauty is somehow part of the eternal order but only manifestly known in the transient order, derived from the One but corrupted by the many in

93. We should hasten to add that this *logos* of the *μεταξύ* only becomes an explicit mode of mindfulness toward the end of the twentieth century in the metaphysical project of William Desmond. See, *inter alia*, *Being and the Between; Ethics and the Between; God and the Between; Art and the Absolute; Desire, Dialectic and Otherness; Philosophy and Its Others; Beyond Hegel and Dialectic; Perplexity and Ultimacy; Art, Origin, and Otherness*.

which it alone appears, inhabiting the infinite while degeneratively falling into the finite. Trapped forever within this back and forth, beauty can only ever be either/or but never both/and.

Beauty, it might be said, unwittingly exposes the limits inherent within the Greek mode of reason and by extension any mode of reason that relies too heavily on its own intrinsic power. To be sure, Greek philosophy, especially as it is expressed through Plato and his heirs, opens thought to a transcendental realm in which thinking encounters its other. And in so doing, it demonstrates perhaps more than at any other time in philosophical history the tremendous power that reason bears in itself. Nevertheless, in stepping into that transcendent realm, Greek thought—by its own admission—encounters an object it is simply ill equipped to engage. Like Virgil acquiescing to Beatrice in Dante's great *La Divina Commedia*, Greek reason reaches its limits before the overwhelming beauty to which it leads. Through the progression of Greek thought from Plato to Proclus, this is certainly evidenced by the more spiritual, or religious, momentum that it gathers. But by the time Neoplatonism becomes for all intents and purposes a religion, it is simply unable to narrate its vision with the same influential power as the fledgling Church. For with the arrival of God into the transient order of time and decay, the ambiguity surrounding beauty's association with the divine that endures from Plato to Proclus is now made clear in the form of a person.

## PART TWO

DIONYSIUS THE AREOPAGITE IS A FIGURE OF PROFOUND MYSTERY. CLAIMING for himself the name of a biblical eyewitness, the author of the corpus that bears his name comes to exercise immense influence on Christian thought. Despite this, the enigmatic nature of the authorship of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* along with the enigmatic nature of its contents continues to shroud its contribution in controversy, a characteristic that seems ever present. The identity of the Areopagite falls under suspicion ever since its first appearance during the Christological debates of the sixth century. In a report titled “Epistle to Innocent the Maronite concerning a Conference Held with the Severians” [*Innocentii Maronitae epistula de collatione cum Severianis habita*], one finds evidence that the identity of the author of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* is from the beginning questioned. This report comes from a colloquy that took place in 532 between a group loyal to the decrees of Chalcedon (451) and a group of so-called “monophysites” loyal to Severus of Antioch. The latter contingent cites Dionysius to bolster the authority of their position. In response, the opposition questions the authenticity of the quotations taken from the Areopagite, based primarily on the fact that “Blessed Cyril” knew nothing of them. But this does little to thwart the Dionysian influence and his texts become authoritative for centuries. After a period of relative acquiescence to Dionysius’ apostolic authenticity, the sixteenth-century Reformation begins to rock the boat once more fueled in no small measure by Luther’s assessment. In his “Disputation of 1537” he insists that Dionysius “Platonizes more than he Christianizes,” and in his *Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, Luther advises Christians to “shun like the Plague” the mystical theology of the Areopagite.<sup>1</sup>

1. Cf. Foehlich, “Pseudo-Dionysius and the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century,” 33–46, and Golitzin, “A Contemplative and a Liturgist,” 132.

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Amidst all this controversy, the high point of interest in the Areopagite can be found among the scholastics of the high Middle Ages. Passed on from Maximus the Confessor, John Scotus Eriugena and others, the Dionysian inheritance is received with remarkable enthusiasm. No doubt this is in part due to the esteem that the author's allonym merits, but it is even more so on account of the content within the corpus itself. Scholars of the Middle Ages from all schools of thought write commentaries and shape their own ways of thinking around this enigmatic figure and his work.

This begins to wane as the identity of the Areopagite comes more and more under suspicion. When Koch and Stiglmayr publish their discoveries that finally pull the "Apostolic mask" from the face of the author of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*, the thought of the Areopagite largely falls out of fashion.<sup>2</sup> This can be gleaned especially from the fact that no critical edition of the Corpus appears until late in the twentieth century.<sup>3</sup> This appearance, however, also demonstrates the fact of a resurgence of interest in Dionysius's thought. With the publication in the later half of the twentieth century of von Balthasar's *Herrlichkeit*, interest in the thought of Dionysius the Areopagite experiences a resurgence that in large part leads to what could be considered a community of Dionysian scholarship.

2. A passage found in ch. 4 of Dionysius' *On Divine Names* contains an excursus on evil that appears to be directly dependent on Proclus's monograph *On the Existence of Evils*. This passage was the primary grounding for the argument made by Koch and Stiglmayr: Koch, "Der pseudo-epigraphische Charakter der dionysischen Schriften," 353–421; Stiglmayr, *Der Neuplatoniker Proclus*, 253–73, 721–48; cf. also Wear and Dillon, *Dionysius the Areopagite and the Neoplatonist Tradition*, ch. 5; Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 151ff.; Riordan, *Divine Light*, 136ff. More evidence is later uncovered that demonstrates Dionysius' dependence on a fifth-century mode of Syrian liturgy. As Paul Rorem explains in *Biblical and Liturgical Symbols within the Pseudo-Dionysian Synthesis*, 27, this was one primary foundation for Stiglmayr's investigation into the setting and dating of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* (hereafter CD). Although some scholars, e.g., Schepens, "La liturgie de Denys, le pseudo-Aréopagite," 357–76, have sought to establish other milieus for Dionysius's liturgy (like the Alexandrian), these are considered largely unsuccessful. Boularand, "L'Eucharistie d'après le pseudo-Denys l'Aréopagite," 193–217, strengthened Stiglmayr's thesis and refuted Schepens's. As Rorem further notes, the Syrian setting has, more recently, been confirmed by Strothmann, *Das Sakrament der Myron-Weihe*, LX.

3. The first edition of the Corpus does not appear until 1516 in Florence. A century later, two more editions are published: the first by P. Lanssel in Paris (1615), and the second by B. Cordier in Antwerp (1634) and Paris (1644). Cordier's edition is used in edited form in the *Patrologia Graeca* in 1857. In 1991, the first critical edition appears, prepared by B. R. Suchla, G. Heil, and A. Ritter and published by de Gruyter out of Berlin. See Lacost, *Encyclopedia of Christian Theology*, 442.

Among contemporary scholars writing over the last three or four decades, a notable community interested in Dionysius has arisen. Some of the more noteworthy contributions that have proven themselves influential include the work of Stephen Gersh, René Roques, Paul Rorem, Eugenio Corsini, and Jan Vaneste.<sup>4</sup> More recent contributions that merit mention include studies put forth by Eric Perl, Christian Schäfer, Andrew Louth, William Riordan and a few different collections of essays published by *Modern Theology* and the *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*.<sup>5</sup>

Dionysian scholarship tends to polarize itself according to the “two faces” of Dionysius, namely, his Christian face and his Neoplatonic face. This polarization in some sense corresponds to the distinction between a *resourcement* approach to Dionysius and an approach that focuses upon the reception of the Areopagite, with those interested in Dionysius’ sources emphasizing his Neoplatonism and those interested in his reception emphasizing his Christianity. Nevertheless, because these two faces are present in both approaches and must therefore be mediated somehow in each, the correspondence is not without complexity and ambiguity. One pole tends to read Dionysius first and foremost as a Neoplatonist whose Christianity is little more than camouflage designed to make Neoplatonism more palatable to a burgeoning Christian society.<sup>6</sup> There is also, however, a more moderate contingent of this pole, e.g., Gersh, Perl, Schäfer, Rorem, that emphasizes Dionysius’ Neoplatonism but not over and against his Christian allegiances. The other pole tends to position itself in reaction to the first pole by aspiring to emphasize Dionysius’ Christian, and thus theological, dimension. Scholars such as Andrew Louth, John Jones, and

4. Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena*; Roques, *L’Univers Dionysien*; Rorem, *Biblical and Liturgical Symbols and Pseudo-Dionysius*; Corsini, *Il Trattato De Divinis Nominibus*; Vaneste, *Le Mystère de Dieu*.

5. Perl, *Theophany*; Schäfer, *Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite*; Louth, *Denys the Areopagite and Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition*; Riordan, *Divine Light*; Coakley and Stang, *Rethinking Dionysius the Areopagite*, originally published as vol. 24, issue 4 of *Modern Theology*.

6. Contemporary scholars advocating a form of this position include Wear and Dillon who, in *Dionysius the Areopagite and the Neoplatonist Tradition*, assert that in altering Platonic terminology to fit his theology, Dionysius is suggesting the superiority of the Platonic tradition (12). It is not exactly clear to what this “superiority” is related. One could suggest Wear and Dillon have in mind other philosophical traditions (Stoicism, Epicureanism, etc.), but given that the context involves a comparison between Neoplatonism and Christianity, it is more likely that “superior” refers to a contrast with the Christian tradition. Arthur, in *Pseudo-Dionysius as Polemicist*, argues that Dionysius conscientiously hides his Christian devotion, i.e., his angelology and Christology, behind the veil of Neoplatonism (40–41).

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Wayne Hankey read Dionysius in such a way as to cast his Neoplatonism in the light of his allegiance to the Judeo-Christian tradition.<sup>7</sup>

Within this community of Dionysian scholars several themes and ideas in the *Corpus Dionysiacum* occupy a majority of the work done. Chief among these include Dionysius' contribution to the Christian mystical tradition; the nature of apophatic, or "negative," theology; the theme of hierarchy; Dionysius' impact on speculative theology; Dionysius' use and interpretation of Scripture; the world as a theophany; and, along side these internal themes, the multitude of receptions by, and relations to, Dionysius' posterity. One theme that, only until recently, has been left off the agenda of Dionysian scholarship is beauty. With the increasing influence of theological aesthetics, however, Dionysius' contribution to a theological configuration and defense of beauty is drawing equally increasing attention. This second part of the present work hopes to further increase this attention and contribute to its development.

Chapter 3 begins with an examination of the Dionysian doctrine of divine names. In the opening of his treatise *On the Divine Names* Dionysius refers to a tradition of divine names in which he locates his project. However, no further mention of this tradition can be found throughout his corpus. Acquiring any knowledge of it—something significant for the present study—necessitates looking at his sources. Chief among these are the Judeo-Christian biblical tradition and the Neoplatonic tradition. The examination put forth in chapter 3 argues that both traditions are necessary for a more complete portrait of the divine name tradition that influences Dionysius's project.

Chapter 4 and 5 examine the specifics of how beauty is conceived as a divine name in the thought of the Areopagite. Although the association between beauty and God in Dionysius is much more explicit than in his Greek predecessors, it remains difficult to render this association with any systematic organization. However, by recognizing a parallel between Dionysius's own reconfiguration of the two Parmenidean hypotheses (the One is not, and the One is) and the addition of beauty to the list of divine names, a way forward can be established. Chapter 4 examines beauty insofar as it corresponds to Dionysius's reconfiguration of the first Parmenidean hypothesis as God in himself. In this chapter, beauty

7. Along with Louth's work noted above, we include here Hankey, "Denys and Aquinas," 139–84, and "Dionysian Hierarchy in St. Thomas Aquinas," 405–38; Jones, "Character of the Negative (Mystical) Theology for Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagite," 66–74, as well as "(Mis?)-Reading the Divine Names as a Science," 143–72, and "Absolutely Simple God?," 371–406.

is read as naming God in himself as a transcendent plenitude. Chapter 5 examines beauty insofar as it corresponds to Dionysius's reconfiguration of the second Parmenidean hypothesis as God in his self-communication. In this chapter, beauty is read as naming God as a principle of determination. Although such language appears to evoke a more modern, perhaps Hegelian, sensibility, it is used simply to indicate the way in which God's self-disclosure in Dionysius concerns (*de*) the origin and goal (*terminus*) of all created entities. Beauty is indispensable for this feature of the divine identity, as will become clear in this fifth chapter.

Finally, chapter 6 will close this second part by examining the question concerning Dionysius's God and the One of Neoplatonism. This chapter will argue that when beauty as a divine name is taken into consideration it becomes clear that the God who inhabits the pages of the Dionysian corpus is essentially different from the One of Neoplatonism.

# 3

## The Tradition of the Divine Names

THE OPENING TITULAR LINES OF DIONYSIUS'S *ON THE DIVINE NAMES* suggest that not only does the phenomenon of a divine name antedate the treatise, but also that Dionysius intends his treatise to be part of an ongoing tradition.<sup>1</sup> In the remainder of the corpus, however, nothing further is said of this "tradition." Therefore, any attempt to relate this tradition to the Dionysian text for the most part is an exercise in speculation and historical construction.<sup>2</sup> This chapter explores the possible roots and contours of the divine name tradition as it antedates the Dionysian formulation, as well as the nature of a divine name that emerges from Dionysius's own contribution to this mysterious tradition.

For propaedeutic purposes it is important at the outset to clarify that the term "divine name" corresponds to two primary, though interrelated, significations. In a broad sense, it may refer to a *tradition* in which human thought reflects upon the relation between language and divinity. Such traditions can be found both in biblical and Greek thought, though with vastly different textures. The biblical source is found in the *Exodus* account where God gives his name to Moses. In Greek thought, because Plato's *Cratylus* explores the natural and conventional dimensions of language as such, it could be considered a foundational text for divine names. When

1. Dionysius the Areopagite, *On the Divine Names* [hereafter *DN*] 1, 1 (585A): ΤΩΙ ΣΥΜΠΡΕΣΒΥΤΕΡΩΙ ΤΙΜΟΘΕΩΙ ΔΙΟΝΥΣΙΟΣ Ο ΠΡΕΣΒΥΤΕΡΟΣ ΠΕΡΙ ΘΕΙΩΝ ΟΝΟΜΑΤΩΝ. τίς ὁ τοῦ λόγου σκοπός, καί τις ἡ περὶ θεῶν ὀνομάτων παράδοσις. "To my fellow Presbyter Timothy, Dionysius the Presbyter. What is the purpose of the discourse, and the tradition regarding the divine names." We should note that, unlike the Migne, the de Gruyter edition does not contain this introductory subtitle. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from *On the Divine Names* will be taken from John Parker's edition. For referential purposes, citations will include the text followed by column numbers and letters as found in Migne.

2. The following brief exposition is prescriptive rather than demonstrative or diagrammatic, open to being weighed against further evidence.

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one adds those works of Aristotle that treat the theme of naming/language (*Topics*, *On Interpretation*, *Posterior Analytics*) and later Neoplatonic works, such as Proclus's *Commentary on the Cratylus* and his *On the Theology of Plato*, and Porphyry's *On the Divine Names*, it is possible to discern a philosophical tradition that emerges from the Greek approach to naming in general and divine naming more specifically. As Greek reflection develops, certain designations, or "names" become more widespread as references to divinity or divinities. Certainly, given the Neoplatonic coloring of his thought, Dionysius is influenced by this approach. However, as will become clear it is not the primary influence on his approach to naming, but supplements a more biblical substance.

More specific to Dionysius, the term "divine name" refers to a *phenomenon* that identifies the communication of a divine perfection into the created order. This makes it something highly complex as it identifies a reality in between the ineffable divine essence and actual, concrete entities. But more will be said on this later on. What is important to note at the outset is that although the Dionysian treatise *On the Divine Names* employs grammatical and conceptual strategies that are indisputably Neoplatonic, the treatise itself, as well as the unique approach to divine names it embodies, is profoundly biblical. The synthesis that is achieved in the text between the two traditions is remarkable and a testament to the massive influence that the whole Dionysian corpus would have upon posterity. However, it is important to stress that it is a synthesis that employs Neoplatonic grammar and language in the service of the more fundamental biblical substance.

### The Biblical Dimension of Divine Names

The origins of the divine name tradition can be located within the continuity between God and creation that is first established in God's covenant with the people of Israel. The third commandment of the Decalogue is evidence of the fact that within the biblical tradition "names" are taken very seriously because it is believed that they harbor an *essential* aspect of that which they identify. Similar to a view of names found among Greek thinkers like Plato, Aristotle, Proclus and others, that of the Bible maintains that names attempt to identify the essence of the named thing.<sup>3</sup> Precisely for this reason, names are powerful utterances. To know a name is to conceptually possess the named thing. At the same time, insofar as the

3. Cf. Adler, "What's in a Name?," 265.

being of the named thing (its essential and existential content) exceeds the utterance of its name, it perpetually eludes possession.

When it comes to naming God, this complexity is only heightened. Human language is incapable of capturing that which transcends all conceptual and linguistic categories, a fact that the ancient Jews keenly perceive. Nevertheless, they continue to believe it possible to utter names of the ineffable God. Unlike the Greek tradition, however, this conclusion does not derive from philosophical reflection. It derives from a profoundly personal relationship between a communicative God and his chosen people. Reflection follows upon and derives from personal and intimate relationship rather than, as is more commonly held in Neoplatonism, theurgically engendering it.

Within the context of this personal relationship a name for God differs significantly from a conception of God, whether that concept is communal or individual. While the concept “god” remains at a categorical distance allowing a variety of phenomena to fall under its purview, a name for God closes this distance in a personal relationship of intimacy. A name breaks through the abstraction of conceptual categorization opening discursive thought to that which transcends discursive thought. A name, in this sense, is not intended to replace the necessity of discursive reasoning. Rather, a name identifies a surplus of intelligible content that inspires and motivates the cognitive process through the attraction of personal intimacy and affection. This cognitive process indicates how a name provokes subsidiary concepts without being reduced to any one of the concepts provoked. Insofar as they are integral to the process of defining, concepts necessarily bring closure to a given phenomenon enabling the process of discursion between concepts. Names, in contrast, enable a named phenomenon to maintain a sense of porosity with the surplus of intelligible content it signifies while simultaneously providing enough conceptual closure for the sake of the cognitive process. Where a concept predominantly appeals to the intricate workings of the head (mind or thought), a name appeals to a latent unity always surrounding both the heart and the head. As the name above all names, then, God’s name is unique in this regard. To borrow an image from the Eastern Christian mystical tradition, God’s name is the grace that alone can fully unite the head to the heart, and the heart to the head.

Throughout Jewish classical literature and practice, names rather than concepts serve as the primary referential mechanism. Although in Judaism there are a multiplicity and variety of names appropriated to

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God,<sup>4</sup> it is the Tetragrammaton, the *Hashem*, often represented as YHWH, which occurs most frequently throughout Scripture.<sup>5</sup> Many names are used throughout the Old Testament to identify God, but only YHWH identifies the personal name of God.<sup>6</sup> But even this name is no simple moniker. As the following demonstrates, it is a name that is revealed alongside several other important features.

God gives this personal name to Moses through a three-part disclosure. First, without using a proper name at all God introduces himself with a reference to Moses' ancestry, "I am the God [*Elohey*] of your father, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" (Exod 3:6). Second, when Moses beseeches a more specified name to present to the people, God replies, "*Ehyeh asher Eyheh*. . . . Thus you shall say to the Israelites, '*Ehyeh* has sent me to you'" (Exod 3:14).<sup>7</sup> Third, God seems to reiterate by saying, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, '*HaShem*, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you': This is my name forever, and this is my title for all generations" (Exod 3:15).

There are a few notable dynamics involved in this triadic disclosure. In the first place, there is a nomenclatural sequence wherein a more difficult, even abstractly conceptual, name is provided in between a reference to historical ancestry and a reference to ancestral posterity. The triad itself embodies the three elements of time—past (reference to ancestry), present (*Ehyeh asher Eyheh* as the name to be for presentation), and future ("this will be my title for all generations"). This triadic introduction bears significant correspondence with Exodus 6:2–9, where God again says to Moses:

I am *HaShem*. I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name *HaShem* I did not make myself known to them. I also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they resided as aliens. I have also heard the groaning of the Israelites whom the Egyptians are holding as slaves, and I have remembered my covenant. Say therefore to the Israelites, "I am *HaShem*, and I will

4. Cf. Leeman, "Names of God," 104.

5. 6828 times to be exact. Cf. Leeman, "Names of God," 104.

6. Gieschen, "Divine Name in Ante-Nicene Christology," 121: "Unlike Elohim and the many other titles or names used to identify God in the OT (*sic*), YHWH was understood to be the personal name of God"; cf. Adler, "What's in a Name," 266.

7. Given the controversy surrounding the translation of this phrase, we employ here the English transliteration following Adler, "What's in a Name?," 265.

free you from the burdens of the Egyptians and deliver you from slavery to them. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my people, and I will be your God. You shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has freed you from the burdens of the Egyptians. I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; I will give it to you for a possession. I am *HaShem*.”

As the above passage indicates, the name *HaShem*, or YHWH, is a name not simply given, but one that is given in and as an historical event. The fact that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob do not know this name suggests that without this history, the name is not yet ready to be revealed. Only after God has given the “substance” of the meaning—that is, the events in which personal intimacy is given and received—does he consummate it with a name. The intention of the name, then, is not to provide the Israelites a source of conceptual determinacy to the divine identity, nor to display a sort of divine identity card for their approval. Rather, embedded within the historical context, it is intended to draw the Israelites into a deeper, more profoundly intimate relationship with YHWH’s personal love by alerting them to the meaning of this name along with its living efficacy as it appears in their history of salvation. But perhaps the most significant feature in all this is the distinction, and hence eventual association, between *Ehyeh asher Eyeh* and the *HaShem*, a matter that involves issues regarding the translation of these names.

In the *Exodus* account of the divine introduction, although the *HaShem* is God’s “official” name, it is not the first name spoken to Moses. The first name given is *Ehyeh asher Eyeh*, which is translated most frequently as “I am that I am.” According to Jewish scholars this translation fails to get at the full sense of the name since it neglects the “future” or “imperfect” sense in the actual verb usage and consequently “binds” God within the limitations of stasis.<sup>8</sup> A better translation, according to these scholars, is

8. Cf. Fields, *Torah commentary for Our Times*, 19; Adler, “What’s in a Name,” 267–68. Adler, in our view, overstates the matter by claiming that the common (Christian) “grievously mistranslated” phrase “I am that I am” is a “ridiculously oblique phrase, which makes it clear why Christians have had such limited success understanding this name” (267). His explanation, which does draw out subtle and important distinctions, does not justify such an overstated criticism. Moreover, the fact that he proceeds to employ a Hegelian reading of what he considers to be the more accurate understanding (“I will be what I will be”) casts suspicion over his claim to a more successful interpretation: “It [i.e., *Ehyeh asher Ehyeh*] is, in other words, the ultimate declaration of transcendent self-determination. . . . The name *Ehyeh asher Ehyeh* informs us that God alone of all things can be said to embody the quintessence of self-determination.”

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“I will be what I will be,” since this conveys the implication of divine unboundedness—that is, “I will be whatever I will be, and not what anyone else wills me to be, but anything at all that I will to be.”<sup>9</sup> Reading a modern idiom into the matter, other scholars emphasize an element of consolation in this name. This reading of the name emphasizes the functional presence of YHWH as the god who is with his people in all things, especially suffering. As one such scholar articulates this:

I think that God is here depicted not as saying what His name is, or what it means, or who He is, but rather as saying to Moses how they can know him: “When the people ask for my name, tell them not to worry. Tell them, as I have been telling you . . . that I am there with them . . . then, and will ever be there with them. . . . They will not need a “true name” with which to call no me, for I will be there, present with them, then and always. Let them know me as the one who will be there. Let them call me “I-will-be-there” to remind them of my dependable presence.<sup>10</sup>

Taken at face value, this observation strips the *Ehyeh* of real name-quality and reduces it to an utterance of functionality. However, if it is taken as drawing out a functional *feature* of the meaning of the divine name it emphasizes the divine name as “being in the mode of promise and presence.” In fact, other readings of the issue combine this emphasis with a more traditional perspective, generating the following interpretation:

God’s reply [to Moses] in Hebrew was: ‘Eh-yeh ‘Asher ‘Eh-yeh. Some translations render this as “I AM THAT I AM” (sic). However, it is to be noted that the Hebrew verb ha-yah, from which the word Eh-yeh is drawn, does not simply mean “be.” Rather, it means “become” or “prove to be.” The reference here is not to God’s self-existence but to what he has in mind to become toward others. Therefore the New World Translation properly renders the above Hebrew expression as “I SHALL PROVE TO BE WHAT I SHALL PROVE TO BE” (sic). . . . Perhaps the best word on this momentous occasion is: “What I please,” since we

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Rather, corresponding to various features of beauty, God as communicated in his Divine Name is better understood from the perspective of a *plenitude of determinate promise* rather than self-determination since the latter implies not only incompleteness, but also a relationship of utility with otherness. A plenitude of determinate promise, in contrast, allows otherness to exist for its own sake, as a gift given to the other for the good of the other.

9. Cf. Adler, “What’s in a Name,” 267.

10. Sobel, *Logic and Theism*, 539.

know that the Divine resources are infinite, and that God will please to become to His people only what is wisest and best. Thus viewed, the formula becomes a most gracious promise: the Divine capacity of adaptation to any circumstances, any difficulties, any necessities that may arise, becomes a veritable bank of faith to such as love God and keep His commandments. The formula is a promise, the promise is concentrated in a Name. The Name is at once a revelation, a memorial, a pledge. To this Name God will be ever faithful.<sup>11</sup>

From this perspective, the name remains a name, but one that simultaneously binds God's people to him in a personal love relationship and illuminates the divine being as one of promise. One of the primary problematics that shadows this debate concerns how to express the divine name beyond the linguistic limits imposed by finite temporality. This is exemplified in the way that those who subscribe to "process thought" exploit the ambiguities of this name in order to advance the idea that "God is the yet to be perfected 'I.'"<sup>12</sup> In such cases, following a trend within modern and post-modern thinking, the idea of "futurity" is identified as a "space" of utter ontological indeterminacy that even applies to God. In signifying a futurity without separation from past or present, the language of promise moves beyond process thought. This is because where process thought posits a "space" of indeterminacy beyond even God, the language of promise posits the plenitude of divine being as the overfullness of determinacy.<sup>13</sup> God is such that his fullness constitutes the promise of all determinate being.

The other divine name, the *HaShem*, consummates this perspective. If the *Ehyeh* can be construed as "a name which describes something objectively innate in the nature of God . . . the 'existing Being which is existing Being'; that is to say, the Being whose existence is absolute," the *HaShem* is intended more as God's sacred and "official" use-name.<sup>14</sup> The most interesting feature of this name is the fact that it embodies a paradox. "It represents the verb 'to be' in all three tenses simultaneously. If names

11. Navas, *Divine Truth or Human Tradition?*, 540ff.

12. Fields, *Torah Commentary for Our Times*, 19.

13. Metz, *Theology of the World*, 88, interprets the futurity of the Tetragram as follows: "God revealed Himself to Moses more as the power of the future than as a being dwelling beyond all history and experience." One could read Metz's interpretation of "futurity" here from the perspective of promise since it contrasts the "future" as a reserve of divine power against the conception of "future" as an indeterminate dwelling "beyond" history and experience.

14. Adler, "What's in a Name," 266.

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are descriptive of the essences of their subject, *HaShem* seems to be telling us numerous things about God: Eternality, paradox, perhaps something related to God's Being the source of being."<sup>15</sup> The *HaShem*, then, is a name that unites past, present and future in a single utterance. The union given by this utterance is intimately connected to the *Ehyeh* as God's excess or plenitude of being, which as such is constituted as infinite promise to become, or "be determined to," whatever is necessary for those in a personal relationship with him.

The biblical divine name tradition, when traced back to the Exodus text, reveals that the divine name has both a "conceptual" dimension and a dimension of personal intimacy, both equally bound up together in God's act of self-communication. The *Ehyeh* identifies God's identity as a plenitude of being, capable of becoming determined to any and every possible situation or event. It is a name that discloses a "concept" of unboundedness, which as such eludes the boundaries of conceptualization. It reveals God as the One whose "being" is beyond all categories, even the category "being" itself. This sort of understanding of the *Ehyeh* certainly would have resonated with aspects of the Neoplatonism available to Dionysius, though to what extent Dionysius read Exodus this way is difficult to determine. Certain hints suggest themselves in his fifth chapter of *On the Divine Names*, especially when he reiterates that the treatise intends to treat the names insofar as they set forth God's providence rather than the divine essence.<sup>16</sup> This detail, which *prima facie* appears rather minor, bespeaks the other dimension of the Exodus account of the divine name, the *HaShem*. It is this name for God, the official, personal name, that gives concrete content to the *Ehyeh*. It is the name that identifies God's loving care for his people as it is experienced in historical events as divine providence. It is this name that communicates the personal, intimate relationship to which God calls Israel, and by extension all people in Christ. Given the anagogical and pedagogical foundation of his treatise, it seems that this dimension of the divine name makes a significant contribution to the overall Dionysian project of naming God.

15. Adler, "What's in a Name," 266.

16. *DN* 5, 2 (816C): "The treatise, then, seeks to celebrate these, the Names of God, which set forth his Providence. For it does not profess to express the very superessential Goodness, and Essence, and Life, and Wisdom, of the very superessential Deity, which is seated above all goodness, and deity, and essence, and wisdom, and life, in hidden places as the oracles affirm."

## Dionysian Divine Naming: Biblical or Neoplatonic?

This brief account of the possible origins of the divine name tradition is intended to indicate the way in which “naming God,” in its earliest biblical form, is viewed as an existential, concrete and trans-discursive event rather than merely a linguistic or conceptual phenomenon. Its origins are rooted most fundamentally in a community of worship and faith practice, a feature that significantly marks Dionysius’s treatment of the divine names. In general, when treating Dionysius’s *On the Divine Names* scholars tend to downplay the importance of this biblical origin to the overemphasis of Dionysius’s Neoplatonic pedigree.<sup>17</sup> As noted above, there is little doubt that Dionysius is influenced by Neoplatonic categories and structures, among which triads like One, Intellect and Soul, or Being, Life and Mind are certainly fundamental. But when it comes to a divine name, the influence of the biblical divine name tradition may be more dominant than the Greek philosophical tradition.

In ancient Greek thought, a god, a “theos,” is most fundamentally a power to be won over, and as Schroeder has rightly observed, “The equation of power with divinity leads naturally to a predicative use of the word ‘god’. . . (consequently) the word ‘god’ appears in Greek as a predicate.”<sup>18</sup> Since in this context the act of naming is an act that predicates something of a subject it cannot apply to that which is itself a predicate. Instead of naming “god” as X, Y, or Z the ancient Greeks name X, Y, and Z “gods.” From the biblical perspective, however, God establishes a personal relationship with creation by giving his “name” to his chosen people. In so doing he fills the empty concept of “god” with personal, historically concrete substance trumping the categorical notion of divinity. Powers and perfections are not, in this biblical view, grouped under a more generic category of “divinity” or “god” but are identified as belonging to YHWH himself. It is this latter mode of nomination that more closely resembles Dionysius’s approach to the divine names.

Special mention, though, should be made of Proclus’s *On the Theology of Plato*, in which he makes occasional reference to the divine names.<sup>19</sup> Dionysius’s own conception of a divine name is in many ways similar to

17. See, e.g., Wear and Dillon, *Dionysius the Areopagite and the Neoplatonist Tradition*, 15ff.; Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, ch. 6. Schäfer, *Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite*, makes absolutely no reference to this biblical tradition of the Divine Name.

18. Schroeder, “Self in Ancient Religious Experience,” 341. Schroeder cites Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, 17.

19. Proclus, *Pl. Theo.* 1.1, 5, 29; 5.25, 34; 7.38, 51.

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the conception that appears throughout this Procline text. For Proclus, a divine name identifies some attribute associated primarily with divinity that becomes intelligible through a certain reasoning process. Explaining the relation between the divine names and the various dialogues of Plato, Proclus writes the following: “For in each of these dialogues, more or less mention is made of divine names, from which it is easy for those who are exercised in divine concerns to discover by a reasoning process the peculiarities of each.”<sup>20</sup> Later on he identifies these as the “names of divine natures” that Socrates revealed in Plato’s *Cratylus*, and that derive from the second hypothesis of Parmenides.<sup>21</sup> From this, Proclus explicitly states what he takes to be the principle of the divine names: “In short, therefore, it must be admitted that the first, most principal and truly divine names are established in the gods themselves. But it must be said that the second names, which are imitations of the first, and which subsist intellectually, are of a daemonical allotment.”<sup>22</sup> Following the Greek tradition, Proclus understands the daemonical element to be a quasi-divinity, something that is god-like but not purely divine. Proclus’s approach to divine naming, then, follows from what one would expect to find in a Neoplatonistic system that is mystically and religiously becoming more and more open to the divine realm. While the Neoplatonism informing Proclus cannot be said to be purely philosophical (whatever that may actually mean), it nevertheless is dominated by the impulse of rational inquiry that marks Greek thought. Divine naming derived from this impulse is akin to an artistic act that shapes statues in the form of various divinities. The fashioning of names, Proclus states, “generates every name as if it were a statue of the gods.”<sup>23</sup> The act of naming the divine, Proclus continues to explain, is analogous to “theurgic art,” by which certain symbols “call forth” the goodness of the gods into linguistic artificial statues, as it were. Despite the fact that this later Neoplatonism of Proclus becomes imbued with the thinking born from spiritual longing, it nevertheless remains indebted to the concept. The emphasis remains on the self’s own power and will. The true divine name remains embedded in the One, which as such is unknowable,

20. Proclus, *Pl. Theo.* 1.5: ἐν ἐκάστῳ γὰρ αὐτῶν πλείων ἢ ἐλάττων μνήμη γίνεται τῶν θεῶν ὀνομάτων ἀφ’ ὧν ῥάδιον τοῖς περὶ τὰ θεῖα γεγυμνασμένοις τὰς ιδιότητας αὐτῶν τῷ λογισμῷ περιλαμβάνειν.

21. Proclus, *Pl. Theo.* 1.29.

22. Proclus, *Pl. Theo.* 1.29: “Ἴν’ οὖν συλλήβδην εἴπωμεν, τὰ μὲν πρώτιστα καὶ κυριώτατα καὶ ὄντως θεῖα τῶν ὀνομάτων ἐν αὐτοῖς ὑποθετέον ἰδρῦσθαι τοῖς θεοῖς· τὰ δὲ δεύτερα καὶ τούτων ὁμοιώματα νοερῶς ὑφεστηκότα τῆς δαιμονίας μοίρας εἶναι λεκτέον.

23. Proclus, *Pl. Theo.* 1.29: ἕκαστον γὰρ ὄνομα καθάπερ ἄγαλμα τῶν θεῶν ἀπογενεῖ.

unthinkable, and so really un-nameable. The secondary names, deriving as they do from the second Parmenidean hypothesis, are not so much names of gods as mere imitations. They are wrenched forth through the act of *theurgy*, the self-determination of will in its quest to acquire knowledge and understanding of the divine. These names are intended to win for the searching intellect greater knowledge of divine hiddenness. And although, like Dionysius, Proclus uses the word “celebrate” in conjunction with his inquiry,<sup>24</sup> it is difficult to see this as anything but the kind of celebration that accompanies volition-oriented achievement. As Saffrey has rightly observes, this mode of celebration is best characterized as a “religio mentis” wherein “the ideal of the Neoplatonic philosophers thus becomes the celebration of divinity through the creation of a scientific theology. In other words, the celebration of divinity has become an entirely intellectual process.”<sup>25</sup> As an entirely intellectual process, it is predominantly if not wholly a celebration of self-determination. It is not celebration intended as a mode of praise or worship for the given as such, which marks a significant albeit subtle difference from Dionysius’s approach.

Dionysius is clear that the Scriptures are the final normative criteria for determining the divine names. At no point is there any mention made of normative criteria established by Greek philosophy. To suggest that the name “wisdom” in Dionysius’s account is synonymous with Neoplatonic “mind,”<sup>26</sup> or that the names expounded in his treatise are gathered entirely from various texts of Plato,<sup>27</sup> appears not only to overlook Dionysius’s own claim to exclusive scriptural authority,<sup>28</sup> but also to neglect the significant difference between biblical and Greek thought. For while clearly Dionysius is borrowing from Neoplatonism, especially as it is found in Proclus, there remains a scriptural priority that sanctions the debt in the first place. The names that Dionysius discovers in the world of Greek thought, at least if Dionysius’s own allegiances are to be taken seriously, remain empty conceptual shells without the substance of the names found in Scripture.

24. E.g., Proclus, *Pl. Theo.* 2.9.

25. Saffrey, “Neoplatonist Spirituality II,” 253.

26. Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 164.

27. Wear and Dillon, *Dionysius the Areopagite and the Neoplatonist Tradition*, 15–16.

28. *DN* 1, 1 (372A): Καθόλου τοιγαροῦν οὐ τολμητέον εἰπεῖν οὔτε μὴν ἐννοῆσαι τι περὶ τῆς ὑπερουσίου καὶ κρυφίας θεότητος παρὰ τὰ θειωδῶς ἡμῖν ἐκ τῶν ἱερῶν λογίων ἐκπεφασμένα. “By no means then is it permitted to speak, or even think, anything concerning the hidden and superessential deity, beyond those things divinely revealed to us in the sacred oracles.”

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As chapter 7 of *On the Divine Names* demonstrates, for Dionysius, “mind” is considered along with reason, faith and truth under the name “wisdom” where it receives a transformation typical of Dionysian originality: it becomes an excess of mind overflowing with all things in its act of divine comprehension.<sup>29</sup> The biblical influence is very much present. The utter transcendence of the divine wisdom (Ps 147:5, etc.) is such that it manifests itself in the world as foolishness. Echoing Paul (1 Cor 1:25), Dionysius declares that divine “foolishness” renders all human intelligence a sort of “error” (ὅτι πᾶσα ἀνθρωπίνη διάνοια πλάνη τις ἔστι)<sup>30</sup> in comparison. His intention in emphasizing this, as with the whole of his treatise, is primarily *anagogical*, concerned with the faith practices of the worshipping community.<sup>31</sup> Such evidence indicates that Dionysius’s doctrine of divine names goes beyond Neoplatonic schematics and structures fully embracing the biblical heritage he espouses.

In extending this biblical community of worship and faith practice, the event of the Incarnation also adds important nuances to the divine name tradition as this name is applied to Jesus of Nazareth. Recent studies into the matter make clear that the many references throughout Christian literature and especially the New Testament to the “name of Jesus” are not references to “Jesus” *qua* name, but rather to the name above all names, the divine name—namely, the *HaShem*, YHWH.<sup>32</sup> It is long held that the relationship between Jesus and the divine name in explanations of the

29. DN 7, 2 (868B).

30. DN 7, 1 (865B).

31. DN 7, 1 (865CD), which is an instructional exhortation: Ἄλλ’ ὅπερ ἐν ἄλλοις ἔφην, οἰκείως ἡμῖν τὰ ὑπὲρ ἡμᾶς παραλαμβάνοντες καὶ τῷ συντροφῷ τῶν αἰσθήσεων ἐνιλλόμενοι καὶ τοῖς καθ’ ἡμᾶς τὰ θεῖα παραβάλλοντες ἀπατώμεθα κατὰ τὸ φαινόμενον τὸν θεῖον καὶ ἀπόρρητον λόγον μεταδιώκοντες. Δέον εἰδέναι τὸν καθ’ ἡμᾶς νοῦν τὴν μὲν ἔχειν δύναμιν εἰς τὸ νοεῖν, δι’ ἧς τὰ νοητὰ βλέπει, τὴν δὲ ἔνωσιν ὑπεραίρουσαν τὴν νοῦ φύσιν, δι’ ἧς συνάπτεται πρὸς τὰ ἐπέκεινα ἑαυτοῦ. Κατὰ ταύτην οὖν τὰ θεῖα νοητέον οὐ καθ’ ἡμᾶς, ἀλλ’ ὅλους ἑαυτοὺς ὅλων ἑαυτῶν ἐξισταμένους καὶ ὅλους θεοῦ γιγνομένους, κρεῖττον γὰρ εἶναι θεοῦ καὶ μὴ ἑαυτῶν. Οὕτω γὰρ ἔσται τὰ θεῖα δοτὰ τοῖς μετὰ θεοῦ γινομένοις. “But, as I elsewhere said, by taking the things above us, in a sense familiar to ourselves, and by being entangled by what is congenial to sensible perceptions, and by comparing things Divine with our own conditions, we are led astray through following the Divine and mystical reason after a mere appearance. We ought to know that our mind has the power for thought, through which it views things intellectual, but that the union through which it is brought into contact with things beyond itself surpasses the nature of the mind. We must then contemplate things Divine, after this Union, not after ourselves, but by our whole selves, standing out of our whole selves, and becoming wholly of God. For it is better to be of God, and not of ourselves. For thus things Divine will, be given to those who become dear to God.”

32. Gieschen, “Divine Name in Ante-Nicene Christology.”

Κύριος title reflects an early Jewish identification of Jesus with YHWH.<sup>33</sup> In the mid-twentieth century this becomes challenged, however, on the grounds that the title Κύριος derives from Hellenistic conceptions rather than an identification of Jesus with YHWH, and the Κύριος/YHWH identity in Jesus is cast into doubt.<sup>34</sup> This doubt does not endure as it is soon established that worship of Jesus as Κύριος already occurs among his Aramaic-speaking Palestinian followers.<sup>35</sup> Eventually the theory of the Κύριος dependence on Hellenism is largely discredited by further study of the title Κύριος,<sup>36</sup> and by later studies into Paul's use of Hebrew Scripture YHWH texts.<sup>37</sup> Although this feature of Christology has not received the attention it merits, many scholars have thrown more light on the meaning and importance of appropriating the divine name to Jesus.<sup>38</sup>

A significant consequence of these studies is the awareness that, as Cullman puts it, "Once he (Jesus) was given the 'name which is above every name,' God's own name ('Lord,' *Adonai*, *Kyrios*), then no limitations at all could be set for the transfer of divine attributes to him."<sup>39</sup> Jesus is seen in effect as a personal manifestation of the divine attributes revealed in Scripture. Especially after the relation between Christ's divine and human natures are doctrinally established at the Councils of Ephesus (AD 431) and Chalcedon (AD 451), this personal descent of divine attributes in Jesus opens a symmetrical ascending movement relative to various aspects of predication. In ways that reflect the human/divine harmony in Christ, within this ascent the biblical event of personal, intimate naming and the Greek categorical approach to names begin to coalesce. As a result, attributes that are not as *clearly* identified with God in Scripture, although expressed in Scripture as related to and constitutive of the divine nature, become more confirmed the more they are read in the context of Greek thought. The alliance between Athens and Jerusalem, so lamented by Tertulian, seems almost spontaneous with respect to theological language and the issue of divine names.

33. *Ibid.*, 116–17.

34. Bousset, *Kyrios Christos*. Bousset's argument gained influence when it was endorsed by Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 1:52.

35. Cullman, *Christology of the New Testament*.

36. Fitzmeyer, "Semitic Background of the New Testament Kyrios-Title," 115–42.

37. Capes, *Old Testament Yahweh Texts in Paul's Christology*.

38. Most notably, Gilles Quispel, Jean Daniélou, Richard Longenecker, Alan Segal, Aloys Grillmeier, and Jarl E. Fossum. For a list of references pertaining to these authors, see Gieschen, "Divine Name in Ante-Nicene Christology," 119–20.

39. Cullman, *Christology of the New Testament*, 237.

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The case of “light” provides an appropriate example. Throughout both testaments of Christian Scripture, light has an enigmatic association with God in ways that parallel beauty’s association with the One in Plotinus. At times it appears to be identifiable with the first emanation (similar to *nous*); at other times with God (similar to the One/Good).<sup>40</sup> On the one hand, the Jewish people are concerned to distinguish themselves from their pagan neighbors whose religious practices involved worshipping the various sources of light as divine in themselves. Consequently, light in the Jewish understanding is everywhere subordinated to God as his divine instrument and viewed as God’s first creation.<sup>41</sup> On the other hand, light is identified as the first derivation of the creative Word of God (Gen 1:3) that exists independently of the heavenly bodies and all material light. This light is given only by YHWH and imparts not only understanding, but also life and salvation.<sup>42</sup> It is identified with the good (Isa 45:7), an identification that derives from the fact that it is YHWH’s dwelling place and thus his attribute.<sup>43</sup> There is then a subtle identification between this light and YHWH’s very self (Ps 43:3; Isa 2:5), one that continues in the New Testament (Jas 1:17, 1 Tim 6:15–16). In appropriating the divine name to Jesus, the Christological tradition also identifies him with *light*.<sup>44</sup>

As a divine attribute, beauty follows a course similar to light so much so that by the time Dionysius writes his treatise beauty immediately follows light in the sequence of names. Nevertheless, the development that takes place with respect to beauty in the divine name tradition between the closure of the New Testament and Dionysius’s treatise remains unknown. Beauty’s eventual inclusion among the ranks of the names for God, however, may be the result of the continual development of the “divine name” tradition both as a Neoplatonic concept in Porphyrian and Procline Neoplatonism,<sup>45</sup> but more so as a biblical mode of praise. In neither tradi-

40. Cf. Achtemeier, “Jesus Christ, the Light of the World,” 439–49.

41. Cf. *inter alia*, Gen 1:14–19; Ps 74:16, 121:6, 136:7–9; Jer 31:35; Job 9:7; Isa 38:7–8, 49:10; Josh 10:12–13.

42. Mic 7:8; Isa 9:2, 42:16, 51:4, 58:8, 60:1; Ezra 9:8; Ps 18:21, 36:9, 56:13; Job 33:28–30.

43. Ps 104:2; Hab 3:4; Dan 2:22; Isa 10:17; Exod 13:21–22; Neh 9:12; Ps 78:14.

44. There are a multitude of references among which are the following: John 1:9, 8:12, 9:4–5, 11:9–10, 12:35–36, 46; Acts 26:23; 2 Tim 1:10; 2 Cor 4:6; Rom 13:12.

45. As noted at the beginning of the chapter, Porphyry is said to have written a treatise entitled *On the Divine Names*, noted in, e.g., Arnou, “Platonisme des pères,” cols. 2285–87; 2314–16; 2363–67, and van den Berg, *Proclus’ Commentary on the Cratylus in Context*, 74. As Berg notes, nothing is known of Porphyry’s treatise except its title. Berg, however, has suggested that Porphyry’s *Peri Agalmaton* (*On Images*), a

tion is beauty *explicitly* identified with God, though as noted above, both traditions in different ways flirt with the idea. Both traditions also contribute to the way that the early Church fathers contribute to the development of the divine names. Typically among the Church fathers the phenomenon of a divine name is treated in an apologetic or polemical context. For example, in Iraneaus' *Adversus Haereses* book 2, chapter 35, the name of God is invoked as an example of a single identity predicated in a pluralized way in order to refute Basilides's claim that prophetic predication of God occurs under the influence of diverse divinities. Or amidst the Cappadocian polemic against Eunomius of Cyzicus, found chiefly in Basil's *Adversus Eunomium* I 6–7 and Gregory of Nyssa's *Contra Eunomium* bk. VII, the divine names appear in the context of broader discussions concerning various aspects of the Trinity, predication, divine substance, etc. At no time does beauty enter the discussion. Despite the shared Platonic and Neoplatonic context the degree of philosophical and linguistic analysis involved in this debate marks a stark contrast to Dionysius's treatment of the divine names. An exception to the polemical context is Gregory Nazianzen's *Fourth Theological Oration* (Oration 30, *De Filio*) chapters 17–20, which sets out a brief examination of the divine names as they are attributed to the Son. Dividing the names between those that precede the Incarnation and those that follow it, Gregory anticipates many of the names that will appear in the Dionysian text such as Almighty, King of Kings, Wisdom, Life, Light, and Truth. However, there is still no mention of beauty. In any case there remains a marked difference between Dionysius's treatment of the divine names and the Cappadocians'; for the latter the divine names remains only ever a theme, while in Dionysius this theme is extended into a system of praise.<sup>46</sup>

A significant parallel to Dionysius's approach that is worth noting here can be found in the work of St. Ephrem (or Ephraem) the Syrian. Not

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work that examines the symbolic attributes given to the gods by sculptors, may throw some light on Porphyry's general approach to language and naming because in the course of his discussion he makes reference to the divine names. From this approach, Porphyry's view, much like the Procline view it influences, is that divine names are like divine statues. However, for Porphyry these are viewed as representations of the divine though from a natural rather than conventional perspective. This approach that connects the etymologies of the names for the gods with the natural realm stands in contrast to both Plato's *Cratylus* and Proclus' *Commentary on the Cratylus*, which both connect them to the metaphysical realm. In any case, the Greek approach in general remains within the realm of a categorical, conceptual framework that seeks to connect a name, e.g., Hera, with the (limited) power it is used to express.

46. Louth, *Dionysius the Areopogite*, 78.

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only do they share a possible cultural milieu, and are both part of a theological tradition, which “never made a sharp distinction between mysticism and theology”;<sup>47</sup> they also share an interest in the so-called “theology of the divine names.”<sup>48</sup> The precise nature of this “theology of the divine names” is difficult to pin down, though it most likely involves basing the possibility of theology on the various perfections that proceed from God. Like Dionysius, Ephrem distinguishes between perfect names and those borrowed from experience,<sup>49</sup> although the parallel is widely believed to be coincidental.<sup>50</sup> Consequently, although it is possible that Ephrem influences Dionysius, and that the philological similarities suggest some correspondence,<sup>51</sup> any strict connection between the two remains somewhat superficial and unsubstantiated.

In light of the preceding, Dionysius’ treatise *On the Divine Names* can be read as a point of culmination within the tradition of the divine names since it embodies elements from these various precedents. It appears that the addition of beauty to the list of divine names, as a Judeo-Christian tradition, may be Dionysius’ original contribution. Admittedly, it is an originality that appears somewhat overshadowed when cast in the light of Proclus’s *On the Theology of Plato*. But, as was explained in chapter 2 above, even Proclus’s account does not attribute the same priority nor content that Dionysius does. Indeed, it is this priority that in part accounts for its appearance at the very beginning of his treatise. Unlike Proclus, Dionysius does not begin with the names “the one” and “the good,” and from these determine the remaining names. Rather, beginning with the good, a sequence of increasing concretion ensues for which light, beauty, and love provide the substantive content. The originality of Dionysius’ addition of beauty derives from the explicit nature of the identification involved. In neither the biblical account nor in the development within Greek philosophy can such an explicit identification be found. However, both the biblical and the Greek accounts testify to the worthiness of beauty within created entities as well as to the beauty that is attributed to the divine. Part of the Dionysian development includes bridging these dimensions by configuring the divine names as perfections processing from the

47. Lossky, *Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 8.

48. Taylor, “St. Ephraim’s Influence on the Greeks,” 15. See also Brock, *Luminous Eye and Hymns on Paradise*; Griffith, “Faith Adoring Mystery.”

49. Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 43–48.

50. Cf. Louth, *Dionysius the Areopagite*, 80.

51. Chevallier, *Dionysiaca*, 2:1659, saw in these philological similarities enough evidence to propose the theory that Ephrem himself was actually Dionysius.

one Judeo-Christian God. A closer examination of these perfections in the Dionysian text will complete the foundation for examining how beauty is conceived as a divine name.

One further issue must be examined before proceeding. Given the preceding analysis of the Hebraic understanding of God's name and its Christian development in the name Jesus Christ, the question arises: how much is Dionysius influenced by *the* Divine Name, the Tetragrammaton, YHWH? In a recent study of how a Trinitarian pattern of naming God enables a better understanding of the name Trinity itself, R. Kendal Soulen emphasizes the importance of the Tetragrammaton for such Trinitarian naming.<sup>52</sup> Soulen's thesis is that of the three primary patterns of naming God that have been used throughout the Christian tradition—what he refers to as theological, christological, and pneumatological patterns—“the theological pattern occupies a special place in the economy of the Trinitarian names because it alone orbits a personal proper name, indeed, *the* personal proper name.”<sup>53</sup> The theological pattern, as he proceeds to clarify, is closest to the Tetragrammaton and hence serves as a kind of divine fountain for the other patterns. Soulen locates the Dionysian approach to names within the pneumatological pattern but contends, rather unhesitatingly, that “by every indication, Dionysius is simply unaware” of the Tetragrammaton. Soulen admits that Dionysius is “well acquainted” with the “I am who am” (*Ehyeh*) name of God and that this name provides the basis for his consideration of the divine name “Being.” He also acknowledges Dionysius's affection for Moses's ascent up Sinai into the cloud of darkness. Despite these details, however, Soulen continues to insist that “Dionysius appears oblivious to the existence of the Tetragrammaton.”<sup>54</sup> If Soulen is correct, it could throw into doubt the preceding attempt to characterize Dionysius's approach to names as an approach that reflects the intimate, personal approach of the biblical divine name tradition. However, a few points ought to be considered before drawing such a conclusion.

First, as Soulen himself points out, it is not surprising that Dionysius is ignorant of the Tetragrammaton since knowledge of it was uncommon in his day. But Dionysius's ignorance of the name *per se* does not preclude him having some kind of unrefined knowledge of it; the divine name (*HaShem*, YHWH) could be, as Soulen calls it, the “unrecognized host”

52. Soulen, *Divine Name(s) and the Holy Trinity*. Soulen's work is remarkable and illuminating, and a most welcome contribution to a theological topic all too rarely taken up.

53. *Ibid.*, 23.

54. *Ibid.*, 66.

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who provides cognitive and spiritual hospitality to the Areopagite's own project of naming God.<sup>55</sup> From this perspective, knowledge of the Tetragrammaton is not limited exclusively to knowledge of its being a name, but includes knowledge of the personal and intimate content intended by the name. Second, following Soulen's examination of the development of the Tetragrammaton in the early Church, especially under Paul, it becomes possible to contend with Soulen himself that "Paul distributes the key theonyms of the Shema—"Lord" and "God"—to Christ and to God respectively in order to express the idea that Christ participates in the dignity of the divine name, and so of the one God."<sup>56</sup> Consequently, as noted above, the content of the divine name is now given to Jesus Christ, in whom the name is manifest in the most personal way possible. So in his letter to the Phillipians (2:10), when Paul writes "so that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow," the "name of Jesus" is the *Hashem*. "Jesus" as a name, in other words, now becomes the eternal and salvific occasion for the divine name *Hashem*. Given Dionysius's Pauline allegiance, it is likely that even though the specific knowledge of the Tetragrammaton with respect to the divine name may not appear in Dionysius's writings, its personal and intimate power is relocated in Christ, about whom Dionysius declares "he who is mine, if it is lawful for me to say, the inspiration of all hierarchical revelation."<sup>57</sup> And although Dionysius does not examine the name Christ or Jesus insofar as it is a divine name, the personal and intimate dimensions of what the name signifies do contribute to his overall examination.<sup>58</sup> In any case, as was noted above, Dionysius's emphasis on the providential aspects of the divine names suggests that both the *Ehyeh* and the *HaShem* contribute to his approach to the divine names.

The point to be made here is that the tradition of divine names that Dionysius refers to need be neither exclusively biblical nor Neoplatonic. Several linguistic and grammatical structures, turns of phrases, ordering and substance of the names, derive directly from Neoplatonism, especially

55. *Ibid.*, 66.

56. *Ibid.*, 40–41.

57. Dionysius the Areopagite, *On the Celestial Hierarchy* [hereafter *CH*] 2, 5 (154C): Ἠγήσοιτο δὲ τοῦ λόγου Χριστός, εἶπερ ἐμοὶ θέμις εἰπεῖν, ὁ ἐμός, ἢ πάσης ἱεραρχικῆς ἐκφαντορίας ἐπίπνοια.

58. Most significantly in ch. 11, where Dionysius examines the name "Peace," and in ch. 12, where Dionysius examines the name "Lord of Lords." However, to acquire the complete scope of Dionysius's God as the God of personal love and intimacy, and so the God identified with the Tetragrammaton, one must consider the whole of his corpus.

in its Procline form. However, the structure of the text and the spiritual and anagogical concerns in Dionysius's approach puts him much more in alliance with the biblical tradition than the Neoplatonic. His own declaration of scriptural normativity further solidifies this. In any case, it is not necessary to equivocate between either of the two. The Dionysian genius, the same genius which reappears almost a millennium later in Aquinas, is found in the capacity to bring into harmony seemingly disparate strands of thought. In fact, it may be the case that tilting the balance too much in one direction only serves to distort the Dionysian intention to portray the whole of creation itself as being called into personal, intimate union with the God who fills it with his own divine identity.

### **Divine Names: The Procession of Divine Perfections**

Another way to approach the issue of the "divine name tradition" is to examine what exactly Dionysius means by a "divine name." The matter is far more complex than it may first appear. The complexity, however, may be relieved somewhat by examining the divine names within the biblical context where both the *Ehyeh* and the *HaShem* are held together as the conditions in which the Dionysian account ought to be read. Quite obviously such a reading would include Dionysius's Neoplatonic influence, but this influence would be subordinated under the broader biblical context.

As used by Dionysius, a "divine name" identifies a perfection of God that proceeds from his superessential plenitude into the intelligible order manifesting itself through various existential phenomena. Interestingly, nowhere in the treatise does Dionysius provide an exact definition of a "divine name." Instead, in the first three chapters, which most scholars characterize as a propaedeutic to the actual subject of the text,<sup>59</sup> he articulates the nature of a divine name indirectly both by means of a comparison with other modes of divine attribution as well as by providing a preliminary outline of most of the names that the treatise will treat. This methodology, however, is consistent with his overall goal:

But now, collecting from the Oracles so much as serves the purpose of our present treatise, and using the things aforesaid as a kind of canon, and keeping our eyes upon them, let us advance to the unfolding Names of God, which fall within the range of our

59. See, *inter alia*, Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 137ff.; Wear and Dillon, *Dionysius the Areopagite and the Neoplatonist Tradition*, 33ff.; Schäfer, *Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite*, 23–24, 77–80; Putnam, *Beauty in the Pseudo-Denys*, 1.

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understanding, and, what the hierarchical rule always teaches us throughout every phase of theology, let us become initiated (so to speak authoritatively) in the godlike contemplations with a god-enlightened conception. And let us bring religious ears to the unfoldings of the Holy Names of God, implanting the Holy in the Holy, according to the divine tradition.<sup>60</sup>

As can be seen from this excerpt, Dionysius's intention is not to outline the ways that words and concepts can determine the divine nature. His purpose is wholly bound up with "purifying our praise of God"<sup>61</sup> so that, advancing through the various hierarchies that constitute the created order,<sup>62</sup> a greater union with God even to the point of deification might follow.<sup>63</sup> Part of his methodology, then, involves allowing the divine names to remain, in a sense, "determinately open" in their communication of divine perfections in order to allow the reader to progress with the unfolding vision.

This does not mean, as already noted, that the divine names are indeterminate. His indirect articulation of their content results in more substance than can be determined or defined by one overarching concept. Consequently he approaches a divine name in a plurality of ways.

The broadest of these involves highlighting its position in his overall corpus.<sup>64</sup> Throughout the first chapter, the objective and content of *On the*

60. DN 1, 8 (597BC): Νῦν δέ, ὅσα τῆς παρουσίας ἐστὶ πραγματείας, ἐκ τῶν λογίων συναγαρόντες καὶ ὡσπερ τινὶ κανόνι τοῖς εἰρημένοις χρώμενοι καὶ πρὸς αὐτὰ σκοποῦντες ἐπὶ τὴν ἀνάπτυξιν τῶν νοητῶν θεωνυμιῶν προΐωμεν καί, ὅπερ ἀεὶ κατὰ πᾶσαν ἡμῖν θεολογίαν ὁ ἱεραρχικὸς θεσμὸς ὕφηγεῖται, θεοπτικῆ διανοίᾳ τὰς θεοφανεῖς ἐποπτεύσωμεν, κυρίως εἰπεῖν, θεωρίας καὶ ὧτα ἱερά ταῖς τῶν ἱερῶν θεωνυμιῶν ἀναπτύξεσι παραθώμεθα τοῖς ἁγίοις τὰ ἅγια κατὰ τὴν θείαν παράδοσιν ἐνιδρύοντες καὶ τῶν ἀμύστων αὐτὰ γελώτων καὶ ἐμπαιγμῶν ἐξαιρούμενοι.

61. DN 2, 7 (645A); Louth, *Dionysius the Areopagite*, 83.

62. For a development of this, see Roques, *L'Univers Dionysien*.

63. CH 3, 1 (164D); Dionysius the Areopagite, *On the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* [hereafter *EH*] 1, 1 (372B); etc.

64. The order of presentation of the Dionysian corpus has been considered in a few different ways. Jan Vanneste, *Le Mystère de Dieu*, argued that the *DN* and the *Mystical Theology* [hereafter *MT*] expounded the ascent of the individual mind, while the *EH* and the *CH* exposit a mode of "theurgy" (divine work) mediated by hierarchies. In contrast to this splitting of the *CD*, Roques, "Denys l'Areopagite" and *Structures théologiques de la Gnose à Richard de Saint Victor*, suggested a more unified sequence that follows the order *DN*, *MT*, *CH*, and *EH*. Most recently, Rorem, *Biblical and Liturgical Symbols*, followed Roques but argued that there is a single argument threading its way through all of the treatises, showing "signs of a conscious arrangement which itself reinforces the argument they contain" (127).

*Divine Names* is compared to two other (non-extant) Dionysian treatises, namely, the *Theological Outlines* and the *Symbolic Theology*. The particular objective and content of *On the Divine Names* is positioned in between the particular objectives and contents of these other two treatises. The *Theological Outlines*<sup>65</sup> “celebrates the principle affirmative expressions respecting God” insofar as it is both one and three. It considers the unions and distinctions as they are in the divine itself, “which is neither possible to say or to conceive” (οὔτε εἰπεῖν οὔτε ἐννοῆσαι δυνατόν). This impossibility of “saying” or “conceiving” these attributes implies the limitations of human effort and the need to rely on prayer and divine disclosure alone.<sup>66</sup> Thus this first treatise concerns a purely biblical doctrine of God. In contrast, the *Symbolic Theology* celebrates God through sensible symbols derived from created entities.<sup>67</sup> In this way, something of God is communicated in the form of various creatures, even one as lowly as a worm,<sup>68</sup> and various material entities like a throne or a wheel. As Dionysius explains, however, these images are “dissimilar similitudes” (ἀνομοίους ὁμοιότητας) because once they communicate something of the divine, their obvious incongruity functions as a negating mechanism that immediately enables the shortcoming of the image to reveal itself.<sup>69</sup>

Situated in between these two modes of divine attribution, a “divine name” is both similar to and distinct from both. Similar to the mode of attribution found in the *Theological Outlines*, a divine name is revealed in Scripture but in a way that is intelligible and thus conceptual and capable of being “spoken.” Similar to the mode of attribution found in the *Symbolic Theology*, a divine name can be found among formal qualities in things but without depending on any concrete, material entity. The mode of attribution found in the *Theological Outlines* can itself be distinguished from both the *Divine Names* and the *Symbolic Theology*. The former mode, expressing the divine unions, is beyond all conceptualization and thus

65. This work is referenced in *DN* 1, 1 (585B) indicating that in the order of his corpus the *Divine Names* will be treated after the *Theological Outlines*, and again in *DN* 1, 5 (593B) indicating some of the content of what was treated in the *Theological Outlines*. It is given a much fuller explanation in *DN* 2, 7 (645AB) and *MT* 3 (1033A). István Perczel has suggested that this treatise is actually the *De Trinitate* that is attributed (erroneously in his view) to Didymus the Blind. See his “Earliest Syriac Reception of Dionysius,” 31–32.

66. *DN* 3, 1 (680A–D), 3, 2 (681AB); Cf. von Balthasar, *GOTL*, II, 157.

67. This lost treatise is explained most fully in *Epistles* [hereafter *Ep.*] 9, 1 (1104BC, 1105A).

68. *CH* 2, 5 (145A). See Rauro, “God and the Worm,” 581–92.

69. *CH* 2, 2–4 (137 D–140A–C, 141C, 144A, 145A).

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requires the divine speaking communicated in Scripture. In contrast, the latter two, in expressing divine *distinctions*, involve a communicative act that takes some kind of intelligible shape through existential phenomena.<sup>70</sup> But as Dionysius further explains, a divine name is immaterial while a symbolic image involves sensibility, a distinction he seeks to emphasize by treating them in distinct treatises.<sup>71</sup>

A “divine name,” then, is a mode of attribution in between the unspeakable, inconceivable, unified essence of God in himself and the conceivable, differentiating, symbolic mode of attribution found in created entities. As such, divine names constitute a degree of porosity between the symbolic and the ineffable, the material and the spiritual. Dionysius hints at this porosity when he refers to the divine names as “God-becoming names of God” (τὰς θεοπρεπεῖς ἐπωνυμίας) and when he explains that each diverse name applies to the whole Godhead.<sup>72</sup> A divine name, then, performs a pivotal role in the overall anagogical function of the Dionysian project by mediating the excess of intelligible plenitude within God himself to the limits of human conceptualization. Dionysius explains this feature in chapter 2:

This then is sufficient on these matters, let us now advance to the purpose of the discourse by unfolding, to the best of our ability, the kindred and common Names of the Divine distinction. And, in order that we may first distinctly define everything in order, we call Divine distinction, as we have said, the goodly processions of the Godhead. For, by being given to all things existing, and pouring forth the whole imparted goods in abundance, It is distinguished uniformly, and multiplied uniquely, and is molded into many from the One, whilst being self-centered.<sup>73</sup>

70. DN 2, 4 (640D–641A).

71. DN 9, 5 (912D–913AB). It is important to note, with Rauro, that in his explanation of various symbols, Dionysius does not refer to them as “names” but as τύπος “representation” σχῆμα “form” μόρφωσις “embodiment, concrete form” and other like cognates.

72. DN 2, 1 (636C–637A): Τοῦτο μὲν οὖν καὶ ἐν ἄλλοις ἐξετασθὲν ἡμῖν ἀποδεδείχεται τὸ πάσας αἰεὶ τὰς θεοπρεπεῖς ἐπωνυμίας οὐ μερικῶς, ἀλλ’ ἐπὶ τῆς ὅλης καὶ παντελοῦς καὶ ὁλοκλήρου καὶ πλήρους θεότητος ὑπὸ τῶν λογίων ὑμνεῖσθαι καὶ πάσας αὐτὰς ἀμερῶς, ἀπολύτως, ἀπαρτηρήτως, ὀλικῶς ἀπάσῃ τῇ ὁλότητι τῆς ὀλοτελοῦς καὶ πάσης θεότητος ἀνατίθεσθαι.

73. DN 2, 11 (649B): Τούτων μὲν οὖν ἄλλις. Ἐπὶ δὲ τὸν τοῦ λόγου σκοπὸν προΐωμεν τὰ κοινὰ καὶ ἠνωμένα τῆς διακρίσεως τῆς θείας ὀνόματα κατὰ τὸ ἡμῖν ἐφικτὸν ἀνελίττοντες. Καὶ ἵνα σαφῶς περὶ πάντων ἐξῆς προδιορισώμεθα, διάκρισιν θείαν εἶναι φημέν, ὡς εἴρηται, τὰς ἀγαθοπρεπεῖς τῆς θεαρχίας προόδους. Δωρουμένη γὰρ πᾶσι τοῖς οὐσίς καὶ ὑπερχέουσα τὰς τῶν ὄλων ἀγαθῶν μετουσίας ἠνωμένως μὲν διακρίνεται, πληθύεται δὲ ἐνικῶς καὶ

Clearly, contrary to what Soulen contends, a divine name is much more than a reference to “the intelligible structure of the world.”<sup>74</sup> Rather, a divine name is a procession from the divine goodness given in abundance to all things that exist, embodying simultaneously divine uniformity and the multiplicity derived from its communication. Or to put it another way, the divine names are God’s very presence in the constitution of a created entity.<sup>75</sup> They are, in this sense, *the uncreated in the process of creating* since, as Proclus had shown, anything that is immediately produced by a principle both remains in the principle and proceeds from it in simultaneity.<sup>76</sup> The complexity of this schematic gives rise in Dionysius to a paradoxical grammar and thought-structure that strains to articulate a singular, unified, reality, i.e., God, through a diversity of processions without in any way diminishing the unity of the divine reality. Like beauty, a divine name is both beyond discursive determination even as it proceeds into the discursive, determinate order.

Most scholars connect the Dionysian move from the many names to the one God with the development that occurs with respect to the Neoplatonic interpretation of Plato’s *Parmenides*.<sup>77</sup> In this dialogue, Parmenides famously distinguishes two hypothetical attributions of the One. The first hypothesis, “the One is not,” intends to establish the complete removal of the One from every other thing that is. If the One is in fact the One, then its being must be beyond any relativity whatsoever. The second hypothesis, “the One is,” establishes the inevitable relation to being that is implicated in any consideration of the One (indeed in any act of thinking). The distinction between these two hypotheses leads to the distinction between the One in itself, derived from the first hypothesis, and the first emanated principle, the Intellect (*nous*), derived from the second hypothesis. But as the Neoplatonic tradition develops, this distinction, although abiding, becomes less and less clear. Plotinus’s efforts to secure the absolute isolation of the One instead creates ambiguities with regard to its relativity—a point that becomes especially poignant in his treatment of beauty. For

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πολλαπλασιάζεται ἐκ τοῦ ἐνὸς ἀνεκφοιτήτως.

74. Soulen, *Divine Name(s)*, 63.

75. Perl, *Neoplatonic Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite*, 65; O’Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas*, 9; Jones, “(Mis?)-Reading the Divine Names as a Science,” 157–62.

76. Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, prop. 30.

77. E.g., Louth, *Dionysius the Areopagite*, ch. 5; Wear and Dillon, *Dionysius the Areopagite and the Neoplatonist Tradition*, ch. 2; Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 164ff.

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Proclus, who follows Syrianus,<sup>78</sup> those aspects denied of the One by the first hypothesis correspond to the positive features that are affirmed of the One in the second hypothesis, signaling a step toward a relation beyond the distinction.<sup>79</sup> But more than any other Neoplatonist it is Porphyry who refuses any absolute distinction between the first and second hypothesis, largely providing a foundation for Dionysius's eventual progression.<sup>80</sup>

In Dionysius, rather than identifying two discrete realities—the One and *nous*—the two Parmenidean hypotheses are instead transferred into the divine to identify distinct aspects of the one God.<sup>81</sup> The first hypothesis identifies God as he is in himself, hidden from all knowledge while the second hypothesis identifies God's creative act of self-communication. From this perspective, a divine name identifies the procession of God's self-communication in the creative act that, although revealing something real of God, never compromises divine transcendence and hiddenness. Therefore, in Dionysius a distinction between communication and hiddenness remains, but it is not as hard and fast as the distinction between the One and *nous* in Neoplatonism.

As processions of the divine perfection in itself, the divine names are the various ways in which the divine plenitude of perfection can be encountered in its intelligibility. They have a relation to this plenitude of perfection only insofar as they are considered in a superlative modality, signifying an excess of the named content. "The (Names) then, common to the whole Deity," writes Dionysius, "as we have demonstrated from the Scriptures by many instances in the *Theological Outlines*, are the Super-Good, the Super-God, the Superessential, the Super-Living, the Super-Wise, and whatever else belongs to the superlative abstraction."<sup>82</sup> This superlative configuration denotes the porosity that a divine name harbors in its relation to God; the content that is communicated through a divine

78. See Proclus's commentary on the Parmenides, *In Parm.* 1142, 10–15; cf. Wear and Dillon, *Dionysius and the Neoplatonic Tradition*, 33–34.

79. Cf. Proclus, *On the Theology of Plato*, bk. 2, ch. 10.

80. For a more detailed discussion of the hypotheses in the context of the *Parmenides* and its interpretation among Neoplatonists, see Brisson, *How Philosophers Saved Myths*, 87–106.

81. Corsini, *Il Trattato De Divinis Nominibus*, 144ff. Stephen Gersh maintains that Corsini was the first to recognize this as an original step in Dionysius. See his *From Iamblichus to Erigugena*, 155.

82. *DN* 2, 3 (640B): Τὰ μὲν οὖν ἡνωμένα τῆς ὅλης θεότητος ἐστίν, ὡς ἐν ταῖς Θεολογικαῖς ὑποτυπώσεσι διὰ πλειόνων ἐκ τῶν λογίων ἀπεδείξαμεν, τὸ ὑπεράγαθον, τὸ ὑπέρθρον, τὸ ὑπερούσιον, τὸ ὑπέρζων, τὸ ὑπέρσφον καὶ ὅσα τῆς ὑπεροχικῆς ἐστὶν ἀφαιρέσεως.

name exists in a superlative, superessential manner in the divine unity where it exists as one with all other superlatively existing names. But as the divine names are communicated, they take a form more akin to causality: “With which also, all those denoting Cause: the Good, the Beautiful, the Being, the Life-Producing, the Wise, and whatever Names are given to the Cause of all Good, from His goodly gifts.”<sup>83</sup> In this way the divine names are intelligible and speakable as they enter into the formal constitutions of created entities while remaining immaterial in themselves.

Based upon this consideration of Dionysius’s indirect articulation of the nature of a divine name, it seems that the congruity between a divine name and beauty—in that both oscillate between the spiritual and the material, the ineffable and the determinate, the “trans-” or “over-discursive” and the discursive—gives rise to a relationship of mutual enrichment. The schematic of a divine name, deriving from a preceding biblical and Christological tradition in its encounter with Neoplatonic thought, crystallizes in Dionysius as an original development of the One and the Many. At the same time, the Christian appropriation of beauty to the status of a divine name occurs for the first time amidst this Dionysian development. Since the theological synthesis of *On the Divine Names* contains these two original developments, one may speak of a coincidence of originality in Dionysius. This coincidence of originality signifies a primary foundation for all later development of beauty as a divine name.

## Conclusion

The lack of abundant textual evidence concerning the nature of a divine name in the Dionysian corpus and the lack of historical evidence concerning the tradition of the divine names to which Dionysius alludes renders the task of examining this aspect of his thought rather difficult. Nevertheless, this chapter has sought to draw out as much as possible textual and historical evidence to throw light on the complexity of the divine name phenomenon. The conclusion that arises from this approach is that when textual and historical evidence is taken into consideration, it is difficult to prioritize either Dionysius’s biblical allegiances or his Neoplatonic inheritance. Rather, as this chapter attempted to do, one must view Dionysius from both dimensions of his thought since the concept of a divine

83. DN 2, 3 (640BC): μεθ’ ὧν καὶ τὰ αἰτιολογικὰ πάντα, τὸ ἀγαθόν, τὸ καλόν, τὸ ὄν, τὸ ζωογόνον, τὸ σοφόν καὶ ὅσα ἐκ τῶν ἀγαθοπρεπῶν αὐτῆς δωρεῶν ἢ πάντων ἀγαθῶν αἰτία κατονομάζεται.

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name emerges uniquely from the Dionysian synthesis between biblical Judeo-Christianity and Neoplatonism. In this context, as noted already, a coincidence of originality can be detected in Dionysius. On the one hand, there emerges an original synthesis of the two Parmenidean hypotheses concerning the One and *nous* into two dimensions of the One biblical God. With this development, names for God are transfigured within the personal love relationship context that derives from the Hebraic understanding of God as expressed in Genesis, Exodus and other accounts from the Hebrew Scriptures. It is primarily through this Hebraic dimension, and the consequent appropriation of the divine name itself to Jesus Christ, that the divine names of Dionysius come to bear the personal sense that they do. By virtue of this Judeo-Christian configuration, names are no longer derivative concepts that emerge from the various emanations from the One. Therefore, on the other hand, the addition of beauty to the list of divine names may also be seen as original in Dionysius because the ambiguity that shadows beauty's direct association with the highest principle throughout Platonic and Neoplatonic thought is overcome as it now unequivocally identifies God. With this coincidence of originality in place, a more thorough and structured examination of beauty as a divine name in Dionysius becomes possible.

# 4

## Beauty as a Divine Name in Dionysius the Areopagite I

### *Beauty as Transcendent Plenitude*

AS A THEME WITHIN THE THOUGHT OF THE AREOPAGITE, BEAUTY HAS received relatively little scholarly treatment. The only extant monograph is a dissertation published over fifty years ago under the title *Beauty in the Pseudo-Denys*,<sup>1</sup> a work that examines beauty as an object of philosophical inquiry emphasizing Dionysius's Platonic/Neoplatonic heritage. The author's tendency, however, to privilege beauty's so-called objectivity over and against any subjective components produces an overly discursive and analytic product. Beauty is abstracted from the concrete context in which Dionysius treats it, i.e., in a community of worship where beauty's capacity to uplift the soul is illuminated as it is encountered in between the discursive and the "trans-" or "over-discursive." Consequently, some significant aspects of beauty in Dionysius—e.g., anagogy, hierarchy, plenitude—is largely overlooked. Other more recent examinations of beauty in Dionysius treat beauty from within the idiom of modern aesthetics.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, features such as Dionysian anagogy are treated primarily in the context of his iconology rather than his doctrine of beauty as such. Eric Perl's recent monograph on Dionysian thought devotes a chapter to the consideration of beauty alongside goodness and love.<sup>3</sup> In contrast with those previously mentioned, this work recognizes the anagogical dimension of beauty in Dionysius, along with the importance that this dimension places on beauty's insoluble relation to intelligibility. However, by examining it exclusively within the parameters of Neoplatonic emanation,

1. Putnam, *Beauty in the Pseudo-Denys*.

2. Koutras, "Beautiful According to Dionysius," 31–40.

3. Perl, *Theophany*, ch. 3.

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Perl admits the limitations of his approach insofar as he leaves out the aspect of divine pedagogy within beauty's anagogical power.

The approach of the present work differs from these previously mentioned in significant ways. It does not view beauty as an abstract object of philosophical reflection, nor as a theme passed on predominantly through Neoplatonism, nor as something to be located within a Dionysian "aesthetic." To be sure, it does recognize the importance of these aspects. But the present approach contends that in order to truly grasp the Dionysian account of beauty, the examination of beauty must occur within the context of the phenomenon of a divine name and therefore in the concrete community of faith and spirituality.

As the last chapter sought to establish, *On the Divine Names* embodies a coincidence of originality in the thought of Dionysius. In this treatise, Dionysius transforms the One and the *nous* of Neoplatonic thought into two dimensions of the one God: divine hiddenness and divine self-communication. At the same time, he introduces beauty into the tradition of the divine names, an introduction that is an original Dionysian contribution insofar as, bringing together the biblical Judeo-Christian tradition and the Neoplatonic tradition, it serves as the first unequivocal identification of God with beauty. It is within this coincidence of originality that the issue of beauty as a divine name is to be examined. In other words, as Dionysius himself contends, beauty as with all the "Divine properties, even those revealed to us, are known by the participations alone."<sup>4</sup> Abstracting beauty as an object of inquiry and drawing out the many parallels with various Neoplatonic thinkers has done much for demonstrating the ways in which Dionysius is indebted to this tradition. In itself, however, this methodology is incomplete and risks giving the impression that Dionysius is at best a Christian disguising his agenda in the dress of Neoplatonism, or at worst nothing but the Neoplatonic plagiarist that some have suggested.<sup>5</sup> Dionysian originality can only be adequately established with a more complete picture of his theological concerns.

4. DN 2, 7 (645A): Πάντα γὰρ τὰ θεῖα, καὶ ὅσα ἡμῖν ἐκπέφανται, ταῖς μετοχαῖς μόναις γινώσκεται. Αὐτὰ δέ, ὅποιά ποτε ἔστι κατὰ τὴν οἰκείαν ἀρχὴν καὶ ἴδρυσιν, ὑπὲρ νοῦν ἔστι καὶ πᾶσαν οὐσίαν καὶ γνῶσιν.

5. The most straightforward claim of Dionysius's lack of anything original or constructive, which views Dionysius as "neither a philosopher or theologian" with merely "negligible speculative power" is Müller, "Dionysios. Proclus. Plotinos," 109–10. A second example concerns Dionysius's lack of argumentation or demonstration, which is read as a lack of originality by Steel, "Proclus et Denys," 89–116; as well as Vacherot, *Histoire Critique de l'école d'Alexandrie*, 23ff.

This chapter and the next will examine the contours of beauty that emerge when beauty is read within the conditions of its being a divine name: this chapter examines beauty insofar as it corresponds to God in himself by examining it as a *transcendent plenitude*, while the following chapter examines beauty as it corresponds to God's act of self-communication by examining beauty as a *principle of determination*. The overall examination emphasizes beauty as an analogical power by which God calls creatures back to himself. As this call of beauty's analogical power orients itself toward the rational creature, it establishes a dialectic of intelligibility reminiscent of what appears in Plato, Aristotle and Plotinus. However, insofar as this call is oriented to a faith practicing community, it is a call that issues from the personal voice of the God who gathers all people into a holy community (*synaxis*). It is a call that therefore reflects in its most substantial dimensions the biblical account of divine personhood and intimacy. The various themes to be examined will be cast into relation with these dimensions.

## On the Divine Names, Chapter 4

Throughout the *Corpus Dionysiacum*, beauty performs an important and indispensable role in almost every primary theme treated but with a degree of subtlety that makes it difficult to comprehend. Its most obvious role is found in the sequence of divine names where it is articulated in progression with the Good, Light, and Love.<sup>6</sup> Throughout the remainder of *On the Divine Names*, beauty is present in the constitutions and dynamisms of a number of other names. Following Plato, beauty describes aspects of desire<sup>7</sup> and love,<sup>8</sup> and serves as a principle of unity.<sup>9</sup> Reflecting a more Aristotelian dimension, it appears with the Good as a principle of knowledge.<sup>10</sup> Following Plotinus and Proclus, beauty is linked to an ordering wisdom that enables the analogical ascent of the mind through the various orders of created things.<sup>11</sup> Beauty is also instrumental in other treatises of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*. It is a fundamental feature of hierarchical activity

6. DN 4, 7 (701C–704D), 4, 8 (704D–705A), 4, 10 (708A, 708B).

7. DN 4, 13 (712A)–4, 17 (713D).

8. DN 4, 12 (709D).

9. DN 7, 3 (872BC).

10. DN 4, 9 (105A); 5, 8 (824A); 10, 1 (937AB).

11. DN 7, 1 (865B); DN 8, 3 (892B), 8, 5 (892CD).

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in both the Ecclesial and the Celestial orders.<sup>12</sup> It enters into Dionysius's Christological teachings,<sup>13</sup> plays a role in the mystical way of unknowing,<sup>14</sup> and is associated directly with the hiddenness of God.<sup>15</sup>

This ubiquity of beauty throughout the *Corpus Dionysiacum* displays the diversity of attributes that Dionysius associates with beauty. This diversity, however, is unified in beauty's more general anagogical power. Dionysius employs beauty for the way in which its material visibility communicates the transcendent divine beauty. In this communication, perception of beauty's material form uplifts, or opens, the gaze of the onlooker to the immaterial divine beauty. Part of beauty's anagogical power derives from the fact that the ascent through beauty's material form to the immaterial divine beauty does not involve relinquishing the material communication, but entering into it with greater profundity. There is an abundance of biblical content reflected in such a perspective, which no doubt makes significant contributions to Dionysius's eventual configuration.<sup>16</sup> Most significant, perhaps, is the Pauline anagogy expressed in Romans and echoed again in Hebrews.<sup>17</sup> With respect to Greek thought, although Dionysian anagogy reflects aspects of Plato's and Aristotle's considerations of beauty, Dionysius no doubt follows primarily the synthesis of the two in the Plotinian view of beauty, and its consequent extensions in Proclus. As chapter 2 above explained, Plotinus identifies beauty with *nous*, configuring it as a one and many at the very same time. This unity in plurality feature of Plotinian beauty is a necessary conceptual foundation for any theory of anagogy that aspires to safeguard the integrity of both the plurality of ascending entities in their unique particularity and the unity into which they ascend.

However indebted Dionysius may be to Plotinus and Proclus, he goes beyond them when he transfers beauty from the first emanation to God himself. The result of this transfer produces two fundamental ways of

12. *EH* II, 2, 5 (393D, 396A); *EH* III, 3, 2 (428CD); *EH* III, 3, 3 (429A); *EH* III, 3, 7 (436D); *EH* IV, 1 (472D); *EH* IV, 3, 1 (473B), (476A); *CH* 1, 3 (121D); *CH* 3, 1 (164D); *CH* 3, 2 (165A); *CH* 7, 2 (208C); *CH* 7, 4 (21AB).

13. Though not expressed in any discrete treatise, this teaching is found throughout the *Corpus Dionysiacum* at times alongside beauty, e.g., *EH* III, 3, 11 (441B); *CH* 1, 2 (121A).

14. *MT* 2 (1025B).

15. *Ep.* 9, 1 (1105C).

16. See, *inter alia*, Wis 13:3–5, 14:20; Eccl 43:1–18; Ps 71:8, 96:1–13, 148:13; Job 37:21–22, 40:10.

17. Rom 1:20; Heb 11:3.

understanding beauty as a divine name, each relative to the two aspects of the one God. The first concerns beauty insofar as it is bound up with the divine hiddenness, and so the divine identity as it is in itself. The second concerns the way in which beauty corresponds to divine communication and so is caused in things by the divine power.

Beauty as a divine name in Dionysius may be examined from this two-fold foundation. With respect to beauty as bound up with the divine identity, beauty may be considered as a *transcendent plenitude*. This identification admittedly is not obvious, but derives from the evidence internal to the corpus. When beauty is associated with the divine identity in itself, that is in its hiddenness, it corresponds to a fullness of intelligible content that surpasses all conceptualization and knowing. This does not mean that beauty is capable of “getting at” the aspect of God discussed in Dionysius’s *Theological Outlines*. Rather, beauty insofar as it is a divine name corresponds to this component from the perspective of beauty in itself. The focus remains beauty rather than divine hiddenness; in being porous to the hiddenness that is ever transcending it, beauty enables a seeing that is also a non-seeing, a knowing that is also a non-knowing, and a speaking that is also a non-speaking. Beauty, in other words, facilitates a consideration of the divine in itself without compromising the transcendence to which it always refers. This consideration generates three relevant sub-categories: beauty as the good, beauty as light, and beauty as intelligibility, and it is in examining these three subcategories that beauty as a transcendent plenitude will best come to light.

With respect to the way that God causes beauty in things, or beauty as it corresponds to divine communication, beauty may be considered as a *principle of determination*. Determination in this sense identifies the coming to be of any given entity insofar as that entity’s being is given to be from the creative activity of divine self-communication. Determination concerns the mediation of limitations within a fuller excess of being. It is a mode of mediation incumbent upon every given entity insofar as it provides the necessary uniqueness and particularity to that entity’s identity. It is the way in which a being, called from the endless “ocean of substance” (to borrow a phrase from John Damascene), receives its ontological constitution as it more and more becomes a determined “this.” Beauty’s association with this process means that becoming a determined “this” happens only in community, that is to say, in relation to all other entities involved in the same process. Consequently, this second consideration of beauty also generates three relevant sub-categories: beauty as emanation,

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beauty as a unity in plurality, and beauty as hierarchy. The first consideration will be examined in what follows, while the second consideration will be examined in the following chapter.

### *Beauty as Transcendent Plenitude*

Perhaps the most fundamental feature of Dionysian beauty in its context as a divine name is the way in which it is described as a transcendent plenitude. The transcendent dimension in itself is widely recognized though it is a feature of the Areopagite's thought that has at times become an object of criticism. One evaluation of Dionysius's views on beauty concludes that "neither before nor since has there been an aesthetics more transcendental, more *a priori*, and more divorced from the real world and from normal aesthetic experience."<sup>18</sup> Other historians of aesthetics evaluate Dionysius's elevation of beauty to the highest point of transcendence, i.e., by making it a "name of God," as little more than a "confusion."<sup>19</sup> What seems neglected in such judgments is that for Dionysius, transcendence is never an empty space of remote distance but refers to the plenitude of divine being. Consequently, beauty in such a state does not remain removed from the world but rather pours itself forth as the very appearance of the world itself.<sup>20</sup>

Beauty as a divine name is integral to this vision. In *Divine Names* 4, 7 Dionysius establishes some of the fundamental principles for how he understands beauty, principles that resonate in other areas of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*. That beauty is a transcendent plenitude accounts for the fact that it constitutes both the source of beautification as well as those things that become beautified:

But the beautiful and beauty are not to be divided, as regards the cause which has embraced the whole in one. For with regard to all created things, by dividing them into participations and participants we call beautiful that which participates in Beauty; but beauty, the participation of the beautifying Cause of all the beautiful things.<sup>21</sup>

18. Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics*, 2:28.

19. Gilbert and Kuhn, *History of Esthetics*, 120.

20. Cf. Schäfer, *Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite*, 67ff., 125ff.; Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 139; von Balthasar, *GOTL*, II, 158.

21. *DN* 4, 7 (701C): Τὸ δὲ καλὸν καὶ κάλλος οὐ διαιρετὸν ἐπὶ τῆς ἐν ἐνὶ τὰ ὅλα συνειληφείας αἰτίας. Ταῦτα γὰρ ἐπὶ μὲν τῶν ὄντων ἀπάντων εἰς μετοχὰς καὶ μετέχοντα διαιροῦντες καλὸν μὲν εἶναι λέγομεν τὸ κάλλους μετέχον, κάλλος δὲ τὴν μετοχὴν τῆς καλλοποιοῦ τῶν ὄλων καλῶν αἰτίας.

Beauty and all beautiful things are united in a principle of causality, which itself “embraces the whole in one.” Following Plato, Dionysius invokes the scheme of participation to describe the relationship between this cause and its beautified effects. But in light of the fact that a divine name is porous to its transcendent source, Platonic participation undergoes some modification in Dionysius’s configuration of causality by virtue of the plenitude of the participated source. Unlike Platonic participation, which involves an immediate and direct relation of formality between participated form and participating entity, Dionysian participation is predicated on the porous content of the divine names. This allows his notion of participation to involve a reduction of secondary formal causes to the one divine cause itself. Whereas the formality of a thing in Platonic participation owes its being and becoming directly to the Idea and indirectly to their form in the Good, for Dionysius a thing’s formality derives directly from the divine plenitude.<sup>22</sup> It therefore exceeds any direct dependence on a separate formal cause and is instead imbued with the excess of formality that marks the divine beauty. Participation is described as a “communication” of the divine perfection of beauty to all things made beautiful:

But, the superessential Beautiful is called Beauty, on account of the beauty communicated from Itself to all beautiful things, in a manner appropriate to each, and as Cause of the good harmony and brightness of all things which flashes like light to all the beautifying distributions of its fontal ray, and as calling (*καλοῦν*) all things to Itself (whence also it is called Beauty) (*κάλλος*), and as collecting all in all to Itself.<sup>23</sup>

Not only does beauty communicate itself but it does so in such a way that allows its “sublimely objective”<sup>24</sup> quality to enter into the “subjective” capacity of every recipient. As a causal source, if it is to avoid collapsing into pantheism, divine beauty must both relate to and simultaneously transcend that which it causes. These two components, however, can only be properly maintained if its causal communication is understood as an

22. O’Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas*, 117–29.

23. DN 4, 7 (701D): Τὸ δὲ ὑπερούσιον καλὸν κάλλος μὲν λέγεται διὰ τὴν ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ πᾶσι τοῖς οὐσι μεταδιδόμενην οἰκείως ἐκάστω καλλονὴν καὶ ὡς τῆς πάντων εὐαρμοστίας καὶ ἀγλαΐας αἴτιον δίκην φωτὸς ἑναστράπτου ἅπασιν τὰς καλλοποιούς τῆς πηγαιῆς ἀκτῖνος αὐτοῦ μεταδόσεις καὶ ὡς πάντα πρὸς ἑαυτὸ καλοῦν, ἔθεν καὶ κάλλος λέγεται, καὶ ὡς ὅλα ἐν ὅλοις εἰς ταὐτὸ συναγον.

24. Putnam, *Beauty in the Pseudo-Denys*, 1. In our view, the categories of “objective” and “subjective” have very limited explanatory power. We use them here only to show such limitations.

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overflow of plenitude. Beauty becomes vital as a strategy by emphasizing the way in which the source, remaining in its transcendence beyond every beautified entity, simultaneously calls (κάλλος) all things back to itself in the very act of beautifying them.

Dionysius expresses both of these dimensions of causality—call and plenitude—elsewhere in the *Corpus Dionysiacum*. “For this is the peculiar characteristic of the Cause of all things and of goodness surpassing all,” Dionysius writes, “to call (καλεῖν) things being to participation of Itself, as each order of things being was determined from its own analogy. For all things being share in a Providence, which bubbles forth (ἐκβλυζομένης) from the superessential Deity, Cause of all things.”<sup>25</sup> The idea of plenitude is indicated by the use of ἐκβλυζομένης, the “bubbling forth,” a word whose root, βλυώ, is defined as “to be full.”<sup>26</sup> It is a word used in other places, most notably *Divine Names* 4, 2 and 4, 6 where it describes the fullness of good that overflows as light.<sup>27</sup> The good possesses in itself the light that

25. CH 4, 1 (177CD): “Ἐστι γὰρ τοῦτο τῆς πάντων αἰτίας καὶ ὑπὲρ πάντα ἀγαθότητος ἴδιον τὸ πρὸς κοινωνίαν ἑαυτῆς τὰ ὄντα καλεῖν, ὡς ἐκάστῳ τῶν ὄντων ὄρισται πρὸς τῆς οἰκειάς ἀναλογίας. Πάντα μὲν οὖν τὰ ὄντα μετέχει προνοίας ἐκ τῆς ὑπερουσίου καὶ παναιτίου θεότητος ἐκβλυζομένης.

26. This word and its variants occur a total of 13 times: ὑπερβλυζῶ (8x), αναβλυζῶ (2x), ἐκβλυζῶ (3x). Although the language is borrowed from Proclus, who uses it to express an overflow of power, in Dionysius it becomes an overflow of love. Cf. Wear and Dillon, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Neoplatonic Tradition*, ch. 4. The significance of Dionysius’s use of this word, as well as the other ways in which Dionysius expresses fullness through the prefixed “ὑπερ,” is underscored when compared to his infrequent use of πλήρωμα, which occurs four times in the whole Dionysian corpus: in DN 4, 6 where it occurs in conjunction with ὑπερβλύζουσα; in EH 2, 2, 4, where it is used merely to describe the “whole body of the Church”; in EH 3, 2, again describing the fullness of the *synaxis* or communion of the Church; and in EH 3, 3, 14, used in the same way. This is notable because πλήρωμα was a very common Neoplatonic term. Although its meaning is a matter of some dispute, Gersh, following Nock, points out three usages that should be distinguished [*From Iamblichus to Eriugena*, 83–86]: (1) a process of filling something; (2) that which is given to something in order to fill it; or (3) the totality. But Gersh notes that quite often it occurred in Neoplatonic thought as a combination of 1 and 3, “the totality which fills.” “The Neoplatonists apply this notion to various spiritual principles which are held to embrace some form of multiplicity” (84). At other times it is used as a combination of 2 and 3, where the “internal multiplicity is viewed as being the source in some way of the manifold phenomena.” That Dionysius opted to employ new terms to convey what is found in these combined senses is suggestive of (1) the fact that he saw himself combining Neoplatonism with Christianity and so giving rise to new ways of conceiving these categories, and (2) a certain desire to avoid strict Neoplatonic allegiance. Gersh further explains that πλήρωμα becomes a technical term in Gnosticism, which we would suggest may be another reason for its infrequent use in Dionysius.

27. DN 4, 2 (696C): Ἀλλὰ καὶ μετ’ ἐκείνους τοὺς ἱερούς καὶ ἀγίους νόας αἱ ψυχὰι καὶ.

overflows to illuminate, by a multitude of luminaries, the good in itself. Dionysius employs a similar luminary dynamic to express the relationship between beauty as the transcendent source of all beautiful things. He describes beauty “as Itself, in Itself, with Itself, uniform, always being beautiful, and as having beforehand in Itself pre-eminently the fontal beauty of everything beautiful.”<sup>28</sup> Beauty is a causal source that pre-embraces all attributes in its unified fullness. This is why God is identifiable as beauty itself. In God, all things that were, are and will be beautiful preexist in such a way that, because they are yet to be determined, their eventual determination is held as an excess of determinate promise. Here, Dionysius appears to synthesize the biblical notion of God’s name as *Ehyeh*—the One who will be whatever he will be, that is, a promise of determinate plenitude—with the Plotinian *nous* to arrive at beauty as a divine identity.

The idea that a causal source is a plenitude that overflows may contribute to Dionysius’s eventual inclusion of beauty among the ranks of the divine names. Significant features of this can be found in *Divine Names* 5 where Dionysius expounds the name “Being.” The first three sections explain being as a principle of perfective depth, providing a more concrete image to the divine plenitude. He opens chapter 5 with a reminder that the *Divine Names* as a treatise is not concerned with the divine superessence as such, since that is treated in the *Theological Outlines*. It is a reminder that emphasizes both

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ὅσα ψυχῶν ἀγαθὰ διὰ τὴν ὑπεράγαθον ἔστιν ἀγαθότητα τὸ νοερὰς αὐτὰς εἶναι, τὸ ἔχειν τὴν οὐσιώδη ζωὴν ἀνώλεθρον αὐτὸ τὸ εἶναι καὶ δύνασθαι πρὸς τὰς ἀγγελικὰς ἀνατεινομένας ζωὰς δι’ αὐτῶν ὡς ἀγαθῶν καθηγεμόνων ἐπὶ τὴν πάντων ἀγαθῶν ἀγαθαρχίαν ἀνάγεσθαι καὶ τῶν ἐκέειθεν ἐκβλυζομένων ἐλλάμψεων ἐν μετουσίᾳ γίνεσθαι κατὰ τὴν σφῶν ἀναλογίαν καὶ τῆς τοῦ ἀγαθοειδοῦς δωρεᾶς, ὅση δύναμις, μετέχειν καὶ ὅσα ἄλλα πρὸς ἡμῶν ἐν τοῖς Περὶ Ψυχῆς ἀπηρίθμηται. “Further, after these—the sacred and holy minds—the souls, and whatever is good in souls is by reason of the super-good Goodness—the fact that they are intellectual; that they have essential life; indestructible; the very being itself; and that they are able, whilst elevated themselves to the angelic lives, to be conducted by them as good guides to the good Origin of all good things, and to become partakers of the illuminations, thence bubbling forth, according to the capacity of each, and to participate in the goodlike gift, as they are able, and whatever else we have enumerated in our Treatise concerning the soul.” And *DN* 4, 6 (701B): Φῶς οὖν νοητὸν λέγεται τὸ ὑπὲρ πᾶν φῶς ἀγαθὸν ὡς ἀκτὶς πηγαία καὶ ὑπερβλύζουσα φωτοχυσία πάντα τὸν ὑπερκόσμιον καὶ περικόσμιον καὶ ἐγκόσμιον νοῦν ἐκ τοῦ πληρώματος αὐτῆς καταλάμπουσα καὶ τὰς νοερὰς αὐτῶν ὅλας ἀνανεάζουσα δυνάμεις. “The Good then above every light is called spiritual Light, as fontal ray, and stream of light spilling over, shining upon every mind, above, around, and in the world, from its fullness, and renewing their whole mental powers, and embracing them all by its over-shadowing; and being above all by its exaltation.”

28. *DN* 4, 7 (704A): ἀλλ’ ὡς αὐτὸ καθ’ ἑαυτὸ μετ’ ἑαυτοῦ μονοειδὲς αἰεὶ ὄν καλὸν καὶ ὡς παντὸς καλοῦ τὴν πηγαίαν καλλονὴν ὑπεροχικῶς ἐν ἑαυτῷ προέχον.

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how each theonym includes every phenomenon that shares the content it signifies, and that the fullness of substance identified by the name exceeds every phenomenon that shares its signified content.<sup>29</sup> That is to say, in the created order the various “divine names” identify distinct phenomena. As they exist in God, however, they are not distinct but are rather consubstantial with the divine plenitude itself. As the Areopagite explains, “the whole good progressions and the Names of God celebrated by us are of one God.”<sup>30</sup> Dionysius establishes this at the beginning of *Divine Names* 5 since in the third section he addresses an objection whose force arises from distinguishing the names to the neglect of their unity. His response, however, involves more than just repeating the importance of this superessential unity. Overcoming the objection requires that the unity be understood as an *intensive depth of perfections*. The objection is predicated upon a particular evaluation of the hierarchy of names: since wisdom is superior to mere life, and life is superior to mere being, then things with wisdom are above those with life, and those with life are above those that merely exist. In light of Dionysius’s claim that being is the first and greatest gift from God, however, this order seems contradictory.<sup>31</sup> If being is the first and greatest, how can wisdom be considered superior to being?

This objection paints a picture of hierarchy that conceives superiority in terms of *breadth* measured *extensively*. As the hierarchy proceeds from God to Being to Life to Wisdom the objection assumes there is no intrinsic relativity between the various levels in the hierarchy. Consequently, the various levels in the hierarchy are interpreted as if they are distinct hypostases, emerging as the hierarchy extends itself outward. This is why the superiority of Wisdom over Being appears to be a contradiction. Dionysius’s corrective describes the relation among these perfections as one of *intensive depth* rather than *extensive breadth*, with being’s perfection itself—as the Beautiful and the Good—establishing their intrinsic relativity:

But if the Divine Minds are both above all the rest of beings, and live above the other living beings, and think and know above sensible perception and reason, and, beyond all the other existing beings, aspire to, and participate in, the Beautiful and the Good, they have more around the Good, participating in it

29. *DN* 5, 1 (816B).

30. *DN* 5, 2 (816D): ἀλλ’ ἐνὸς θεοῦ τὰς ὅλας ἀγαθὰς προόδους καὶ τὰς παρ’ ἡμῶν ἐξυμνουμένας θεωνυμίας.

31. *DN* 5, 3 (817BC).

more abundantly, and having received larger and greater gifts from it.<sup>32</sup>

Although the subtlety of his explanation perhaps renders the matter less than clear, it is not that wisdom is distinct from life and life distinct from being as the divine perfection extends outward. Rather, these divine perfections bespeak an intensive depth where life is being more abundantly, and wisdom is both life and being more abundantly. As one proceeds into the depths of being, one encounters a more intense concentration of perfective content that manifests more noble, or “higher,” modes of existence like life and wisdom. Wisdom is being in the mode of living rationality, a fuller mode of being than being in the mode of life alone. As the source of this intensive depth, the beautiful and the good communicate a plenitude of divine perfections.<sup>33</sup> In this sense, God is beauty “for God is not in any way (οὐ πῶς) a being, but absolutely and unboundedly, becoming pregnant with and anticipating the whole of being in himself.”<sup>34</sup> This configuration of being closely resembles the image of God found in the biblical divine name tradition where God’s name *Ehyeh* identifies unbounded ontological promise.

Of course this is in no way definitive evidence of Dionysius’s use or even appreciation of the name *Ehyeh* in his understanding. But it does provoke the question as to where Dionysius’s configuration of the divine being as intensive depth comes from. Neoplatonic ontology—if such a phrase may be invoked—may have provided important elements. But this only begs a further question: what sanctions Dionysius’s appropriation of the image of intensive, ontological depth to the Judeo-Christian God of Jesus Christ? If the *Exodus* account of divine being plays no role whatsoever, what could have allowed him to conceive divine being as he does and unhesitatingly apply it to the God of Jesus Christ?

Alongside this biblical component, there can be little doubt that Proclus’s *Elements of Theology* also plays a role in alerting Dionysius to the

32. DN 5, 3 (817B): Εἰ δὲ καὶ εἰσὶν οἱ θεοὶ νόες ὑπὲρ τὰ λοιπὰ ὄντα καὶ ζῶσιν ὑπὲρ τὰ ἄλλα ζῶντα καὶ νοοῦσι καὶ γινώσκουσιν ὑπὲρ αἴσθησιν καὶ λόγον καὶ παρὰ πάντα τὰ ὄντα τοῦ καλοῦ καὶ ἀγαθοῦ ἐφίενται καὶ μετέχουσιν, αὐτοὶ μᾶλλον εἰσὶ περὶ τὰγαθὸν οἱ περισσῶς αὐτοῦ μετέχοντες καὶ πλείους καὶ μείζους ἐξ αὐτοῦ δωρεὰς εἰληφότες ὥσπερ καὶ τὰ λογικὰ τῶν αἰσθητικῶν ὑπερέχει πλεονεκτοῦντα τῇ περισσειᾷ τοῦ λόγου, καὶ ταῦτα τῇ αἰσθήσει καὶ ἄλλα τῇ ζῳῇ.

33. Cf. O’Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas*, 66ff.

34. DN 5, 4 (817D): Καὶ γὰρ ὁ θεὸς οὐ πῶς ἐστὶν ὢν, ἀλλ’ ἀπλῶς καὶ ἀπεριορίστως ὄλον ἐν ἑαυτῷ τὸ εἶναι συνειληφῶς καὶ προειληφῶς. My translation.

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plenitude of a cause.<sup>35</sup> In proposition 18, Proclus explains how anything that bestows characteristics upon others must pre-possess those characteristics in abundance. “Thus the character as it exists in the original giver has a higher reality than the character bestowed; it is what the bestowed character is, but is not identical with it since it exists primitively and the other only by derivation.”<sup>36</sup> The word “primitively” (πρώτως) as used by Proclus refers to a state in which all derivatives exist prior to determination. It is on account of the higher reality’s completeness and “superfluity of potency” that allows it to generate a derivative.<sup>37</sup> When Proclus examines the divine sources in this context, the principle of plenitude becomes most fully apparent. In Proposition 131 Proclus explains how in order to give rise to otherness, a source cannot be deficient in any sense. Nor is it sufficient that it be full since fullness implies a sense of self-satisfaction that is “unripe for communication” (οὐπω δὲ εἰς μετάδοσιν ἔτοιμον). Rather, “that which fulfills others and extends to others its free bestowals *must itself be more than full*.”<sup>38</sup> For Proclus, only a source that is full in a way beyond full can communicate this fullness by generating other entities. Being insofar as it is communicated, that is to say, being that calls forth others and calls these others back to itself, is in the Greek tradition being’s *kalos*, or beauty. There is a relation, then, between the appropriation of the name beauty to God and the identification of divine being as a fullness of fullness.

With the preceding in mind, it becomes possible to sharpen the focus of the examination upon the three subcategories that correspond to beauty as a transcendent plenitude. Insofar as beauty as a divine name identifies God as he is in himself, it identifies the biblical God who revealed himself to Moses as *Ehyeh* and *HaShem*, as well as the divine principle that results from the combination of the Neoplatonic One and *nous*. This unique combination makes it possible to flesh out with more precision various aspects of the Dionysian identification of God as beauty. To reiterate, these aspects include beauty as the good, beauty as simplicity and light, and beauty as intelligibility. In order to enable some sort of concreteness to the examination of beauty as a divine name, these aspects become foundational.

35. Proclus, *Elements of Theology*.

36. Ibid., prop. 18: τοῦ δοθέντος ἄρα τὸ ἐν αὐτῷ τῷ δεδωκότι προυπάρχον κρειττόνως ἔστι· καὶ ὅπερ ἐκέينو μὲν ἔστιν, ἀλλ’ οὐ ταῦτὸν ἐκέινω· πρώτως γὰρ ἔστι, τὸ δὲ δευτέρως.

37. Ibid., prop. 26.

38. Ibid., prop. 131: ὑπέρπληρες ἄρα εἶναι δεῖ τὸ πληρωτικὸν ἄλλων καὶ εἰς ἄλλα διατεῖνον τὰς ἑαυτοῦ χορηγίας. Emphasis added. Cf. also prop. 152.

BEAUTY AS THE GOOD

The divine transcendent plenitude possesses the character of the good as that which all things desire. Dionysius is clearly expressing his Neoplatonic influence when he identifies God as the good whose self-diffusion elicits universal attraction, but it is an identification that he clearly believes is not only compatible with, but native to, the biblical God of Jesus Christ. Attraction and desire constitute the substantive similarity between the good and beauty as energies radiating from both, though in different ways. The divine as the transcendent good elicits desire spontaneously prior to any determinate form that the desire may take; the good, it might be said, is the very genetic code of desire itself. Insofar as beauty is bound up with God in himself, it identifies a transcendent plenitude that calls (*kalos*) to all other beings. It therefore elicits a more concrete attraction provoking a greater degree of volition in the percipient. As a name for God, however, beauty is a transcendent plenitude of all determinate content and so of desirable things. Consequently beauty provokes the will toward that which the will may not know, or at least may not fully know, it wills. Everything that was, that is and that will be is swathed in the divine being. As the good, God is that which all things desire. As beauty, God is that desire insofar as it is more concretely ordered toward determination, and so may be seen as a plenitude of volitional content.<sup>39</sup>

Together, both beauty and the good generate what in Dionysius's account could be called a "cruciform movement" embodying a vertical and a horizontal momentum. As the good, God's embrace over all things elicits a vertical response though in a horizontal way. That is to say, the divine attracts all things to itself by attracting all things to each other.<sup>40</sup> It does this by beautifying things, that is, by endowing them with concretizing and analogical energy. What all this means is that beauty and the good are

39. Admittedly, this appears to be a rather modern way to view the matter. However, it is worth noting that the emphasis on the will with respect to desire—insofar as that emphasis intends to stress the object of the will prior to the will's willing—resonates with Thomas's own explanation. In the *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 5, a. 5, Thomas explains that Dionysius's *Divine Names* is concerned with divine causality, which consists of *two movements*, that of the divine cause itself and that of the created recipient, each involving three steps. Movement 1: (a) the goodness of the end moves the agent to act; (b) the agent's action moves it toward form; (c) the form itself becomes actualized. Movement 2: (a) the form itself in being actualized; (b) moves its effective power which perfects it in being; (c) increasing itself into the form of goodness. Here, the divine good is always the will's object even prior to the will's action.

40. *DN* 5, 7 (821B), *DN* 13, 3 (980BC).

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both names that identify God as a source and goal of desire. Consequently, the examination of beauty must begin with an examination of their mutual indwelling.

The relationship between beauty and the good in Dionysius is complicated and at times inadequately represented by scholars of Dionysius. The majority of scholars tend to see beauty as nothing but a residual affect of the good, thrown into the sequence of divine names as synonymous with the good but with little more than a cosmetic purpose.<sup>41</sup> The fourth chapter of *On the Divine Names*, however, indicates that beauty's significance resides at a much more substantial level.

What is interesting about the fourth chapter of the *Divine Names* is that even if one were to concede that its primary subject matter is the good, it appears that the good in itself is so abstract that it requires the names light, beauty, and love in order to “fill it out” as it were. Dionysius opens chapter 4 by echoing the Neoplatonic principle that the good is self-diffusive, extending its goodness to all things that exist in the way that the sun shines its light to all things capable of receiving it.<sup>42</sup> He proceeds to explain how the self-diffusion of the good enters into the ontological constitution of all things that are and of the many modalities that existing things may possess.<sup>43</sup> At the same time, Dionysius invokes the principle of plenitude and declares that the good in itself transcends all things insofar as it negates all things by its superlative excess.<sup>44</sup> It is “non-essence” insofar as it is the pre-eminence of essence; it is non-living insofar as it is a “superior life”; it is mindless insofar as it is a “superior wisdom”; and it is even non-being insofar as it is above all beings.<sup>45</sup>

The opening three relatively short sections of chapter 4 are the only passages where the good is treated in itself. The remainder of the chapter treats the good indirectly—or perhaps more concretely—by treating light, beauty and love, suggesting the importance that these other names bring to understanding the good. This is not to say that these other names are merely subordinates to the all important good. Rather, each name identifies indelible modalities of the divine in itself and in its self-communication in

41. See, e.g., Rorem's comments in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 71n133, which declares that even though the title of the chapter suggests otherwise, the dominant subject matter is the good. Schäfer's analysis of DN 4, *Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite*, 80–84, simply identifies beauty with the good and offers nothing further.

42. DN 4, 1 (693B).

43. DN 4, 2 (696BCD).

44. This is a point he echoes in MT 1, 2 (1000B).

45. DN 4, 3 (697A).

that they enable more and more concreteness to what otherwise remains rather distant and therefore abstract.

In the first three sections, the good is spoken of somewhat generically in terms of its self-diffusion, its ontological providence, and its superlative essence. Dionysius takes the first step toward giving concrete intelligibility to the good when he introduces the name light, which he discusses in the three sections that follow the opening sections on the good.<sup>46</sup> Admitting that something is missing in his consideration of the good (“But what slipped from our view in the midst of this discourse. . .”<sup>47</sup>), Dionysius acknowledges that his prior discourse—ostensibly the previous three sections—neglected to relate the good with the movements of the heavenly bodies. He proceeds to do this by introducing the sun and the various forms of light, emphasizing how these luminaries provide a way to perceive the intelligibility of, or “to contemplate,” the good. Dionysius’s use of the sun enables him to describe desire for the good in the concrete terms of sensibility that light evokes. After describing the way in which “Goodness turns all things to itself,” he reiterates this turning with respect to light and its concrete effects:

After the same method of its illustrious original, the light also collects and turns to itself all things existing—things with sight, things with motion, things enlightened, things heated, things wholly held together by its brilliant splendors. . . . And all creatures endowed with sensible perceptions, aspire to it, as aspiring either to see or to be moved and enlightened and heated and to be wholly held together by the light.<sup>48</sup>

As Dionysius moves his examination from the good to the light, there is a clear development toward a greater degree of concrete content. This is especially discernable toward the end of this section, where Dionysius feels it necessary to clarify that these images ought not be taken in the literal sense associated with “antiquity” but in the more spiritual sense found in Pauline theology. “By no means do I affirm, after the statement of antiquity,” he explains, “that as being God and Creator of the universe, the sun,

46. DN 4, 4 (697B–700C); 4, 5 (700D–701A); 4, 6 (701B).

47. DN 4, 4 (697B): Ἄλλ’ ὅπερ ἡμᾶς ἐν μέσῳ παραδραμὸν διαπέφευγε.

48. DN 4, 4 (700C): Κατὰ τὸν αὐτὸν τῆς ἐμφανοῦς εἰκόνας λόγον καὶ τὸ φῶς συνάγει καὶ ἐπιστρέφει πρὸς ἑαυτὸ πάντα τὰ ὄρῶντα, τὰ κινούμενα, τὰ φωτιζόμενα, τὰ θερμαινόμενα, τὰ ὄλως ὑπὸ τῶν αὐτοῦ μαρμαρυγῶν συνεχόμενα. Διὸ καὶ ἥλιος, ὅτι πάντα ἀολλῆ ποιεῖ καὶ συνάγει τὰ διεσκεδασμένα. Καὶ πάντα αὐτοῦ τὰ αἰσθητὰ ἐφίεται ἢ ὡς τοῦ ὄραν ἢ ὡς τοῦ κινεῖσθαι καὶ φωτιζεσθαι καὶ θερμαίνεσθαι καὶ ὄλως συνεχέσθαι πρὸς τοῦ φωτὸς ἐφιέμενα.

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by itself, governs the luminous world, but that the invisible things of God are clearly seen from the foundation of the world, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power an deity.”<sup>49</sup> These statements indicate Dionysius’s intention to extend the divine names even to the sensible properties found in material things without univocally identifying any particular divine perfection with those material things. The good, through the perfection of light, is made intelligible to sight by creating the possibility of vision and to sense by taking the form of heat, both of which stimulate desire. And the fact that Dionysius believes it is necessary to warn against taking these images literally demonstrates the way in which these images express more concrete content.

When Dionysius arrives at *Divine Names* 4, 7, he opens his account of the name beauty by identifying it with that aspect of the good that pertains to attraction and desire. “The good is celebrated by the sacred theologians,” writes the Areopagite, “both as beautiful and as beauty, and as love, and as beloved; and all the other Divine Names that are well suited to the beautifying and highly favored comeliness.”<sup>50</sup> The final part of the statement identifies beauty as that divine perfection that accounts for the concrete presence of the good’s allure. Beauty is the divine perfection that most fittingly serves the foundation for the name love and any other name that pertains to this concrete presence of the good’s attraction.

It is significant that the word used to characterize how the other divine names are well suited to the “highly favored comeliness” is *ωραιότητος* rather than *καλόν* since the former connotes the sense of youthfulness. This suggests that while beauty, as identified with the divine itself, calls to all things (*καλόν*), other names, like love, relate to beauty at its more initial stages. In other words, these two distinct ways of identifying beauty as a divine name correspond to distinct though continuous phases of beauty’s anagogical power, indicating beauty’s overall relation to the good. Beauty is the good insofar as the good becomes more concrete in its “call” to all things. Beauty comes closer to these things, however, in a more “youthful” form as the attraction that elicits love’s concrete desire. Its youthfulness corresponds to the fact that it identifies the early stages of beauty’s

49. DN 4, 4 (700C): Καὶ οὐδέποτε φημι κατὰ τὸν τῆς παλαιότητος λόγον, ὅτι θεὸς ἂν ὁ ἥλιος καὶ δημιουργὸς τοῦδε τοῦ παντός ἰδίως ἐπιτροπεύει τὸν ἐμφανῆ κόσμον, ἀλλ’ ὅτι «τὰ ἀόρατα» τοῦ θεοῦ «ἀπὸ κτίσεως κόσμου τοῖς ποιήμασι νοούμενα καθορᾶται, ἢ τε αἰδῖος αὐτοῦ δύναμις καὶ θεϊότης».

50. DN 4, 7 (701C): Τοῦτο τὰγαθὸν ὑμνεῖται πρὸς τῶν ἱερῶν θεολόγων καὶ ὡς καλὸν καὶ ὡς κάλλος καὶ ὡς «ἀγάπη» καὶ ὡς ἀγαπητὸν καὶ ὅσα ἄλλαι εὐπρεπεῖς εἰσι τῆς καλλοποιοῦ καὶ κεχαριτωμένης ωραιότητος θεωνυμίας. My translation.

attraction relative to the percipient. The good is surely what all things desire, but this remains at an abstract, or ideal, distance without the more concrete content provided by the phenomenon of beauty.

The echoes of the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*, as well as the *Republic*, can be detected here. Beauty as *ὡραιότητος* corresponds to the attraction that all beautiful material objects elicit while beauty as *καλὸν* corresponds to the more universal, spiritual beauty to which the beauty of these material objects opens and uplifts. A passage in *Divine Names* 4, 7, which is universally recognized for its similarity to the *Symposium* 210E–211A, describes this:

(And it is called) Beautiful, as (being) at once beautiful and super-beautiful, and always being under the same conditions and in the same manner beautiful, and neither coming into being nor perishing, neither waxing nor waning; neither in this beautiful, nor in that ugly, nor at one time beautiful, and at another not; nor in relation to one thing beautiful, and in relation to another ugly, nor here, and not there, as being beautiful to some, and not beautiful to others; but as Itself, in Itself, with Itself, uniform, always being beautiful, and as having beforehand in Itself pre-eminently the fontal beauty of everything beautiful.<sup>51</sup>

The emphasis here, like the *Symposium* passage, is on beauty's more universal, spiritual aspects, which is why the word used throughout is *καλὸν* and its cognates rather than *ὡραιότητος*. Beauty as *καλὸν* is like the *mania* that descends upon the soul alerting it to beauty's more youthful presence as *ὡραιότητος* in particular things in order to begin drawing the soul back to itself through beautiful things. Contrast this with what Plato writes in the *Republic*, book 10. Commenting on those who are ignorant of depth and instead judge only from appearance, Plato contends that “they are like faces which were never really beautiful, but only blooming; and now the bloom of youth has passed away from them?”<sup>52</sup> Here, it seems, the contrast is between the more youthful form of beauty on the surface versus a more mature sense of beauty at the depth. Dionysius's use of similar

51. DN 4, 7 (701D–704A): καλὸν δὲ ὡς πάγκαλον ἅμα καὶ ὑπέρκαλον καὶ αἰεὶ ὄν κατὰ τὰ αὐτὰ καὶ ὠσαύτως καλὸν καὶ οὔτε γιγνώμενον οὔτε ἀπολλύμενον οὔτε αὐξανόμενον οὔτε φθίνον, οὔδὲ τῇ μὲν καλόν, τῇ δὲ αἰσχροὺς οὔδὲ τότε μὲν, τότε δὲ οὔ, οὔδὲ πρὸς μὲν τὸ καλόν, πρὸς δὲ τὸ αἰσχροὺς οὔτε ἔνθα μὲν, ἔνθα δὲ οὔ ὡς τισὶ μὲν ὄν καλόν, τισὶ δὲ οὐ καλόν, ἀλλ' ὡς αὐτὸ καθ' ἑαυτὸ μὲν ἑαυτοῦ μονοειδὲς αἰεὶ ὄν καλόν καὶ ὡς παντὸς καλοῦ τὴν πηγαίαν καλλονὴν ὑπεροχικῶς ἐν ἑαυτῷ προέχον.

52. *Republic*, bk. X, 601b: οὐκοῦν, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, ἔοικεν τοῖς τῶν ὡραίων προσώποις, καλῶν δὲ μὴ, οἷα γίνεσθαι ἰδεῖν ὅταν αὐτὰ τὸ ἄνθος προλίπη. Translation B. Jowett.

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terms might, then, reflect this dynamic though altered from the Platonic context, which tends toward a negative appraisal of this youthful beauty. All of these dynamics are the concrete working of the good in its stimulation of desire, which may be the reason why the remainder of Dionysius's account after *Divine Names* 4, 7 no longer speaks either of the good or the beautiful in themselves, but rather of "the one Good and Beautiful" (τὸ ἓν ἀγαθὸν καὶ καλόν).

To reiterate in brief, in *Divine Names* 4 there is a detectable sequence of names that reflects a momentum that moves from the more abstract toward the more concrete, or perhaps the "hyper-determinate" to the "more-determinate." The good is spoken of in rather abstract and general terms, indicating the sense that it is in excess of all determination. These more general and abstract terms become more and more concrete, or determinate, through light and beauty. Once beauty enters the picture, the good returns as the two are partnered up, so to speak, for the remainder of the treatise. Beauty, then, cannot be considered a mere synonym for, or cosmetic component of, the good. Rather, it must be considered as a divine perfection that not only actualizes the concrete presence of the good, providing it with determinate content, but also serves as an analogical conduit that carries attraction more and more intensely into the good that is desired.

### BEAUTY AS LIGHT

The relationship between beauty and the good in Dionysius also involves a divine perfection that is fitted with the name light, aspects of which have already been touched upon in the preceding section. Dionysius's examination of the divine name light, as noted already, appears in between the names good and beauty signifying, among other things, its mediating role. There are two fundamental features of beauty's relationship to the name light that serve to establish beauty's contours as a divine name, both of which involve the configuration of beauty as transcendent plenitude: simplicity and desire.

Part of the way in which Dionysius establishes the identification between beauty and the divine itself involves appropriating the Plotinian contribution to the philosophy of beauty that recognizes beauty as simplicity. As chapter 2 explained, Plotinus questions the classical identification between beauty and *symmetria*, insisting that *symmetria* itself owes its beauty to an even more primordial principle. Otherwise, only

composite things can be called beautiful while simple things, like light, cannot.<sup>53</sup> Light is also a prevalent biblical image used to convey divinity both insofar as God dwells in himself and insofar as God communicates himself. For Dionysius, light harbors a concrete way to establish how a source could remain simple in itself without diminishment while simultaneously communicating itself in a real way:

And then, indeed, we may see in a house, in which are many lamps, the lights of all united to form one certain light and lighting up one combined radiance; and, as I suppose, no one would be able to distinguish in the air containing all the lights the light of one or other lamp from the rest, and to see one without the other, since whole in whole are mixed together without being mingled.<sup>54</sup>

Elsewhere in the *Corpus Dionysiacum*, this luminary dynamic is transferred to the divine light:

For it (divine light) never leaves behind its own unique inwardness, but multiplied and going forth, as becomes its goodness, . . . remains firmly and solitarily centered within itself in its unmoved sameness, and raises according to their capacity, those who lawfully aspire to it and makes them one after the example of its own unifying oneness.<sup>55</sup>

Light is inherently a plenitude since it is capable of distributing itself innumerable times without ever diminishing itself as a source. In its plenitude, however, light remains simple; the illuminations that proceed from light do not thereby indicate a composition of luminaries in the original source itself. In the simplicity of its luminous content, the divine plenitude “comprehends in itself all things intellectual and all things rational and

53. See esp. *Enneads* I, 6, 1; Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics*, 1:313–31; von Balthasar, *GOTL*, 4:292–301.

54. *DN* 2, 4 (641B): Καὶ γοῦν ὁρῶμεν ἐν οἴκῳ πολλῶν ἐνότων λαμπτήρων πρὸς ἕν τι φῶς ἐνούμενα τὰ πάντων φῶτα καὶ μίαν αἴγλην ἀδιάκριτον ἀναλάμποντα, καὶ οὐκ ἂν τις, ὡς οἴμαι, δύναιτο τοῦδε τοῦ λαμπτήρος τὸ φῶς ἀπὸ τῶν ἄλλων ἐκ τοῦ πάντα τὰ φῶτα περιέχοντος ἀέρος διακρίνειν καὶ ἰδεῖν ἄνευ θατέρου θάτερον ὄλων ἐν ὅλοις ἀμιγῶς συγκεκραμένων.

55. *CH* 1, 2 (121B): Καὶ γὰρ οὐδὲ αὐτὴ πώποτε τῆς οἰκειᾶς ἐνικῆς ἐνότητος ἀπολείπεται, πρὸς ἀναγωγικὴν δὲ καὶ ἐνοποιὸν τῶν προνοουμένων σύγκρασιν ἀγαθοπρεπῶς πληθυνομένη καὶ προϊοῦσα μένει τε ἔνδον ἑαυτῆς ἀραρότως ἐν ἀκινήτῳ ταυτότητι μονίμως πεπηγυῖα καὶ τοὺς ἐπ’ αὐτὴν ὡς θεμιτὸν ἀνανεύοντας ἀναλόγως αὐτοῖς ἀνατείνει καὶ ἐνοποιεῖ κατὰ τὴν ἀπλωτικὴν αὐτῆς ἔνωσιν.

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makes them one altogether.”<sup>56</sup> Dionysius uses this luminary dynamic in his explanation of the divine name beauty:

But, the supersensual Beautiful is called Beauty, on account of the beauty communicated from Itself to all beautiful things, in a manner appropriate to each, and as Cause of the good harmony and brightness of all things which flashes like light to all the beautifying distributions of its fontal ray, and as calling all things to Itself (whence also it is called Beauty), and as collecting all in all to Itself.<sup>57</sup>

Like light, beauty distributes itself in such a way that it comes to constitute all beautiful things without ever diminishing itself as a source of plenitude. As it identifies the divine plenitude, beauty remains simple as the source of all things that are to be beautified even as it distributes its beauty in countless ways. Consequently, not only are all things beautified by the simplicity of beauty, but also as beautiful all things share in beauty’s original simplicity insofar as they are caused by it. In being beautiful, they bespeak the original simplicity from which their beauty derives. “For by the simple and supernatural nature of all beautiful things,” explains the Aroepagite, “all beauty and everything beautiful pre-existed uniquely as to Cause.”<sup>58</sup> The simplicity of beauty remains in every beautiful thing even though it is diversified in beauty’s distributive act, and it is this simplicity

56. Cf. *DN* 4, 6 (701B) as it is more fully expressed: Φῶς οὖν νοητὸν λέγεται τὸ ὑπὲρ πᾶν φῶς ἀγαθὸν ὡς ἀκτὶς πηγαία καὶ ὑπερβλύζουσα φωτοχυσία πάντα τὸν ὑπερκόσμιον καὶ περικόσμιον καὶ ἐγκόσμιον νοῦν ἐκ τοῦ πληρώματος αὐτῆς καταλάμπουσα καὶ τὰς νοεράς αὐτῶν ὄλας ἀνανεάζουσα δυνάμεις καὶ πάντας περιέχουσα τῷ ὑπερτετάσθαι καὶ πάντων ὑπερέχουσα τῷ ὑπερκεῖσθαι καὶ ἀπλῶς πᾶσαν τῆς φωτιστικῆς δυνάμεως τὴν κυρείαν ὡς ἀρχίφωτος καὶ ὑπέρφωτος ἐν ἑαυτῇ συλλαβούσα καὶ ὑπερέχουσα καὶ προέχουσα καὶ τὰ νοερά καὶ λογικὰ πάντα συνάγουσα καὶ ἀολλῆ ποιούσα. “The Good then above every light is called spiritual Light, as fontal ray, and stream of light welling over, shining upon every mind, above, around, and in the world, from its fullness, and renewing their whole mental powers, and embracing them all by its over-shadowing; and being above all by its exaltation; and in one word, by embracing and having previously and pre-eminently the whole sovereignty of the light-dispensing faculty, as being source of light and above all light, and by comprehending in itself all things intellectual, and all things rational, and making them one altogether.”

57. *DN* 4, 7 (701D): Τὸ δὲ ὑπερούσιον καλὸν κάλλος μὲν λέγεται διὰ τὴν ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ πᾶσι τοῖς οὐσι μεταδιδόμενην οἰκειῶς ἐκάστῳ καλλονῆν καὶ ὡς τῆς πάντων εὐαρμοστίας καὶ ἀγαλαίας αἴτιον δίκην φωτὸς ἑναστράπτου ἅπασι τὰς καλλοποιούς τῆς πηγαίας ἀκτίνος αὐτοῦ μεταδόσεις καὶ ὡς πάντα πρὸς ἑαυτὸ καλοῦν, ὅθεν καὶ κάλλος λέγεται, καὶ ὡς ὄλα ἐν ὄλοις εἰς ταὐτὸ συνάγον. This passage is cited above for different reasons. Here the stress is on the luminary dynamic.

58. *DN* 4, 7 (704A): Τῆ γὰρ ἀπλῆ καὶ ὑπερφυεῖ τῶν ὄλων καλῶν φύσει πᾶσα καλλονῆ καὶ πᾶν καλὸν ἐνοειδῶς κατ’ αἰτίαν προῦφέστηκεν.

that becomes a doorway, so to speak, that opens the anagogical pathway to the transcendent, supernatural, simplicity.

Beauty and light, therefore, also share an anagogical power that in Dionysius is in some way associated with desire. But while desire as it relates to the good remains rather abstract in a general and universal modality, as it relates to light it begins to take concrete form in the act of cognition.

God is named “spiritual Light” because he fills every supercelestial mind with spiritual light and expels all ignorance and error from all souls in which they may be, and imparts to them all sacred light, and cleanses their mental vision from the mist which envelops them, from ignorance, and stirs up and enfolds those enclosed by the great weight of darkness, and imparts, at first, a measured radiance.<sup>59</sup>

By creating the conditions of visibility, light identifies the divine perfection that enters the world in order to illuminate the multitude of forms. It is in this capacity that light also touches the intellect with the first stirrings of cognition. Beauty names the actualized result of this luminous phenomenon.

These cognitive stirrings indicate the way in which beauty, as transcendent plenitude, is constituted by substantive difference. For Dionysius, the concrete distributions of the good as light and beauty are never configured as univocal, unilateral, or objective distributions. The relationship that a divine perfection has with any given recipient is always “measured” by that recipient. This is true of both the “radiance” of light and the beauty of the being of all things: “From this Beautiful (comes) being to all existing things—that each is beautiful in its own proper order.”<sup>60</sup> By virtue of this relativity of reception, the anagogical dynamic that marks the Dionysian divine names is most fundamentally *analogical* insofar as the uplifting power of light and beauty conforms to the diverse needs of each recipient. Beauty therefore includes difference *qua* difference as part of its constitution.

59. DN 4, 5 (701A): ὅτι φῶς νοητὸν ὁ ἀγαθὸς λέγεται διὰ τὸ πάντα μὲν ὑπερουράνιον νοῦν ἐμπιπλάναι νοητοῦ φωτός, πᾶσαν δὲ ἄγνοιαν καὶ πλάνην ἐλαύνειν ἐκ πασῶν, αἷς ἂν ἐγγένηται ψυχαῖς, καὶ πάσαις αὐταῖς φωτὸς ἱεροῦ μεταδιδόναι καὶ τοὺς νοεροὺς αὐτῶν ὀφθαλμοὺς ἀποκαθαίρειν τῆς περικειμένης αὐταῖς ἐκ τῆς ἀγνοίας ἀχλύος καὶ ἀνακινεῖν καὶ ἀναπτύσσειν τῷ πολλῷ βάρει τοῦ σκότους συμμεμυκῶτας καὶ μεταδιδόναι πρῶτα μὲν αἴγλης μετρίας.

60. DN 4, 7 (704AB): Ἐκ τοῦ καλοῦ τούτου πᾶσι τοῖς οὔσι τὸ εἶναι κατὰ τὸν οἰκεῖον λόγον ἕκαστα καλά.

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Dionysius uses this analogical anagogy to explain the effect of Light: “Then, while they taste the light, as it were, and desire it more, more fully does it give itself and more abundantly does it enlighten them because ‘they have loved much,’ and ever elevates them to things in advance, as befits the analogy of each for aspiration.”<sup>61</sup> When it is cast in the context of beauty, this analogical anagogy takes the form of an act of gathering elicited by the “call” that is inherent within and intrinsic to desire that characterizes the power of beauty. This call is articulated most clearly in beauty’s relation to love, in which love is defined as a unifying power that exists pre-eminently in the beautiful, given by the beautiful, and drawn to the beautiful as its end:

For those who have rightly listened to things Divine, the name of Loving-kindness and of Love is placed by the holy theologians in the same category throughout the Divine revelations, and this is of a power unifying, and binding together, and mingling pre-eminently in the Beautiful and Good; pre-existing by reason of the beautiful and good, and imparted from the beautiful and good, by reason of the Beautiful and Good.<sup>62</sup>

As this passage explains, the beautiful and good identify a pre-eminent mingling of the power to unify that becomes manifest and concrete in and as love. Love is characterized here in terms of an emanation from the beautiful and the good. It preexists in the beautiful and the good, and by reason of the beautiful and the good it is imparted into all things. Love therefore, much like light, includes in its very constitution the anagogical power of the beautiful and the good. In stimulating desire and moving the recipient to love, both light and beauty communicate the anagogical power of the good.

The relationship between beauty and light in the context of the Dionysian theology of the divine names establishes the more concrete intelligibility of the good as the good distributes itself in and as creation. Given the parallel between this concretization and God’s own concretization in the Incarnation it is not surprising to find a strong Christological component in Dionysius’s configuration of beauty and light. When Dionysius

61. DN 4, 5 (701A): εἶτα ἐκεῖνων ὡσπερ ἀπογευομένων φωτὸς καὶ μᾶλλον ἐφιεμένων μᾶλλον ἑαυτὴν ἐνδιδόναι καὶ περισσῶς ἐπιλάμπειν, «ὅτι ἠγάπησαν πολὺ», καὶ αἰεὶ ἀνατείνειν αὐτὰς ἐπὶ τὰ πρόσω κατὰ τὴν σφῶν εἰς ἀνάνευσιν ἀναλογίαν.

62. DN 4, 12 (709D): Ἐπὶ τοῖς ὀρθῶς τῶν θείων ἀκρωμένοις ἐπὶ τῆς αὐτῆς δυνάμεως τάττεται πρὸς τῶν ἱερῶν θεολόγων τὸ τῆς ἀγάπης καὶ τοῦ ἔρωτος ὄνομα κατὰ τὰς θείας ἐκφαντορίας. Καὶ ἔστι τοῦτο δυνάμεως ἐνοποιοῦ καὶ συνδυετικῆς καὶ διαφερόντως συγκρατικῆς ἐν τῷ καλῷ καὶ ἀγαθῷ διὰ τὸ καλὸν καὶ ἀγαθὸν προῦφεστῶσης καὶ ἐκ τοῦ καλοῦ καὶ ἀγαθοῦ διὰ τὸ καλὸν καὶ ἀγαθὸν ἐκδιδομένης.

invokes the image of light to articulate the person of Jesus Christ, he brings together three fundamental approaches to beauty: Eastern, Greek, and biblical thought. The originality that is often attributed to Dionysius arises not only from the coalescing of these approaches in his vision, but also from the way that in this vision these approaches engender the notion of light as a concrete manifestation of divine beauty.<sup>63</sup>

For Dionysius, the concrete personhood of Jesus reveals how divine Goodness distills its plenitude as an analogical power. Similar to how beauty and light correspond to the good, Jesus Christ is understood as a more concrete and present manifestation of the hidden God who is ever beyond all thought.<sup>64</sup> The theme of light in Dionysius's cultural milieu, found in both works of art and popular pagan religiosity,<sup>65</sup> provides a preliminary referent to his encounter with the Christ that he finds in Scripture.<sup>66</sup> From the very beginning of *Genesis*<sup>67</sup> to the "I am" motif in the Gospels,<sup>68</sup> the theme of light permeates the divine self-disclosure through-

63. Cf. Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics*, 2:30.

64. Cf. Epistle 3 (1069B).

65. Doherty, "St. Thomas and the Psuedo-Dionysian Symbol of Light," 170–89. Doherty maintains that, since he was a fifth-century Syrian, Dionysius's "historical matrix" is one of a "Christian Neoplatonist's . . . religious reaction to the cult of Mithras, the Persian sun-god." Dionysius would have encountered a powerful cult of Mithriac mysteries established by Julian the Apostate (ca. AD 360), whose *Hymn to King Helios* had been written in a literary genre "long stamped as a vehicle of syncretistic theological thought," and was dedicated to Sallustius's *On the Gods and the Cosmos*, which at that time had become "a quasi official creed and catechism of late imperial paganism" (176). Consequently, Doherty believes, following Pera, that Dionysius's luminary theology was composed "at least in part, as a homeopathic medicine against the disease of Mithraic heliolatry" (177).

66. In a passage cited above (Ep 3, 1069B), Dionysius uses the word "suddenly" (Ἐξαίφνης) to describe the coming forth of the visible from the invisible. As Alexander Golitzin has explained in "Suddenly, Christ," 22–23, this word has its roots in Plato's *Parmenides*, where it is used to speak of the rupture of the eternal into the temporal, as well as the *Symposium* to describe the ascent of *eros* to the final conclusion in beauty. He also points out its use in Plotinus's *Enneads*, 5.3.17, 5.5.7, and 6.7.36 indicating the moment when the One becomes visible in light. What is instructive for our purposes, however, is his observation that modern scholars stop with these references, remaining "insensitive to the use of the sudden in the scriptures and subsequent Christian literature." He provides four appearances: Acts 9:3 and 22:6 describing Paul's conversion on the way to Damascus, as well as Luke 2:14 and Mark 13:36, the former linking the suddenly to the *Gloria in excelsis* of the angels in the pastures, and the latter indicating the suddenness of Christ's return. Gollitzen's observation indicates the way in which Dionysius's biblical heritage is often eclipsed by his Neoplatonism.

67. E.g., Gen 1:1–6.

68. E.g., John 9:5.

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out the Scriptures.<sup>69</sup> A particularly significant expression of this theme occurs in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians,<sup>70</sup> where Paul not only echoes the Johannine "Light of the world" motif, but in linking it to the notion of intelligibility—the "knowledge of the glory of God" grounded in Christ Jesus—he incorporates the anagogical power of Light. Dionysius's allonym, the use of which intends to place his vision alongside Paul's, underscores the significance of this passage. Such passages in Scripture no doubt reinforce Dionysius's encounter with the Platonic image of the sun as an analogy for intelligibility.<sup>71</sup> It may also reinforce his encounter with Plotinus's ideas concerning the way that light "invades" the darkness of matter granting it a share in beauty.<sup>72</sup> The scriptural depiction of Christ as the light, then, becomes a most appropriate fit with Dionysius's developing vision.

The most explicit articulation of light as a Christological theme in Dionysius is found in the *Celestial Hierarchy*. Dionysius opens this treatise with a citation from the New Testament Epistle from James (1:17): "Every best gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no change nor shadow of alteration." The anagogical component involved in this follows immediately: "Further also, every procession of illuminating light, proceeding from the Father, whilst visiting us as a gift of goodness, restores us again gradually as a unifying power, and turns us to the oneness of our Paternal guidance, and to a deifying simplicity."<sup>73</sup> In identifying the light with Jesus, Dionysius more

69. For a brief summary of the most relevant biblical passages with respect to light, see Riordan, *Divine Light*, 152.

70. 2 Cor 4:3–6: "And even though our gospel is veiled, it is veiled for those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, so that they may not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not preach ourselves but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your slaves for the sake of Jesus. For God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to bring to light the knowledge of the glory of God on the face of (Jesus) Christ."

71. Plato, *Republic*, 508b. It is almost common knowledge that the Platonic use of the sun intends to convey that light is both the source of *perception* and *existence*. See, e.g., Pershouse, *Plato's Republic: A Reader's Guide*, 93.

72. E.g., *Enneads* I, 6, 3. Plotinus uses fire as a concrete image of how light penetrates a body. A corresponding biblical passage can be found in Exod 24:17, "To the Israelites the glory of the Lord was seen as a consuming fire on the mountaintop."

73. *CH* 1, 1 (120B): Ἀλλὰ καὶ πᾶσα πατροκινήτου φωτοφανείας πρόδος εἰς ἡμᾶς ἀγαθοδότης φοιτῶσα πάλιν ὡς ἐνοποιὸς δύναμις ἀνατατικῶς ἡμᾶς ἀναπλοῖ καὶ ἐπιστρέφει πρὸς τὴν τοῦ συναγωγῶ πατρὸς ἐνότητα καὶ θεοποιὸν ἀπλότητα.

clearly and concretely expresses light's power to open a path of ascent into the simplicity of divine splendor:

Invoking then Jesus, the Paternal Light, the Real, the True, "which lights every man coming into the world," "through Whom we have access to the Father," Source of Light, let us aspire, as far as is attainable, to the illuminations handed down by our fathers in the most sacred Oracles, and let us gaze, as we may, upon the Hierarchies of the Heavenly Minds manifested by them symbolically for our instruction. And when we have received, with immaterial and unflinching mental eyes, the gift of Light, primal and super-primal, of the supremely Divine Father, which manifests to us the most blessed Hierarchies of the Angels in types and symbols, let us then, from it, be elevated to its simple splendor.<sup>74</sup>

This passage is packed full of a multitude of Dionysian themes, though the dominant theme is light and its analogical power. Reflecting the account of light in the *Divine Names*, the passage posits the plenitude of luminous content as the simplicity of divine beauty ("simple splendor"). This luminous plenitude is distributed as a way to draw all things back to this divine light identified as the "supremely divine Father." Similar to the way in which beauty and light provide access to the good, Jesus is invoked as the one through whom access to the Father is made possible.

Beauty as a divine name in Dionysius identifies the way in which the divine is a transcendent plenitude. Insofar as it relates to the good, beauty is the more concrete and present communication of this plenitude. It therefore elicits desire in a more concrete, "visible," way. Insofar as it relates to light, beauty is the simplicity of this transcendent plenitude even as it distributes itself to all things. Light stimulates an increase in desire for what it offers, which, with regard to creatures endowed with intellect, primarily corresponds to a cognitive dimension. When beauty's relation to the good as transcendent plenitude is brought together with beauty's relation to light as an analogical power of cognition, beauty reveals itself as a plenitude of intelligibility.

74. *CH* 1, 2 (121A): Οὐκοῦν Ἰησοῦν ἐπικαλεσάμενοι, τὸ πατρικὸν φῶς, τὸ ὄν «τὸ ἀληθινόν, ὃ φωτίζει πάντα ἄνθρωπον ἐρχόμενον εἰς τὸν κόσμον», δι' οὗ τὴν πρὸς τὸν ἀρχίφωτον πατέρα προσαγωγὴν ἐσχήκαμεν, ἐπὶ τὰς τῶν ἱεροτάτων λογίων πατροπαραδότους ἐλλάμψεις ὡς ἐφικτὸν ἀνανεύσωμεν καὶ τὰς ὑπ' αὐτῶν συμβολικῶς ἡμῖν καὶ ἀναγωγικῶς ἐκφανθείσας τῶν οὐρανίων νοῶν ἱεραρχίας ὡς οἰοί τε ἔσμεν ἐποπτεύσωμεν καὶ τὴν ἀρχικὴν καὶ ὑπεράρχιον τοῦ θεαρχικοῦ πατρὸς φωτοδοσίαν, ἣ τὰς τῶν ἀγγέλων ἡμῖν ἐν τυπτικαῖς συμβόλοις ἐκφαίνει μακαριωτάτας ἱεραρχίας, αὐλοῖς καὶ ἀτρεμέσι νοδὸς ὀφθαλμοῖς εἰσδεξάμενοι πάλιν ἐξ αὐτῆς ἐπὶ τὴν ἀπλὴν αὐτῆς ἀναταθῶμεν ἀκτίνα.

## Part Two

### BEAUTY AS INTELLIGIBILITY

The final dimension of beauty insofar as it relates to the divine identity in itself concerns the way in which beauty identifies a plenitude of intelligibility. This dimension is not as explicit in Dionysius as the previous two, though much of its content can be discerned by examining the way in which beauty functions within Dionysian symbolism.

Symbolism in Dionysius is much more than a strategy for speaking or even thinking. Rather it identifies the real way in which all created things anagogically refer, through the uniqueness of their substantial content, to the higher, spiritual foundation of their existence. Hence, it is expressed as a *logos*, or “discourse,” between a mode of intelligibility in excess of discursive, conceptual thought and the discursive, conceptual thought itself that allows for its communicability. For this reason, it is inherently linked to beauty, which, as Plato’s considerations of the matter indicate, also stands between the discursive and the “trans-” or “overly-discursive.” It might be said that Dionysian symbolism is itself a *logos* of beauty, a mode of thinking and speaking by which beauty’s intelligibility becomes communicable.

In *Divine Names* 4, 8, Dionysius describes the effect that the beautiful (and good)<sup>75</sup> has upon the “divine minds,” i.e., the angels. As they are united to the illuminations of the beautiful, they are moved circularly “without beginning and without end.” When they act in such a way to provide help to subordinate creatures, they move “in a direct line,” i.e., linearly, and accomplish all things directly. These two movements operate in unison and constitute the overall “spiral” movement of an angel; an angel remains fixed in its identity as it “dances” around the beautiful while moving linearly in its providential activity upon subordinate creatures.<sup>76</sup>

This spiral angelic movement serves as a propaedeutic to Dionysian symbolism, which involves an anagogical activity marked by an oscillation between the circular and the linear.<sup>77</sup> The very next section in *Divine Names* 4, 9, Dionysius describes the movement of the soul in terms of a cognitive analogy whose final goal and ultimate principle is the beautiful. In this sense, the mode of knowledge associated with Dionysian symbolism is more akin to a spiritual perception, or contemplation, since the final

75. As noted, after *DN* 4, 7, Dionysius combines the beautiful and the good as a unified perfection. For the sake of the present context and ease of reading, the text will refer to the beautiful only, though this should be taken as the unity of the beautiful and the good.

76. *DN* 4, 8 (704D).

77. Cf. Rorem, *Biblical and Liturgical Symbols*, 110–16.

goal is always to arrive at a more complete union with the beautiful. In this regard, beauty as a divine name signifies the way in which the divine plenitude is a plenitude of intelligibility that transcends, while simultaneously conforming to, discursive, conceptual knowing.

Dionysius's outline in *Divine Names* 4, 9 indicates that contemplative knowledge in the mode of symbolism involves three movements. The first involves a *circular* movement whereby the soul enters into itself by engaging objects outside of itself, allowing the union that accompanies each object to "conduct it (the soul) to the beautiful" beyond the object itself.<sup>78</sup>

Further, there is a movement of soul, circular indeed—the entrance into itself from (*ἀπὸ*) things without, and the unified convolution of its intellectual powers, bequeathing to it inerrancy, as it were, in a sort of circle, and turning and collecting itself, from the many things without, first to itself, then, as having become single, uniting with the uniquely unified powers,

78. It is important to note the controversial nature of this interpretation. The phrase *ἢ εἰς ἑαυτὴν εἴσοδος ἀπὸ τῶν ἔξω* is unclear as to how one should understand the sense of *ἀπὸ*. Either it means "an entrance into oneself *away from* external things," (place from which) or "an entrance into oneself *springing from* external things" (source from). Both C. E. Rolt and J. Parker translate it simply as "from" rather than "away from" leaving open the question of its interpretation as a reference to a "source," while Luibheid includes the word "away" expressing the view that this movement involves an exodus from the world of things. However, two reasons would support the use as "source from." (1) In *DN* 4, 11 Dionysius makes a direct assertion that the mind strives upward "through objects of sense." The literal expression is "when the mind is swayed, or uprooted, through the objects of sense. . ." [*Ὅταν δὲ ὁ νοῦς διὰ τῶν αἰσθητῶν ἀνακινεῖσθαι*] indicating the causal role of the external object. Even if one wants to assert that "through" here is used as a spatial reference, it would still refute the idea that *ἀπὸ* is used as "away from"; moving "through" something and moving "away from" something are vastly different movements. (2) In light of Dionysius' account in *DN* 7, 1, which recognizes a union given *ab extra* within objects of knowledge and which explicitly recognizes this union as other to the mind itself, it would seem justifiable to conclude that Dionysius is not describing mystical knowledge as an idealism that rejects the world of things, but a realism that ascends through the things of the world to the higher realities. In other words, the union arising from the circular knowledge described in *DN* 4, 9, when considered alongside the union described in *DN* 7, 1 that is explicitly other to the mind, must derive from an external source given through something other than the mind itself. Thus, *ἀπὸ* is better understood in terms of "source" rather than "movement away from": the internal entrance into oneself occurs *by virtue of* (or *through*) external things, not by virtue of moving *away from* external things. The entrance into oneself is indeed a move away from the surface-appearance of the external thing's communication, but it is not a rejection of what the external thing communicates since what is communicated is divine beauty and goodness precisely through that external thing. Otherwise, from where does the eventual union arise and with what is the soul united?

## Part Two

and thus conducting to the beautiful and good, which is above all things being, and one and the same, and without beginning and without end.<sup>79</sup>

A few important features of Dionysian symbolism can be discerned here. First, Dionysian symbolism as a mode by which the beauty of intelligibility becomes communicable is initiated by the world of things, not by escaping from it. This stands in contrast to an unfortunately all too common reading of Dionysius that views his symbolism as a “Platonic” escape from the world to the more ideal, spiritual realm. Secondly, there is a spiral movement wherein the soul, through its natural process of discursive and logical engagement with objects outside of itself, is illuminated by the higher, spiritual realities held in these objects. “But a soul is moved *spirally*,” writes the Areopagite, “insofar as it is illuminated, as to the divine kinds of knowledge, in a manner proper to itself, not intuitively and at once, but logically and discursively.”<sup>80</sup> In this second stage of symbolic knowledge, the things in the world prompt the mind’s common mode of cognition, namely, discursive thought. But this mode of cognition is intended toward higher realities. The final movement is *linear* wherein the soul denies its circular movement and instead moves through the symbolic to the simple and unified contemplations.

But in a straight line, when, not entering into itself, and being moved by unique intuition (for this, as I said, is the circular), but advancing to things around itself, and from things without, it is, as it were, conducted from certain symbols, varied and multiplied, to the simple and unified contemplations.<sup>81</sup>

79. DN 4, 9 (705A): Ψυχῆς δὲ κίνησις ἐστὶ κυκλική μὲν ἢ εἰς ἑαυτὴν εἴσοδος ἀπὸ τῶν ἕξω καὶ τῶν νοερῶν αὐτῆς δυνάμεων ἢ ἐνοειδῆς συνελίξεις ὥσπερ ἐν τινὶ κύκλῳ τὸ ἀπλανὲς αὐτῆ δωρουμένη καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν πολλῶν τῶν ἕξωθεν αὐτὴν ἐπιστρέφουσα καὶ συναγουσα πρῶτον εἰς ἑαυτὴν, εἶτα ὡς ἐνοειδῆ γενομένην ἐνοῦσα ταῖς ἐνιαίως ἡνωμέναις δυνάμεσι καὶ οὕτως ἐπὶ τὸ καλὸν καὶ ἀγαθὸν χειραγωγῶσα τὸ ὑπὲρ πάντα τὰ ὄντα καὶ ἐν καὶ ταυτὸν καὶ ἀναρχον καὶ ἀτελεύτητον.

80. DN 4, 9 (705AB): Ἐλικοειδῶς δὲ ψυχὴ κινεῖται, καθ’ ὅσον οἰκείως ἑαυτῇ τὰς θείας ἐλλάμπεται γνώσεις, οὐ νοερῶς καὶ ἐνιαίως, ἀλλὰ λογικῶς καὶ διεξοδικῶς καὶ οἶον συμμίκτης καὶ μεταβατικαῖς ἐνεργείαις.

81. DN 4, 9 (705B): Τὴν κατ’ εὐθείαν δέ, ὅταν οὐκ εἰς ἑαυτὴν εἰσιοῦσα καὶ ἐνικῆ νοερότητι κινουμένη, τοῦτο γάρ, ὡς ἔφην, ἐστὶ τὸ κατὰ κύκλον, ἀλλὰ πρὸς τὰ περὶ ἑαυτὴν προϊοῦσα καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν ἕξωθεν ὥσπερ ἀπὸ τινων συμβόλων πεποικιλμένων καὶ πεπληθυσμένων ἐπὶ τὰς ἀπλᾶς καὶ ἡνωμένας ἀνάγεται θεωρίας. As Rorem points out in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 78n146, Bernard, in “Les formes de la Théologie chez Denys l’Aréopagite,” 39–69, identified the straight mode as symbolical knowledge, the spiral mode as discursive knowledge, and the circular mode as mystical knowledge.

Dionysius explains how these three modes of knowing correspond to beauty in the very next section: “Of these three motions, then, in everything perceptible here below, and much more of the abidings and repose and fixity of each, the beautiful and the good, which is above all repose and movement, is cause and bond and end.”<sup>82</sup> Not only is beauty the origin and final goal of these movements, but it is the power that holds these three together as a bond. Consequently, beauty is present throughout the entire cognitive activity of spiritual contemplation, which for Dionysius is the fullness of knowledge.

Dionysian symbolism, when read as a communication of beauty’s intelligibility—as a sort of kalology—is derivative upon its object, namely, the divine plenitude. Dionysius conceives the divine plenitude, from which proceed the divine perfections, as a plenitude of intelligibility that attracts the desire of creatures endowed with intellect through a process of cognitive anagogy. Plotinus configures the intellectual principle, or *nous*, in the same way. But where the Plotinian *nous* is the first emanation from the supreme principle, the One, Dionysius transfers this directly to the divine itself. For this reason, knowledge must take the form of spiritual contemplation in which the excess of divine substance is communicated through the limitations of material symbols. It is clear that discursive logic is involved in the process of cognitive anagogy, but, as Rorem rightly contends, contemplation remains the final and ultimate goal of this ascent.<sup>83</sup> Dionysius’s approach to knowledge, rooted as it is in beauty, includes both discursive logic and symbolism.

There is a discernable Aristotelian dimension to Dionysian symbolism-as-knowledge. This dimension is most visible in certain parts of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* that emphasize a more discursive approach to the act of knowing. Dionysius incorporates at times an Aristotelian scheme of cognitive advance wherein knowledge is acquired by moving from effect to cause and also by moving from what is more complex to what is simpler. He invokes both schemes in his description of the Ecclesiastical and the Celestial hierarchies.

With regard to the movement from effect to cause, Dionysius explains that in order to behold the holy *synaxis* (communion) in a way that reflects the original divine beauty, one must move from the effects to their

82. DN 4, 10 (705BC): Τούτων οὖν καὶ τῶν αἰσθητῶν ἐν τῷδε τῷ παντὶ τριῶν κινήσεων καὶ πολλῷ πρότερον τῶν ἐκάστου μονῶν καὶ στάσεων καὶ ἰδρύσεων αἰτιόν ἐστι καὶ συνοχικόν καὶ πέρας τὸ καλὸν καὶ ἀγαθὸν τὸ ὑπὲρ πᾶσαν στάσιν καὶ κίνησιν.

83. Rorem, *Biblical and Liturgical Symbols*, 115.

causes.<sup>84</sup> Divine beauty, itself beyond conception, communicates itself in the form of the multitude of beautiful things in the world. Its intention, however, is to uplift the soul more profoundly toward the higher, intelligible realm where the archetypes of these beautiful things reside. Moving from effect to cause, then, does not involve abandoning the effects but rather opening oneself in order to see their spiritual depth in and as beauty; it involves moving from beauty as *ωραιότητος* to beauty as *καλόν*.

With regard to the movement from what is complex to what is simpler, Dionysius explains that contemplation of divine mysteries, in this case the angelic forms, requires a descent into the “many shaped variety” of things. From there one advances to the “simplicity of the heavenly mind” by means of a more analytic (*ἀναλυτικῶς*) manner.<sup>85</sup> As indicated by the word *ἀναλυτικῶς*, this advance is conceived in terms of a “return” from what is a variety to what is simpler.<sup>86</sup>

Both of these examples are grounded in Dionysius’s anagogical and symbolic approach to knowledge of the divine, which includes knowledge of material things since these are viewed as doorways toward a higher knowledge.<sup>87</sup> When understood against his doctrine of beauty, material

84. *EH* 3, III, 2: εἰσέλθωμεν ἀπὸ τῶν αἰτιατῶν εἰς τὰ αἴτια κατὰ τὴν ἱεράν ἡμῶν σύναξιν, καὶ τὴν εὐπρεπῆ τῶν νοητῶν Ἰησοῦ φωταγωγοῦντος ὀψόμεθα θεωρίαν τὸ μακάριον ἀποστίλβουσαν ἐμφανῶς τῶν ἀρχετύπων κάλλος. Ἄλλ’ ὡς θειοτάτη καὶ ἱερά τελετή, τὰ περικείμενά σοι συμβολικῶς ἀμφιέσματα τῶν αἰνιγμάτων ἀποκαλυψαμένη τηλαυγῶς ἡμῖν ἀναδείχθητι καὶ τὰς νοεράς ἡμῶν ὄψεις ἐνιαίου καὶ ἀπερικαλύπτου φωτὸς ἀποπλήρωσον. “Let us, then, as I said, leave behind these things, beautifully depicted upon the entrance of the innermost shrine, as being sufficient for those, who are yet incomplete for contemplation, and let us proceed from the effects to the causes; and then, Jesus lighting the way, we shall view our holy Synaxis, and the comely contemplation of things intelligible, which makes radiantly manifest the blessed beauty of the archetypes.” Cf. also *DN* 1, 5 (539D).

85. *CH* 15, 1 (328A): Φέρε δὴ λοιπὸν ἀναπαύοντες ἡμῶν εἰ δοκεῖ τὸ νοερὸν ὄμμα τῆς περὶ τὰς ἐνίκας καὶ ὑψηλὰς θεωρίας ἀγγελοπρεποῦς συντονίας ἐπὶ τὸ διαιρετὸν καὶ πολυμερές πλάτος τῆς πολυειδοῦς τῶν ἀγγελικῶν μορφοποιῶν ποικιλίας καταβάντες πάλιν ἀπ’ αὐτῶν ὡς ἀπ’ εἰκόνων ἐπὶ τὴν ἀπλότητα τῶν οὐρανίων νοῶν ἀναλυτικῶς ἀνακάμπωμεν. “Now then, let us bring our intellectual vision to rest from the exertion of high and lofty contemplation befitting the angels and descend to the separated and manifold variety of the angelic forms and then rise up in an analytical way from the same, as from images, to the simplicity of the heavenly mind.”

86. The word *ἀναλυτικῶς* appears only one other time in the *Corpus Dionysiacum*, *Ep.* 7, 2 (1080D), where it is used to describe a possible reason for the miraculous “epistrophic” return of the sun “retrogressively” back upon its original course. In any case, both uses appear to suggest some sort of “return.” Luibheid makes this explicit when he translates the *CH* 15 use as “by retracing” rather than, as in the Parker translation, “analytically.”

87. Cf. *Ep.* 9 (1104A–1113C).

entities in the world are not mere references that become dispensable once they accomplish the act of referring. Rather, each material entity communicates beauty precisely in and through its own ontological constitution. The anagogical power this includes does indeed incorporate a momentum that prompts a horizontal movement between objects along with a vertical movement toward loftier realities. But the material entities are never merely pointers with no significance of their own since these horizontal and vertical momentums are given and sustained by them.

The symbolic sense of Dionysian knowledge becomes most clear when he makes use of art as a *topos* for expressing the cognitive mediation of the divine communication. Using the artist as an exemplar of how human activity ought to be carried out, Dionysius writes the following:

And, as in the case of sensible images, if the artist looks without distraction upon the archetypal form, not distracted by sight of anything else, or in any way divided in attention, he will duplicate, if I may so speak, the very person that is being sketched, whoever he may be, and will show the reality in the likeness, and the archetype in the image, and each in each, save the difference of substance; thus, to copyists who love the beautiful in mind, the persistent and unflinching contemplation of the sweet-savored and hidden beauty will confer the unerring and most Godlike appearance. Naturally, then, the divine copyists, who unflinchingly mould their own intellectual contemplation to the superessentially sweet and contemplated comeliness, do none of their divinely imitated virtues “to be seen of men” as the Divine text expresses it; but reverently gaze upon the most holy things of the Church, veiled in the Divine Muron as in a figure.<sup>88</sup>

Two types of artistic activity can be detected here, which in many ways correspond to a distinction within contemporary thought between the idol and the icon.<sup>89</sup> The first neglects to keep in mind that although the

88. *EH* 4, III, 1 (473C): Καὶ καθάπερ ἐπὶ τῶν αἰσθητῶν εἰκόνων εἰ πρὸς τὸ ἀρχέτυπον εἶδος ὁ γραφεὺς ἀκλινῶς εἰσορᾷ πρὸς μηδὲν ἄλλο τῶν ὀρατῶν ἀνθελκόμενος ἢ κατὰ τι μεριζόμενος αὐτὸν ἐκείνῳ ὅστις ἐστὶ τὸν γραφόμενον εἰ θέμις εἰπεῖν διπλασιάσει καὶ δείξει τὸν ἐκάτερον ἐν ἐκατέρῳ παρὰ τὸ τῆς οὐσίας διάφορον, οὕτω τοῖς φιλοκάλοις ἐν νῶ γραφεῦσιν ἢ πρὸς τὸ εὐᾶδες καὶ κρύφιον κάλλος ἀτενῆς καὶ ἀπαρέγκλιτος θεωρία τὸ ἀπλανὲς δωρήσεται καὶ θεοειδέστατον ἵνδαλμα. Εἰκότως οὖν πρὸς τὴν ὑπερουσίας εὐᾶδη καὶ νοητὴν εὐπρέπειαν οἱ θεῖοι γραφεῖς τὸ νοερὸν ἑαυτῶν ἀμεταστρέπτως εἰδοποιούντες οὐδεμίαν δρῶσι τῶν ἐν αὐτοῖς θεομιμήτων ἀρετῶν «Εἰς τὸ θεαθῆναι» κατὰ τὸ λόγιον «τοῖς ἀνθρώποις» ἀλλ' ἱερῶς ἐποπτεύουσιν ὡς ἐν εἰκόνι τῷ θεῷ μύρω τὰ τῆς ἐκκλησίας ἱερώτατα περιεκαλυμμένα.

89. I have in mind the distinction as explicated in the work of Marion, *God Without Being*, esp. ch. 1.

## Part Two

image may capture the archetype with such accuracy there will always remain a crucial, even infinite, distance of substance. In neglecting this truth, this first kind of art produces an *idol* that wholly absorbs the gaze of the onlooker, obscuring the surplus beyond its visible limitations. In this case, it is the object of artistic attention itself that becomes the “distrac-tion” (κλινω̄ς). It diverts the gaze from its true focus upon what is beyond every object—namely, the divine plenitude that, as such, continually and perpetually attracts the desiring gaze of cognition; in other words, the thing’s beauty.

The second kind of art overcomes idolatry because it bears in mind the substantial distinction between image and archetype, or symbol and plenitude. It casts the gaze “without distraction” (ἀκλινω̄ς) at the arche-typal form, at the divine promise of determinate plenitude. Consequently, this second type of art, like an *icon*, remains ontologically open even as it gives closure to concrete, singular forms. This openness arises out of and expresses, in Dionysius’s view, a cognitive love for the beautiful—a love that the beautiful itself rewards with the gift of divine creativity. As he himself puts it, (to reiterate a sentiment from the above cited passage), “the persistent and unflinching contemplation of the sweet-savored and hid-den beauty will confer the unerring and most Godlike appearance.” It is by remaining open to beauty as the divine plenitude, the universal cause, that one merits this reward because the universal cause and divine plenitude is itself the intended gift given to the artist in and through the artistic act.

This contention can be further verified by a passage in the *Di-vine Names* where, making reference to a certain Clement<sup>90</sup> and also to Scripture,<sup>91</sup> Dionysius expounds on the nature of an exemplar:

And although the philosopher Clement thinks that among the beings in existence, “exemplar” should be said of the highest in relation to something, his account proceeds in itself not through the principal, perfect and simple names. Even if we concede this, to be rightly said, the assertion of scripture must be called to mind that “I have not shown these things to you that you might follow after them,” but so that through the analogical

90. Rorem maintains that this Clement could be either Clement the Apostolic Father (ca. 100) or Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150–215), *Pseudo-Dionysius the Complete Works*, 102n186. Rolt, on the other hand, suggests only that it is the Bishop of Rome (ca. 95) who is also the author of a well-known Epistle to the Corinthians (*Dionysius the Areopogite*, 142n386).

91. *Hos* 13:4 (LXX).

knowledge of these things, we might be led, as far as possible, to the Universal Cause of all things.<sup>92</sup>

The explanation that Dionysius puts forth here occurs in the context of a discussion as to whether or not “exemplar” (*παραδείγματα*) is an appropriate name of the divine. This becomes a necessary point since, in the same chapter, Dionysius has just finished explaining how being is the first of God’s gifts, through which “God is celebrated in a more excellent manner above all things.”<sup>93</sup> Dionysius, therefore, must obviate any concept through which being might be subordinately mediated. It would be inaccurate, according to Dionysius’s account, to understand God as the exemplar of Being since this would imply either that “exemplar” is a higher, and hence prior, category than being, or that being is a univocal substrate in which God holds the highest position. Instead, even the name exemplar *qua* name must also be applied to God.

The consequences that this has with respect to beauty, alluded to in Dionysius’s explanation, are significant. All created entities are images of exemplars, which reside in the divine plenitude of intelligibility, that is to say, in divine beauty.<sup>94</sup> Insofar as an image implicates its exemplar in its act of appearing, it risks generating a simulacrum, or idol, of exemplarity. Absorbing the gaze into the exemplar it represents, the image may cause the gaze to lose sight of exemplarity *qua* exemplarity closing it within this particular exemplar. But Dionysius, referring to the admonition in Hosea (“I have not shown you these things that you might follow after them”), explains that this is not what images, or symbols, are intended to do. Rather, in implicating an exemplar, every image and symbol *per se* conveys not

92. DN 5, 9 (824D): Εἰ δὲ ὁ φιλόσοφος ἀξιοῖ Κλήμησ καὶ πρὸς τι παραδείγματα λέγεσθαι τὰ ἐν τοῖς οὖσιν ἀρχηγικώτερα, πρόεισι μὲν οὐ διὰ κυρίων καὶ παντελῶν καὶ ἀπλῶν ὀνομάτων ὁ λόγος αὐτῶ. Συγχωροῦντας δὲ καὶ τοῦτο ὀρθῶς λέγεσθαι τῆς θεολογίας μνημονευτέον φασκούσης ὅτι «Οὐ παρέδειξά σοι αὐτὰ τοῦ πορευέσθαι ὀπίσω αὐτῶν», ἀλλ’ ἵνα διὰ τῆς τούτων ἀναλογικῆς γνώσεως ἐπὶ τὴν πάντων αἰτίαν, ὡς οἴοι τέ ἐσμεν, ἀναχθῶμεν.

93. DN 5, 5 (820B): Πάντων οὖν εἰκότως τῶν ἄλλων ἀρχηγικώτερον ὡς ἂν ὁ θεὸς ἐκ τῆς πρεσβυτέρας τῶν ἄλλων αὐτοῦ δωρεῶν ὑμνεῖται.

94. Consider in particular DN 1, 7 (597A): Πάντα δὲ ἀπλῶς καὶ ἀπεριορίστως ἐν ἑαυτῇ τὰ ὄντα προείληφε ταῖς παντελέσι τῆς μιᾶς αὐτῆς καὶ παναιτίου προνοίας ἀγαθότησι καὶ ἐκ τῶν ὄντων ἀπάντων ἐναρμονίως ὑμνεῖται καὶ ὀνομάζεται. “For it is not only cause of sustenance, or life, or perfection—so that from this or that forethought alone the Goodness above Name should be named, but it previously *embraced in itself all things existing, absolutely and without limit*, by the complete benefactions of His one and all-creating forethought, and by all created things in joint accord It is celebrated and named.” Emphasis added.

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only the exemplar itself of which it is an image or symbol, but also *exemplarity as such*, that is to say, “subsistent exemplarity.”<sup>95</sup> It is this “subsistent exemplarity,” surrounding every image and exemplar, or every symbol and plenitude of intelligibility communicated in the symbol, that accounts for the divine presence.<sup>96</sup> Moreover, it is this dynamic that accounts for the analogical character of all knowledge. In knowing an object, which is always an image of an exemplar residing in the divine plenitude, the knower opens herself to knowledge of the divine as the divine gives itself in and through this particular object.<sup>97</sup> Although the knower is never forced to free her gaze from the confines of the object to the surplus beyond the object, there is within her nature, indeed all nature, a spontaneous, even exigent, impulse toward this plenitude.

In the case of creatures endowed with intellect, this impulse is expressed in every artistic activity, which is why art serves as the locus of analogical cognition. Dionysius himself does not use the term “analogical” in this specific regard. Instead he speaks of *dissimilar similitudes* (*ἀνομοίους ὁμοιότητας*), a concept noted earlier, when discussing how human depiction of material things can elevate the mind to the realm where the plenitude of intelligibility descends to saturate the depiction:

It is then possible to frame in one’s mind good contemplations from everything, and to depict, from material things, the aforesaid dissimilar similitudes, both for the intelligible and the intelligent; since the intelligent holds in a different fashion things which are attributed differently to sensible things.<sup>98</sup>

*Dissimilar similitudes* name an artistic *topos* in Dionysius expressing the way that forms and concepts derived from artistic activity signify “not what is, but what is not.”<sup>99</sup> It is a mode of signification that acknowledges

95. There is here a correspondence to Dionysius’ account of the dual communication that takes place in all acts of knowledge described in *DN* 7, 1 (865A–865D). All knowable entities communicate not only a higher, spiritual reality, but also a moment of unity with the divine plenitude. Here, this idea is conveyed insofar as an entity, through the act of the image or symbol, communicates an exemplar (which represents the higher, spiritual reality) and exemplarity as such (which represents the moment of unity with the divine plenitude).

96. *DN* 5, 5 (820A).

97. *DN* 5, 7 (821B); 7, 3 (869D, 872A).

98. *CH* 2, 4 (141D): “Ἔστιν οὖν ἐκ πάντων αὐτῶν ἐπινοῆσαι καλὰς θεωρίας καὶ τοῖς νοητοῖς τε καὶ νοεροῖς ἐκ τῶν ὑλαίων ἀναπλάσαι τὰς λεγομένας ἀνομοίους ὁμοιότητας, ἐτέρω τρόπῳ τῶν νοερῶν ἐχόντων ἢ τοῖς αἰσθητοῖς ἐτεροίως ἀπονεύμεναι.”

99. *CH* 2, 3 (140C).

in its very constitution how all affirmations finally fall short of that which they seek to affirm, while all negations remain accurate in their act of negating. The divine plenitude of intelligibility is communicated by means of *dissimilar similitudes*, differences conveying unity, or, likenesses that are constituted by something unlike that to which their likeness corresponds. The dissimilarity allows the surplus of ontological content communicated in the similarity to manifest itself all the more. Hence, the dissimilarity becomes a kind of energy of transcendence by which one may move ever higher into the excess of ontological content conveyed in the similarity.

These *dissimilar similitudes*, therefore, express an analogical principle present in every form of art, where “art” is taken in the classical sense to refer broadly to all human acts of determination. Although it is not explicit in Dionysius, by bringing together the preceding it becomes possible to suggest something like the following. Every act of determination by which human cognition mediates with the natural world is an act that illuminates the plenitude of being—this is, in general, how the ancient world tended to understand *techné*; what today is primarily referred to as “art.” In illuminating this plenitude, even if not self-consciously intended, art is always and everywhere a manifestation of beauty; for beauty is the plenitude of intelligibility beyond discursive determination whether conceptual or material. Beauty is the excess of the icon that is ever surrounding the idol, willingly sacrificing itself to the limits of the idol’s caesura.

Dionysius applies this *dissimilar similitude* schematic as a *topos* to the activity of the biblical authors. It is through this analogical principle that these authors are able to demonstrate the superiority of the heavenly order. “Thus the sacred descriptions of the Scripture Writers,” writes the Areopagite, “honor and do not expose to shame the Heavenly Orders when they make them known by dissimilar pictorial forms, and demonstrate through these their supermundane superiority over all material things.”<sup>100</sup> For Dionysius the only way to accurately depict the communication of transcendent plenitude is to somehow intermediate, or hold in a tensile unity, the plenitude itself and its determinate communication. As alluded to above, the plenitude is the ground of similarity though in a transcendent mode, exceeding all determinate communications. The dissimilarity is the *sine qua non* of the similarity, enabling the similarity to show itself as “other” (a requirement of all showing) by means of the interval established

100. CH 2, 3 (141AB): Τιμῶσι τοιγαροῦν, οὐκ αἰσχυροῦσι ἀποπληροῦσι τὰς οὐρανίας διακοσμήσεις αἱ τῶν λογίων ἱερογραφίαι ταῖς ἀνομοίοις αὐτὰς μορφοποιαῖς ἐκφαίνουσαι καὶ διὰ τούτων ἀποδεικνύουσαι τῶν ὑλικῶν ἀπάντων ὑπερκοσμίως ἐκβεβηκυίας.

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by the distance of the dissimilarity. Symbolism as a mode of cognition requires both similarity and dissimilarity in order to function as a mediation of divine communication.

Inasmuch as Dionysius orients the *dissimilar similitude* schematic to the event of scriptural representation, it applies *a fortiori* to the conceptual level. It reveals how the determination of divine plenitude in and through discursive, abstract concepts remains an “open phenomenon” through the artistic act. The plenitude of intelligibility that resides in the divine super-essence does indeed give itself over to discursive, abstract, conceptually determined patterns of thought. In Dionysius’s view, however, the divine super-essence as beauty is pouring itself out so generously that it gives itself even beyond these modes as a form of intelligibility that, though exceeding discursive, abstract, conceptual determination, is native to artistic mediation. As a mode of cognition, symbolism inhabits artistic activity allowing the beauty of the divine plenitude to communicate itself more fully than it does through discursive conceptualization.

Beauty as a divine name in Dionysius identifies the divine perfection as a plenitude of intelligibility. In its excess it evokes a way of knowing that *inclusively* transcends “normal” modes of intellectual cognition. For this reason, Dionysius’s approach to knowledge includes both a discursive, conceptual modality as well as a modality that transcends discursion and conceptualization. Dionysius accounts for this second mode in his epistemological symbolism. Through various artistic dynamics like *dissimilar similitudes*, symbolism mediates the communication of beauty—that is to say, mediates the communication of the divine plenitude of intelligibility.

With the focus on intelligibility, the examination of beauty as a divine name has already transitioned from God in himself to God in his communicability. The initial stirrings of God’s call, or *kalos*, begin to take shape in the intelligibility of created things. For Dionysius, each thing created can serve as a contemplative path into the divine life itself. Therefore, the examination may now fittingly turn toward this second dimension of beauty as a divine name.

## Conclusion

This chapter has laid out the first of two primary aspects of beauty as a divine name in Dionysius. These two aspects derive from his transfiguration of the two Parmenidean hypotheses—the One is (i.e., the “One”) and the One is not (i.e., *nous*)—into two features of the one biblical God.

The One is (the One) becomes God as he is in himself while the One is not (*nous*) becomes God in his self-communication. Dionysius's own division between beauty and the beautiful that participates beauty indicates the way in which beauty as a theonym corresponds to the transfigured Parmenidean distinction. When divided according to this scheme, beauty corresponds to both God in himself and God in his communicative self-disclosure setting the structure for the examination of beauty as a divine name.

Discerning how best to examine these two dimensions of beauty as a divine name admittedly required an interpretive strategy. However, this strategy was drawn from the text itself. Based upon the sequence of divine names in chapter 4, the examination began with beauty's relation to the good, then to light, and finally to intelligibility. The one feature that appeared common to each of these was the way in which each exhibited the transcendent plenitude of the divine being. It is in beauty where this transcendent plenitude reaches its most determinate or concrete modality. Hence, beauty was first examined insofar as it corresponds to the divine as a transcendent plenitude. This meant examining beauty as a theonym from the way in which it relates to the good, to light, and to intelligibility.

What emerges from this examination is the idea that in Dionysius the good in itself remains rather abstract and general, or perhaps "hyper-determinate" (as in possessing a super-abundance of determinate promise), as that which all things desire. This desire is elicited insofar as the good becomes more concretely manifest as light, providing the conditions in which the good may become more determinate for the sake of the recipient's desire. The condition by which the good becomes more determinate means that the good also becomes more intelligible. But insofar as this intelligibility communicates the transcendent plenitude of the divine, it is communicated in the form of symbolism. It was within this emanational scheme where beauty, insofar as it is a divine name, was best seen to identify the divine transcendent plenitude. In the following chapter, beauty will be examined as it corresponds to the divine self-communication that is the result or consequence of this scheme.

# 5

## Beauty as a Divine Name in Dionysius the Areopagite II

### *Beauty as a Principle of Determination*

AS THE LAST CHAPTER ATTEMPTED TO EXPLAIN, BEAUTY AS A DIVINE name in Dionysius identifies the divine in itself as a transcendent plenitude. As the good, God is an endless diffusion of an intensive depth of being. For Dionysius, the diffusion of this intensive depth of being begins to take manifest form in and as light, which ceaselessly radiates its luminous content into endless luminaries without ever ceasing to be a single, unified source of luminous content. As the good diffuses its light it grants the conditions and content of intelligibility as it concretizes itself more and more into determinable content. In this way, light opens to being's depth as the beauty that gives perceptible form. For this reason, God is named beauty insofar as God is a transcendent plenitude of all intelligible and determinable content. Reflecting God himself, beauty in this first, transcendent sense is beyond all eventual determinate form that intelligibility will come to take. God as beauty is the utter, infinite excess of all intelligibility and determinable form pre-held in the unified, intensive depths of divine being.

This chapter examines the second aspect of beauty as a divine name, which identifies the divine in its act of self-communication. Insofar as beauty corresponds to the divine in its act of communication, it identifies the divine causal power as a principle of determination. This identification derives from beauty's correspondence to the divine as a transcendent plenitude as this plenitude pours forth the excess of its goodness in its act of creative—and so volitional (as will be seen)—emanation.

## Beauty as a Principle of Determination

The rudimentary passage in which the identification of beauty with a divine causal power is articulated can be found in *Divine Names* 4, 7:

From this beautiful (comes) being to all existing things—that each is beautiful in its own proper order; and by reason of the beautiful are the adaptations of all things, and friendships, and inter-communions, and by the beautiful all things are made one, and the beautiful is origin of all things, as a creating cause, both by moving the whole and holding it together by the love of its own peculiar beauty; and end of all things, and beloved, as final cause (for all things exist for the sake of the beautiful) and exemplary (cause), because all things are determined according to It.<sup>1</sup>

This passage echoes significant features of both Platonic and Aristotelian dimensions of beauty. Following Plato, Dionysius maintains that beauty is the ontological origin and end of all things. He therefore identifies beauty as an absolute principle of unity.<sup>2</sup> Aristotle also recognizes beauty in this respect.<sup>3</sup> Where Aristotle limits beauty's originating power to "many" things rather than to "all," however, Dionysius does not concede such limitations. Dionysius also draws together beauty's causality with the biblical notion of "creation," which he characterizes as a power that "moves the whole" and "holds the whole together" by eliciting the desire of love in all the entities it creates. Beauty in this regard is also a final cause insofar as, by eliciting the love of all things, it establishes the *telos* for these things in its transcendent plenitude. When this *telos* is configured from the perspective of beauty, however, it is an "end" or "goal" that is always already present in some manner. Thus, beauty is also considered an exemplary cause insofar as its creative causal power remains continually present in things as they more and more become a determined "this."

In establishing beauty as a principle of determination, Dionysius reunites the beautiful and the good and emphasizes the universal nature of its causality: "Wherefore, also, the beautiful is identical with the good,

1. *DN* 4, 7 (704BC): Ἐκ τοῦ καλοῦ τούτου πᾶσι τοῖς οὐσι τὸ εἶναι κατὰ τὸν οἰκείον λόγον ἕκαστα καλά, καὶ διὰ τὸ καλὸν αἰ πάντων ἐφαρμογαὶ καὶ φιλίαι καὶ κοινωναί, καὶ τῷ καλῷ τὰ πάντα ἤνωται, καὶ ἀρχὴ πάντων τὸ καλὸν ὡς ποιητικὸν αἴτιον καὶ κινουῦν τὰ ὅλα καὶ συνέχον τῷ τῆς οἰκειᾶς καλλονῆς ἔρωτι καὶ πέρας πάντων καὶ ἀγαπητὸν ὡς τελικὸν αἴτιον, τοῦ καλοῦ γὰρ ἕνεκα πάντα γίγνεται, καὶ παραδειγματικόν, ὅτι κατ' αὐτὸ πάντα ἀφορίζεται.

2. *Symposium* 210a 4ff.

3. *Metaphysics* 1013a 23.

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because all things aspire to the beautiful and the good on every account, and there is no existing thing which does not participate in the beautiful and the good.”<sup>4</sup> It is important to note here that Dionysius’s assertion is metaphysical rather than aesthetic in the modern sense; that all things participate in the beautiful is not intended to describe their outward attractiveness but rather their ontological constitutions. This is made clear as he continues his exposition:

This, the one good and beautiful, is uniquely cause of all the many things beautiful and good. From this are all the substantial beginnings of things existing, the unions, the distinctions, the identities, the diversities, the similarities, the dissimilarities, the communions of the contraries, the commingling of things unified, the providences of the superior, the mutual cohesions of those of the same rank; the attentions of the more needy, the protecting and immoveable abidings and stabilities of their whole selves and, on the other hand, the communions of all things among all, in a manner peculiar to each, and adaptations and unmingled friendships and harmonies of the whole, the blendings in the whole, and the undissolved connections of existing things, the never-failing successions of the generations, all rests and movements, of the minds, of the souls, of the bodies.<sup>5</sup>

As a principle of determination, beauty generates the origin of substance, or what he refers to as “the substantial beginnings.” Substance for Dionysius is a phenomenon that involves unions, distinctions, identities, diversities, similarities, etc. Although Dionysius does not provide an intricate metaphysical explanation of “substance” the above passage indicates that it is a metaphysically complex notion with origins rooted in a community of relations. A substance in this sense is a unity in plurality, an idea he no doubt discovers in Plotinus’s doctrine that *nous*, the intellectual principle,

4. DN 4, 7 (704C): Διὸ καὶ ταῦτόν ἐστι τὰγαθῶ τὸ καλόν, ὅτι τοῦ καλοῦ καὶ ἀγαθοῦ κατὰ πᾶσαν αἰτίαν πάντα ἐφίεται, καὶ οὐκ ἔστι τι τῶν ὄντων, ὃ μὴ μετέχει τοῦ καλοῦ καὶ ἀγαθοῦ.

5. DN 4, 7 (704CD): Τοῦτο τὸ ἐν ἀγαθὸν καὶ καλὸν ἐνικῶς ἐστι πάντων τῶν πολλῶν καλῶν καὶ ἀγαθῶν αἴτιον. Ἐκ τούτου πᾶσαι τῶν ὄντων αἰ οὐσιώδεις ὑπάρξεις, αἰ ἐνώσεις, αἰ διακρίσεις, αἰ ταυτότητες, αἰ ἑτερότητες, αἰ ὁμοιότητες, αἰ ἀνομοιότητες, αἰ κοινωνίαι τῶν ἐναντίων, αἰ ἀσυμμιξίαι τῶν ἡνωμένων, αἰ πρόνοιαι τῶν ὑπερτέρων, αἰ ἀλληλουχίαι τῶν ὁμοστοίχων, αἰ ἐπιστροφαι τῶν καταδεεστέρων, αἰ πάντων ἑαυτῶν φρουρητικαὶ καὶ ἀμετακίνητοι μοναὶ καὶ ἰδρύσεις, καὶ αὖθις αἰ πάντων ἐν πᾶσιν οἰκείως ἐκάστῳ κοινωνίαι καὶ ἐφαρμογαὶ καὶ ἀσύγχυτοι φιλίαι καὶ ἁρμονίαι τοῦ παντός, αἰ ἐν τῷ παντὶ συγκράσεις, αἰ ἀδιάλυτοι συνοχαὶ τῶν ὄντων, αἰ ἀνέκλειπτοι διαδοχαὶ τῶν γινομένων, αἰ στάσεις πᾶσαι καὶ αἰ κινήσεις αἰ τῶν νοῶν, αἰ τῶν ψυχῶν, αἰ τῶν σωματῶν.

is a unity in plurality and therefore identical to beauty.<sup>6</sup> In this sense, beauty corresponds to *nous* primarily as a principle of exemplarity, a surplus of all that is, was, or will be. However, by transferring the Plotinian *nous*, the intellectual principle, to God himself, Dionysius transforms beauty into a causal principle of determination. As the above excerpt maintains, this accounts for the way in which beauty's unity in plurality enters the very constitution of all created entities. In being created, that is to say, as created beings—beings whose ontological actuality is given through a divinely creative act—every entity is constituted as a unified “this” that is given through a plurality, or community. As created, these entities become more and more established in their mutual relations, giving rise to an ontological principle of hierarchy.

The ensuing examination of beauty as a principle of determination follows the perspective of these features noted above. First, beauty's causal power is examined from within Dionysius's reconfiguration of Neoplatonic emanation. In this reconfiguration, the natural necessitarianism of Neoplatonic emanation is married to the biblical principle of a freely willed movement of creation.<sup>7</sup> When examined through the lens of beauty, creative emanation identifies God's sharing of his transcendent plenitude with every created entity in the coming to be of each entity's unique, singular, and particular determination. Second, beauty's causal power is examined from the way in which its emanative act gives rise to a unity in plurality. The sharing of every entity in God's transcendent plenitude in their coming to be more and more determinate means that a plurality of participants are each given a unique share in the plenitude that unites them. The particularity that marks every entity coming to determination is radical in the sense that it is “rooted” in the more primordially shared and unifying transcendent plenitude. Third, beauty is examined insofar as this sharing in divine plenitude as a unity in plurality generates an ontological hierarchy that, in Dionysius, becomes the very image of divine beauty. This is not an exclusive, and so oppressively evaluative, hierarchy, where the higher levels lord it over the lower levels who are made subservient. Rather, it is a “sacred ordering” that alone enables the communication of divine beauty in terms of both its unity and plurality—the

6. Plotinus also identifies the intellectual principle, *nous*, as a unity in plurality and maintains this unity in plurality as grounds both for its being the first emanation and for its identity as beauty. See *Enneads* 4.8.3; 5.1.4; 6.2.21; 6.5.6.

7. On this, see also te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas*, 102–8.

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unifying foundation emanated in and through each unique and particular participant for the sake of the other participants as other.

### *Beauty as Emanation*

Dionysius adopts the Neoplatonic triad of *monos*, *prodos* and *epistrophe* to express the creative power of divine causality. As a foundational principle for emanation, this triad marks Neoplatonism from the beginning, though it receives specific articulation in Proclus's *Elements of Theology*. Although in Neoplatonism emanation identifies the natural and necessary diffusion of the good, in Dionysius this natural and necessary diffusion is coupled with the biblical account of divine volition. Moreover, while Neoplatonic emanation posits a sequence wherein each emanated level is directly dependent upon its preceding level and therefore only indirectly relates to the source itself, Dionysian emanation establishes the causal dependency directly on God. Beauty's causal power as a principle of determination contributes in significant ways to these reconfigurations of emanation.

In Proclus's *Elements of Theology*, beauty does not specifically play a primary role in the structure of emanation though the entire schematic bespeaks an expression of being's call, or "*kalos*." In propositions 25 through 39, Proclus outlines his conception of emanation, wherein are found a few important features that correspond to Dionysian emanation and its relation to beauty.

The first concerns the plenitude of the productive source, the *monos*.<sup>8</sup> For Proclus, emanation is grounded most fundamentally in the fact that the productive source overflows in its fullness giving rise to the various emanated phenomena. The significance of this is that, for Proclus, emanation does not involve a projection of a derivative outward into a space of ontological indeterminacy, but rather a distillation of a fullness as the coming to determination of the proceeding entity. "For the product is not a parceling-out of the producer," explains Proclus, "nor is it a transformation" of the producer.<sup>9</sup> This is due to the fact that "the producer" remains steadfast in its own ontological constitution (*monos*) while emanating derivative entities. This point cannot be overstated: the *monos* of the triad *monos*, *prodos*, and *epistrophe*, is a necessary dimension of emanation's

8. Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, props. 25, 27.

9. Ibid., prop. 27: οὐ γὰρ ἀπομερισμός ἐστι τοῦ παράγοντος τὸ παραγόμενον· οὐδὲ γὰρ γενέσει τοῦτο προσῆκεν, οὐδὲ τοῖς γεννητικοῖς αἰτίοις. οὐδὲ μετάβασις· οὐ γὰρ ὕλη γίνεταί τοῦ προϊόντος.

triadic structure, since it identifies the ontological surplus in which, and out of which, emanation takes place. Or to put it more succinctly without the *monos*, there simply is no *prodos* or *epistrophe*.

A second feature concerns the way in which “all procession is accomplished through a likeness of the secondary to the primary.”<sup>10</sup> Part of this likeness includes a share in the plenitude of the source, which in turn bequeaths the productive power of emanation to the secondary thing. This is established in proposition 30 where Proclus explains that an entity that is produced both remains in the productive cause and proceeds from it simultaneously. Remaining in the producer, the procession shares an identity with it, while its procession establishes its difference; two relations—identity and difference—that are inseparable.<sup>11</sup>

Finally, it is this inseparability between identity and difference that enables the proceeding entity to revert back upon the producer. Proclus configures this reverting act in terms of appetite for the well-being that is provided by the producer, implicitly linking reversion both to desire and to the good.<sup>12</sup> Emanation as Proclus conceives it, then, is a process whereby a plenitudinous source, remaining steadfast in its own plenitude of being (*monos*), emanates a derivative entity through a process that distills the plenitude of the source. This grants the emanated entity a share in the plenitude itself while simultaneously establishing its difference as it proceeds (*prodos*). But insofar as it shares the source’s plenitude in a limited mode, it reverts through increasing desire for that plenitude (*epistrophe*). This is a process, Proclus adds, that occurs cyclically<sup>13</sup> as the emanated entity, in its becoming determinate, remains (*monos*) in the cause, proceeds from it (*prodos*) and reverts upon it (*epistrophe*).<sup>14</sup>

10. Ibid., prop. 29: Πᾶσα πρόδος δι’ ὁμοιότητος ἀποτελεῖται τῶν δευτέρων πρὸς τὰ πρῶτα.

11. Cf. Ibid., prop. 30.

12. Cf. Ibid.

13. Cf. Ibid. 33.

14. Cf. Ibid., prop. 35. The influence of a Hegelian interpretation has led some to misconstrue Procline emanation as if it expressed a prototype of Hegel’s God. E. R. Dodds, for example, in his translation of the *Elements of Theology*, proposes the following reading of prop. 35: “Combining the results reached in the preceding group of propositions, Proclus now affirms as a trinity-in-trinity, the three moments of the Neoplatonic world-process, immanence in the cause, procession from the cause, and reversion to the cause—or identity, difference, and the overcoming of difference by identity. This triad is one of the governing principles of Proclus’ dialectic,” *Elements of Theology*, 220–21. While the first triad in Dodd’s summary is indeed a “governing principle” of Proclus’s account, the reformulation of this triad in such stark Hegelian

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Although only a few passages in the *Elements of Theology* make specific reference to beauty, they are not insignificant in terms of establishing beauty's causal power of determination. The most relevant reference is found in proposition 63 where Proclus explains how that which does not itself participate in anything generates a twofold mode of participation: one mode in which things always participate in it, and a second mode in which things only occasionally participate in it.<sup>15</sup> Beauty is named—along with similitude, permanence, and sameness—as an imparticipable that grants both permanent and occasional participation to other entities. A second passage, proposition 22, refers to beauty as one of the primary subsisting forms that, as such, can only be one *per se* rather than many. Both references to beauty display a subscription to the Plotinian view that beauty is other to the One as the first emanation, as well as the Platonic doctrine that posits a plurality of subsisting forms. When Dionysius transfers beauty directly to the divine, however, these observations contribute to the way he understands beauty's role in the divine activity of creative emanation.

The biblical account of divine causality, that is to say of creation, insofar as it refers both directly and indirectly to beauty, furnishes Dionysius with the capacity to see beauty as a divine principle of determination and to incorporate this vision into his reconfiguration of emanation. Although there are a multitude of passages that mention beauty throughout Scripture, a few of these stand out with respect to beauty's relation to God's act of creation. The *Genesis* account of creation establishes the way in which the divine self-diffusion derives from a consciously willed act. While it is difficult to know how Dionysius would have read Genesis,<sup>16</sup> given the

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overtone—identity, difference and *the overcoming of difference by identity*—appears to be an entirely inferential maneuver that distorts Proclus's meaning. Any "overcoming of difference" would entail (1) an indeterminate space beyond both source and emanated entity so as to provide the conditions for identity's movement of self-transcendence in its act of overcoming difference, and (2) an ultimately incomplete configuration of the original identity. But Proclus is clear that emanation requires not only that the source be complete, but that it be overly-complete, or "more than full," in order to generate any derivative. The *monos*, or "remaining," for Proclus is not indeterminate but rather a plenitude. Dodd's interpretation is a poignant example of how neglect for the importance of *monos* leads to distorted configurations of Neoplatonic emanation even for notable classicists.

15. Cf. Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, prop. 63.

16. It is possible that the hexaemeral tradition and the tradition of Genesis commentary, especially as it is found among the Cappadocian Fathers, could have influenced Dionysius. But given the fact that both traditions are fairly well established methods of interpretation and commentary, without any specific reference to them in

lack of any direct attention to it in his corpus, it is clear that at the forefront of his understanding of any doctrine of creation stands the Pauline anagogical principle expressed in Romans 1:20: “Ever since the creation of the world, God’s invisible attributes of eternal power and divinity have been able to be understood and perceived in what he has made.” Indeed, the way that Dionysius understands creation’s relationship to its divine source begins and is everywhere imbued with this anagogical principle. Every created entity is a doorway into the hidden divine substance. Divine substance, therefore, is perpetually calling every entity into the light and beauty of perceptive form.

When coupled with the Neoplatonic notion that the good of its nature necessarily diffuses itself, the biblical creation account of divine volition is associated with the illumination of natural forms and, therefore, called beauty. It is possible to discover texts throughout Scripture that perhaps contribute to Dionysius’s understanding in this regard. The *Book of Wisdom* contributes several passages to this idea, passages that prove to have enduring influence well into the high Middle Ages. One of the more well-known passages declares how God orders all things “by measure, number and weight” (11:20) indicating particular properties of the divine causal principle. A lengthier passage (13:1–9) speaks of those who mistake beautiful things for gods and admonishes the believer to teach that the “Author of beauty” creates all beautiful things. It explains how the beauty of created things provides a “corresponding perception of their Creator” but it also expresses understanding for those who, while seeking God, are led astray by the power of beauty. Beyond these, several other passages—e.g., the *Psalms* (e.g., 8:5, 48:2, 96:6) and *Ecclesiastes* (40:22, 43:1, 43:9)—make reference to beauty as it relates to the power of creation.<sup>17</sup> Again, it remains difficult to know with any certainty what scriptural passages influence what aspects of Dionysius’s particular doctrine of creation (if indeed one may speak of such a doctrine in Dionysius). But it is certain that Scripture is his authority, and that the Pauline principle of anagogy serves as a primary lens through which Scripture is read.

Therefore, it can be said that Dionysius’s own account of emanation reflects both Procline and biblical characteristics. Like Proclus, Dionysius emphasizes the plenitude of the divine source that, by remaining steadfast in its own plenitude, establishes the conditions wherein emanation takes the Dionysian corpus, any correspondence remains largely speculative.

17. For a helpful account of possible and actual scriptural references, see the *Index to Biblical Allusions and Quotations* in the translation of the Dionysian Corpus by Colm Luibheid and Paul Rorem, *Classics of Western Spirituality*, 294ff.

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place as the diffusion and distillation of its own goodness. Following the biblical account, however, this diffusion occurs both “in” and “through” the beauty of divine plenitude, which emanates all things directly, even down to the slightest and most insignificant entity:

For, both from it and through it is both essence and every life, and both of mind and soul and every nature, the minutiae, the equalities, the magnitudes, all the standards and the analogies of beings, and harmonies and compositions; the entirities, the parts, every one thing, and multitude, the connections of parts, the unions of every multitude, the perfections of the entirities, the quality, the weight, the size, the infinitude, the compounds, the distinctions, every infinitude, every term, all the bounds, the orders, the pre-eminences, the elements, the forms, every essence, every power, every energy, every condition, every sensible perception, every reason, every conception, every contact, every science, every union, and in one word, all things existing are from the beautiful and good, and in the beautiful and good, and turn themselves to the beautiful and good.<sup>18</sup>

The final statement in this passage is most illuminating with respect to beauty’s role in emanation. That all things are “from” the beautiful signifies beauty as a causal source. That all things are “in” the beautiful indicates both beauty’s steadfast remaining in itself as it emanates entities and the fact that the emanated entities are not projected out into a space of ontological indeterminacy but continually inhabit beauty’s transcendent plenitude. That all things “turn themselves” to the beautiful indicates the way in which, reminiscent of the *Symposium*, the reversion involves a seeking for an end that is always already present.

The influence of the more specific Christian development of these themes upon Dionysius’s approach to Neoplatonic emanation, especially as regards the Trinity and the Incarnation, also has significant impact on

18. DN 4, 10 (705CD): Διὸ πᾶσα στάσις καὶ κίνησις καὶ ἐξ οὗ καὶ ἐν ᾧ καὶ εἰς ὃ καὶ οὐ ἔνεκα. Καὶ γὰρ «ἐξ αὐτοῦ καὶ δι’ αὐτοῦ» καὶ οὐσία καὶ ζωὴ πᾶσα καὶ νοῦ καὶ ψυχῆς καὶ πάσης φύσεως αἱ μικρότητες, αἱ ἰσότητες, αἱ μεγαλειότητες, τὰ μέτρα πάντα καὶ αἱ τῶν ὄντων ἀναλογίαι καὶ ἄρμονίαι καὶ κράσεις, αἱ ὀλότητες, τὰ μέρη, πᾶν ἓν καὶ πλῆθος, αἱ συνδέσεις τῶν μερῶν, αἱ παντὸς πλῆθους ἐνώσεις, αἱ τελειότητες τῶν ὀλοτήτων, τὸ ποιόν, τὸ ποσόν, τὸ πηλίκον, τὸ ἄπειρον, αἱ συγκρίσεις, αἱ διακρίσεις, πᾶσα ἀπειρία, πᾶν πέρασ, οἱ ὄροι πάντες, αἱ τάξεις, αἱ ὑπεροχαί, τὰ στοιχεῖα, τὰ εἶδη, πᾶσα οὐσία, πᾶσα δύναμις, πᾶσα ἐνέργεια, πᾶσα ἕξις, πᾶσα αἴσθησις, πᾶς λόγος, πᾶσα νόησις, πᾶσα ἐπαφή, πᾶσα ἐπιστήμη, πᾶσα ἔνωσις. Καὶ ἀπλῶς πᾶν ὄν ἐκ τοῦ καλοῦ καὶ ἀγαθοῦ καὶ ἐν τῷ καλῷ καὶ ἀγαθῷ ἔστι καὶ εἰς τὸ καλὸν καὶ ἀγαθὸν ἐπιστρέφεται.

the way it is reconfigured.<sup>19</sup> The concretion of God in the person of Jesus Christ brings greater concretion to Neoplatonic emanation by adding a relational dimension both in terms of the vertical relation between source and emanated entity and in terms of the horizontal relation among emanated entities themselves.<sup>20</sup> The relation is conceived mostly in terms of love, which affirms the source itself as a principle of desire and fortifies its characterization as beauty. Dionysius gestures toward this idea in a passage that articulates the way Christ emits the “rays” that “light” the path back to the Father’s loving generosity:

But, while in silence welcoming the beneficent rays of the really good and super-good Christ, by them let us be lighted on our path, to His divine works of goodness. For assuredly is it not of a goodness inexpressible and beyond conception, that He makes all things existing to be, and brought all things themselves to being, and wishes all things ever to become near to Himself, and participants of Himself, according to the aptitude of each? And why? Because He clings lovingly to those who even depart from Him, and strives and beseeches not to be disowned by those beloved who are themselves coy; and He bears with those who heedlessly reproach Him, and Himself makes excuse for them, and further promises to serve them, and runs towards and meets even those who hold themselves aloof, immediately that they approach; and when His entire self has embraced their entire selves, He kisses them, and does not reproach them for former things, but rejoices over the present, and holds a feast, and calls together the friends, that is to say, the good, in order that the household may be altogether rejoicing.<sup>21</sup>

19. Cf. Corsini, *Il Trattato De Divinis Nominibus*, 40–44, where he explains the Neoplatonic emanationist triad as it was reconfigured by Dionysius according to Trinitarian principles, especially insofar as it relates to the *Divine Names*. Also cf. Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena*, 181–90. These findings stand to refute certain contemporary views that exaggerate the role of Neoplatonic emanation *qua* Neoplatonic and consequently fail to see Dionysius’s originality in his Christian reconfiguration of emanation. For example, one finds in Arthur, *Pseudo-Dionysius as Polemicist*, 143, the following statement: “The whole set of [Dionysius’s] treatises is a mirror of Neoplatonic process and return.” In our view, the “mirror” metaphor is a grossly overstated way of expressing the relationship between Dionysius and Neoplatonic emanation, since a mirror adds nothing new whatsoever to that which is being reflected.

20. Cf. Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena*, 205.

21. *Ep.* 8, 1 (1085D–1088A): ἀλλὰ τοῦ ὄντως ἀγαθοῦ καὶ ὑπεραγάθου Χριστοῦ τὰς ἀγαθοποιούς ἀκτίνας ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ παραδεχόμενοι πρὸς αὐτῶν ἐπὶ τὰς θείας ἀγαθουργίας αὐτοῦ φωταγωγηθῶμεν. Ἄρα γὰρ οὐκ ἔστιν ἀφάτου καὶ ὑπὲρ νόησιν ἀγαθότητος, ὅτι τὰ ὄντα εἶναι ποιεῖ καὶ ὅτι πάντα αὐτὰ πρὸς τὸ εἶναι παρήγαγε καὶ πάντα βούλεται αἰε

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There is a dual subtlety in this passage with regard to both Neoplatonic emanation and the Prodigal Son parable that bespeaks their kinship in Dionysius. That the passage is explaining divine causality is clear from the fact that at issue is what “makes all things existing to be.” The creative source is described as a plenitude of goodness “inexpressible and beyond conception,” who not only donates being to all things, but “wishes all things to become ever nearer to himself, and participants of himself.” The source is a goodness that remains steadfast in its identity (*monos*) as it creates the otherness of entities. Procession (*prodos*) is expressed as the prodigality of “departure” but, reflecting the Procline principle that every proceeding entity remains in the source, this remaining of the prodigal procession is expressed in terms of God “clinging lovingly to those who depart from Him.” This is the biblical God who, as the passage explains, “runs” out to embrace the returning son (i.e., the reverting identity, the *epistrophe*), even “makes excuses” for him, promising to further “serve” him. This God welcomes the returning prodigal (or the “reverting-procession”) with “kisses,” without “reproach,” with “rejoicing” and a “feast” in communion with the entire “household.” In a word, according to Dionysius God openly welcomes the reverting prodigal by lavishing upon him greater *plenitude*.

The conjunction in Dionysius of Neoplatonic emanation with Trinitarian-Incarnational thought enables the more abstract content of the former to become more concretely visible in the identification of Jesus with light and beauty. This feature of the Areopagite’s thought is described most clearly in the first chapter of the *Celestial Hierarchy*. Every instance of light harbors the emanationist triad and thus images the divine light grounded in the light made flesh as Jesus Christ who is the “Paternal Light,” the “Real,” the “True.” In other words, Christ becomes for Dionysius a concrete model for how emanation is manifest in light. As the *remaining source*, light “never loses its own unique inwardness, but multiplied and going forth, as becomes its goodness, for an elevating and unifying blending of the objects of its care, remains firmly and solitarily

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γενέσθαι παραπλήσια ἑαυτῶ και κοινωνικά τῶν αὐτοῦ κατὰ τὴν ἐκάστου ἐπιτηδειότητα; Τί δέ, ὅτι και τῶν ἀποφοιτῶντων ἐρωτικῶς ἔχεται και φιλονεικεῖ και δεῖται μὴ ἀπαξιωθῆναι τῶν ἐρωμένων και θρυπτομένων αὐτῶν και εἰκὴ κατεγκαλούντων ἀνέχεται, και αὐτὸς ἀπολογεῖται; Και μᾶλλον ἐπαγγέλλεται θεραπεύσειν και ἔτι αὐτοῖς ἀπέχουσιν, ὅμως προσιοῦσι, προστρέχει και ὑπαντᾷ και ὅλος ὅλους περιφύσιν, ὅμως προσιοῦσι, προστρέχει και ὑπαντᾷ και ὅλος ὅλους περιφύς ἀσπάζεται και οὐκ ἐγκαλεῖ περὶ τῶν προτέρων, ἀλλ’ ἀγαπᾷ τὰ παρόντα και ἐορτὴν ἄγει και «συγκαλεῖται τοὺς φίλους»—δηλαδὴ τοὺς ἀγαθοῦς—, ἵνα ἦ πάντων εὐφραινομένων ἢ κατοικία. The context of this passage is one where Dionysius chastises Demophilus the monk who, in an effort to reprimand a fellow monk, transgressed the hierarchical order of authority.

centered within itself in its unmoved sameness.”<sup>22</sup> Just as the Incarnation does nothing to diminish the Father’s divinity, so too does light remain a plenitude of luminous content even as it radiates itself into diverse luminaries. It *proceeds*, therefore, as a fullness.<sup>23</sup> As such its procession exceeds the capacity of the finite intellect and must therefore be made manifest through the mode of symbolism: “For it is not possible that the supremely Divine Ray should otherwise illuminate us, except so far as this light is enveloped, for the purpose of instruction, in variegated sacred veils, and arranged naturally and appropriately according to our nature, by paternal forethought.”<sup>24</sup> As if divine works of art, these many sacred veils, that is, these symbols, are the way that divine fullness makes itself known to the human intellect similar to the way that light manifests itself through various colors and forms that it illuminates. The divine light gives a material form to satisfy the human need for cognitive abstraction, and this form bears in itself the opening to a fullness beyond the material limits. In personalizing this phenomenon, Christ’s Incarnation reveals the universality of this condition with respect to all created entities and therefore reveals how God and beauty are synonymous. For it is precisely the surplus, the plenitude itself, that is communicated—in the mode of symbol—by every entity in virtue of its status as a beautiful emanated entity. Corresponding to the third component of emanation, these symbols, insofar as they are constituted by, and consequently give themselves as, a fullness of light beyond their material appearance, *revert* to the source by giving this fullness as a power to other emanated entities: “[This Light] raises those who lawfully aspire to it, according to their capacity, and makes them one, after the example of its own unifying Oneness.”<sup>25</sup> Every proceeding entity bears

22. CH I, 1, 2 (121B): Καὶ γὰρ οὐδὲ αὐτὴ πώποτε τῆς οἰκειᾶς ἐνίκῃς ἐνότητος ἀπολείπεται, πρὸς ἀναγωγικὴν δὲ καὶ ἐνοποιὸν τῶν προνοουμένων σύγκρασιν ἀγαθοσπεπῶς πληθνυομένη καὶ προϊοῦσα μένει τε ἔνδον ἑαυτῆς ἀραρότως ἐν ἀκινήτῳ ταυτότητι μονίμως πεπηγυῖα καὶ τοὺς ἐπ’ αὐτὴν ὡς θεμιτὸν ἀνανεύοντας ἀναλόγως αὐτοῖς ἀνατείνει καὶ ἐνοποιεῖ κατὰ τὴν ἀπλωτικὴν αὐτῆς ἔνωσιν.

23. As Corsini rightly notes, although the second term of the emanationist triad, procession, is most closely identified with the Logos, the Son, this should not be understood as an exclusion of the fullness of God. See Corsini, *Il Trattato De Divinis Nominibus*, 41–42.

24. CH I, 1, 2: (121B): Καὶ γὰρ οὐδὲ δυνατὸν ἐτέρως ἡμῖν ἐπιλάμψαι τὴν θεαρχικὴν ἀκτῖνα μὴ τῇ ποικιλίᾳ τῶν ἱερῶν παραπετασμάτων ἀναγωγικῶς περικεκαλυμμένη καὶ τοῖς καθ’ ἡμᾶς προνοία πατρικῆ συμφυῶς καὶ οἰκειῶς διεσκευασμένην.

25. CH I, 2 (121C): Καὶ γὰρ οὐδὲ δυνατὸν ἐτέρως ἡμῖν ἐπιλάμψαι τὴν θεαρχικὴν ἀκτῖνα μὴ τῇ ποικιλίᾳ τῶν ἱερῶν παραπετασμάτων ἀναγωγικῶς περικεκαλυμμένη καὶ τοῖς καθ’ ἡμᾶς προνοία πατρικῆ συμφυῶς καὶ οἰκειῶς διεσκευασμένην.

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a unique distinction from its creative source. Since it remains in its source, however, its reversion back to this source involves a communication of the emanated entity's relative share in the source's plenitude.

Dionysian beauty relates to Neoplatonic emanation in conjunction with the triadic structure of emanation itself. As a transcendent plenitude, the beauty in a given object expresses both the fullness of the principle of emanation and its remaining steadfast in its plenitude (*monos*). The classical identification of beauty as *symmetria*, expressed in the more particular biblical properties of measure, number and weight, or the Aristotelian properties of order, symmetry and definiteness, establishes beauty's communication as the form of the proceeding entity (*prodos*). In its anagogical power, expressed especially in Dionysian symbolism, beauty accounts for the reversion of an entity back to its source (*epistrophe*).<sup>26</sup>

To bring the preceding together more concisely, beauty as a divine name identifies God insofar as God's creative activity of self-communication is conceived as a principle of determination. For Dionysius, combining both Neoplatonic emanation and biblical creation, God's creative act is understood as creative emanation. Beauty is integral to this vision insofar as it identifies the way in which creative emanation is the distillation of God's transcendent plenitude into the many determinate modes that come to comprise a given entity, or substance (without denying to God his own beautiful simplicity). In being creatively emanated from the divine surplus, every created entity, every substance, shares in the triadic emanationist scheme, accounting for the way in which Dionysian "substance" is conceived primarily in a community of relations. Divine beauty distills its own beautifying content as it creatively emanates each new substantial entity. Read in terms of Dionysian symbolism, each entity bears its own relative plenitude (*monos*), which is a participation or sharing in the divine plenitude—its connectedness to its divine origin and to

26. One recent interpretation of Dionysian emanation (Schäfer, *Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite*, 88–94) alters the sequence of the Neoplatonic triad such that *monos* follows *prodos* and precedes *epistrophe* as the "identifying halt" and "self-abiding" of the emanated entity after it proceeds and before it returns. As Schäfer describes it, however, *monos* still appears to be a creaturely recapitulation of divine plenitude as the creature proceeds and returns, creating the conditions of the *prodos* and the *epistrophe*. But because it is positioned in between the *prodos* and *epistrophe*, it risks giving the impression that the recapitulated plenitude is an act of self-determination rather than a participation in the divine plenitude of determination. If one simply bears in mind that the *monos* is always present as an originating plenitude, then repositioning it in between the *prodos* and *epistrophe* is unnecessary because redundant. As a remaining plenitude, it *both* precedes *and* stands in between the *prodos* and *epistrophe* insofar as it remains as the end to which the entity returns.

all others also sharing in that plenitude. Hence, each entity is a substance in excess of the determinate form it comes to take in its participation in procession (*prodos*). But insofar as it participates in procession, it proceeds into greater determinate form. It is a procession, however, that seeks its own determinate form by simultaneously participating, alongside other proceeding and returning entities, in the reversion back to the divine plenitude (*epistrophe*). Substance, in other words, is inherently analogical insofar as it identifies a discretely determinate “this” as well as the shared fullness of being out of which it is given to be. For Dionysius, then, beauty names God insofar as God’s creative causality gives its own substantial beauty through this process of creative emanation.

### *Beauty as Unity in Plurality*

The obvious origins of this aspect of beauty derive from Plotinus, for whom the intellectual principle, the *nous*, is identified both as a unity in plurality and as beauty itself. Much of the content of this aspect of beauty is indirectly addressed in the previous sections. As a transcendent plenitude, beauty prepossesses in itself the “fontal beauty” of everything beautiful as a unity of beautiful content.<sup>27</sup> For this reason, “all things are determined according to” beauty, indicating the way in which it is a principle of determination.<sup>28</sup> Through its creative activity of emanation, beauty diffuses itself as a plurality of beautiful forms. By remaining steadfast in its own identity, it shares its plenitude with its emanated plurality and in so doing calls these emanated entities back to itself. The cyclic activity of this generative act identifies beauty as a unity in plurality, or a plurality in unity.

In identifying God with the name beauty, Dionysius therefore introduces this aspect of beauty as a unity in plurality into the divine nature. But in doing so he also risks imposing the perennial problem of the one and the many into the Christian God. Trinitarian thought had already created the conditions wherein this problem could be resolved. In the context of Dionysius’s divine name theology, however, the name “peace” provides significant insight into how the problem of the one and many in God, as the unity in plurality of beauty, is overcome. A closer look at this name and its contours will serve to bring this to light.

Part of Dionysius’s approach to the name “peace” involves assimilating Neoplatonic difference as a positive approach to otherness. In his

27. DN 4, 7 (704A).

28. DN 4, 7 (704A).

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well-known introduction to Aristotelian logic, Porphyry examines the various kinds of difference along with the way that difference *per se* enters into the substantive constitution of an entity.<sup>29</sup> This notion of constitutive difference is interpreted in various ways between pagan and Christian Neoplatonists. As Gersh explains, “the notion of otherness (= procession) in pagan Neoplatonism tended to convey the negative idea of a lapse from some perfection which had to be recaptured by a counterbalancing of assimilation (= reversion),” while “the positive interpretation of otherness is present if not prominent for” Dionysius.<sup>30</sup>

Expounding on the name peace, Dionysius explicitly invokes this positive understanding of otherness, implying how unity in plurality is an aspect of beauty. He explains that peace is a suitable name for God since by this name is intended the power that “unifies all, and engenders, and effects the agreement and fellowship of all.”<sup>31</sup> Through participation in the divine peace, the divided multiplicity is transformed (ἐπιστρεφούσης) into a full unity (εἰς τὴν ὅλην ἐνότητα). Dionysius is clear that this peace is not the elimination of the constitutive differences. Rather it is the union of all things not only to each other, but also to themselves. As he writes:

First then, this must be said, that it is mainstay of the self-existent peace, both the general and the particular; and that it mingles all things with each other within their unconfused union, as be-seems which, united indivisibly, and at the same time they stand severally continuously unmingled, as regards their own proper kind, not muddled through their mingling with the opposite, nor blunting any of their unifying distinctness and purity.<sup>32</sup>

Peace is a direct outcome of an unconfused union among the distinctions and differences of the many. Though not explicitly stated, it is by virtue of the transcendent plenitude of the divine beauty that entities are enabled to acquire more fully their integral wholeness while coming into

29. Porphyry, *Isagogue*, ch. 3, in Porphyry, *Introduction (or Isagoge) to the Logical Categories of Aristotle*, 2:609–33.

30. Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena*, 239n163, 240. In this assessment, Gersh follows von Balthasar, *Komische Liturgie*, 61–64.

31. DN 11, 1 (948D): Αὕτη γάρ ἐστιν ἡ πάντων ἐνωτικὴ καὶ τῆς ἀπάντων ὁμοιοῦσας τε καὶ συμφυΐας γεννητικὴ καὶ ἀπεργαστικὴ.

32. DN 11, 2 (949C): Καὶ πρῶτόν γε τοῦτο ῥητέον, ὅτι τῆς αὐτοειρήνης καὶ τῆς ὅλης καὶ τῆς καθ’ ἕκαστόν ἐστιν ὑποστάτις καὶ ὅτι πάντα πρὸς ἄλληλα συγκεράννυσι κατὰ τὴν ἀσύγχυτον αὐτῶν ἔνωσιν, καθ’ ἣν ἀδιαιρέτως ἠνωμένα καὶ ἀδιαστάτως ὁμῶς ἀκραιφνῆ κατὰ τὸ οἰκεῖον ἕκαστα εἶδος ἔστηκεν οὐκ ἐπιθολούμενα διὰ τῆς πρὸς τὰ ἀντικείμενα κράσεως οὐδὲ ἀπαμβλύνοντά τι τῆς ἐνωτικῆς ἀκριβείας καὶ καθαρότητος.

greater unity with all other entities. Unless the ground of interpreting this configuration of peace incorporates the remaining source (*monos*) as a transcendent plenitude, an unmediated difference between the many (the determined) and the one (the indeterminate) remains. This is because without the conditions provided by a transcendent plenitude, prior to any mediation the remaining empty space of indeterminacy can only yield an unmediated difference. The manyness and the oneness are then conceived as if they coexisted in one overarching ontological emptiness, mediated only by the sheer power of their own substantive volition. Consequently, there arises the objection that the many, rejoicing in their diversity, might reject the kind of repose assumed to be characteristic of coming to rest in unity. In responding to this objection, Dionysius affirms the kind of constitutive difference seen in Porphyry and suggests that peace is the effect of the transcendent plenitude of beauty as a unity in plurality:

But how, some one may say, do all things aspire to peace, for many things rejoice in diversity and division, and would not, at any time, of their own accord, be willingly in repose. Now, if in saying this, he affirms that the identity of each existing thing is diversity and division, and that there is no existent thing whatever, which at any time is willing to destroy this (identity), neither would we in any way contradict this, but would declare even this an aspiration after peace. For all things love to dwell at peace, and to be united amongst themselves, and to be unmoved and unfallen from themselves, and the things of themselves. And the perfect peace seeks to guard the idiosyncrasy of each unmoved and unconfused, by its peace-giving forethought, preserving everything unmoved and unconfused, both as regards themselves and each other, and establishes all things by a stable and unswerving power, towards their own peace and immobility.<sup>33</sup>

As a principle of determination, beauty's unity in plurality is the source of the unifying foundation of peace because the aforementioned

33. *DN* 11, 3 (952BC): Πῶς δέ, φαίη τις, ἐφίεται πάντα εἰρήνης; Πολλὰ γὰρ ἑτερότητι καὶ διακρίσει χαίρει καὶ οὐκ ἂν ποτε ἐκόντα ἡρεμεῖν ἐθελήσοι. Καὶ εἰ μὲν ἑτερότητα καὶ διάκρισιν ὁ ταῦτα λέγων φησὶ τὴν ἐκάστου τῶν ὄντων ιδιότητα καὶ ὅτι ταύτην οὐδὲ ἐν τῶν ὄντων ὄν, ὅπερ ἔστιν, ἐθέλει ποτὲ ἀπολλύειν, οὐκ ἂν οὐδὲ ἡμεῖς πρὸς τοῦτο ἀντιφύσομεν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ταύτην εἰρήνης ἔφεσιν ἀποφανόμεθα. Πάντα γὰρ ἀγαπᾷ πρὸς ἑαυτὰ εἰρηνεύειν τε καὶ ἠνώσθαι καὶ ἑαυτῶν καὶ τῶν ἑαυτῶν ἀκίνητα καὶ ἄπτωτα εἶναι. Καὶ ἔστι καὶ τῆς καθ' ἑκάστον ἀμιγροῦς ιδιότητος ἢ παντελῆς εἰρήνης φυλακτικῆ ταῖς εἰρηνοδώροις αὐτῆς προνοίας τὰ πάντα ἀσασίαστα καὶ ἀσύμφυρτα πρὸς τε ἑαυτὰ καὶ πρὸς ἄλληλα διασώζουσα καὶ πάντα ἐν σταθερᾷ καὶ ἀκλίτῳ δυνάμει πρὸς τὴν ἑαυτῶν εἰρήνην καὶ ἀκίνησιαν ἰστώσα.

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“transformation” (ἐπιστρεφούσης) of multiplicity is the reversion back to the fullness of divine plenitude. Through beauty, all things are brought into a beautiful unity in plurality as they, in their plural distinctions, learn to become more divine by “laying down their arms” and to cease waging war on themselves and each other. When Dionysius describes this he draws from beauty’s anagogical power and personalizes it in Christ since it is Christ who teaches the substance of peace in an existential and concrete way:

What would any one say of the peaceful stream of love towards man in Christ, according to which we have learned no longer to wage war, either with ourselves, or each other, or with angels, but that with them, according to our power, we should also be fellow-workers in divine things, after the purpose of Jesus, who works all in all, and forms a peace unutterable and pre-ordained from eternity, and reconciles us to himself, in Spirit, and through himself and in himself to the Father.<sup>34</sup>

Christ is the source of the “peaceful stream of love” that God emanates toward man, but also the center of the return to that source as a reconciliation. Like beauty, Jesus is a locus of unity in plurality; he is the one in whom the all become “fellow workers” in the effort to form a “peace unutterable and pre-ordained from eternity.” The effect of beauty as a unity in plurality is experienced as peace, which for Dionysius is brought to personal visibility in Christ Jesus.

In naming God beauty, Dionysius appropriates the Plotinian *nous* as a unity in plurality to the divine substance itself. Insofar as beauty as a divine name identifies the aspect of God’s self-communication as a principle of determination, beauty as a unity in plurality accounts for the peace that accompanies the plurality of creatively emanated entities. As a unity in plurality, beauty identifies the way in which a singular entity, as substance, comes to be a “determined this” only in and through a communion of relations. In this configuration, there is an intermediation between a vertical and a horizontal dimension. Every individual entity relates to both the divine transcendent plenitude out of which it is first called (vertical), as well as every other entity thus called (horizontal). That this community of

34. DN 11, 5 (953AB): Τί ἂν τις εἴποι περὶ τῆς κατὰ Χριστὸν εἰρηνοχότου φιλανθρωπίας; Καθ’ ἣν οὐ μὴ μάθωμεν ἔτι πολεμεῖν, οὔτε ἑαυτοῖς οὔτε ἀλλήλοις οὔτε ἀγγέλοις, ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτοῖς τὰ θεῖα κατὰ δύναμιν συνεργήσωμεν κατὰ πρόνοιαν Ἰησοῦ τοῦ «τὰ πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν» ἐνεργοῦντος καὶ ποιούντος εἰρήνην ἄρρητον καὶ ἐξ αἰῶνος προωρισμένην καὶ ἀποκαταλλάσσοντος ἡμᾶς ἑαυτῷ ἐν πνεύματι καὶ δι’ ἑαυτοῦ καὶ ἐν αὐτῷ τῷ πατρὶ.

relations is possible without a necessary conflict derives from beauty. As the one who gathers the all into a peaceful unity ascending to the Father, Christ is foundational to this component of beauty. It is through Christ's drawing all things together into a holy communion (*synaxis*) and returning with these to the Father that generates beauty as a hierarchy, the final feature of beauty as a divine name insofar as beauty identifies a principle of determination.

### *Beauty as Hierarchy*

The final aspect of beauty insofar as it corresponds to the divine in its creative causality concerns the Dionysian notion of hierarchy. As a unity in plurality, beauty appears in the world as the peaceful coexistence of all determined entities with each other and with themselves. In *Divine Names* 4, 10 Dionysius explains how this peaceful coexistence occurs by virtue of a love for the beautiful:

By all things, then, the beautiful and good is desired and beloved and cherished; and, by reason of it, and for the sake of it, the less love the greater suppliantly; and those of the same rank, their fellows brotherly; and the greater (love) the less considerately; and these severally love the things of themselves continuously; and all things by aspiring to the beautiful and good, do and wish all things whatever they do and wish.<sup>35</sup>

For Dionysius, far more than an expressed affection or principle of attraction, love is an ontological adhesive that not only accounts for the way in which a particular substantial entity is constituted in and by a community of relations, but also brings all substantial entities into a sacred ordering. The principle of love that is described here bears an ordering power that reflects Dionysian hierarchy. Love is the power that unites the various orders with each other and themselves as they all strive to the final goal of beauty. A similar passage appears in the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*:

*And by our love of things beautiful elevated to Him, and which elevates us, folds together our many diversities, and after perfecting into a uniform and divine life and habit and operation,*

35. DN 4, 10 (705BC): Πᾶσιν οὖν ἐστὶ τὸ καλὸν καὶ ἀγαθὸν ἐφετὸν καὶ ἐραστὸν καὶ ἀγαπητόν, καὶ δι' αὐτὸ καὶ αὐτοῦ ἕνεκα καὶ τὰ ἤττω τῶν κρείττων ἐπιστρεπτικῶς ἐρώσι καὶ κοινωνικῶς τὰ ὁμόστοιχα τῶν ὁμοταγῶν καὶ τὰ κρείττω τῶν ἡττόνων προνοητικῶς καὶ αὐτὰ ἑαυτῶν ἕκαστα συνεκτικῶς, καὶ πάντα τοῦ καλοῦ καὶ ἀγαθοῦ ἐφιέμενα ποιεῖ καὶ βούλεται πάντα, ὅσα ποιεῖ καὶ βούλεται.

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holily bequeaths the power of the divine priesthood; from which by approaching to the holy exercise of the priestly office, we ourselves become nearer to the beings above us, by assimilation, according to our power, to their abiding and unchangeable holy steadfastness; and thus *by looking upwards to the blessed and supremely divine self of Jesus*, and reverently gazing upon whatever we are permitted to see, and illuminated with the knowledge of the visions, we shall be able to become, as regards the science of divine mysteries, purified and purifiers; images of light, and workers, with God, perfected and perfecting.<sup>36</sup>

In this passage, beauty continues to serve as a final, and so efficient, cause of a hierarchical momentum. What Dionysius includes, however, is a more explicit account of beauty's anagogical power. Beauty provides the visibility and knowledge that enables the ascending creatures to become purified images of light and so co-workers with God in the divine activity of perfecting creation. Hierarchy is conceived in ways similar to beauty; as an anagogical power whose origin and goal is beautification, that is, an increase in beauty itself.

Dionysius is widely credited with the origination of the neologism *ἱεραρχία*, though his originality is not without precedent. For whatever reason its many applications and significations throughout his corpus has led some scholars to misread it in one way or another. Such misreadings tend to reify Dionysian hierarchy into a “highly systematized, highly variegated *structure*,”<sup>37</sup> or a “mediated *pyramid* of revelation and authority,”<sup>38</sup> or

36. *EH* 1, 1 (372B): ἡμῶν τε τῶ πρὸς αὐτὸν ἀνατεινομένῳ καὶ ἡμᾶς ἀνατείνοντι τῶν καλῶν ἔρωτι συμπτύσσει τὰς πολλὰς ἑτερότητας καὶ εἰς ἑνοειδῆ καὶ θεῖαν ἀποτελειώσας ζῶν ἕξιν τε καὶ ἐνέργειαν ἱεροπρεπεῖ δωρεῖται τῆς θείας ἱερωσύνης τὴν δύναμιν, ἐξ ἧς ἐπὶ τὴν ἀγίαν ἐρχόμενοι τῆς ἱερατείας ἐνέργειαν ἐγγύτεροι μὲν αὐτοὶ γινόμεθα τῶν ὑπὲρ ἡμᾶς οὐσιῶν τῇ κατὰ δύναμιν ἀφομοιώσει τοῦ μονίμου τε καὶ ἀνεξαλλάκτου τῆς αὐτῶν ἱεράς ἰδρύσεως καὶ ταύτῃ πρὸς τὴν μακαρίαν Ἰησοῦ καὶ θεαρχικὴν αὐγὴν ἀναβλέψαντες ὅσα τε ἰδεῖν ἐφικτὸν ἐποπτεύσαντες ἱερώς καὶ τῆς τῶν θεαμάτων γνώσεως ἐλλαμφθέντες τὴν μυστικὴν ἐπιστήμην ἀφιερῶμενοι καὶ ἀφιερῶται φωτοειδεῖς καὶ θεουργικοὶ τετελεσμένοι καὶ τελεσιουργοὶ γενέσθαι δυνησόμεθα. Emphasis added.

37. E.g., Wear and Dillon, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Neoplatonic Tradition*, 57. Emphasis added.

38. Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 31. Emphasis added. Here, the key is both the word “mediated” and “pyramid.” The former would be better expressed with the active gerundive “mediating,” and the latter is indicative of the reification that Rorem commits to in his reading. Rorem also identifies Dionysian hierarchy with a “system for sourcing or channeling the sacred” (21) rather than identifying it, more accurately, as the sourcing or channeling itself.

a “staircase principle.”<sup>39</sup> By reconfiguring Dionysius hierarchy as a reified and so stagnated thing, interpretations like these distort the explanation of hierarchy provided in the Dionysian text, which conceives it primarily in terms of act. To be sure, interpretations such as these follow almost naturally from the requirements incumbent upon thought as such; like anything in act, for hierarchy to be perceptible it must be removed or arrested from the flux of its activity and considered in the form of some image. Nevertheless, to avoid mistaking the arrested image for the underlying act, it is necessary to avoid as much as possible relying on such images. Indeed, hierarchy is no “thing” as such. Rather it is a name given to the divine act of creative emanation insofar as that act is given to perception.

That Dionysius provides the most explicit definition of hierarchy in the third chapter of his *Celestial Hierarchy* indicates the propaedeutic significance of the first two chapters. The first chapter is notable for the way it articulates some of the themes associated with beauty examined above, e.g., light, simplicity, cognitive anagogy, unity in plurality. Moreover, in contemplating hierarchy Dionysius stresses the important role that material beauty has in symbolically presenting hierarchy’s immaterial beauty and expresses it in the context of Romans 1:20: “For it is not possible for our mind to be raised to that immaterial representation and contemplation of the Heavenly Hierarchies, without using the material guidance suitable to itself, accounting the visible beauties as reflections of the invisible comeliness.”<sup>40</sup> After providing several examples of this dynamic, Dionysius prepares the reader for his exposition into the dynamic’s internal logic.

In the second chapter, this “logic” (when “logic” is taken in the pre-modern sense as the “art of the mind”) is identified as “symbolism.” As explained previously, implementing principles of beauty, symbolism identifies a mode of beauty’s power to distill the divine transcendent plenitude into more limited, or determined, forms. It appears at this point in this treatise to provide the foundation upon which the hierarchical activity can be understood as a “symbolic” appearance, or “theophany,” of the divine in and as the world.

At the very beginning of chapter 3 in the *Celestial Hierarchy*, Dionysius sets out his explanation of hierarchy by distinguishing it as a triad: a

39. Florovsky, *Byzantine Ascetic and Spiritual Fathers*, 221. Emphasis added.

40. *CH I*, 3 (121CD): ἐπεὶ μὴδὲ δυνατόν ἐστὶ τῷ καθ’ ἡμᾶς νοῖ πρὸς τὴν ἄυλον ἐκείνην ἀναταθῆναι τῶν οὐρανίων ἱεραρχιῶν μίμησιν τε καὶ θεωρίαν, εἰ μὴ τῇ κατ’ αὐτὸν ὑλαίᾳ χειραγωγίᾳ χρῆσαιτο τὰ μὲν φαινόμενα κάλλη τῆς ἀφανοῦς εὐπρεπειᾶς ἀπεικονίσματα λογιζόμενος.

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sacred ordering (τάξις<sup>41</sup> ἱερὰ), a science or knowledge (ἐπιστήμη), and an action/operation/energy (ἐνέργεια). Since this occurs at the very beginning, it suggests that hierarchy ought to be understood in terms of dynamic activity rather than static structure. So even in those places where hierarchy is expressed with reified images,<sup>42</sup> it is this foundation that enables one to avoid any misconceptions that such reification may engender.

The remainder of this opening passage, indicating the purpose and goal, explains that hierarchical activity is “assimilated, as far as attainable, to the likeness of God, and conducted to the illuminations granted to it from God, according to capacity, with a view to the Divine imitation.”<sup>43</sup> Hierarchy is an activity, an operation of sacred ordering, whose goal is divine union, and—through reception of divine light—divine imitation. All of this is made possible by beauty and imaged in the concrete person of Jesus. Beauty, as Dionysius explains here, is a deifying agent because it is simple (ἀπλοῦν), good (ἀγαθόν), has the power to initiate (τελεταρχικόν), and, from every dissimilarity relative to the whole (ἀμιγῆς μὲν ἐστὶ καθόλου πάσης ἀνομοιότητος), is universally attractive.

Through these features of beauty, hierarchy harbors the capacity to impart divine light to each creature according to that creature’s own capacity to receive it. For Dionysius, the cosmic order is designed in such a way that each created thing, expressing its unique relationship to its divine origin, bears its own inherent limitations. “For it is not lawful for the Mystic Rites of sacred things, or for things religiously done, to practice anything whatever beyond the sacred regulations of their own proper function.”<sup>44</sup> The hierarchical activity is designed so as to allow every participant to learn these limitations—limitations which, because they are hierarchically constituted, become more and more liberated by the anagogical power of beauty. That is to say, they are limitations that do not remain stagnant in some spacio-temporal position, but are continually being pushed further and further into the very excess they attempt to limit. But such

41. Although Parker translates this with the substantive “order” rather than the gerundive “ordering” most dictionary entries list it first with the gerundive; e.g., Liddel and Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 691: “an arranging, or drawing up of order.”

42. E.g., *EH* 1, 3 (373C) where hierarchy is described as “the whole account of the sacred things falling under it, a most complete summary of the sacred rites.”

43. *CH* 3, 1 (164D): πρὸς τὸ θεοειδὲς ὡς ἐφικτὸν ἀφομοιουμένη και πρὸς τὰς ἐνδιδομένας αὐτῇ θεόθεν ἐλλάμψεις ἀναλόγως ἐπὶ τὸ θεομίμητον ἀναγομένη.

44. *CH* 3, 2 (165AB): Οὐ γὰρ θεμιτὸν ἐστὶ τοῖς τῶν ἱερῶν τελεταῖς ἢ τοῖς ἱερῶς τελομένοις ἐνεργῆσαι τι καθόλου παρὰ τὰς τῆς οἰκείας τελεταρχίας ἱερὰς διατάξεις ἀλλ’ οὐδὲ ὑπάρχειν ἐτέρως.

liberation is not a freeing from the hierarchy itself. Rather, it is a liberation into a greater participation within the operation of sacred ordering that marks hierarchical power. Hierarchy is an activity, then, that teaches as it assimilates, allowing its practitioners to *begin* to see the beauty of God: “He, then, who mentions hierarchy, denotes a certain altogether holy order, an image of the supremely divine beauty. . .”<sup>45</sup> Here again Dionysius uses the word *ῥαιότητος* rather than *κάλλος*, indicating that, as it relates to hierarchical activity, beauty remains in its initial, more “youthful,” stages. As the anagogical power of beauty is distilled through hierarchical activity, however, beauty at its more mature stages—which Dionysius signifies with the word *εὐπρέπειαν* as “well-ordered beauty” or even “dignity”—appears as it confers assimilation with the divine:

The purpose, then, of hierarchy is the assimilation and union, as far as attainable, with God, having him leader of all religious science and operation, by looking unflinchingly to his most divine beauty, and copying, as far as possible, and by perfecting its own followers as divine images, mirrors most luminous and without flaw, receptive of the primal light and the supremely divine ray, and devoutly filled with the entrusted radiance, and again, spreading this radiance ungrudgingly to those after it, in accordance with the supremely divine regulations.<sup>46</sup>

Beauty’s anagogical power is prevalent in this passage insofar as divine beauty takes the form of “religious science and operation” (*ιεραῖς ἐπιστήμης τε καὶ ἐνεργείας*), which can be validly reconfigured as “knowing” (science) and “being” (operation/act). In being received, divine beauty in this form is horizontally passed through members of the hierarchy to other members. This “receiving” and “passing on” occurs when each member vertically looks “unflinchingly” at the divine beauty (*εὐπρέπειαν*) in order to imitate this beauty for every other member. As conceived in this Dionysian sense, divine beauty is not an “object” to be captured and handed on through some kind of material exchange. Rather, the one who beholds

45. CH 3, 2 (165B): Οὐκοῦν ἱεραρχίαν ὁ λέγων ἱεράν τινα καθόλου δηλοῖ διακόσμησιν, εἰκόνα τῆς θεαρχικῆς ῥαιότητος.

46. CH 3, 2 (165A): Σκοπὸς οὖν ἱεραρχίας ἐστὶν ἢ πρὸς θεὸν ὡς ἐφικτὸν ἀφομοίωσις τε καὶ ἔνωσις αὐτὸν ἔχουσα πάσης ἱεραῖς ἐπιστήμης τε καὶ ἐνεργείας καθηγεμόνα καὶ πρὸς τὴν αὐτοῦ θειοτάτην εὐπρέπειαν ἀκλινῶς μὲν ὁρῶν ὡς δυνατὸν δὲ ἀποτυπούμενος καὶ τοὺς ἑαυτοῦ θιασώτας ἀγάλματα θεῖα τελῶν ἔσοπτρα διειδέστατα καὶ ἀκηλίδωτα, δεκτικὰ τῆς ἀρχιφώτου καὶ θεαρχικῆς ἀκτίνος καὶ τῆς μὲν ἐνδιδομένης αἴγλης ἱερώς ἀποπληρούμενα, θεαρχικῆς ἀκτίνος καὶ τῆς μὲν ἐνδιδομένης αἴγλης ἱερώς ἀποπληρούμενα, ταύτην δὲ αὖθις ἀφθόνως εἰς τὰ ἐξῆς ἀναλάμποντα κατὰ τοὺς θεαρχικοὺς θεσμούς.

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the vision of divine beauty transmits it to other members by showing forth her own beauty, by being a participant in the divine beauty itself. Divine beauty, in other words, increases the particular beauty of each participant.

For each of those who have been called into the hierarchy, find their perfection in being carried to the divine imitation in their own proper degree; and, what is more divine than all, in becoming a “fellow-worker” with God, as the oracles say, and in showing the divine energy in himself manifested as far as possible.<sup>47</sup>

Hierarchy, as Dionysius conceives it, is, in its most fundamental sense, a showing forth of divine beauty. Beauty arrives in the gradual increasing appearance of each created entity, which is in direct proportion to the increasing light that serves as the condition for such appearing. This increase of light occurs when these entities pass their particular share on to other members.<sup>48</sup> Dionysius views both beauty and light as ontological constituents of every created entity.<sup>49</sup> The communal sharing of beauty and light involves an ontological giving and receiving of each particular entity’s own unique being. Consequently, this passing on is an act that occurs within beauty’s unity in plurality giving rise to a hierarchical ordering whose goal is fuller ascent into beauty itself.

## Conclusion

When Dionysius contemplates Neoplatonic cosmology and cosmogony, with the separation between its hyperaxic One and its first hypostatic emanation *nous*, something in his Pauline form of Judeo-Christianity moves him to unite them in the one Trinitarian Godhead. Rather than identifying a divine principle that subsists in absolute isolation from all otherness, the configuration of the One now identifies God in himself; that is to say, that feature of the Trinitarian Godhead that forever transcends every conceptual, finite, or limited capture whatsoever. Rather than identifying the first emanated principle, the configuration of the *nous* now identifies that

47. CH 3, 2 (165B): ἔστι γὰρ ἐκάστῳ τῶν ἱεραρχία κεκληρωμένων ἢ τελείωσις τὸ κατ’ οἰκείαν ἀναλογίαν ἐπὶ τὸ θεομίμητον ἀναχθῆναι καὶ τὸ δὴ πάντων θεϊότερον ὡς τὰ λόγια φησι «Θεοῦ συνεργὸν» γενέσθαι καὶ δεῖξαι τὴν θεῖαν ἐνέργειαν ἐν ἑαυτῷ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν ἀναφαινομένην.

48. Cf. DN 4, 1 (693BC, 696AB).

49. DN 4, 4 (697C), (700A): Light “contributes to the generation of sensible bodies, and moves them to life, and nourishes, and increases, and perfects, and purifies and renews.” DN 4, 7 (704A) “From this Beautiful (comes) being to all existing things—that each is beautiful in its own proper order.”

feature of the Trinitarian Godhead that creatively gives every particular creature its unique existence. Precisely what sanctions this appropriation in the mind of the Areopagite remains largely a mystery. Where does Dionysius acquire the theological confidence that such an appropriation would not tear asunder the unity of the Trinitarian God? For the source of that confidence is the same source that provides him with the clarity to unequivocally and directly identify the Trinitarian God with the “name” beauty.

Beauty as a divine name in Dionysius the Areopagite signifies the way in which both features of the Trinitarian Godhead—God in Himself, and God in his creative act—are identified as “beauty.” The previous chapter examined the name beauty insofar as it corresponds to God in Himself. This correspondence configured beauty as a transcendent plenitude, simplicity and light, and as intelligibility. This chapter examined beauty insofar as it corresponds to God’s creative activity. This correspondence configured beauty as a principle of determination and examined it as emanation, a unity-in-plurality, and as a hierarchy. Both dimensions of beauty as a divine name ultimately correspond to divine causality insofar as they constitute the foundation for the Christian transfiguration of Neoplatonic emanation as creation. God in himself identifies the *monos* and the initial stages of the *prodos*, as well as the teleological conditions in which the *epistrophe* occurs. God in his creative act identifies the more concrete elements of the *prodos* and the *epistrophe*. In this transfigured creative act, emanation itself is subordinated to a larger sequence now performing a more limited role than in Neoplatonism. For Dionysius, the role that beauty plays in this entire theological synthesis cannot be overstated.

As it corresponds to God in himself, beauty is above all a transcendent plenitude, which, as a configuration of beauty as a divine name, holds the unique capacity to signal something determinate without actually determining it. In other words, by identifying God as a transcendent plenitude the name “beauty” signals a fullness of determinate content and so presents determinacy without actually determining anything. Or to put it another way, beauty as a divine name identifies divine “hyper-determinacy.” In this way, the name “beauty” remains loyal to the transcendence of God in Himself as it ever gestures to the “always-more” of God identified in the Hebrew Scripture as *Ehyeh*.

The configuration of beauty as “simplicity and light,” then, indicates the way that beauty’s capacity to signal divine “hyper-determinacy” already necessarily bears some positive content. But this positive content

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is always already bound up with the negation incumbent upon the excess of divine “hyper-determinacy” and therefore harbors a degree of recalcitrance. As simplicity and light, beauty identifies the positive content and the recalcitrance that accompanies it. As simplicity, beauty identifies the most rudimentary stage of any positive content. As light, beauty names the initial stages where simplicity begins to show itself as such, as well as the capacity that such self-showing has to become a plurality without abandoning its simply unity. In this second configuration, simplicity and light begin to provide clarity to the first configuration (transcendent plenitude) without closing beauty’s porosity to it.

In the third configuration, beauty as intelligibility identifies this self-showing at the point where its luminous content begins to take even greater determinate form. It is on account of this ever-increasing determinacy that all of creation receives, through intelligibility, the capacity to become united within itself on a horizontal level and with God on a vertical level. In locating intelligibility at this point in the scheme, it does not mean that the previous two configurations of beauty are unintelligible. Rather, the first two configurations must be understood as an excess of intelligibility that both culminate in this third configuration and become perceptible *as an excess of intelligibility* by means of this third configuration. And because beauty as intelligibility identifies greater determinacy and hence a locus of unity with respect to both creation in itself and with its Creator, it is in this configuration where beauty as a divine name passes from God in Himself to God in his creative act.

When beauty as a divine name identifies God in His creative activity, it most fundamentally names a principle of determination. That is to say, God is beauty insofar as He gives every existing thing a unique and particular share in his hyper-determinacy, a share in the excess of his divine being. Again, three configurations of beauty in this respect presented themselves in the Dionysian corpus as a way to better conceive God as a principle of determination.

Beauty was first configured insofar as it corresponds to emanation, which identifies the more particular (than in Neoplatonism) creative act whereby an existing “this” comes to be what it is by virtue of divine creative causality. Both Neoplatonic, especially Procline, principles and Judeo-Christian biblical principles were seen to have influenced Dionysius’s understanding of this dimension. Insofar as beauty names God as a principle of determination, it identifies the way in which God bestows measure, number, and weight to a particular being (as *prodos*) while

always remaining with that being as the steadfast presence of the *monos* in its return to its source (as *epistrophe*). These various dimensions of emanation must be read in the context of beauty since only within the context of Dionysian symbolism, itself a contracted mode of beauty, is Dionysian emanation perceivable and thus meaningful. Where Neoplatonic emanation expresses a falling away from the One through a sequence of separated hypostases, Dionysian emanation expresses an analogical and anagogical bond of identity and difference as a consequence of God's creative will. Beauty serves as an indelible cohesive for the Dionysian scheme and without it one's reading of Dionysian emanation can all too easily slip into seeing only the Neoplatonic model.

Beauty is therefore configured secondly as a unity-in-plurality, a configuration which derives largely from the Neoplatonism that influences Dionysius. But where the Neoplatonic conception locates the unity-in-plurality, and thus beauty, only with the first emanation (*nous*)—on account of the fact that the One must only and always ever be a one—Dionysius sees the fittingness of appropriating this directly to the Trinitarian God. In so doing, beauty as a unity-in-plurality is not an attribute belonging solely to the Trinitarian God but is given to everything created since God's creative act is a sharing in his very divine being. Thus, in being creatively emanated by God's divine causality, every being is endowed with beauty and so with a substantive unity-in-plurality. The beauty of a creature is a refraction of divine beauty insofar as it signals its own relative transcendent plenitude, its simplicity and luminosity, and its intelligibility vis-à-vis all other beings that constitute its substantive unity-in-plurality. From this perspective, Dionysian substance is a discrete "this" but only insofar as it is constituted by a unique, (it might be said) one time only, coalescence of a given set of particular relations.

From this substantive set of relations, beauty can be understood configured in a third way—namely, as hierarchy. Throughout the *Corpus Dionysiacum*, there is a clear and explicit correspondence between beauty and hierarchy. Hierarchy is precisely the cosmic form that divine beauty takes in the act of divine creation. But it is important to clarify that hierarchy in this sense is the metaphysical, de facto, result of the "sacred ordering" of the multitude of unities-in-plurality as each one relates to all others in its context of particularity. Hierarchy, for Dionysius, is neither a static "thing" out there to be easily observed from a detached distance, nor is it an exclusively evaluative schematic wherein "superior" and "inferior" denote levels of value. In its simplest and most illuminating sense, hierarchy is the

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image of divine beauty as the ordering of all differences in the one divine unity-in-plurality, a process of emanated distillation through which the divine plenitude of intelligibility may pass to each and every member. It is the very result of a God of love who calls all creatures into the beauty of its own divine being simply for the sake of those creatures themselves and their enjoyment of divine beauty. In this regard, the God of Dionysius the Areopagite can be distinguished from the divine as formulated within any Neoplatonic thought structure. At this point, it will be helpful to examine this in more detail.

# 6

## Beauty and the One

TO BRING PART TWO TO A CLOSE, IT WILL BE BENEFICIAL TO RAISE THE following point of inquiry: just who is the God inhabiting the pages of Dionysius's treatise *On the Divine Names*? The preceding chapters have sought to examine and illumine what it means for Dionysius to appropriate the name "beauty" to God. It now becomes necessary to determine with more precision to whom the name "beauty" is being given. As the present work has sought to argue, Dionysius's God is the biblical God of Jesus Christ, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Indeed, it is precisely because this is the God being praised that Dionysius is able to appropriate the name "beauty" to him. Without the personal and intimate nature of God revealed in Scripture, the God who comes near in Christ Jesus, the conditions that allow beauty to be identified with the supreme principle remain distant and elusive. This chapter aspires to further verify this contention by examining how the appropriation of the name "beauty" to God not only distinguishes Dionysius's God from any Neoplatonic configuration of the divine, but also exhibits a unique understanding of how this God relates to his creation.

### Who Is the God of Dionysius the Areopagite?

Dionysius concludes his treatise *On the Divine Names* by praising God with the names One and Perfect. Scholars of note view this as evidence for Dionysius's implementation of Neoplatonic emanation as the fundamental structure of his work.<sup>1</sup> Dionysius begins with the name Good and all its variances (Light, Beauty, Love), proceeds to the name Being and all subsequent emanations derived from Being (life, wisdom, Justice, Virtue etc.) finally to return to the One. And it is the return into the One in the

1. See, e.g., von Balthasar, *GOTL*, II, 189ff.

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final chapter that, according to interpretations that read the text as structured on Neoplatonic emanation, verifies the Areopagite's allegiance to the Neoplatonic supreme principle. This then gives the impression that as a card carrying Neoplatonist the God who inhabits the pages of his treatise is much more the Plotinian, or Procline, One than the biblical God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who became incarnate in Christ Jesus. Given the linguistic difficulties surrounding the Dionysian corpus in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century—the complex Greek that adorns the treatise, and the limited availability of translations—rather than giving a careful reading of the text, many scholars during this period resort to secondary source material for their knowledge of the treatise. This in part allows the association between Dionysius and the Plotinian One to endure as it does.

From its earliest origins well up until the sixteenth century or so, without historical evidence to suggest otherwise, Dionysius is believed to be the actual biblical eyewitness mentioned in Acts 17:34. During this time this identity makes the issue of Dionysius's God a non-question: as a follower of Paul, Dionysius's God was the God of Jesus Christ, and in turn, the God of Israel. To quote the same chapter in Acts, this God is "the God who made the world and everything in it. . . . The Lord of heaven and earth, who does not live in temples built by human hands. . . . Who is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. . . . The God in whom we live and move and have our being." After Renaissance humanists like Valla, Grocyn, Colet, and Erasmus begin to voice suspicion about the Areopagite's biblical identity, and after Luther's final rejection of the relevance of the Dionysian corpus, a new current arises that associates the God of Dionysius with something of a far more Platonic flavor than anything authentically biblical.<sup>2</sup>

The discoveries at the end of the nineteenth century by Koch and Stiglmayr, which finally pulls the apostolic mask from the author of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*,<sup>3</sup> fans these flames of suspicion, setting the stage for

2. In his "Disputation of 1537," Luther insists that Dionysius "Platonizes more than he Christianizes," and in his *Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, Luther advises Christians to "shun like the Plague" the mystical theology of the Areopagite. Cf. Foehlich, "Pseudo-Dionysius and the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century," 33–46, and Golitzin, "A Contemplative and a Liturgist," 132.

3. A passage found in ch. 4 of Dionysius' *On Divine Names* contains an excursus on evil that appears to be directly dependent on Proclus's monograph *On the Existence of Evils*. This passage was the primary grounding for the argument made by Koch and Stiglmayr: Koch, "Der pseudo-epigraphische Character der dionysischen Schriften,"

a twentieth century both ambivalent toward and enticed by this now “unknown” thinker. For many Dionysius becomes above all a Neoplatonist whose Christianity is at best subordinate to his Neoplaontic allegiances and at worst little more than cultural camouflage used to disguise the Neoplatonic One in the garb of the biblical God. This view is advanced by many early twentieth-century scholars such as Godet, Arnou, Zeller, and Prächter, and at times uncritically promoted in nuanced ways by notable historians like Gilson and Copleston.<sup>4</sup> The conclusion advanced is that despite every effort to investigate and articulate the mystery of the Trinitarian God of Judeo-Christianity, Dionysius never finally escapes the Plotinian One that lurks behind his every theological impulse. A closer examination, however, of both the Plotinian One and Dionysius’s God will verify the incompatibility between the two and give greater clarity to the Dionysian understanding of the God of Jesus Christ.

## The Neoplatonic One

Given the role that he plays in establishing the Neoplatonic One, Plotinus will be examined as its representative. To a large extent, the way in which the One of Neoplatonism is understood first depends upon how, in general, the thought of Plotinus is approached. If, following some scholars,<sup>5</sup> Plotinus is read as an early representative of a form idealism understood

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353–421; Stiglmayr, *Der Neuplatoniker Proclus als Vorlage des sogenannten Dionysius Areopagita in der Lehre vom Übel*, 253–73, 721–48. More evidence is later uncovered that demonstrates Dionysius’ dependence on a fifth-century mode of Syrian liturgy. As Paul Rorem explains in *Biblical and Liturgical Symbols Within the Pseudo-Dionysian Synthesis*, 27, this was one primary foundation for Stiglmayr’s investigation into the setting and dating of the *CD*. Although some scholars, e.g., Schepens, “La liturgie de Denys, le pseudo-Aréopagite,” 357–76, have sought to establish other milieus for Dionysius’s liturgy (like the Alexandrian), these are considered largely unsuccessful. Boularand, “L’Eucharistie d’après le pseudo-Denys l’Aréopagite,” 193–217, strengthened Stiglmayr’s thesis and refuted Schepens’s. As Rorem further notes, the Syrian setting has, more recently, been confirmed by Strothmann, *Das Sakrament der Myron-Weihe in der Schrift De ecclesiastica hierarchia des Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita*, LX.

4. See Godet, “Denys l’Aréopagite,” columns 429–36; Arnou, “Platonisme des pères,” columns 2285–87; 2314–16; 2363–67; Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, 84; Copleston, *History of Philosophy*, 2:95; on Prächter and Zeller, see Putnam, *Beauty in the Pseudo-Denis*, 100.

5. E.g., Emilsson, “Cognition and Its Object,” 249n47: “For Plotinus absolutely everything has a mental cause and everything that deserves the name of ‘being’ is thinking of some sort.” Emilsson cites, among other passages, *Enneads* III, 8, as evidence of his claim.

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as some kind of mind-dependent existence, then the Plotinian One will be understood as little more than the projection into absolute status of a finite, mental conception of unity with no counterpart in the real world of things. However, other scholars maintain that if in fact idealism is identified with a doctrine of mind-dependent existence, Plotinus cannot be read as an idealist.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, the One cannot be reduced to a mere mental projection with no basis in reality, but must be seen as the unified font of all existence, whether concrete, abstract, real, or notional. The question of Plotinus's fundamental philosophical starting point, it seems, does not yield a simple answer. Nevertheless, the tension that is born within the debates surrounding it illustrates from the beginning the complexity of Plotinus's supreme principle. It is crucial to bear this complexity in mind when examining the Plotinian One in order to avoid the scholarly impulse that aspires to provide definitive determination beyond all ambiguity. The ambiguity in this case is essential to the inquiry at hand, which makes it all the more important to avoid any hasty reduction of the One to something Plotinus never articulated.

Among scholars of Plotinus, there appear to be two predominant ways of approaching his configuration of the One. The first, which is generated by a Hegelian hermeneutic, tends to infer some kind of self-negation on the part of the One in its generation of Intellect (*nous*). In his *Verlosungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, Hegel had made this very claim about Plotinus' One<sup>7</sup> and it set a certain hermeneutical foundation for later scholarship. Gilson's remarks are representative: "As with the One of Plotinus, the (Hegelian) Idea which thus alienates itself in nature is finding its way back through the successive moments of its dialectical realization."<sup>8</sup> In this sense the One is a self-reliant mind or intelligence, a recapitulation of the Aristotelian self-thinking thought as the absolute, self-determining *Geist*. The *monos-prodos-epistrophe* schematic that characterizes the generation of all things from the One becomes understood precisely as the One's act of self-determination. In this Hegelian understanding, the negation of all otherness is what comes to determine the constitution of the One, whose act of generating these others is merely the preliminary stage of its constitutional negation and fuller self-realization. In many respects, this Hegelian reading of Plotinus seems inconsistent

6. Gerson, *Plotinus*, ch. 2. Cf. also 227n3.

7. Hegel, *Verlosungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, 443–44, 451, as cited in Ferrarin, *Hegel and Aristotle*, 122n18.

8. Gilson, *Unity of Philosophical Experience*, 196.

with a great deal of what is stated about the One both by Plotinus himself and his Neoplatonic posterity.

A second way of approaching the One arises as both a reaction to this first way and as a “Christianizing” of Plotinus. The tendency in this way of reading the Plotinian One is to appropriate the attributes of the Christian God, and in particular those attributes associated with the person of the Father. The degree to which the Plotinian hypostases influenced Trinitarian thought is debatable. But what is clear is that Plotinus did not speak of the One as a power that “creates” *ex nihilo* out of love and freewill. This Christianized reading of the One is often accompanied by a rather hasty and unqualified identification of the Good with the One, speaking of them as if they are in Plotinus’ view *unqualifiedly* identical. For example, in *Reading Plotinus*, not only does Corrigan speak of the One and the Good as if there was no distinction, but he appears to ignore important differences between Neoplatonic emanation and Christian creation:

The One, or Good, is beyond everyone’s grasp, and yet it is “gentle, kindly and gracious, and present to anyone when anyone wishes” (V,5 [32]12). Though the One may be so utterly ineffable as to seem unrelated to ordinary experience, everything—ourselves included—has in fact come from the One. . . . The making, or *creation*, of all things is not some sort of reflex action of an insensible and unthinking principle; nor does it happen by simple necessity or in accordance with any determinate plan or choice between opposite courses of action, but instead it springs from the free spontaneous self-productive activity of a principle that makes freedom and will what they will be in its products.<sup>9</sup>

In Corrigan’s reading, Plotinus advocates a doctrine of creation that simply cannot be validly appropriated to him. And if there was any doubt, Corrigan adds, “Thus the One’s unrestricted, infinite activity is creative, self-productive freedom that establishes everything else in being.”<sup>10</sup> While it may be possible to mount a textual defense of such a reading it stretches credulity to imagine the Plotinian One as a source that *creates* in infinite freedom. Any such defense too easily infers Christianized features of creation into Plotinus’s thinking and glosses over important distinctions that Plotinus himself goes to great lengths to articulate concerning the One. To offer but one example, in *Enneads* 6.9.6,<sup>11</sup> he says that the “Good is the

9. Corrigan, *Reading Plotinus*, 27. Emphasis added.

10. *Ibid.*, 28.

11. Hereafter, all citations of the *Enneads* in the main text will only include book,

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very being of the One,” but also that because it cannot have a will to anything, the “One is Beyond-Good.” Here it seems an important distinction is stressed in order to more clearly highlight the absolute transcendence of the One. These distinctions are crucial, especially since they are at the very heart of Dionysius’ alteration when, going well beyond Plotinus’s configuration of the One, he appropriates beauty to God himself.

Both the Hegelian and the Christianizing approaches appear to have merit and demerit, a testament to a certain ambiguity and complexity within Plotinus’s own understanding of his supreme principle. In any case, transcendence is a key feature that marks the One in both approaches, and looking more directly to Plotinus’s own account may throw some of the ambiguity into relief. Precisely what does the One’s transcendence look like? For Plotinus, the One has never known nor can know measure (5.5.11); it does not bear to be numbered among any others and is no peer of other entities (5.5.4); even as the absolute Good, it is utterly alone, void of all things but itself (5.5.13); in fact, if after one utters “the One” or “The Good” anything else is uttered a deficiency is immediately introduced (3.8.11); and because it was at no time incomplete, it cannot be a power of providence (5.3.12). If the One is truly to be a One, then in the mind of Plotinus it must eternally eschew any and all relativity whatsoever. Relation to otherness is a deficiency for the utter self-sufficient One. Hence, the derivation of things from the One is a falling away that results in a defective realm of becoming. The One is transcendent precisely by its being beyond every entity that springs forth from it, every other entity that is, was, or will be. Transcendence is, therefore, understood as the absence of relation, the removal of all things from the presence of the One who, in being truly a One, is eternally isolated in its own self-existence.

At the same time, Plotinus explains that every particular thing has its own “One” (3.8.10); that existence is a trace of the One (5.5.5); that the One can be conceived as the total power toward things (6.8.9); and as the Good, it is the source of all good things that any others have (6.8.14). Despite Plotinus’s own efforts to establish the One’s absolute transcendence as absolute removal and isolation, some sense of relativity remains almost of necessity. All of this indicates a degree of ambiguity within the Plotinian One generated from the tension between the idea of absolute unity, which forever strains to shed any sense of relativity, and the insurmountable relation to finite thought that this idea cannot escape.

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chapter, and number within parentheses.

Again, it may be worth asking what sanctions the belief that the One is real rather than a mental construction forged from absolutizing unity beyond all other transcendental attributes? For if it is simply the persuasive strength that the idea of absolute unity possesses as an idea, with no other evidence either in reality or in thought, it seems difficult to exonerate Plotinus from the charge of idealism. Nevertheless, Plotinus does not himself concede the mere idea of the One, but attempts a complex metaphysical account of it. In so doing, he already appears to pass beyond mere idealism insofar as any successful metaphysics of the One would provide at least a modicum of evidence for its extra-mental reality. In other words, if Plotinus and his Neoplatonic posterity truly and firmly believed in the One, there would be little use in applying inquiry of any kind to it. Here in between the articulated ideal and the metaphysical fact the ambiguity of the Neoplatonic One becomes most palpable. And it is precisely in this ambiguity where beauty's own ambiguous relation to the One derives.

### **Is the Neoplatonic One “Beauty”?**

As with Plato and Aristotle before him, Plotinus does not arrive at a final, unequivocal identification of beauty with the One but labors under an unresolved ambiguity. It is an ambiguity attested to by the secondary literature that attempts to address the question of beauty's relation to the One in Plotinus. As if imitating the ambiguity internal to the Plotinian corpus, this secondary literature itself leaves the issue unresolved despite attempts at a resolution.

It will be helpful to begin by highlighting the distinction. Plotinus is explicit in his insistence that, although the One is identifiable with the good, it cannot be identifiable with beauty. There are a number of places throughout his *Enneads* where he expresses this point, one of the most significant of which occurs at 5.5.12. In this passage Plotinus explains how beauty orients itself to “those already in some degree knowing and awakened” and is often accompanied by a “painful appearance,” while the good, in establishing an entity's “natural tendency,” has an inherent presence even to “those asleep” and is always with them. Consequently, the love of beauty is later than the love of good and requires a “more sophisticated understanding.” There is a kind of reasoning from experience here that enables Plotinus to conclude that “beauty is shown to be secondary because this passionate love for it is secondary and is felt by those who are already conscious. But the more ancient, unperceived desire of the

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Good proclaims that the Good itself is more ancient and prior to beauty.”<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, Plotinus contends that since the beautiful needs the good while the good has no need for the beautiful, the good is the “older, not in time but by degree of reality” and has a power that is therefore higher and earlier than beauty. Finally, the difference between the good and the beautiful corresponds to the difference between reality and appearance: for while the good satisfies only within the sphere of the real, the beautiful can satisfy in appearance regardless of whether or not it is real.

However, despite those assertions throughout the *Enneads* that definitively distinguish the One from beauty, there are enough passages to suggest that Plotinus does leave open the possibility for some sort of identification between them.<sup>13</sup> A passage in *Enneads* 1.6.6 is especially significant. There Plotinus writes, “And first we must posit beauty which is also the good; from this immediately comes *nous*, which is beauty, and soul is given beauty by *nous*.”<sup>14</sup> Inge has suggested that in this and other passages it is possible to discern in Plotinus different kinds of beauty.<sup>15</sup> Here in 1.6.6. the linguistic distinction that Plotinus makes between *καλλονή* (beauty) and *καλόν* (beautiful) correspond to different *kinds* of beauty, the former alone being identified as appropriate to the One.<sup>16</sup> Following his translation of 6.7.32., Inge maintains that for Plotinus, *καλλονή* (beauty) cannot be embodied in forms, while *καλόν* (beauty) must be so embodied. Hence because the One as such must be without form, it cannot be validly called *καλόν*. Therefore, following 6.2.18, the One must be understood as *καλλονή*.<sup>17</sup> As Rist correctly observes, however, “This is to state a problem, not to solve it,”<sup>18</sup> since in making a distinction between two kinds of a given thing, one is left with the task of accounting for the unity that holds these distinct kinds together.

12. 5.5.12: Δεύτερος ὢν οὗτος ὁ ἔρωσ και ἤδη συνιέντων μᾶλλον δεύτερον μηνύει τὸ καλόν εἶναι. ἡ δὲ ἀρχαιότερα τούτου και ἀναίσθητος ἔφεσις ἀρχαιότερόν φησι και τὰγαθόν εἶναι και πρότερον τούτου. Translation Armstrong.

13. Perhaps the best discussion of this issue is found in Rist, *Plotinus: The Road to Reality*, ch. 5.

14. 1.6.6: Καὶ τὸ πρῶτον θετέον τὴν καλλονήν, ὅπερ και τὰγαθόν· ἀφ’ οὗ νοῦς εὐθύς τὸ καλόν· ψυχὴ δὲ νῶ καλόν.

15. In particular 1.6.7; 6.2.18; 6.7.32. Rist, *Plotinus*, 56–57, includes analysis of some other passages where there appears to be an identification between beauty of some kind and the One: 4.8.1; 6.9.4; 6.9.9; 6.7.40.

16. Inge, *Philosophy of Plotinus*, 124ff.

17. This is how Rist reads Inge in, *Plotinus*, 53.

18. Rist, *Plotinus*, 53.

If the preceding is not sufficient for drawing out the ambiguity surrounding Plotinus's view of beauty's relation to the One, an examination of Rist's own analysis stands to confirm it beyond any doubt. In taking up the task of analyzing beauty's relation to the One in Plotinus, Rist, in contrast with Inge, recognizes both a relation and a distinction. It is within this recognition where Rist finally concludes: "The beauty of the One is that unique beauty which is the power to create beautiful Beings."<sup>19</sup> Such a conclusion fittingly reflects the ambiguity that remains even after careful inquiry and analysis is undertaken. Even for Rist it remains unclear whether such an observation intends to admit or deny an identity between beauty and the One—a consequence that may have been intended. In Rist's analysis, beauty is directly identified with the forms in the world—that is to say, beauty is always a reference to a beautiful "this." Taken in this sense, as Rist rightly explains, saying the One is beautiful entails denying beauty to anything else.<sup>20</sup> This fact forces Rist to read Plotinus as if the latter were attributing to the One a transcendent beauty that is somehow only a source of beauty without itself being beautiful. Hence his assertion cited already that "the beauty of the One is that unique Beauty which is the power to create beautiful things." However, this kind of beauty—if it may even be considered a kind (and if we take Rist's own assessment of Inge then it appears it cannot, at least not without restating the problem rather than resolving it)—cannot have any correspondence in the world as it is known. Otherwise, it does not belong uniquely to the One. But then how can such a beauty be known at all? Rist's answer is that the beauty of the One is a hyper-beauty, a "beauty beyond beauty" (as Plotinus explains in 6.7.32–3), or as the "flower of beauty." Rist is clear that as the maker and begetter of beauty the One cannot itself be beautiful: "There is only one Beauty (sic), that is, the Form, but this Beauty is only Beauty because of its standard and creator, the One."<sup>21</sup> And so it seems that Rist settles on a final equivocation between beauty as it identifies the One and beauty as it is realized in things: beauty in the One is an unmediatable difference from the beauty of things. That they share a common name, then, can only really be understood equivocally. But such an equivocation is a testament to the ambiguity of this relation in Plotinus himself. On both Inge's and Rist's analysis, it appears that Plotinus continues to view beauty as something secondary to the One. If the One, as a source, or "flower" of beauty, is not

19. Ibid., 60. Rist cites *Enneads* 6.7.33.

20. Rist, *Plotinus*, 60.

21. Ibid., 63.

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itself beautiful than its being a source or “flower” is other to its beauty. The implication follows that beauty remains secondary. For Dionysius, the story is much different.

As was seen in the second part of chapter 2 above, Proclus does develop the relationship between beauty and the One/Good beyond what Plotinus had previously done. However, even with Proclus it was seen that there is no direct identification. Instead, a paradigmatic middle is established by the Demiurgic gaze upon the One/Good. While this resolves the ambiguity one finds in Plotinus, it does so by definitively declaring the separation between beauty and the One/Good. The possibility of realizing their identity, at least with respect to Neoplatonic thought, then, remains with the Plotinian configuration if it remains a Neoplatonic possibility at all.

### **The One Who Is Beauty: The God of Dionysius the Areopagite**

The ambiguity in Plotinus between beauty and the One is resolved in a way opposite Proclus when Dionysius unequivocally identifies God with the name beauty. However, the impact that this has upon the God of Dionysius tends to be overlooked in contemporary scholarship on Dionysius. In identifying God with the name beauty, Dionysius unites the Plotinian One with the Intellectual Principle, the *nous*. Consequently, Dionysius simultaneously rejects the Plotinian One as a discrete, separate identification of God, reconfiguring it as that aspect of the divine identity that remains ever beyond communication. In this regard, the name One becomes a teleological parallel to the name good (assuming some normativity to the order of the Dionysian text). But just as the name good is given a concrete counterpart in the name beauty, Dionysius couples the name One with its own concrete counterpart in order to avoid hypostasizing the One and thus regressing back to Plotinus. This he does with the name “perfect.”

A key element involved in Dionysius’s configuration of the names “one” and “perfect” is that when cast together they embody both of the primary attributes of beauty examined above: beauty as it identifies the divine in itself, and beauty as it identifies the divine in its creative causality. The name “one” fulfills the teleological role of beauty as it identifies the divine in itself, while the name “perfect” fulfills the teleological role of beauty as it identifies divine creative causality. The following offers a brief exposition of the contours of this position.

In his analysis of the issue, Dionysius unequivocally identifies the Supreme Godhead with the name beauty without any ontologically evaluative distinction from the names “good,” and “one.” This means that Dionysius rejects Plotinus’s (and Proclus’s) assertions that render beauty an ontologically secondary principle subsequent to the good. Dionysius even goes so far as to appropriate a *textual* priority to beauty over the one. It is difficult to arrive at any definitive conclusions about what this textual priority means, though, as noted already, some speculate that it reflects the way that the treatise itself follows Neoplatonic emanation. From this perspective, the name “one” occurs at the end of the treatise as a symbolic “return” to divine transcendence.

One possible way to examine the Dionysian formulation of the name “one” is to approach it from an etymological/linguistic perspective. In the final chapter of the *Divine Names*, Dionysius opens by characterizing the “subject” of the name one with the word *καρτερώτατον*, a superlative form of *καρτερός*. What is notable about this is the fact that among four of the more prominent translations available, this word is translated in four *different* ways, indicating a degree of uncertainty regarding its definitive meaning.<sup>22</sup> A search through the use of this word in classical literature reveals that it is most often used in a military or polemic context to signify strength or might when confronted with opposition.<sup>23</sup> Of the eight times it appears in Plato, seven maintain this military/polemic use<sup>24</sup> while one carries the pejorative sense of obstinacy.<sup>25</sup> Of the nine times it appears in Proclus, eight of them are cognates of the verbal form and so relatively distant from the concern at hand.<sup>26</sup> The only place where it is used in a superlative adjectival sense appears to have the connotation of “enduring” since it is one of four adjectival forms used in a sequence expressing

22. Parker translates it as “most difficult”; Rolt translates it as “most important”; Luibheid translates it as “most enduring”; and the Editors of the Shrine of Wisdom render it simply as “greatest.”

23. Cf., *inter alia*, Homer, *Il.* 1.172; 1.245; 5.363; 5.576; etc.; *Od.* 4.219; 4.265; 8.121; 10.345; etc.; Plut. *Alc.* 31; Plut. *Arist.* 9; Thuc. 4.43 [2], 4.131 [1]; Hdt. 1.76 [4]; Soph. *Ajax*, 646.

24. *Laws* 5.727c; *Statesman* 295d; *Theaetetus* 157d, 169b; *Republic* 3.388d; *Symposium* 217c, 220c.

25. *Phaedo* 77a: “He is the most obstinately incredulous of mortals” (*καίτοι καρτερώτατος ἀνθρώπων ἐστίν*). Translation by Burent in Plato, *Platonis Opera*.

26. 1 time in *Commentary on the Rep.*, I: p. 175, l. 27; 1 time in *Theology of Plato*, I: p. 100, l. 2; 2 times in *Commentary on the Alcibiades I*, §37, l. 14; §292, l. 12; 2 times in *Commentary on the Parmenides*, 706, l. 4; 994, l. 2; 1 time in the *Commentary on the Cratylus*, §89, l. 7; 1 time in *Commentary on the Timaeus*, I, 303, l. 2.

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the power of the soul.<sup>27</sup> Its use in Proclus, then, appears to have in some measure absorbed the term's traditional sense of might, strength, and durability. Proclus's infrequent use of this term, however, calls into question the influence of his use on Dionysius's selection of this term here.

Bearing in mind the enormous relevance of the One as a theme in any Neoplatonic thought, how ought this particular term, placed at the very opening of this final chapter of his treatise, be understood? Is Dionysius's use of this term, like Proclus's use, rather inconsequential, a term he employs simply to signify the strength and durability of the One as a theme of inquiry? Or is it possible that Dionysius hearkens back to an older tradition that uses this term either pejoratively or to signify strength and might in the context of contrariety and opposition? If the former response appears more plausible, it would follow that the One as a theme in the Dionysian text merits little more than a rather common qualifier to introduce what is—in the world of Dionysius—an enormous topic. If the latter, it suggests that Dionysius uses it in a similar way to indicate not only the difficulty of the name “one,” but also in order to alert his readers that his account will oppose what is at the time the most well-known account of the one, namely, that found in Plotinus.

Emphasis on this term may appear to overstate the issue. However, the impact that this term has had on the reception of Dionysius should not be underestimated. One finds it influencing, for example, Copleston's analysis of Dionysius.<sup>28</sup> Citing the opening of *On the Divine Names* 13, Copleston explains that when Dionysius “speaks of the One as the “*most important title of all*” he is clearly writing in dependence on the Plotinian doctrine of the ultimate Principle as the One.” Here, the translation of *καρτερώτατον* as “most important” gives the false impression that Dionysius' God is dependent on the Plotinian One, and so appropriates too much of Plotinian unity to Dionysius' God. A reassessment of the original Dionysian text, then, with some history of the terms he uses is more important than may first appear.

Before pursuing some of the other grammatical and syntactic elements of the final chapter in the Dionysian treatise, it will be helpful to posit two hypotheses based upon the considerations above. *Hypothesis 1*: although Plotinus rejects the identification between beauty and the One,

27. Proclus, *Comm. on the Rep.*, II: p. 118, l. 21: *κινούντες ἐς τόνδε τὸν τόπον σώματα αὐταῖς ὑποστρωαννύουσιν καὶ χωρῆσαι δυνάμενα τὴν ὑπερφυσὴ ζῶν τῶν ψυχῶν καὶ ὑπηρετοῦντα ταῖς ἐνεργείαις αὐτῶν ταῖς καρτερωτάταις καὶ ἀπαθεςτάταις καὶ δύστρεπτα καὶ δυσδιάλυτα.*

28. Copleston, *History of Philosophy*, 2:94.

it is a rejection that leaves open the possibility to discover ways to reconfigure their identification. *Hypothesis 2*: Dionysius seizes this possibility so much so that he even attributes to the name beauty a priority of some kind over the name one, an attribution that he eventually acknowledges in the opening of his final chapter of the *Divine Names*. A closer examination of some of the details from that final chapter will throw further light on, or perhaps offer textual evidence to support, these hypotheses by examining the relation between beauty and the names “one” and “perfect.”

The first significant feature of Dionysius’ configuration of the name one is the way that he utilizes the unity in plurality dynamic of beauty to relate the one to its others. This feature of the one is first explicated when Dionysius explains why he characterizes the exposition of this name as *καρτερώτατον* (indicated by the explanatory γὰρ). His explanation establishes a mutual mediation between unity and plurality: “For the Word of God predicates all attributes of the Cause of all things, *both singly and collectively*, and extols Him both as Perfect and as One.”<sup>29</sup> It cannot be overstated that for Dionysius the ground of all thought and speech about God is what has been revealed in sacred Scripture. From this ground, Dionysius asserts that predication of unity or oneness is accompanied by relation to otherness, not opposed to it. Each predication predicates God as one insofar as it predicates a *singular* “all” and predicates God as perfect insofar as it predicates a *collective* “all.” The difference, it seems, is that the singular “all” signifies an attribute in its unity—for example, the life of all living things as life simply—while the collective “all” signifies a plurality as held in its pre-existent plenitude. This is verified in the two components of his explanation of the name “perfect” that immediately follows the previous citation:

[*component 1*] He is then perfect not only as self-perfect, and solitarily separated within Himself, by Himself, and throughout most perfect, but also as super-perfect, as beseems His pre-eminence over all and limiting every infinitude, and surpassing every term, and by none contained or comprehended; [*component 2*] but even extending at once to all and above all by His unfailing gratuities and endless energies.<sup>30</sup>

29. DN 13, 1 (977B): Καὶ γὰρ ἡ θεολογία τοῦ πάντων αἰτίου καὶ πάντα καὶ ἅμα πάντα κατηγορεῖ καὶ ὡς τέλειον αὐτὸ καὶ ὡς ἔν ἀνυμνεῖ. Emphasis added.

30. DN 13, 1 (977B): Τέλειον μὲν οὖν ἔστιν οὐ μόνον ὡς αὐτοτελὲς καὶ καθ’ ἑαυτὸ ὑφ’ ἑαυτοῦ μονοειδῶς ἀφοριζόμενον καὶ ὅλον δι’ ὅλου τελειότατον, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὡς ὑπερτελὲς κατὰ τὸ πάντων ὑπερέχον καὶ πᾶσαν μὲν ἀπειρίαν ὀρίζον, παντὸς δὲ πέρατος ὑπερηπλωμένον καὶ ὑπὸ μηδενὸς χωρούμενον ἢ καταλαμβανόμενον, ἀλλὰ διατεῖνον ἐπὶ πάντα ἅμα καὶ

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What Dionysius presents here is a vision of God that is fuller and more complete, by virtue of his Judeo-Christian confession, than the Neoplatonic One. The distinction between God in Himself and God in his creative causality finds its way into the articulation in this excerpt. In order to draw out how this important distinction is presented here, the excerpt has been divided into two components.

The first [*component 1*] refers to God as he is in himself, explaining the way that God's perfection refers to immanent divine completion. If the Dionysian God has any similarity to the Neoplatonic One, it is only in his self-perfection. As the above excerpt explains, in the perfection of his self-completion God is "solitarily separated within Himself." Dionysius locates God's separation in the divine integrity, which is to say that feature of God that belongs solely to God. But as Dionysius proceeds to explain, this is not the end of the story. God is also super-perfect, a characterization that, albeit somewhat enigmatically, is explained by relationship: his super-perfection derives from his preeminence over all things, the fact that he limits everything, surpasses everything and is contained by none. In this sense, a parallel comes to light between divine perfection and divine beauty insofar as both refer to not only how it is possessed as constitutive of the integrity of divine identity, but also as it is held as a super-fullness. Both are necessary for Dionysius to avoid the extremes of the Neoplatonic One in transcendent isolation from all otherness, and the pantheism that is a consequence of uniting God to all things. All this gives clarity to the fact that for Dionysius, divine transcendence is not an isolated dwelling but an identity that overflows into relativity.

The second part [*component 2*] confirms this vision of transcendental relativity. This second component of the excerpt includes an almost anti-Plotinian maneuver that not only describes this divine perfection in terms of relation to the all but also seems to attribute this relativity to divine transcendence. In other words, where Plotinus holds that any relation to otherness compromises the One's transcendence, Dionysius draws relativity and transcendence together. It is precisely on account of God's super-perfection and self-completion that he "extends at once to all." This statement signals the transfer of the distinction between the One and the *Nous* into the distinction between God as he is in himself and God as he is in his self-communication. Dionysius does not, however, settle on some kind of equivocal division between these. Rather, in the final statement of this first section of chapter 13, he explains how divine perfection

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ὕπερ πάντα ταῖς ἀνεκλείπτους ἐπιδόσσει καὶ ἀτελευτήτοις ἐνεργείαις.

is such that its relation to all things must be spoken in terms of an immanent plenitude that overflows inexhaustibly to fill all things with its own perfection:

But, on the other hand, He is called perfect both as without increase, and always perfect, and as undiminished as pre-holding all things in Himself and overflowing as befits one, inexhaustible, and same, and super-full, and undiminished, abundance, in accordance with which He perfects all perfect things, and fills them with His own perfection.<sup>31</sup>

Not only does divine perfection identify the unique, integral identity of God, and not only does it identify a super-perfection that overflows into relation with all that exists, but it also expresses the fact that God gives this sense of perfection to all things. To be a creature in the Dionysian view is to be filled with God's own perfection. God, for Dionysius, is an overfull source of all that is, was, and will be. Consequently, God is a creative source that gives the creature to be for that creature's own sake. This is what it means to "fill it with his own perfection." When Dionysius's own account of divine perfection is carefully and attentively grasped with respect to this idea, it is clear that God's giving his own perfection is not an extension of a self-determining identity. The otherness of creatures, in other words, is not merely an extension of the divine identity as it returns to itself in an act of self-completion. Rather, the giving of divine perfection is a releasing of the creature into its own relative similitude of that divine perfection. The creature has its own integrity, but it is also bestowed with a sense of overfullness that binds the creature to all others.

The fact that Dionysius examines the names one and perfect together indicates that he understands oneness not in terms of Plotinian separation from all things, but rather in terms of a unique identity that includes relation to otherness through the mode of transcendence. God's oneness can only be understood as expressing the unique quality of being the *only* overfull, and so perfect, source of all things. And precisely because God is the only such one like this, he alone has the capacity to give it to others. Relationship through the mode of transcendence stands as the very opposite of the Plotinian complete removal from all things and instead

31. DN 13, 1 (977B): Τέλειον δ' αὖ λέγεται καὶ ὡς ἀναυξὲς καὶ ἀεὶ τέλειον καὶ ὡς ἀμείωτον, ὡς πάντα ἐν ἑαυτῷ προέχον καὶ ὑπερβλύζον κατὰ μίαν τὴν ἄπαιστον καὶ ταύτην καὶ ὑπερπλήρη καὶ ἀνελάττωτον χορηγίαν, καθ' ἣν τὰ τέλεια πάντα τελεσιουργεῖ καὶ τῆς οἰκείας ἀποπληροῦτελειότητος.

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expresses *absolute relation* to all things. God is one insofar as he alone relates to all things perfectly, and God is perfect in relating to all things at once.

It is on account of the content of beauty—as a transcendent plenitude and a principle of determination—that provides Dionysius with a key to this correspondence between the names perfect and one. These two attributes of beauty as a divine name, with their sub-categories examined above, coalesce into a “perfect one,” as it were. This occurs when Dionysius directs the discussion toward the theology of the Trinity:

For the one, uniformly pre-held and comprehended all things in itself. For this reason, then, the Word of God celebrates the whole Godhead as Cause of all by the epithet of the One, both one God the Father, and one Lord Jesus Christ, and one and the same Spirit, by reason of the surpassing indivisibility of the whole Divine Oneness, in which all things are uniquely collected, and are super-unified and are with it Superessentially.<sup>32</sup>

It is important to note that oneness here is not some abstracted form that stands discretely behind the three persons of the Trinity, as some maintain.<sup>33</sup> Such a conclusion derives from the presupposition that for Dionysius God, for all intents and purposes, is identifiable with the Plotinian One. Dionysius is clear, however, that the attribute “one” refers to a pre-held community of the all comprehended as they preexist in God. This is the transcendent elevation of difference and diversity rather than their elimination for the sake of pure unity. It is unity conceived and expressed as a plenitude or excess of diversity, pre-held in divine transcendence. Like Plotinus, Dionysius does assert the “necessity” of celebrating “the whole and one deity” with the name “one,” a celebration made possible only insofar as there is a “turn from the many to the one.” But unlike Plotinus, Dionysius identifies beauty with the one insofar as this turn from the many to the one takes place through the power of the one’s *attraction*: “And it is necessary, also, that we being turned from the many to the One, *by the power of the Divine Oneness*, should celebrate as one the whole and

32. DN 13, 3 (980BC): Πάντα γὰρ ἐν ἑαυτῷ τὸ ἐν ἐνοειδῶς προεἰληφέ τε καὶ περιεἴληφεν. Ταύτη γοῦν ἡ θεολογία τὴν ὄλην θεαρχίαν ὡς πάντων αἰτίαν ὑμνεῖ τῇ τοῦ ἐνός ἐπωνυμίᾳ, καὶ «εἷς θεὸς ὁ πατὴρ» καὶ «εἷς κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς» καὶ «ἐν καὶ τὸ αὐτὸ πνεῦμα» διὰ τὴν ὑπερβάλλουσαν τῆς ὄλης θεϊκῆς ἐνότητος ἀμέρειαν, ἐν ᾗ πάντα ἐνικῶς συνῆκται καὶ ὑπερήνωται καὶ πρόσεστιν ὑπερουσίως.

33. E.g., Copleston, *History of Philosophy*, 2:95: “The neo-Platonic influence on the Pseudo-Dionysius comes out very strongly in his doctrine of the Blessed Trinity, for he seems to be animated by the desire to find a One behind the differentiation of Persons.”

the One Deity.”<sup>34</sup> It is by virtue of the divine oneness itself that creatures are capable of turning from the many to the One. Admittedly, Dionysius does not include an explicit principle of desire or attraction in the given excerpt. However, it is hoped that what the previous chapters bring to light provides a justification for this inference. The power of divine oneness, for Dionysius, is precisely in its being an object of desire that through light, beauty, and love draws all back to itself. The one for Dionysius is never a univocal, separated identity but rather an attribute only conceived in concert with divine perfection. And it is the divine perfection that all things are ultimately seeking.

## Conclusion

The portrait that the preceding chapters on Dionysius have sought to paint is that the God who adorns the pages of his treatise *On the Divine Names*, indeed the God who inspires and inhabits the entire Corpus, is most fundamentally the biblical God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who became incarnate in Christ Jesus. This God is often obscured behind not only the enigmatic nature of the texts, but the Neoplatonic thinking that Dionysius uses to articulate and express his particular vision of God. In this regard, the argument throughout the preceding chapters has been that the Neoplatonism that colors the Dionysian corpus is supplemental to a more significant biblically Pauline theology. In fact, it is precisely on account of his Pauline allegiances, especially as formulated in Romans 1:20, that Dionysius finds justification for employing non-biblical strategies for his contemplative inquiries. It is out of his unique theological synthesis that Dionysius is able to be the first Christian theologian to unequivocally identify God with the name beauty.

As this chapter has argued, when the God of Dionysius is examined in the context of this divine name it becomes clear that this God is far from the Neoplatonic One, whether Plotinian, Procline, or otherwise. God is the One, to be sure, but his one-ness is configured according to the portrait of God found throughout the Scriptures. Oneness in this sense is bound up with transcendent relativity rather than with transcendent isolation and removal. Hence, Dionysius examines the name one right alongside the name perfect indicating the way divine one-ness must be read in concert

34. *DN* 13, 3 (980BC): *Και χρῆ και ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ τῶν πολλῶν ἐπὶ τὸ ἐν τῇ δυνάμει τῆς θεϊκῆς ἐνότῆτος ἐπιστρεφόμενους ἐνιαίως ὑμνεῖν τὴν ὄλην και μίαν θεότητα, τὸ πάντων αἴτιον ἐν.*

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with the fullness of relation that constitutes divine perfection. In this way, as was noted above, divine oneness becomes a teleological parallel to the divine goodness, while divine perfection becomes a teleological parallel to divine beauty. If one may speak of a “return”—*epistrophe*—with respect to the Dionysian schematic, it is a return of the created entity into greater and more profound depths of intimacy with the God who gives beings to be for the sake of the beings themselves. As touched upon, it is the return of the prodigal to greater plenitude of divine substance. It is a return to a God who is not only beauty itself, but who gives beauty like a lavish spendthrift to all created things.

Dionysius’s vision of God is, therefore, a vision of the God who is beauty. What should be clear at this point is that such an identification is much more a complex metaphysical assertion than an aesthetic one. It is an identification that not only throws light upon God as beauty itself, nor only of God’s presence in all things insofar as they are beautiful, but of the important continuity that obtains between these two complicated poles of the creative activity. The challenge that continually perplexed the ancient world involves just how to hold these two poles in a tensile unity without either compromising the absolute transcendence of the One, or of deifying the material world. And no matter how careful their inquiry, no matter how perceptive and acute their powers of reason, they never arrive at the explicit position found in Dionysius’s *On the Divine Names*.

In this difference a very subtle, but very important, dimension of Christian thought and beauty comes to light: only within the divine name tradition is the most complete portrait of beauty made available. To put it another way, beauty in its fullest expression is a revealed phenomenon. As Greek thought demonstrates, rational inquiry into the nature of beauty may discern a great deal about it. Most importantly, it can come to see how beauty is both material and spiritual, inhabiting both the order of the gods and the order of material beings. It can come to discern the impact that this has on desire, and so beauty’s relation to the good. It can even see how beauty must be simple while also consisting of a plenitude of forms. But the capacity to finally synthesize these various binaries appears to be a skill that eludes even the most brilliant minds of the ancient world. When the Dionysian difference is carefully considered, it appears that such a skill is wanting for any degree of human reason—for it is a skill not found within the capacity of reason alone. Rather, it is a principle given only when this synthesis itself becomes human in the person of Jesus Christ.

Dionysius's theology of divine beauty, then, has a significant Christological dimension even if it is not explicit. The preceding has indicated various areas in his corpus where consideration of Christ is present as a way to think through certain themes. But the presence of the person of Jesus Christ in the Dionysian corpus exceeds specific textual reference. Rather, its most influential presence is as a light cast over the whole relationship between God and creation, the supernatural and the natural, the divine and the human. It is the very possibility of a Christian theology of divine names since only the Incarnation enables the kind of pedagogical anagogy that is found in Pauline theology and expressed in Romans 1:20. And the Christ who makes the created things in the world become doorways, as it were, into divine things is the *sine qua non* for identifying God as beauty itself.

## PART THREE

SO FAR, THIS STUDY HAS EXAMINED THE PRIMARY SOURCES FOR ESTABLISHING the relation between beauty and the divine in the ancient world. It has also examined the Dionysian development of this relationship, arguing that there is a coincidence of originality in Dionysius consisting of his synthesis of the Neoplatonic One and *nous*, as well as his explicit identification of God as beauty by adding beauty to the tradition of divine names. Part 3 now examines the issue of beauty as a divine name insofar as it is treated in the thought of Thomas Aquinas.

The examination opens by preparing some important groundwork. Chapter 7 examines the journey that the Dionysian corpus follows as it is passed into the Latin West. Chapter 8 examines how the relationship between beauty and the divine follows in the wake of this passage but also how it is transmitted to the Latin West by other routes. With these two chapters in place, chapter 9 begins a more in depth analysis of the reception and synthesis of Dionysius and beauty's relation to the divine. It does so by examining the thought of Thomas's remarkable teacher Albert the Great. Not only does Albert exercise considerable influence over Thomas in this matter, but he, like Thomas, pens a commentary on the Dionysian *Divine Name* text. Albert's own treatment of the matter provides important points of consideration and contrast to Thomas's understanding of beauty and how it relates to God.

There has been more literature produced on Thomas's views of beauty than perhaps any figure of the high Middle Ages. Yet in comparison with the volumes of literature devoted to other themes in the thought of the Angelic Doctor, attention to the theme of beauty is minimal. To date, the singular most important work remains Francis Kovach's comprehensive study, *Die Ästhetik des Thomas von Aquin: Eine genetische und systematische Analyse*,<sup>35</sup> though several other monographs have appeared

35. Kovach, *Die Ästhetik des Thomas von Aquin*. Prior to Kovach's study, the most

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since its publication.<sup>36</sup> Thomas's views of beauty can also be found in monographs and articles that pertain to various dimensions of aesthetics and beauty.<sup>37</sup> Each work makes an invaluable contribution to the general picture of Aquinas's doctrine of beauty. Among them, however, there is a tendency to position Thomas's thoughts in relation to modern aesthetics with the result that in some sense, Thomas's doctrine is filtered through the modern idiom. As a result, a great deal of what Thomas has to offer is overlooked or ignored. Even those works that pit Thomas against the modern idiom wind up portraying Thomas's position in a less than accurate light, transforming him as they do into an advocate of a different modern position. For example, many of these works uncritically employ the categories of objective/subjective and objectivity/subjectivity, seeing in them some kind of relation to certain scholastic categories, e.g., real/logical or being/essence. But because the modern categories of objective/subjective or objectivity/subjectivity absorb these scholastic categories into their inherent equivocation they ultimately fail to grasp the subtle nuances of the scholastic *Denkform* that guides Aquinas. A critical awareness of this provides greater perspicacity to understanding how beauty relates to the divine throughout Aquinas's work.

Before proceeding directly to the commentary text itself, however, some groundwork with respect to the commentary treatise must be put in place. Chapter 10 therefore examines a few important preliminary issues.

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significant works on Thomas's views on beauty included the following: Vallet, *L'Idée du Beau dans la Philosophie de S. Thomas d'Aquin*, a work that, even though considered to be a pioneering study of Thomas's aesthetics, suffers under the fact that the author draws a great deal of data from the *De Pulchro et Bono*, which he believed was an authentic work of Thomas; De Wulf, *L'Oeuvre d'art et la beauté*. One notable study published shortly after Kovach is Czapiewski, *Das Schöne bei Thomas von Aquin*.

36. A not exhaustive list includes the following: Callahan, *Theory of Esthetic*; Eco, *Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*; Gilby, *Poetic Experience*; Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism, and the Frontiers of Poetry*; Maurer, *About Beauty: A Thomistic Interpretation*.

37. A not exhaustive list includes the following: Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals*; de Bruyne, *Études d'esthétique médiévale*, 2:278–346; Gilson, *Arts of the Beautiful*; Jordan, "Evidence of the Transcendentals and the Place of Beauty in Thomas Aquinas," 393–407; Narcisse, *Les raisons de Dieu*; Phelan, *Selected Papers*; Forte, *Portal of Beauty*, ch. 2; Bizzarri, "San Tommaso e l'arte," 88–98; Bullough, "St. Thomas and Music," 14–34; Coomaraswamy, "Mediaeval Aesthetic," 66–77; de Munynck, "L'esthétique de St. Thomas d'Aquin"; Improta, *Contributo dell'Angelico Dottore San Tommaso*; Koch, "Zur Aesthetik des Thomas von Aquin," 266–71; Melchiorre, "Il bello come relatzionalità dell'essere in S. Tommaso"; Olgiati, "L'arte e la tecnica nella filosofia di San Tommaso," 156–65, "San Tommaso e l'arte," 90–98, and "San Tommaso e l'autonomia dell'arte," 450–56; Valensise, *Dell'estetica secondo i principi dell'Angelico Dottore*.

First, it considers Thomas's relation to Dionysius and the Neoplatonic tradition that follows him. Second, it briefly considers John the Saracen's translation and how this factors into Thomas's commentary. All of this is followed by an in depth examination of Thomas's doctrine of divine names as found in his commentary.

The examination of beauty as a divine name in Aquinas's thought follows two interrelated trajectories. The first, which is the focus of chapter 11, examines the issue as it appears in his *Commentary on the Divine Names*. Although there is no exact dating of this treatise, scholarly opinion sets it somewhere between 1265 and 1268.<sup>38</sup> While this marks the middle of Thomas's career, it is also his first direct entry into the theme of beauty. It also represents Thomas's first direct and in depth engagement with Neoplatonic thought, despite his earlier commentaries on Boethius's *De Trinitate* (1257–1258) and *De Hebdomadibus* (1258) and his continual engagement with Augustine. Thomas is aware early on of Boethius's and Augustine's debt to Plato. This enables him to consciously adopt aspects of Platonism and Neoplatonism that he finds beneficial while stepping cautiously around certain Platonic and Neoplatonic deficiencies in their thinking. In contrast, Dionysius's Neoplatonism is not disclosed to Thomas until some ten years after Thomas becomes familiar with the Areopagite. As a passage from Thomas's *Commentary on the Sentences* indicates, Thomas originally believes Dionysius to be a thinker in the tradition of Aristotle.<sup>39</sup> By the time he writes his *Commentary on the Divine Names*, Thomas is well aware of Dionysius's Neoplatonism. This means that, much less than he does with either Augustine or Boethius, Thomas almost unknowingly absorbs a strand of Neoplatonic thought through a figure he believes to have been an apostolic witness. His commentary, then, marks a watershed moment in his career, a fact that will significantly shape this first trajectory of analysis.

The second trajectory examines the issue of beauty as a divine name in works beyond the *Commentary on the Divine Names*. The chief text will be the *Summa Theologia*, though other texts will contribute to the

38. One of the more recent discussions of the various attempts to date this can be found in Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 1:127–29. In our view, the significant parallels between this commentary and Thomas's *Commentary on the Liber de Causis* suggests locating the former on the later end of the spectrum. Thomas's *Commentary on the Liber de Causis* is now believed to have been written in the first half of 1272. On this dating, see Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas D'Aquino*, 383, and Saffrey, *Sancti Thomae de Aquino Super Librum de Causis Expositio*, xxxii–xxxvi.

39. *Super Sent.* Lib. 2, d. 14, q. 1, a. 2, resp: Dionysius autem fere ubique sequitur Aristotelem, ut patet diligenter inspicienti librum eius.

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examination. These works demonstrate the way in which Thomas's original thoughts on beauty make their way into his broader conceptions of God. They therefore provide important insight into how Thomas understood beauty's relation to the divine. This second trajectory will be the focus of chapter 12.

# 7

## The Passage of Dionysius into the Latin West

THE DIONYSIAN INFLUENCE OVER THE SCHOOLMEN OF THE HIGH MIDDLE ages can be credited to the coalescence of writings that eventually comprises the Dionysian corpus at the University of Paris. To the scholastics of the twelfth and thirteenth century, Dionysius's status as a biblical eyewitness to a certain extent ensures his theological authority. However, this should not give the impression that the schoolmen were mere sycophants ready to bow to anyone claiming such a revered status. As this chapter will demonstrate, the Dionysius who arrives at the University of Paris is accompanied with a great deal of complexity and controversy. A large part of this derives from the enigmatic nature of the author of the corpus, which is shadowed by controversy the moment it departs the Eastern shores. From Bede, to Hilduin, to Abelard, confusion about exactly which Dionysius—the Areopagite of Acts 17:34, the first bishop of Athens, a second-century bishop of Corinth, or a third-century patron of France after whom the Abbey of St. Denis is named—if any, should be credited with the writing of the corpus. Still, amidst all this the corpus continues to exercise significant influence, indicating that the authority of Dionysius derives first and foremost from the content of the treatises, glosses, commentaries, and translations of his texts than from the status the author claims for himself. When these various dimensions of the Dionysian phenomenon are organized and housed at the University of Paris, they provide a sense of cohesion to what remains a rather unsettled phenomenon.

In order to understand how Thomas approaches the issue of beauty as a divine name, it is necessary to illuminate the historical development through which the issue makes its way to Aquinas. This includes an examination of three interrelated itineraries. The first examines Dionysius's journey into the Latin West; the second the passage that the interpretive tradition of the divine names followed into the world of scholastic thought; and the third the voyage that beauty itself took as a topic of philosophical,

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theological and spiritual inquiry. This chapter examines the first two of these three issues, while the following chapter examines the more specific voyage of beauty itself.

### The Complex Itinerary of the Corpus

As a theme of scholarly interest, Dionysius's passage to the Latin West has experienced increasing attention thanks in large part to the twentieth-century resurgence of interest in both the *Corpus Dionysiaticum* and the Middle Ages. Especially in the last couple of decades a number of scholars have provided studies enabling a more complete portrait of this passage.<sup>1</sup> What comes to light amidst this literature is that the passage of Dionysius into the Latin West follows three distinguishable, though inter-related, routes: an interpretive tradition launched by John of Scythopolis and Maximus the Confessor; a "spiritual odyssey" traveling at the level of doctrinal influence and faith praxis; and a voyage of translation through figures like Hilduin, Eriugena, and John the Saracen. Consequently, the Dionysius who finally arrives in thirteenth-century Western Europe is a "figure" whose complexity, although formidable, did not prevent his appeal from spreading far and wide.

Perhaps the most influential route in this Dionysian passage is the interpretive tradition that begins with the work of John of Scythopolis, who establishes an interpretive foundation not only by issuing the *editio variorum*—the first known edition of the *Corpus Dionysiaticum* that scholars agree is the source for all later Greek manuscripts<sup>2</sup>—but also by providing a *scholia*, or set of commentaries and glosses, on the texts. This

1. See, *inter alia*, the introductory essays in *Pseudo-Dionysius the Complete Works* by Jaroslav Pelikan, "Odyssey of Dionysian Spirituality," 11–24, and Jean Leclercq, "Influence and Noninfluence of Dionysius in the Western Middle Ages," 25–32; see also essays in *Rethinking Dionysius the Areopagite* by István Perczel, "Earliest Syriac Reception of Dionysius," 27–42, Andrew Louth, "Reception of Dionysius up to Maximus the Confessor," 43–54, and Louth again, "Reception of Dionysius in the Byzantine World," 55–70, Paul Rorem, "Early Latin Dionysius," 71–84, Boyd Taylor Coolman, "Medieval Affective Dionysian Tradition," 85–102, and David B. Burrell and Isabelle Moulin, "Albert, Aquinas, and Dionysius," 103–20.

2. Lilla, "Ricerche sulla tradizione manoscritta del *De divinis nominibus* del Pseudo-Dionigi l'Areopagita," and "Osservazioni sul testo del *De divinis nominibus* dello Ps. Dionigi l'Areopagita"; De Gandillac et al., *Denys l'Areopagite*, 42–48; Schula, "Die sogenannten Maximus-Scholien des *Corpus Dionysiaticum Areopagiticum*," 31–66, "Die Überlieferung des Prologs des Johannes von Skythopolis," 177–88, "Eine Redaktion des griechischen *Corpus Dionysiaticum Areopagiticum*," 179–94, "Die Überlieferung von Prolog und Scholien des Johannes von Scythopolis," 79–83.

*editio variorum* derives from a textual tradition that was itself already fragmented and corrupt.<sup>3</sup> John's glosses on the text, although often accused of consciously neutralizing its monophysite and Neoplatonic tendencies,<sup>4</sup> provides a degree of cohesion to the Corpus and as a result becomes normative for its reception thereafter. So much is this the case that it is suggested that the *Corpus Dionysiacum* itself refers neither to a historical figure, nor even to a text *per se*, but rather to its *reception*.<sup>5</sup> Such an observation seems verified if it is true that, as Louth suggests, "all later access to the Areopagite was mediated through John of Scythopolis."<sup>6</sup> There is some disagreement about whether and to what extent the Scythopolite's bequest, which links text and exegesis, divides the authentic Areopagite from the annotated Areopagite.<sup>7</sup> In either case, the fact remains that the *Corpus Dionysiacum* acquires increasing acceptance by a world whose technical language of the sixth-century Christological debates begins to open itself to the more imagery-laden language of Dionysius.<sup>8</sup> While it is true that this acceptance owes much to the venerable pseudonym adopted by the author, it also indicates that the works themselves express "in a novel and exciting way ideas already firmly established in the Byzantine Christian mind."<sup>9</sup> This appeal to nascent ideas is not exclusive to Dionysius's immediate acceptance in the Byzantine world, but can be expanded to account for his acceptance throughout his passage into the Latin West.

This appeal to nascent ideas touches upon the Dionysian influence at a level deeper than an interpretive tradition where spirituality is both formed by and informs doctrinal development in an indirect way. In this regard, the passage of Dionysius has been narrated as a migration from

3. Cf. Perczel, "Earliest Syriac Reception of Dionysius," 29.

4. These accusations have been refuted in Rorem and Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus*, ch. 1.

5. Perczel, "Earliest Syriac Reception of Dionysius," 29. In part, this reception is distinguished from the original Corpus through a comparison with an alternate reception of the Corpus into the Syrian world through a translation by Sergius of Rashaina. This latter reception, which has recently acquired more attention by scholars, serves to bring into clearer focus Dionysius's move westward.

6. Louth, "Reception of Dionysius up to Maximus the Confessor," 49.

7. For instance, Louth questions the degree of significance that Rorem and Lamoreaux (*John of Scythopolis*) attribute to the distinction between the authentic Areopagite and the annotated Areopagite. Louth, "Reception of Dionysius up to Maximus the Confessor," 48.

8. Cf. Louth, "From the Doctrine of Christ to the Icon of Christ," 260–75.

9. Louth, "Reception of Dionysius up to Maximus the Confessor," 51.

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the “heretical East,” to the “orthodox East,” to the “Catholic West.”<sup>10</sup> The interpretive tradition initiated by John of Scythopolis and pursued in, and eventually conflated with,<sup>11</sup> Maximus the Confessor’s work, gives rise to a form of spirituality that provides contemplative “tools” to think other issues in novel ways. The glosses put out by both John and Maximus align Dionysius with the authentic spirituality of Nicaea and Chalcedon, and even at times that of Augustine, making him more appealing to Western concerns.<sup>12</sup> Maximus redeploys the Dionysian categories of apophatic and cataphatic in his Christological articulation, providing a “creative theological development.”<sup>13</sup> Not only does this development bequeath a novelty in itself, but it also demonstrates that Dionysius has more to offer than what appears in the letter of the text. Maximus’s work also emphasizes and even gives “much richer significance” to Dionysian liturgical theory and practice, as well as to the various dimensions of Church hierarchy.<sup>14</sup> These issues have their most significant impact with respect to the relationship of the individual with the Church, a relationship that at the time was perhaps most relevant in the development of the monastic tradition. Dionysius is consequently transported through the monasteries, which eventually flower into the various schools where he takes up residence, so to speak.

Dionysius arrives in the Latin West in a concrete way on two separate occasions. The first, which remains ambiguous, occurs when the eventual Pope Gregory I returns to Rome from Byzantium where he had been sent in 579 by Pelagius II as an *apocrisiarius*. It is alleged that while in Byzantium he becomes familiar with the Dionysian corpus and brings a Greek copy of the complete works back to Rome with him. The lack of references to Dionysius throughout the seventh and eighth centuries, however, beyond those found in Gregory himself, shrouds this first arrival of the Areopagite in ambiguity. The second arrival occurs when a Greek manuscript of the Areopagite’s work is given as a gift by Byzantine

10. Pelikan, “Odyssey of Dionysian Spirituality,” 11–24.

11. The conflation between the glosses of both figures that occurs in the manuscript tradition was first discovered by Hans Urs von Balthasar. See von Balthasar, “Das Scholienwerk des Johannes von Skythopolis,” 16–38.

12. This is most significant with regard to Dionysius’s teachings on the Trinity in which the uncreated Trinity of the Godhead manifests itself everywhere throughout creation in the form of triadic creations. As Pelikan notes (“Odyssey of Dionysian Spirituality,” 19), this idea could easily attach itself to Augustine’s notion of the “vestiges of the Trinity,” as Dionysian spirituality emigrated West.

13. Louth, “Reception of Dionysius in the Byzantine World,” 61.

14. *Ibid.*, 62.

*apocrisarioi* to the Carolingian court of Louis the Pious in the early half of the ninth century. It is entrusted to Hilduin, the Abbot of St. Denis who, with various writings of the life of the patron at hand, directs a translation of this one Greek manuscript. Shortly thereafter, John Scotus Eriugena at the commission of Charles the Bald composes a translation of the same Greek manuscript, writes a commentary on the *Celestial Hierarchy*, and appropriates Dionysian themes into his overall corpus thus constituting the first major Latin reception of Dionysius.<sup>15</sup> Eriugena's work on Dionysius makes an initial and foundational impact in the Cathedral school of Laon and in the *Glossa Ordinaria*, through which Dionysius becomes most influential in the West. At the University of Paris, John of Salisbury recommends that John the Saracen undertake a new translation, which together with Eriugena's translation, commentary on the *Celestial Hierarchy*, and *Periphyseon*, constitutes the basis for the study of the Dionysian corpus in the thirteenth century.

The initial stages of Dionysius's voyage into the Latin West follows a complex itinerary. Although ultimately departing from, and arriving in, relatively similar loci, the ideas contained in the *Corpus Dionysiacum* travel along routes that vary in direction and velocity. The dominant route—that of the *interpretive* tradition—influences and guides a great deal of both the *spiritual* and *philological* dimensions. However, as these two latter routes are increasingly followed, they come to provide their own unique impact on the interpretive tradition. What eventually takes up residence at the University of Paris is anything but a simple, Dionysian *fait accompli*. Rather, it is better understood as a concentrated center of theological energy, secured within the confines of its various constitutive elements but waiting to explode with influence. Indeed, its intellectually mystical approach to God proves to be as alluring to theological interests as Aristotle's sober, scientific view of the world is to philosophical interests.

## The Interpretive Tradition of the Divine Names

The original impact of Dionysius on the Latin West occurs primarily through his thoughts on hierarchy and mysticism. This is demonstrated by the fact that the two treatises in his corpus that receive the most commentary attention are the *Celestial Hierarchy* and the *Mystical Theology*. After Eriugena composes his commentaries on both works, Hugh of St. Victor appears to be the next to express any interest in the work of the

15. Rorem, "Early Latin Dionysius," 71–72.

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Areopagite,<sup>16</sup> producing a commentary on the *Celestial Hierarchy*. About a century later, another Victorine, Thomas Gallus, composes commentaries on the *Celestial Hierarchy* and the *Mystical Theology*, as well as a summarized attempt to clarify all the works of Dionysius titled the *Extracio* and an explanatory treatise on all four major works of the Corpus titled the *Explanatio*. As a consequence of this, the impact that the *Divine Names*, both as a treatise and as an interpretive tradition, has upon early medieval thought is not as clear as the themes treated in the *Mystical Theology* and the *Celestial Hierarchy*.

This is not to say that there is no attention being paid to the divine names as a Dionysian theme. During those same years in which Thomas Gallus is composing his work, Robert Grosseteste, Bishop of Lincoln, both translates and comments upon the entire Dionysian corpus and the *scholia* of Maximus the Confessor. Even though it is believed that Grosseteste's work does not have any effect on the continental thought in the thirteenth century,<sup>17</sup> it does show that the divine name tradition extends as far north as England. But the highest point of concentration for the divine name tradition is undoubtedly the University of Paris, where the preceding tradition of interpretation is made available to the thirteenth century. This tradition is crystallized in the contents of the Dionysian corpus along with the various glosses composed up to that point. Specifically, this corpus is constituted by three primary components.<sup>18</sup>

The first component consists of two supplementary sections. Section 1 includes Eriugena's translation of the *Celestial Hierarchy*, along with the *scholia* of Maximus the Confessor and Anastasius the papal librarian,<sup>19</sup> as well as prologues by John the Saracen and Hugh of St. Victor, and expositions composed by Eriugena, Hugh of St. Victor, and John the Saracen.<sup>20</sup> Section 2 of the first component consists of Eriugena's translation of the remainder of the corpus (*Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, *Mystical Theology*,

16. The lack of any evidence of interest in Dionysius during the time between Eriugena and Hugh of St. Victor is detailed in Luscombe, "Commentary of Hugh of St. Victor on the Celestial Hierarchy," 160–64, and Poirel, "Le 'chant dionysien' du IXe au XIIe siècle," 151–76.

17. Dondaine, *Le corpus dionysien de l'université de Paris au XIIIe siècle*, 34.

18. For the schematic here, we will be following primarily Dondaine, *Le corpus dionysien de l'université de Paris*, 69–121. Latin translations of the Dionysian corpus can be found in Chevallier, *Dionysiaca*, vol. 1.

19. For more detail on the contribution of Anastasius, see Dondaine, *Le corpus dionysien de l'université de Paris*, 35–68.

20. *Ibid.*, 72, and see also 16–17.

*Divine Names* and the *Epistles*), along with the *scholia* of Maximus the Confessor, Anastasius and sections of Eriugena's *Periphyseon* referred to as "Pseudo-Maximus,"<sup>21</sup> as well as a number of glosses from unnamed sources. A second component of the Dionysian corpus consists of John the Saracen's newer translation of the four major treatises in the corpus along with the *Epistles*. And the third component is the *Extractio* of Thomas Gallus on all four major treatises and the *Epistles*.

From this vantage point, the interpretive tradition embodied in the Parisian corpus of translations, commentaries, and expositions means that the issue of the divine names is passed on with a degree of diversity. It also indicates a degree of perspicacity since the new translation of John the Saracen did not replace the translation of Eriugena but rather supplemented it. Scholars of the thirteenth century like Albert and Aquinas were well aware not only that there are multiple translations available to them, but that some translations interpret the Greek terminology differently from others. This renders valid the conclusion that their choice for certain translations over and against others indicates already the disposition with which they approach Dionysius. As will be seen, this is especially significant with respect to the terminology for beauty.

More generally, however, the corpus that comes to reside at the University of Paris is both diverse and complex. Within this diversity, however, it is Eriugena's *Periphyseon* that provides the most significant theological synthesis of the divine names tradition. The interpretive influence that the *Periphyseon* provides to this tradition in the thirteenth century endures despite the condemnations of 1225 primarily by being falsely attributed to Maximus. Excerpts from the *Periphyseon* appear throughout the Parisian *Corpus Dionysiacum*, the majority of which are contained in the margins of the *Divine Names*.<sup>22</sup> The themes contained in these glosses include: reason and authority; the dialectic of human knowledge of God by affirmation, negation and negative "super-affirmation"; the absolute preeminence of apophatic theology; the procession of creatures from their primordial causes; and the eternal preexistence of all things in God. Other, more specifically Eriugenean, themes include: divine nescience; the eternal search for God toward the beatitude of the spirit; and the return of all things to their cause.<sup>23</sup>

21. *Ibid.*, 84–89.

22. *Ibid.*, 85–87. There are apparently 102 glosses from the *Periphyseon*, 73 of which are in the *Divine Names*.

23. Dondaine, *Le corpus dionysien de l'université de Paris*, 86.

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In the *Periphyseon*, the tradition of the divine names is transformed into a mode of theology that views the natural world as everywhere imbued with the divine presence. The Dionysian divine names are investigated insofar as they can be understood as constituents of the created order. In this context, theology becomes above all an interpretive method by which God's very being and substance is revealed and discerned in the natural order. Consequently, the natural order becomes a mode of anagogical pedagogy that, in drawing the soul more deeply into its depths, uplifts the soul more profoundly into God. The various perfections proceeding from God—the Dionysian divine names—take on an intermediary status, at once giving formal determination to created things while remaining porous to the divine essence. In Eriugena, a greater stress is placed upon the way in which these perfections constitute the divine presence in the created order. Commenting on Dionysius's treatment of the name "Being," Eriugena reads this as a proclamation that God is not only the maker of all things, but that God is made in all things.<sup>24</sup> God remains above all things as he creates things out of nothing, but the bond issued from God's creative act means for Eriugena that God is the all in all.<sup>25</sup> Sin obscures the visibility of God's presence in the here and now, but through the illumination of divine grace, exemplified by Paul's rapture into the highest divine mysteries, this vision can be restored.<sup>26</sup> Eriugena's elevation of apophatic discourse as the most valid mode for speaking of God, along with his subscription to the Dionysian doctrine that God is beyond all being and essence, the "formless that creates form,"<sup>27</sup> prevents his ideas from collapsing into explicit pantheism. God remains ever beyond the world even as he creates himself in and as the world. To better illustrate this difficult relation, Eriugena reads these names through the hexaemeral tradition. He includes in his discussion of God's procession into and as the world the

24. Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, III, 9 (646C) [PL 122, 646C]; 20 (683A) [PL 122, 683A]. Eriugena proceeds to explain: "Therefore, descending first from the superessentiality of his nature, in which he is said not to be, he is created by himself in the primordial causes and become the beginning of all essence, of all life, of all intelligence, and of all things which the Gnostic contemplation considers in the primordial causes; then, descending from the primordial causes which occupy a kind of intermediate position between God and creature, that is, between that ineffable superessentiality which surpasses all understanding and the supersubstantially manifest nature which is visible to pure minds, He is made in their effects and is openly revealed in His theophanies." See also Moran, *Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena*, 118.

25. *Periphyseon*, III, 9 (645CD); [PL 122, 645D].

26. *Periphyseon*, III, 20 (683CD, 684A); [PL 122, 683D, 684A].

27. *Periphyseon*, II, 1 (525AB); [PL 122, 525B].

six-day creation sequence where each day of creation corresponds to various phases of the divine manifestation.<sup>28</sup> This is the activity of a God who is both one and multiple, going out of himself as he creates and calling all things back to himself as final end.<sup>29</sup>

What emerges from this theological synthesis is an attempt to illuminate the visibility and intelligibility of the continuity between God and creation. The Dionysian divine names are implicitly present in Eriugena's natural theology insofar the divine perfections provide the means by which the divine essence, which remains beyond all manifestation, somehow simultaneously becomes the forms of all things. All created things are both eternal and made at the same time.<sup>30</sup> All of creation is eternal insofar as it participates in its uncreated cause, that is, in the Word. But in the Word, as John's Gospel attests, creation is "made." The tension between eternity and creation derives from, and is ameliorated in, the divine names since these are the perfections that establish the bridge between the eternal and the made.

The "divine name ontology," which is established in Eriugena's *Periphyseon*, becomes a staple of the Dionysian inheritance. It is found in various ways in those strands of thought such as the Victorine tradition that owe their formation in large part to the Areopagite. Many of Eriugena's original assertions are softened by later developments, but the overall aspiration to express divine continuity throughout the created order remains an overriding theme. One particularly significant example appears in the work of Albert the Great. In his *Summa de Bono*,<sup>31</sup> Albert develops a divine name ontology through a careful and creative analysis of the various dimensions of beauty. By drawing together the many triadic expressions throughout the Christian tradition that name the divine presence in creation, triadic expressions like "measure, number and weight," or "one, good, and true," Albert discovers a detailed method for illustrating how God manifests himself through his creative activity. (This will be explored in detail below). This achievement marks the point at which the divine names tradition becomes transformed into a metaphysics of beauty.

28. *Periphyseon*, III, 24 (690D)–40 (742B); [PL 122, 690D–742B].

29. Cf. Moran, *Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena*, 119.

30. Cf. O'Meara, *Eriugena*, 107–20.

31. Albert the Great, *Summa De Bono*.

## Conclusion

It is fitting that the complexity of identifying God with the name beauty would be reflected in the complexity of the Dionysian phenomenon itself. This complexity begins with the enigmatic status of the author, but reaches a visible form in its journey into the Latin West. Through its various passages, the Dionysian phenomenon shows itself to be larger than any singular account. From the beginning, the Dionysian corpus—its vision of the God and the world—is porous to a diversity of attempts to penetrate its mysterious substance. Discerning some normative criteria by which various readings of the corpus may be judged as more or less valid proves difficult. Rather, what emerges is a theological tradition with a fluidity that among other things is especially hospitable to beauty as a divine name.

# 8

## The Journey of Beauty as a Divine Name

### *From the Sixth to the Thirteenth Century*

BEAUTY AS A DIVINE NAME IDENTIFIES A DOCTRINE THAT ALTHOUGH GESTATING in the wombs of Greek and biblical thought enters the world as a living idea in the thought of the Areopagite. The Greek philosophers and the biblical writers recognize in the beauty of created things a quality that points to a transcendent power they associate with the divine itself. This association is interpreted by posterity in various ways. At times, created things are conceived as mere references to a beauty ever beyond the natural world. The beauty of creatures, in this sense, is referential, always gesturing to the transcendent beauty from which their beauty derives. At other times, the beauty of created things is understood as the concrete presence of divine beauty, that is to say, the concrete presence of God himself. In both cases, however, beauty's association with the divine illuminates beauty's power to reveal divine presence in some way. As one author has recently put it, beauty is "a very tangible divine principle,"<sup>1</sup> simultaneously transcendent and present to sense and intellect.

Beauty is consequently distinguished according to its presence in created things and its transcendent modality. Because of this apparent duality, however, beauty for neither the Greek philosophers nor the biblical writers is directly and explicitly identified as the divine itself. Both the ancient Greek philosophers and the Old Testament authors lack the principle by which these dimensions of beauty can be mediated, a principle that the early Church discovers in the Incarnation. But even for the early Church, the Incarnation as a principle requires its own development. It is not just a coincidence that the Dionysian identification of beauty with the divine itself occurs around the sixth century at the height of Christological

1. Bender, *Dawn of the Invisible*, 11.

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investigations since in these investigations the human/divine harmony that fully appears in Jesus Christ receives its definitive doctrinal affirmation. Prior to the appearance of the Dionysian corpus, the early Church Fathers begin to intensify the relationship between beauty and the divine primarily through the tradition of commentary on the *Song of Songs*. This text is read as an allegory for Christ's relationship to the Church in which the theme of beauty plays a prominent role. Within such a reading, this revered work becomes a text of significant Christological substance and so captures the attention of many early Christian theologians. Hippolytus of Rome, Origen, Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Theodoret of Cyrus, and Maximus the Confessor all compose commentaries on this text contributing to the development of beauty's relationship to God.<sup>2</sup> However, because they continue to view beauty as a property of creation rather than God himself, none of them go so far as to explicitly identify beauty with the divine.<sup>3</sup> It is the purpose of this chapter to examine the way in which beauty's identification with the divine travels into the Latin West from its fifth-century Eastern context.

### From the Fifth to the Eighth Century: Augustine to Bede

Like Dionysius, Augustine comes under the influence of Neoplatonic philosophy and consequently reorients beauty in relation to the Christian God. Because this occurs independently from Dionysius's own work, it reveals a distinct path upon which beauty's association with the divine travels into the Middle Ages. Like Dionysius, Augustine recognizes the way in which beauty is somehow both in God and in the created things of the world. However, in the development of his thinking on the issue, what begins in Augustine as an identification of God with beauty gives way to a more ambiguous account of the relationship. In his *Confessions*, one of his earlier works (ca. 400), Augustine calls God by the name "Beauty,"<sup>4</sup> but in so doing, renders it unclear what specific role created things have in communicating God's beauty.<sup>5</sup> Is the beauty of a created thing a real com-

2. See Origen, *Song of Songs Commentary and Homilies*, 6; de Bruyne, *Études d'esthétique médiévale*, 2:30–71.

3. Cf. Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics*, 2:18.

4. Augustine, *Confessions*, bk. X, ch. 27, 38: "Late have I loved you, Beauty so old and so new: late have I loved you."

5. Earlier in the same book (*Confessions* bk. X, ch. 6, 9) beauty is designated as the

munication of divine beauty, or is it a ladder to be eventually kicked out from underneath once one has ascended to divine beauty? As his thought develops, and the Plotinian influence becomes more pronounced (and perhaps the specter of his Manichean past begins to haunt him), a degree of friction begins to emerge around Augustine's views on beauty and its relationship to God and creation. It is a friction that, in many ways, is to be expected. For Augustine, beauty and love, in terms of efficacy, are all but identical: "*Non possumus amare nisi pulchra*."<sup>6</sup> The pre-conversion Augustine had scattered his love to a multitude of beautiful objects that the post-conversion Augustine comes to characterize as "lesser" (*inferiora*) forms of beauty.<sup>7</sup> The contrast between this "lesser" beauty and the beauty of God renders it all the more difficult for him to arrive at an explicit identification between the two. Nevertheless, this does not prevent his influence from making significant contributions.

Following the Plotinian maxim by which beauty identifies a simple one beyond the symmetrical many, Augustine locates the power to provide pleasure in the causality of beauty rather than attributing to the many pleasures a causal power to produce beauty.<sup>8</sup> This allows him to visualize the beauty of the whole, that is to say a beauty independent of its many effects in which all particular entities have a role.<sup>9</sup> This visualization, encapsulated in Augustine's remark that "unity is the form of all beauty,"<sup>10</sup> expresses the way in which beauty maintains a close association with the divine. Beauty's form is that which embraces all created things, and this form can be nothing other than the divine itself. But if this is so, what becomes of created beauty?

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"response" that created things register to the one whose inquiry about their nature is prompted by love. In the following section (*Confessions* bk. X, ch. 6, 10), beauty is characterized as the "voice" of a created entity that perpetually calls its hearers beyond itself to God. These configurations of beauty suggest that Augustine did not, at this point in his career, view beauty as an intrinsic aspect of a thing's ontological constitution. In fact, citing Rom 1:20, Augustine appears to emphasize the danger in created beauty to wholly absorb the beholder's attention and desire, preventing it from proceeding to the Creator. Hence, he speaks of a "deliverance from the senses" (bk. X, ch. 8, 12).

6. Augustine, *De Musica* VI, 13, 38 [PL 32, col. 1185].

7. Augustine, *Confessions*, bk. IV, ch. 13, 20: "Amabam pulchra inferiora et ibam in profundum et dicebam amicis lmeis: 'num amamus aliquid nisi pulchrum?'"

8. Augustine, *De vera religione*, ch. 32, 59 [PL 34, col. 149].

9. *Ibid.*, ch. 30, 55 [PL 34, col. 146]; ch. 40, 76 [PL 34, col. 156]; ch. 41, 77 [PL 34, col. 157]; *De musica*, bk. VI, ch. 11, 30 [PL 32, col. 1180].

10. Augustine, *Epist.* 18 [PL 33, col. 85].

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In his consideration of the beauty found in creation, the pendulum swings the other way, so to speak. Augustine continues to endorse the ancient view that identifies beauty with symmetry, locating beauty's existential condition in number.<sup>11</sup> Number, in turn, takes the form of the proportions and shapes that appear beautiful as they deliver pleasure to reason's perceptive faculties.<sup>12</sup> Unity, that is to say beauty's form, is dispersed as it becomes concretized into the various beautiful things. From this perspective beauty is identified with numerical equality,<sup>13</sup> which in some cases derives from a contrast of opposites or antitheses.<sup>14</sup> This further makes any direct identity between beauty and God difficult, since under these conditions such identification implies an intrinsic inconsistency in God.

Nevertheless, despite the ambiguity in Augustine regarding the direct identification between beauty and God, by continually referring the beauty of all things to the beauty of God Augustine perpetuates the anagogical element in beauty. It is an anagogy that is unsupported by a systematically worked out doctrine of metaphysical analogy—something unavailable to the world of late antiquity. This is not to say that Augustine does not think with a latent or inchoate analogical understanding of being. This is a debatable issue and depends on how one conceives analogy. Nevertheless, without an explicit elaborate account of analogy (or some explicit mode of analogical reasoning such as the “dissimilar similitude” symbolism of Dionysius), the anagogical feature of Augustine's views of beauty remains more equivocal than the openly dialectical configuration in Dionysius and later scholastics. The identification of God as beauty in Augustine, then, must be conceived as being shadowed by a degree of conflict that arises with a more equivocal approach.

Whether or not Augustine overcomes the conflict that haunts his thinking, derived in part from the Platonic anthropology that guides him, remains an open question. In uplifting the soul away from creatures toward the real beauty of God, created beauty undergoes a functional reduction of sorts. Always gesturing away from itself, the beauty of creation either provokes the soul more profoundly into the soul itself or beyond creation toward divine transcendence. Understood to be both internally within the

11. Augustine, *De libero arbitrio*, bk. II, ch. 16, 42 [PL 32, col. 1263]; *De musica*, bk. VI, ch. 12, 35 [PL 32, col. 1182].

12. Augustine, *De ordine*, bk. II, ch. 15, 42 [PL 32, col. 1014].

13. Augustine, *De musica*, bk. VI, ch. 12, 38 [PL 32, col. 1184].

14. Augustine repeats this aspect of beauty twice almost verbatim: *De civitate Dei*, ch. 11, 18, and *De ordine*, bk. I, ch. 7, 18 [PL 32, col. 986].

percipient and externally beyond the percipient, beauty begins to take on an equivocal character. It generates an ascending momentum wherein the soul moves ever inward toward the divine presence within in rhythm with its movement ever outward to God beyond creation.<sup>15</sup> Lacking an analogical principle, Augustine is unable to mediate these two movements to the extent that the implications of his thinking drive him.

The ambiguous relationship between beauty and the divine in Augustine becomes complicated when it undergoes transmission by Anicius Manlius Boethius who, conceiving beauty almost exclusively as a commensuration of parts, reduces beauty to the mere outward appearance of a thing.<sup>16</sup> Beauty for Boethius is primarily understood in the classical sense as a commensuration of, or proportion between, members.<sup>17</sup> He recognizes how created entities are endowed with a beauty given by the Creator but holds this to be quite low on the scale of values.<sup>18</sup> Neutralizing beauty's metaphysical relevance, he even goes so far as to associate beauty with a weakness of human perception, insisting that if the senses were more completely formed there would be no beauty.<sup>19</sup> The idealism haunting this judgment reduces the analogical energy of beauty to mere function and beauty to a mere accidental correction for the weakness of human sensory powers. And like most idealisms, its momentum drives Boethius to eventually dichotomize what is a conflict in Augustine between idea and sense. For Boethius the word *species* comes to signify not only the beauty of form as an ontological constituent but also the outward appearance. This introduces into the development of the idea of beauty an ambiguity in that a thing's beauty can identify either an internal, ontological principle or an external apparition.<sup>20</sup>

By emphasizing the beauty of the appearance, this Boethian ambiguity exacerbates the tension of the Augustinian perspective that he is handing down expanding the distance between beauty and any direct identification with the divine. The Augustinian conflict, which arises more in the context of a practical spirituality than a theoretical philosophy, is

15. Augustine, *Confessions*, bk. X, 6–10 (10–16); Cf. Torevell, *Liturgy and the Beauty of the Unknown*, 45–70; Forte, *Portal of Beauty*, 1–12.

16. De Bruyne, *Etudes d'esthétique médiévale*, 1:3–34.

17. Boethius, *Topicorum Aristotelis interpretatio*, III, 1 [PL 64, col. 935]; de Bruyne, *Etudes d'esthétique médiévale*, 1:9.

18. See, e.g., Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, bk. II; *Topicorum Aristotelis interpretatio*, III, 1 [PL 64, col. 935].

19. Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, bk. III, 8.

20. Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics*, 2:79.

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extended in Boethius toward a more metaphysico-philosophical orientation. Beauty identifies an internal, ontological principle of determination but such a principle becomes evident only with the outward appearance that a given entity manifests. Regardless of beauty's origin, it arrives in the outward appearance, the particular form of a given entity. The particular, then, becomes the *sine qua non* of beauty and, consequently, something recalcitrant to the Boethian aspiration for comprehensive universality. Boethius's Neoplatonism requires of him to fit beauty and its permutations within his concern for universal learning. And if it is true that Boethius's striving for a unified theory of learning taints his overall project with a degree of "indecisiveness," beauty's embrace of the particular only exacerbates this condition.<sup>21</sup>

In the centuries that follow this "Last of the Romans" little is done to advance the correspondence between beauty and the divine. Those who take up the task of education and literature face enough of a challenge in simply finding a way to preserve and transmit the heritage of the Greco-Roman world to posterity. Consequently, the work of figures like Cassiodorus (480–575),<sup>22</sup> Isidore of Seville (570–636),<sup>23</sup> and the Venerable Bede (672–735),<sup>24</sup> is not ordered toward development and synthesis but only to gathering and disseminating. Beauty in their works continues to signify a proportion, or commensuration and harmony of parts that reveals a higher, more spiritual and simpler power. But beauty's anagogical dimension endures, especially through the dimensions of music theory. Beauty, as harmony, commensurateness and proportion points always toward a more perfect harmony that directs the soul to God by providing a foretaste of eternal bliss.<sup>25</sup> At times these "encyclopediasts" emphasize the association between beauty and light, a theme that although originating in Plotinus becomes common to late antiquity.<sup>26</sup> This emphasis not only perpetuates the anagogical power of beauty but preserves beauty's simplicity enabling its continued association with the divine. This association is affirmed in various doctrines that advance the idea that the beauty of the

21. Cf. Böhner and Gilson, *Christliche Philosophie*, 247. Pieper attributes the "indecisiveness" spoken of by Böhner and Gilson to Boethius's "striving for an all-inclusive" universal theory. See Pieper, *Scholasticism*, 29.

22. Cf. de Bruyne, *Études d'esthétique médiévale*, 1:35–73.

23. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1:74–107.

24. *Ibid.*, 1:108–61.

25. E.g., Cassiodorus, *De artibus ac disciplinis*, V [PL 70, col. 1212B].

26. Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics*, 2:84.

natural world is a special sign of divine grace.<sup>27</sup> During this period, the lack of continued development regarding the relationship between beauty and God is balanced by a preservation of the development that had taken place in the Greco-Roman world up to Augustine and Boethius.

## John Scotus Eriugena

As translator and commentator on the Dionysian corpus, Eriugena is pivotal in the development of the identification between beauty and God. The outstanding feature of Eriugena's work, replete throughout his *Periphyseon*, is the way in which beauty is viewed as a locus of a mutual interpenetration between God and the created order. Where Augustine and Boethius can be said to have equivocally conceived the relation between created and divine beauty, Eriugena's conception is far more unified—almost to the point of univocity: the beauty of creation is the very presence of God.

Beauty is conceived as an ineffable unity constituted by a harmonious coalescence of all diverse components.<sup>28</sup> This provides the foundation for Eriugena's symbolism, which, closely following Dionysius, identifies the active dynamism in which the divine nature that infinitely exceeds all finite determination unexhaustively gives itself over to the limits of finite shape, form, visibility, and comprehension.<sup>29</sup> Beauty in this regard is thoroughly anagogical since these visible shapes and comprehensible forms, according to Eriugena, are given by God in order to recall human minds into the pure and invisible beauty of truth itself.<sup>30</sup> This is a divine recollection that harbors more than an Augustinian referential dynamism. God, who is alone considered to be the highest goodness and beauty, is even said to be the very goodness or beauty that is worthy of being known in created things.<sup>31</sup> Similar to Augustine, Eriugena associates the knowability of created entities with the divine voice calling the knowing intellect back

27. E.g., Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* I, 7.

28. Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, bk. III, 6 [PL 122, col. 637B-D]; (Sheldon-Williams, III, 6, 638A, p. 255).

29. Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, bk. III, 17 [PL 122, col. 678C]; (Sheldon-Williams, III, 17, 678C, p. 305).

30. Eriugena, *Expositiones super ierarchiam caelestem S. Dionysii*, ch. I, §3 [PL 122, col. 138–39A].

31. Eriugena, *Periphyseon* I, 74 [PL 122, col. 520A–B]; (Sheldon-Williams, I, 74, 520A, p. 118): "He alone is the supreme and real Goodness and Beauty. For He Himself is whatever in creatures is understood (to be) really good and really beautiful and really lovable."

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into the causal divine unity-in-diversity.<sup>32</sup> Unlike Augustine, however, Eriugena does not consider divine beauty to be a horizon ever-beyond these entities. Rather, divine beauty is present in them like doorways that open to an ever-greater depth. And, just as a doorway constitutes, in part, the depth to which it opens, so the beauty of created entities constitutes the divine beauty to which it opens.

The identity between created beauty and divine beauty is, for Eriugena, so close that at times he is accused of being a pantheist.<sup>33</sup> His doctrine even results in an official condemnation centuries after his lifetime at the Council of Sens (1225), even though the events surrounding his role are ambiguous.<sup>34</sup> In any case, the impact that his work has upon the medieval reception of beauty as a divine name can be discerned in both his ontological symbolism and his anagogical noetics.

### Early Scholasticism: The Cistercians, the Victorines, and the School of Chartres

As monasteries begin to progenerate the university system, the relationship between God and the world, between divine and human, heaven and earth, infinite and finite, acquires a sense of urgency it had not heretofore maintained. Consequently, beauty is pushed further to the center as an object of inquiry and contemplation. The relationship between beauty and the divine in early scholasticism exhibits both a degree of continuity with preceding configurations and novel developments. Among the early scholastics, beauty's relationship to the divine is distinguished by how these schoolmen position and value the beauty within the created order.

For Cistercian thinkers, the emphasis between the beauty of God and the beauty of created things is worked out primarily in terms of the distinction between spiritual and physical beauty.<sup>35</sup> Reflecting an August-

32. Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, bk. III, 18 [PL 122, col. 680 A–C]; (Sheldon-Williams, III, 18, 680A, p. 306.)

33. Eriugena, *Periphyseon* III, 17 [PL 122, col. 678B–C]; (Sheldon-Williams, III, 17, 678C, p. 305). In particular, the following passage is highly incriminating: "It follows that we ought not to understand God and the creature as two things distinct from one another, but as one and the same"; *Proinde non duo a seipsis distantia debemus intelligere Deum et creaturam, sed unum et id ipsum.*

34. See Moran, *Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena*, 85–91. Moran suggests that Eriugena is only implicated by association.

35. Cf. de Bruyne, *Études d'esthétique médiévale*, 3:38–57. De Bruyne speaks of the Cistercian approach as seeing beauty with a "spiritual" eye.

tinian tendency over and against the views of Eriugena, there is for the Cistercians a repeated insistence on the absolute superiority of spiritual beauty that is most often associated with the inner dimension of human nature over the physical beauty that appears in visible forms.<sup>36</sup> Precisely because spiritual beauty appears in a less noble physical form, however, the Cistercian attitude toward physical beauty tends toward a duality. On the one hand, physical beauty is considered the opposite of, and at times even opposed to, spiritual beauty. On the other hand, it is a manifestation of spiritual beauty.<sup>37</sup> Discovering a way to overcome the tension that this creates between physical and spiritual beauty is a significant characteristic of Cistercian thought.

Following a Plotinian theme by way of the Dionysian texts available to them, the Cistercian approach to this problem involves utilizing a metaphysics of light, which becomes for them a useful *topos* for describing the way in which spiritual beauty reveals itself in the appearance of physical forms.<sup>38</sup> This does not mean that every physical form is a revelation of beauty. As noted the Cistercian attitude toward sensuous beauty is marked by conflict. Embodying the tension between an Augustinian and Eriugenan approach, at times they regard sensuous beauty as an occasion for vanity while at other times they see in it the reflection of a perfection.<sup>39</sup> This conflict may be due to the fact that among the Cistercians, the predominant configuration of beauty follows the classical conception of beauty as a proportion, or commensuration of parts.<sup>40</sup> As Plotinus had understood, if beauty is configured in this way it becomes difficult to relate the beauty of created things to a higher, simpler beauty such as that of the soul. For the Cistercians, the soul serves as a kind of unifying principle for two aspects

36. Bernard of Clairveaux, *Sermones in Cantica Cantorum*, Sermon. XXV, 6 [PL 183, col. 901D].

37. Cf. Baldwin of Canterbury, *Tractatus Septimus: De Salutatione Angelica, de triplici gratia dei* [PL 204, col. 469D]: *Laus verae pulchritudinis magis est mentis quam corporis, et tamen aliquo modo corporis*—"The glory of true beauty is more in the soul than the body, but nevertheless it is in another way in the body." Cf. also de Bruyne, *Études d'esthétique médiévale*, 3:50: "La vrai beauté prend sa source dans l'âme mais ell s'exprime dans le corps"; Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics*, 2:184.

38. E.g., Bernard of Clairveaux, *Sermones in Cantica Cantorum*, Sermon. XLXXXV, 11 [PL 183, 1193B–C].

39. Bernard of Clairveaux, *Sermones in Cantica Cantorum*, Sermon. XXVII, 5–6 [PL 183, col. 915A–916B].

40. E.g., Baldwin of Canterbury, *Tractatus Septimus: De Salutatione Angelica, de triplici gratia dei* [PL 204, col. 469D]; Foliot, *Expositio in Cantico Cantorum*, ch. I, 15 [PL 202, 1209B].

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of beauty. That is to say, the beauty of the soul is conceived as being of two kinds: the first, which corresponds to the soul's internal relationship with the spirit, is beauty as "*claritas*"; the second, which corresponds to the soul's external relationship with the world, is beauty as "*caritas*."<sup>41</sup>

Like Augustine, Boethius, and Eriugena before them, the Cistercians confront the complex duality that shadows beauty. Their solution involves a principle relation that Modern aesthetics would come to firmly reject on grounds that largely misunderstand the matter; namely, beauty and morality. Beauty's relation to morality in the Cistercian sense concerns beauty's relation to the good rather than any set of norms or regulations. Both kinds of beauty—*claritas* and *caritas*—are oriented to the good: the first to the good absolutely and the second to the good relatively. Insofar as beauty is essentially constituted by its association with the good, beauty for the Cistercians becomes largely an issue of moral thought.

By considering beauty within the moral domain beauty's anagogical dimension receives a certain emphasis. In spiritual beauty's "descent" into its physical showing the Cistercians recognize a countermovement wherein the soul ascends ever higher by aligning itself with beauty's three modes, made possible through the proper disposition of the soul toward the good: *beauty that is without blemish* arises when the soul purifies itself from sin; *beauty that bears a certain elegance of taste and decoration* arises in the soul through a life of ascetic aspiration and contemplation; and *beauty that attracts through the charm of its members and color* arises in the soul through the "hidden inspiration of grace."<sup>42</sup> The fact that the physical or sensual beauty of material entities carries a risk of luring one away from the absolute beauty of the spirit means that beauty for the Cistercians is something always in the process of being sought after. The moment beauty shows itself in physical, sensible form it ought to provoke one's perceptive gaze beyond itself to still more beautiful things. Similar to the Platonic view, beauty is not something to be defined and captured in any finite form. Rather it is something always beyond complete determination, ever transcending its many finite forms. In this regard, its association with the divine itself is at least implicitly present to Cistercian posterity.

There is among the Victorines a much stronger alignment with the views expressed by Eriugena than found in the Cistercians, and an almost

41. Thomas of Cîteaux, *Commentarii in Cantica Cantorum*, bk. VI, ch. 4 [PL 206, col. 380C].

42. *Ibid.*, bk. V, ch. 3 [PL 206, col. 309C–D]. Cf. de Bruyne, *Études d'esthétique médiévale*, 3:52–53.

reduplication of the Dionysian account of beauty as a divine name.<sup>43</sup> The Cistercians follow Augustine in stressing the absolute superiority of spiritual, or divine, beauty over every physical form of beauty. In contrast, the Victorines, closely following a Dionysian form of symbolism, hold that the beauty of created things is the very presence of divine absolute beauty.<sup>44</sup> True beauty is divine beauty, but precisely as beauty it gives form and shape to all things visible and intelligible. Every created entity is thought to be ontologically constituted with a symbolical sense intended to communicate the invisible and incomprehensible nature of God.<sup>45</sup> The beauty of every object, in Victorine symbolism, provides to the searching intellect a moment of contemplative encounter with the divine.<sup>46</sup> Beauty in this sense is configured as an anagogical power given to the rational intellect through created objects, engendering the view that the sensual world is a book written by the hand of God.<sup>47</sup> This is an expansion of the Dionysian view that the world itself is a form of “divine appearing,” a “theophany” that perpetually reaches out to creation in order to gather it together in God’s communal embrace.

Although this theophanic theory includes all created entities, the rational soul holds a unique place. In the Victorine view, the soul’s encounter with the beauty of sensible forms enables it to recognize and embrace its own beauty, discovering its own consonance in the harmony communicated by a given form’s unity-in-diversity.<sup>48</sup> This discovery then enhances and augments the soul’s own beauty, increasing its capacity to receive and ascend to the more perfect spiritual beauty of God. Part of this involves a sense of dissatisfaction aroused in the soul, which, in contemplation, becomes aware of the inadequacy of created forms. This feature of the Victorine approach to beauty distinguishes it from the view of Eriugena and brings it closer to the Cistercians. Because the dissatisfaction provoked by the inadequacy of created beauty is closer to the radical dissatisfaction of the mystics, however, it is unlike the Cistercian moral resistance to the

43. Cf. de Bruyne, *Études d’esthétique médiévale*, 1:573–624; Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics*, 2:190–203; von Balthasar, *GOTL*, 4:356–61. De Bruyne speaks of the Victorine approach as seeing beauty with a “physical” eye.

44. Hugh of St. Victor, *Commentariorum in Hierarchiam Coelestem*, bk. II, ch. 1, expositio [PL 175, col. 949A–C].

45. *Ibid.*, bk. II, ch. 1, expositio [PL 175, col. 954A–B]. Cf. de Bruyne, *Études d’esthétique médiévale* 1 (bk. III), 581.

46. Hugh of St. Victor, *Didascalicon*, bk. VII, ch. 4 [PL 176, 815A–B].

47. *Ibid.*, bk. VII, ch. 4 [PL 176, 814B].

48. Cf. de Bruyne, *Études d’esthétique médiévale*, 1:583.

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world.<sup>49</sup> It is a dissatisfaction more akin to Dionysian unknowing, where the excess of divine plenitude reveals its overwhelming gravity in the failure of the finite entity's representation.

If the Cistercian approach to beauty can be characterized as seeing beauty with a "spiritual" eye, and the Victorine approach as seeing it with a "physical" eye, the approach taken by the School of Chartres sees beauty with the scholarly eye of the intellect.<sup>50</sup> Receiving the Platonic inheritance directly through Plato and his commentators Chalcidius and Macrobius, the Chartrians conceive beauty exclusively in terms of proportion. This shifts the focus from God to the natural world.<sup>51</sup> Their primary source in this regard is Plato's *Timeaus*, around which they develop the view that the world is a mathematical work whose principle is that of proportion. God is the "artist" who creates the "royal palace of the world in wondrous beauty."<sup>52</sup> The world for the Chartrians is beautiful in itself rather than being merely a symbol of divine beauty. It is by virtue of the divine presence in the world, however, that its beauty appears through proportion. The Cistercians look to mathematics to peel back the transience of the world and reveal its eternal structure. The beauty thus revealed by mathematics, upon which proportion is grounded, signifies the presence of the eternal in the world and thus indicates its highest beauty.<sup>53</sup> The natural world, then, becomes understood as the self-offer of the divine to the desires of intellectual inquiry. Reminiscent of Eriugena, the Chartrian "axiom," which von Balthasar describes as "the universal teaching of Chartres"<sup>54</sup> holds that, because God informs everything through a donation of being, God is said to be every being with respect to the given form.<sup>55</sup> Because God is in himself removed from all forms as being pure form without any admixture of matter,<sup>56</sup> however, this Chartrian axiom cannot be validly charged with pantheism.<sup>57</sup> One finds in the school of Chartres an identification between

49. Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, 58.

50. Cf. de Bruyne, *Études d'esthétique médiévale*, 1:625–71; Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics*, 2:203–13; von Balthasar, *GOTL*, 4:362–68.

51. Alan of Lille, *Anticlaudianus*, bk. II, ch. 4 [PL 210, 502A]; cf. von Balthasar, *GOTL*, 4:362.

52. Alan of Lille, *Liber de planctu naturae*, q. 4 [PL 210, col. 453B].

53. Guibert of Nogent, *De vita sua*, bk. I, ch. 2 [PL 156, col. 840B].

54. Von Balthasar, *GOTL*, 4:365.

55. Thierry of Chartres, *De sex dierum operibus*, in *Thierry of Chartres*, 553–76; see also Hauréau, *Notices et extraits*, II: 61.

56. Gilbert of Poitiers, *Liber de sex principiis* [PL 188, col. 1257C ff.].

57. Thierry of Chartres proposed a theory that refers to God as the *forma essendi*.

beauty and God but in an inverse way: the beauty of the world is identified as the very presence of God, the eternal that is continually discovered through intelligible proportions.

The relation between beauty and the divine in early scholasticism is conceived most fundamentally as a relationship of mediation; beauty is an excess of intelligible content through which the divine communicates with the world allowing the rational intellect to advance in its quest for the divine. The three “eyes” through which the various schools perceive beauty—the spiritual (Cistercian), the physical (Victorine), the intellectual (Chartrian)—bequeath to posterity both the way in which beauty is conceived as a plenitude of intelligibility as well as beauty’s anagogical power. Because it provides an abundance of intelligibility beauty serves as an “object” of inquiry regarded as an intellectual phenomenon sought through both physical sight and spiritual contemplation. Despite the different emphases within the mediation—the divine for the Cistercians, the creaturely/divine unity for the Victorines, the rational/mathematical for the Chartrians—the fundamental feature of beauty’s relation to God remains its anagogical dimension. Through the efforts of these early schoolmen, the identification between beauty and the divine is advanced in differing though related ways within the scholastic idiom, where it penetrates the thought of many later scholars.

## **The Early Thirteenth-Century Scholastics**

Beauty’s relation to the divine, passed on through a diverse bequest from the twelfth century, sets the foundation for the diversity of its reception in the early thirteenth century. Within the development of the University system, however, a greater sense of educational cohesion means that the diversity of this reception coalesces around a unity of purpose. The work of the eleventh- and twelfth-century schoolmen not only raises awareness of the importance of beauty in any metaphysical approach to the world and to God, but it illuminates beauty’s attraction as an “object” of inquiry. The schoolmen of the early thirteenth century set to the task of penetrating the enigmatic nature of beauty and its relationship to God.<sup>58</sup>

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But as many have understood this, it intended to emphasize the non-existence of all things outside of God rather than the identification between God and an entity’s intrinsic form. See, e.g., McInerney, *History of Western Philosophy*, part 3, ch. 4.

58. Cf. de Bruyne, *Études d’esthétique médiévale*, 2:72–152; Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics*, 2:213–32.

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A great deal is written about beauty during this period, but insofar as such writings concern beauty's relation to God, the dominant themes involve the good, the light, the true and the one. Dionysius remains highly influential, mostly through the Latin version of his corpus (as the last chapter sought to highlight). Building upon their predecessors, and exhibiting the fundamental aspect of scholasticism, the figures in the early thirteenth century define beauty in a few different ways: as that which of itself is able to give pleasure;<sup>59</sup> as the good insofar as it is approved by the internal gaze of sight;<sup>60</sup> as the disposition of form turned outward;<sup>61</sup> as congruence, harmony and ordering;<sup>62</sup> as that which obeys measure, order and form;<sup>63</sup> as a property of the good that pleases perception;<sup>64</sup> as the teleological harmony of a thing with itself;<sup>65</sup> as the identity, or unity, of proportions containing everything and combining them into one;<sup>66</sup> as God insofar as God is the most beautiful beauty.<sup>67</sup> In these formulations, the earlier characterization of beauty as a mediating agency becomes beauty's "relationalism," a characteristic feature of the view of beauty espoused by these early thirteenth-century scholastics.<sup>68</sup>

The penchant for defining beauty, however, does not mean that these thinkers betrayed the wisdom of the *Hippias Major*. On the contrary, the myriad approaches to beauty's "essence" signals a concrete awareness of its plenitude of intelligibility and its anagogical power.<sup>69</sup> By emphasizing

59. William of Auvergne, *De bono et malo*, 206, in Pouillon, "La beauté, propriété transcendante chez les scolastiques, 1220–1270," 315–16; cf. Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics*, 2:221.

60. William of Auvergne, *Do bono et malo*, 206, in Pouillon, "La beauté, propriété transcendante chez les scolastiques," 317.

61. *Summa Alexandri II* (Quaracchi: Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1948), 99.

62. *Summa Alexandri I* (Quaracchi: Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1948), 163.

63. *Summa Alexandri II* (Quaracchi: Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1948), 103.

64. *Summa Alexandri I* (Quaracchi: Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1948), 162.

65. Robert Grosseteste, *Comm. in Divina nomina*, (MS Erfurt 88r, 2) cited in Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics*, 2:229, and de Bruyne, *Études d'esthétique médiévale*, 2:127.

66. Robert Grosseteste, *Comm. in Divina nomina*, cited in Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics*, 2:229, and de Bruyne, *Études d'esthétique médiévale*, 2:128.

67. Robert Grosseteste, *De unica forma omnium*, Bauer, *Die Philosophischen Werke des Robert Grosseteste*, 108.

68. Cf. Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics*, 2:215.

69. This awareness is also at times related verbally as when, e.g., Robert Grosseteste, in his *De unica forma omnium* (Bauer, *Die Philosophischen Werke des Robert Grosseteste*, 108–9), declares, "Ask not what beauty is, for at once the darkness of

beauty's relational aspect, these schoolmen overcome the problems that arise from the bifurcation between beauty's extra-mental and psychical dimensions. These problems mark certain approaches of the past and are problems that Diotima sought to illuminate and ameliorate for Socrates by introducing him to the relational aspect of a *logos* of the *μεταξὺ*. That these early thirteenth-century schoolmen recognize the various problems associated with beauty is clear.<sup>70</sup> It is this recognition that prompts them to treat beauty as carefully and thoroughly as they do, reflecting several of the Dionysian themes highlighted in the previous chapter.

Beauty is above all identified with God's creative causality that gives measure, form and order to every intelligible entity.<sup>71</sup> In this relation to God's creative causality, itself identified with the self-diffusive good of Neoplatonism, beauty is, in an implicit way, that aspect of the good that distills itself for the cognitive desire of the intellect.<sup>72</sup> By virtue of God's creative endowment, the beauty of creation is a "vestige" through which one may arrive at knowledge of God's uncreated beauty.<sup>73</sup> In many ways, this view is an echo of prior views. But given the emphasis on beauty's relational power by these early thirteenth-century schoolmen, this theory is expanded into a more detailed hierarchy in which beauty admits of various grades and degrees of intensity.<sup>74</sup> Beauty as it appears in corporeal forms, lower on the scale than the beauty that appears in spiritual forms, provides value to these corporeal forms in themselves.<sup>75</sup> But the intrinsic value of this lower beauty is only truly visible in its relation to the higher forms of beauty, which together constitute beauty's hierarchical activity.

One way in which this hierarchical structure is worked out is through the familiar *topos* of light. Light is conceived as both the first of corporeal forms, and so the most noble and exalted of all essences, and as

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physical notions and the clouds of delusion will come forth and trouble the clear image which at first sight shone forth for you when the word 'beauty' was said." This is a clear indication that thinkers of this period were well aware of how a too rigid dependency on definition corrodes the essence of beauty.

70. E.g., *Summa Alexandri*, II, pars I, q. 1, tract. 2, q. 3, cited in Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics*, 2:225; cf. de Bruyne, *Études d'esthétique médiévale*, 2:91.

71. *Summa Alexandri* I, (Quaracchi: Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1948), 174–75, cited in de Bruyne, *Études d'esthétique médiévale*, 2:98, and Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics*, 2:224.

72. Cf. de Bruyne, *Études d'esthétique médiévale*, 2:93–95.

73. *Summa Alexandri*, II, n. 81 (Quaracchi: Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1948), 103.

74. Cf. Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics*, 2:219.

75. *Summa Alexandri*, II, n. 40 (Quaracchi: Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1948), 49.

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corporeity itself.<sup>76</sup> Through light, beauty penetrates intellectual perception with an immediacy that is not present in number, measure or weight.<sup>77</sup> Light harbors in its very essence an analogical—and anagogical—power insofar as it identifies a simplicity of source (*lux*) that emanates itself into a “spiritual body” (*lumen*) constituting a unity in plurality. The perfection of the former (*lux*) unites all the things which are made many in the multiplication of the latter’s (*lumen*) varying degrees; *lux* and *lumen* identify a difference between originating source and emanated outflow, a doctrine that becomes common for the thirteenth century.<sup>78</sup> An important result of this is the way in which light also overcomes the timeless tension between beauty as simplicity and beauty as symmetry or proportion; the simplicity of beauty is the light that radiates more intensely in direct proportion with the intensity of its symmetry of parts.<sup>79</sup> In other words, proportion and simplicity coalesce in an illuminated form: the greater the perfection of proportion, the simpler the form and thus the greater the form’s illumination. And because “God is supremely simple, supremely concordant and appropriate to Himself,”<sup>80</sup> God is form itself and thus light itself.<sup>81</sup>

The schoolmen of the early thirteenth century make many significant contributions to beauty as a divine name, a fact that is not surprising given the increasing attention to Dionysius taking place at the time. Above all, they emphasize beauty’s anagogical power by recognizing the fullness of its intelligible content that first appears via illumination. Light remains simple even as it diversifies itself into myriad distinctions, which render beauty visible through the many illuminations of particular entities. Beauty, therefore, provides a concrete way to think the Creator-creation

76. Grosseteste, *De Luce*, 10; see also Bauer, *Die Philosophischen Werke des Robert Grosseteste*, 51. As is well known, it is Grosseteste who produces the most significant work on light.

77. Grosseteste, *Comm. in Hexaemeron*. Cited in Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, 49; cf. de Bruyne, *Études d’esthétique médiévale*, 2:127, 128. See also McEvoy, *Robert Grosseteste*, 87–95.

78. Grosseteste, *De Luce*, 16; Bauer, *Die Philosophischen Werke des Robert Grosseteste*, 57. See also Long and Noone, “Fishacre and Rufus on the Metaphysics of Light,” 517–48.

79. Grosseteste, *Comm. in Hexaemeron*. Cited in Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics*, 2:230, and Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, 49; cf. de Bruyne, *Études d’esthétique médiévale*, 2:132.

80. Grosseteste, *Comm. in Div. Nom.*, (MS. Erfurt 88r 2) cited in Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics*, 2:229; Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, 49; Cf. de Bruyne, *Études d’esthétique médiévale*, 2:131.

81. De Bruyne, *Études d’esthétique médiévale*, 2:135.

relation, a theme that is taken up in the thirteenth century especially by Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas.

## **Conclusion**

Beauty journeys into the Latin West by means of various routes. On the one hand it travels through Augustine and Boethius, where beauty's relationship to the divine is at the very least brought into focus for later thinkers. Early in his career, Augustine does not hesitate to call God beauty, but as time goes by the bond becomes weaker. With Boethius, the bond is all but severed, and beauty becomes something rather irrelevant in his overall approach to God. These points on the itinerary of beauty's journey into the Latin West differ in significant ways from the Dionysian route. For in the Dionysian journey, the unequivocal identification between beauty and God is preserved and fecundated. In this sense, Dionysius can be considered the primary (though not exclusive) locus where beauty's association with the divine is encountered in its fullest expression. In the divine name tradition that passes through Dionysius into the intellectual formation of the scholastics, beauty is synonymous with God. Through the Dionysian journey, then, beauty arrives in the Latin West as a fundamentally theological theme.

# 9

## Beauty as a Divine Name in Albert the Great

IN ALBERT THE GREAT, THE RELATION BETWEEN BEAUTY AND THE DIVINE receives a detailed metaphysical treatment that draws primarily, though not exclusively, from Scripture, Augustine, Cicero, Alexander of Hales, and Dionysius.<sup>1</sup> This chapter examines how beauty is conceived with respect to its relation to the divine in Albert's metaphysical approach. The two most important sources where this treatment can be found are his *Summa de bono*,<sup>2</sup> and his *De Pulchro et Bono*.<sup>3</sup> These texts are selected for primarily two reasons. First, they cover a fair amount of time in Albert's career. The *Summa de Bono* is an early work (ca. 1240) and the *De Pulchro et Bono* is most likely penned some time later by his assistant Thomas

1. For a thorough account of Albert's views of beauty, see de Bruyne, *Études d'esthétique médiévale*, 2:153–88. For a more recent account, see the work of Bychkov, *A Propos of Medieval Aesthetics*, which provides an in depth and insightful linguistic analysis of many of the terms that constitute the development of medieval notions of beauty, as well as an account of Augustine and Cicero's influence on the medieval understanding of beauty in general; "Reflection of Some Traditional Stoic Ideas in the Thirteenth-Century Scholastic Theories of Beauty," 141–60; "Decor ex praesentia mali, 245–69; *Aesthetic Revelation*.

2. Albert the Great, *Summa De Bono*, in *Albert the Great, Opera Omnia*, vol. XXXII, 1–329. This work is believed to have been written early in his career, ca. 1240. Questions and article numbers will be in reference to this edition.

3. This text had long been attributed to Thomas Aquinas. One of the first to call this into question was Mercier, "Du beau dans la nature et dans l'art," 285n1. Shortly thereafter, Mandonnet, in *Des Écrits Authentiques de Saint Thomas d'Aquin*, attributed the work to Albert. This view was later endorsed by De Wulf, *Histoire de la Philosophie Médiévale*, vol. 1, and de Bruyne, *Études d'esthétique médiévale*, 2:153–88. The text contains lectures 5 and 6 of ch. 4 of Albert's *Commentary on the Divine Names*. The text can be found in Albertus Magnus, *Super Dionysium De Divinis*, 180–95, and also in Thomas Aquinas, *Opuscula selecta*. References to the *De Pulchro et Bono* will cite the question, article, and arguments from the Uccelli edition, while all other references to his commentary on the *Divine Names* (hereafter DN) will come from the Simon edition and cite the chapter, page number, and line numbers.

Aquinas (ca. 1252).<sup>4</sup> The period these texts cover enables a general sense of continuity and divergence in Albert's theology of beauty. Second, the *De Pulchro et Bono* most explicitly captures his Dionysian inheritance since it is constituted by a section of his *Commentary on the Divine Names*, namely chapter 4. Read alongside his earlier *Summa de Bono* the way in which his earlier metaphysics of beauty plays a role in his later Dionysian commentary may become more visible. In these texts, Albert secures the identification of God with the name beauty through a rigorous treatment of the nature of beauty both insofar as it identifies the simplicity of the divine substance, and insofar as this simplicity causes the beauty in things. In his account of how God is the cause of beauty in things Albert follows the Dionysian schematic by examining how beauty is a principle of determination through which God endows all created things with visibility and intelligibility. There is a close proximity between Albert's account and the account of beauty passed on from Eriugena through the Victorine and Chartrian traditions. Albert synthesizes and balances this strand of beauty's relationship to the divine, however, with the Augustinian-Cistercian strand in a way that had eluded many of his predecessors. The result is an image of a God who gives himself to be known and loved in the beauty of things in order to elevate the soul into divine glory by means of both knowledge and love.

The dominant idea that emerges from the *Summa de bono* is summarized in the formula that "beauty is the good insofar as the good is known and loved in all its truth."<sup>5</sup> This formula hinges upon Albert's ingenious examinations into form. Where Boethius complicates the concept of form by introducing a duality of form as internal, ontological constitution, on the one hand, and form as outward, accidental appearance on the other hand, Albert brings the two together in what can be called an open dialectic of beauty.<sup>6</sup> This dialectic is necessary for any understanding of beauty because as the origin and end of all things beauty cannot be grasped by some concept within it or beyond it. It must therefore be approached dialectically.

4. Cf. Weisheipl, "Life and Works of St. Albert the Great," 13–51.

5. Cf. de Bruyne, *Études d'esthétique médiévale*, 2:161.

6. *Summa de bono* 12, 3, sol.; 12, 4, 9; 12, 5, 4–9.

## Albert's Open Dialectical Approach to Beauty

In his classical study on beauty in the middle ages, Edgar de Bruyne sees in Albert's theology of beauty a prototype of the Hegelian dialectic. Although much of what follows is informed by de Bruyne's helpful study, it is the contention of the present analysis that the Hegelian dialectic fails to do full justice to Albert's genius. The Hegelian dialectic requires that the higher identity that emerges within the synthesis of the (lower) "self and other" does so from out of a "space" of ontological indeterminacy or emptiness.<sup>7</sup> In contrast, because he was working within the phenomenon of beauty and because he was synthesizing already established triads, the "higher identities" in Albert's scheme emerge from an ontological plenitude rather than ontological indeterminacy. The dialectical character in Albert's thinking remains open to the ontological plenitude that continually distills itself into the more determinate identities that emerge. Contrary to Hegel's God, Albert's God, far from being incomplete in any way, is a super-plenitude, an overly-complete "ocean of substance" (as the Damascene had called God centuries prior). His thinking can therefore be characterized as an open dialectic, wherein identities being determined never relinquish their intrinsic porosity to their transcendent other—a transcendent other that, pace Hegel, does not determine for the sake of itself but rather for the sake of the to-be-determined identities as other.

The first text where this open dialectic can be discerned is Albert's *Summa de bono*, a treatise that follows in terms of style and genre, and in many ways content, from the treatise of the same name written some fifteen years earlier by Philip the Chancellor. With the writing of Philip the Chancellor's *Summa de bono* (ca. 1225)<sup>8</sup> an innovation is introduced into the genre of the *Summa* in its thirteenth-century form. In contrast with other important synthetic works of the age, most significantly perhaps the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard and the so-called "Golden Compendium," or *Summa aurea*, of William of Auxere, Philip's *Summa de bono* incorporates the good, rather than something more explicitly theological, as an organizing principle. In no way, however, does this mean the treatise attempts to be philosophical rather than theological. One of the most significant features of the treatise, namely its exposition of the so-called *transcendentalia* or the "transcendental properties of being," not only recognizes their

7. For analysis of the contrast between the Hegelian dialectic and a more open dialectic, I am indebted to the work of Desmond. See, e.g., *Desire, Dialectic and Otherness; Beyond Hegel and Dialectic; Art and the Absolute*.

8. Cf. Wicki, "Vie de Philippe le Chancelier," 16–27.

common predicability but appropriates them to God. The characteristic that may be recognized with respect to Philip's treatise and the innovation of the *Summa* genre to which it gives rise, then, has more to do with the mediation and relation between identity and difference, and perhaps along with this an increasing consciousness of the discreet uniqueness of the natural order, than with introducing a metaphysical shift from theology to philosophy. As Aertsen has recognized, the relation of identity and difference expositied in the treatise comes to influence Albert's own thinking on the transcendental properties of being.<sup>9</sup> The identity/difference relationship among the transcendentals is a pronounced feature of the dialectic of beauty in the metaphysics one finds in Albert's own *Summa de bono*. It might be viewed as providing an important dimension of the kind of analogical metaphysics required to properly think the issue of beauty and its relation to God. Beginning the analysis with this early treatise will provide the metaphysical foundation upon which to read chapter 4 of his *Commentary on the Divine Names*.

Albert is presented with a number of triads offering possible ways to structure such a dialectic. For example: number, measure and weight (Book of Wisdom); *modus, species, ordo* (Augustine); *illuminans, pulchrificans, bonum faciens* (Dionysius); and the traditional *unum, verum, bonum*. Rather than selecting some and discarding others, Albert discovers a continuity of relation linking nine selected triads together. He orders this continuity in a sequence that reflects both a descent from the originating divine surplus into a singular, material entity, and an ascent from the material entity toward divine illumination. His genius is in the way he discovers an order wherein the three triads of a given level are unified in the constitution of one of the three attributes in the following triad.<sup>10</sup>

The structure itself is grounded upon a distinction of beauty as three moments: as it is in itself as God (*in se*); as it is insofar as God's beauty causes things (*in opere*); and insofar as beauty's causality provides an analogical ordering for the rational soul (*in ordinatione ad hominem*). Each of these three moments includes three subsequent phases that in sequence establish a "spiral" ascent. With respect to beauty in itself as God, the three phases are "becoming," "being," and "perfected being." Here, the focus is on the origin and end of the divine donation of beauty. It also anticipates the communication of beauty as a principle of determination by which a

9. Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals*, 30ff.

10. Here we follow de Bruyne's analysis. For a table in which this schematic is given clarity, see de Bruyne, *Études d'esthétique médiévale*, 2:156.

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thing is given its ontological constitution. Insofar as God's beauty causes things, the three phases include "the caused thing in its disposition," "the caused thing in its activity," and "the caused thing in relation to its end." In this middle phase, beauty is transferred from origin and end to the receiving entity. This in turn anticipates the third phase in which the emphasis is again shifted between these two phases toward the dynamic involving both external donation and immanent emergence. Thus, insofar as beauty provides an anagogical ordering for the soul, the three phases are "an ordering toward its various faculties," "an ordering from within, and therefore by means of, its various faculties," and "an ordering toward or from its final effect." When Albert's nine selected triads are arranged according to this scheme, the result is a synthesis of Dionysian emanation and anagogy that embodies all the Dionysian dimensions of beauty highlighted in chapters 4 and 5 above.

It is within this dialectic that Albert sketches his concept of beauty as form, which derives from a union of Dionysian light and Aristotelian essence. Following the Dionysian impulse, Albert begins with the good in its transcendent mode. Drawing from the *Book of Wisdom*, Albert maintains that the Good diversifies itself in number, perfects itself in measure, and completes itself in weight.<sup>11</sup> De Bruyne has called this "the good under the most humble form" since as number it "gives to the unformed matter its first distinction."<sup>12</sup> Albert's focus here is on the particularity of a singular being and its relationship to its constitutive principles. It is above all a metaphysical point of view in which the explanation of a being requires a certain set of constitutive principles (number), an inclination of these principles toward existence (measure), and an agreement between these principles and the resulting particularity (weight).<sup>13</sup> The set of constitutive principles associated with number remain in a not-yet-determined state until, by means of measure, they acquire ontological momentum and begin to bear the form of particularity. Because number and measure give rise to a resulting particularity, Albert synthesizes them into weight and identifies this as the *modus* in the Augustinian triad *modus, species, ordo*.<sup>14</sup> Mode is the indivisibility of a thing that establishes its proper harmony, particular equilibrium and original rhythm. When measure, number and

11. *Summa de bono* 11, 7, 9.

12. De Bruyne, *Études d'esthétique médiévale*, 2:155.

13. Cf. *Ibid.*, 2:161.

14. *Summa de bono* 11, 10: Haec autem commensuratio ad formam totius secundum continentiam ab Augustino dicitur modus.

weight come together in the *modus*, that particular entity begins to ascend toward functional determination.

Albert uses the example of a foot in order to illustrate his point.<sup>15</sup> Considered in itself, the form of “foot” takes on the dimensions of its measure, number and weight and so the form of a “body.” As a body, the foot provides visibility to its *modus*, which appears not only in its unique physical attributes, but also as a disposition to support the weight of an organism’s body. The *species*, which Albert identifies as form, pertains to the “*mobilitas a virtute gressiva*” and so identifies the active power that constitutes the *modus* of the foot. Both of these are unified in the *ordo* that establishes its aptitude to walk.<sup>16</sup> The form of the foot is determined toward ultimate perfection, that is, toward its function as an entity that steps. This means that the *modus* and *species* are harmonized in the *ordo*, which is nothing other than the organism itself that grants to the foot its capacity to walk. In the organism, which is the ordering agent (*ordo*), the foot’s *modus* and *species* appear as a unity and so constitute the *unum*, in the triad *unum, verum, bonum*.<sup>17</sup> The foot’s *unum* allows it to be distinguished from all other parts of the organism, while its *verum* corresponds to its ideal form. This ideal form stems from its capacity to achieve its ultimate perfection, that is, to accomplish its determined function by walking. And to the extent that the foot manifests its ultimate perfection, it is *bonum*.<sup>18</sup> Here, the *unum* and *verum* are synthesized in the *bonum* of the foot, which is indissolubly oriented to its end. Where *unum* identifies the thing’s particular integrity as “this thing,” *verum* identifies the ideal form that constitutes that aspect of the thing after which it is always striving. Together they comprise the thing’s *bonum*.

*Bonum* names a mode of being and so a principle of activity that is in a perpetual state of tending toward an end. Albert therefore identifies the foot’s *bonum* with its *ens in se perfectum*, an identification that also

15. *Summa de bono* 11, 12: Secundum quod pes est substantia, principia constituenta sunt materialia quorum modus est mensura ad formam totius. Species autem est forma pedis, ordo autem ad actum.

16. *Summa de bono*, 11, 12: Secundum quod pes est organum, sic modus eius erit dispositio ad bene ferendum, et species facilis mobilitas a virtute gressiva; ordo autem ad id, scilicet propter finem quod est incessus.

17. See, e.g., Bernard of Clairveaux, *Sermones in Cantica Canticorum*, Sermon 69 [PL 183, col. 1112–16]; Sermon 74 [PL 183, col. 1139–44].

18. *Summa de bono* 12, 5: Cum vero bonum dicat indivisionem a fine . . . patet quod bonum dicit perfectionem rei secundum ultimum complementum et quod bonum, hic diffinitum, supponit verum et unum et per consequens omnia praecedentia.

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corresponds to its *substantia*.<sup>19</sup> *Substantia* identifies form at a more mature stage by manifesting a thing's (like a foot's) proper determination in act, or *species*, which opens only insofar as it becomes a source of energy or power.<sup>20</sup> He synthesizes *substantia* and *species* within this power, or *virtus*, and identifies it as *essentia*. At this point, immanent, ontological constitution begins to emerge into the order of actuality as *substantia* manifests itself as *species*. But this emergence relies upon an external force given in *virtus*. Albert therefore synthesizes *substantia* and *species* within this power, or *virtus*, and identifies it as *essentia*.

Following in the traditional reading of *virtus*, Albert explains that it can signify either a power that is latent or a power that is in act.<sup>21</sup> Because *essentia* is the name that designates a substance, or nature, in act, in identifying the coalescence of *substantia* and *species* in and as *virtus*, *essentia* indicates the emergence of *virtus* from latency into act. Through its activity the *essentia* enriches its own capacity to acquire more and new *virtus*, an activity that Albert identifies as a thing's *operatio*.

Thus far, the dialectic of metaphysical beauty appears as follows: measure and number are synthesized into weight, which Albert identifies with *modus*. *Modus* is coupled with *species* and synthesized into *ordo* and identified as *unum*. *Unum* along with *verum* is synthesized into *bonum* and identified as *substantia*. *Substantia* along with *species* is synthesized into *virtus* and identified as *essentia*. *Essentia* as a power to acquire more *virtus* is synthesized into *operatio*. It should be noted, however, that with each new synthesis the terms of the previous triad are not displaced but held together in the unity of their particular distinctions.

At this point, Albert stresses the anagogy of his scheme by introducing the necessity of a new, spiritual, way of "seeing." Albert synthesizes *essentia* and *virtus* with a thing's *operatio* and identifies it as *substantia agens*, the substance in act. Here, there occurs a "progressive spiritualization" of form that pushes sight, or physical vision, more deeply into the intellect, or thought. As de Bruyne interprets it, "the foot, which at times concentrates a certain form of organic energy and which now deploys its rhythm in the concrete activity of walking, appears to spirit as a rational finality acting

19. *Summa de bono* 12, 6: *Substantia enim supponit ens in se perfectum: Unde supponit bonum et verum et unum et reliqua praecedentia. Substantia autem perfect est a qua (id est in quantum) egraditur actus et operatio.*

20. De Bruyne, *Études d'esthétique médiévale*, 2:158.

21. *Summa de bono* 12, 7: *Virtus vero quae ponebatur in praehabitis tribus supponebat potentiam inclinatum ad actum, sed non in actu ipso: sicut alia est virtus scribendi in puero et in scriptore perfecto.*

in space.”<sup>22</sup> The form of the foot made visible in its concrete activity (*species*) provokes human consciousness out of itself into the real order where the good presents itself as a universal finality (*ratio finis*). Through the progressive spiritualization of the foot’s form, thought’s encounter with the foot is an encounter with the good in its universal finality becoming a moment where reason “incarnates” itself.<sup>23</sup> The foot’s *ratio finis* is the visibility of its form resulting from a synthesis of the *substantia agens* and the *species*.

Here in this process, beauty *in se* (nature) and beauty *in operatione* (act) become unified with human consciousness as thought returns to its source. The *ratio finis* of a thing is identified as *quod constat*, a necessary condition for perception of a thing to occur. The agreement between the *ratio finis* and the perceptive faculties requires the thing’s perfection or completion. A thing can only be perceivable insofar as it is in act tending toward its end, that is to say, insofar as it subsists in a degree of perfection in nature and act.<sup>24</sup> This perfection of *nature* is established, Albert says, by the first three triads—“number, measure, weight”; “*modus, species, ordo*”; and “*unum, verum, bonum*”—while the perfection of *act* is established in the second three triads—“*substantia, species, virtus*”; “*essentia, virtus, operatio*”; and “*substantia agens, species, ratio finis*.”<sup>25</sup> Along with *quod constat* there follows *quod congruit*, by which the agreeability of an object is ordered to the perceptive faculties of a being, in particular, toward the human being.<sup>26</sup> Albert synthesizes both of these into *quod discernit*, which enables the relation to the human being to take the form of a relation to the intellect.<sup>27</sup>

Through discernment, the form can now become an object of desire both to the mind as *verum* as well as to the heart as *bonum*. Desire itself, therefore, unites the *verum* and the *bonum*, both of which are now

22. De Bruyne, *Études d'esthétique médiévale*, 2:159.

23. *Summa de bono* 12, 7: Pes ut substantia primo sensu . . . supponit substantiam agentem actu; species autem supponit determinationem suam in actu hoc vel illo, ratio vero finem operis, eo quod finis est ratio quare movetur efficiens ad opus. (Et secundum hoc planum est videre qualiter ista tria supponunt praecedentia.)

24. *Summa de bono* 12, 8: Nihil enim perfectum constat, hoc est simul stat, nisi quod stat in perfectione potestatis et naturae.

25. *Summa de bono* 12, 8: Perfectio autem naturae consistit in primis tribus ternariis, perfectio vero potestatis in secundis tribus: perfectio enim potestatis est in opere attingente finem.

26. *Summa de bono*: 12, 8: Quod congruit autem ponit ordinem ad aliud et praecipue ad hominem.

27. *Summa de bono* 12, 8: Quod ver discernit ponit relationem rei ad intellectum.

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synthesized by that which is itself desired, i.e., beauty. Albert therefore synthesizes the *verum* and the *bonum* into *pulcrum*, which he identifies as the *ratio* of the *verum* and the *bonum*.<sup>28</sup> Beauty (*pulcrum*) at this point has both a metaphysical dimension, since it derives from the essential constitution of a thing's ontological coming-into-being, as well as a moral dimension, since it corresponds to that thing's outward activities. Beauty is the union of internal, ontological form with outward, perceptible form as that form is oriented to the fullness of desire both intellectual and spiritual. As that which all things desire, the good bears in itself a necessary distance without which desire would no longer be desire but possession. The true identifies the good that has passed over this distance and given itself to be possessed by the mind, that is to say, given itself to the limits of conceptual determination where mind and thing are unified or "adequated." For Albert, beauty identifies the happening in between the good becoming true. Or as de Bruyne expresses it, "Beauty is the good as it is known and loved in all its truth."<sup>29</sup> Beauty in this sense identifies an illumination that derives from this union between thing and reality, or to put it more specifically, between a thing with itself and between a thing with its particular *telos*. When this union comes about it is manifest as light, and so manifests the effect of beauty to make beautiful things, that is, beauty's "beauty-making." But as light makes something beautiful, it also makes it good. These constitute Albert's final deifying triad. *Pulcrum*, which is a harmony of the *verum* and *bonum*, is identified as *illuminans*. *Illuminans* is synthesized with *pulcrificans* into the deification of *bonum faciens*.<sup>30</sup>

There are a number of important features of this dialectic of beauty. Above all, it reveals how the identification of God with the name beauty requires some sort of account of the relation between God in himself and God as cause of creation. For Albert, this relation involves God's self-presentation to the intellect by an act in which God practically "objectifies

28. *Summa de bono* 12, 8: Pulchrum vero ponit commensurationem veri et boni secundum rationem honesti. Pulchrum enim est "quod propter se expetendum est." Et hoc est in ratione veri boni.

29. De Bruyne, *Études d'esthétique médiévale*, 2:161.

30. A symbolic presentation of this scheme may help to clarify the matter. Let "+" symbolize a synthesis, let "=" indicate the result of a synthesis, and let "à" indicate one term becoming the first term in the next, higher triad: number + measure = weight à modus + species = ordo à unum + verum = bonum à substantia + species = virtus à essentia + virtus = operatio à substantia agens + species = ratio finis à quod constat + quod congruit = quod discernit à verum + bonum = pulcrum à illuminans + pulcrificans = bonum faciens.

himself under this or that *ratio*.<sup>31</sup> God presents his substance and attributes in the created effects that are given to human beings to know and love. Because God's substance and attributes are manifest through creaturely being, they are rendered distinct and therefore intelligible.<sup>32</sup> In knowing the multitude of creatures in the world the human intellect is actually encountering a vision of God, only it is a vision of God derived from an almost infinite multitude of nuances. These nuances are necessary in order to approach any knowledge of God since God's substance exceeds the capacity of the human mind. Through beauty, the divine gives itself in humble form to the searching intellect both to satisfy its desire for knowledge (*verum*) and to increase its desire for more and loftier things (*bonum*).

### **Beauty in the Commentary on the Divine Names**

To what extent does this dialectic of beauty serve as the foundation for the analysis one finds in Albert's commentary on the *Divine Names*, especially chapter 4, lectures 5 and 6? Before proceeding with an analysis of this section of the text, a few points regarding the commentary itself must first be registered. Thirty years ago, scholars pointed out the lack of published attention to this commentary, and since then it appears that little has changed.<sup>33</sup> A few pages appear here and there,<sup>34</sup> but no in depth study of Albert's commentary, nor the role of beauty therein, has been produced.

Recently the Commentary has been criticized for missing the basic liturgical and hymnological character of the original Dionysian *Divine Names* treatise.<sup>35</sup> This criticism asserts that Albert's commentary, in a way typical to scholasticism, seeks to domesticate the mystical component of the treatise within the limits of rational thought. Albert appears to be guilty by association, however, since the real target of this criticism is Aquinas. Given the lack of inquiry by scholars into the treatise to support such a criticism, and given the possible foundational metaphysics of

31. Tugwell, "Albert and the Dionysian Tradition," 90.

32. *Ibid.*, 91.

33. See Catania, "'Knowable' and 'Nameable,'" 97. Catania notes only one notable work on Albert's commentary, namely, Ruello's study *Les "Noms Divins" et Leurs "Raisons" selon Saint Albert le Grand Commentateur du "De Divinis Nominibus."*

34. De Bruyne, *Études d'esthétique médiévale*, 2:161–73; Burrell and Moulin, "Albert, Aquinas and Dionysius," 105–6; Caramello, "Peter Caramello's Introduction," 87–88.

35. Jones, "(Mis?)-Reading the Divine Names as a Science," 143–72.

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beauty of the *Summa de bono* upon which the commentary is structured,<sup>36</sup> this criticism appears to be unsubstantiated, at least as far as it concerns Albert. Whether the criticism holds for Aquinas will be considered later. For now, it is important to note this criticism in order to draw attention to the structure in which Albert writes his commentary.

Using the translation of John the Saracen,<sup>37</sup> Albert structures his commentary with the same logical technique used by the scholastics of the thirteenth century in their *Commentaries on the Sentences*. Each *lectio* consists of an introduction, followed by the Dionysian text, which Albert then divides and comments upon. Albert selects those themes, points and words that he finds noteworthy for posing questions, which follow in the form of doubts and responses. This structure renders the product less a commentary and more a scholastic treatise,<sup>38</sup> though in some respects this structure evinces a “profound contemplation” resulting in the “richest fruits” and a “fructifying fountain from which later scholastics and mystics . . . will drink deeply.”<sup>39</sup> That later mystics will find Albert’s commentary so appealing indicates that it did not in fact rationalize the mystical elements of the original treatise but illuminated them.<sup>40</sup>

The challenge that faces Albert in his commentary is the same challenge that Eriugena confronts with less success, at least if the condemnations of 1225 are a valid measure. It is the challenge of holding a position that avoids positing either preexisting matter or pantheism while maintaining a harmony between divine immanence and divine transcendence.<sup>41</sup> Albert’s success owes largely to his account of form, derived as it is from his vision of beauty. The position Albert sketches in his *Summa de bono* provides him with a view of form in which it is neither wholly

36. Admittedly, this statement remains speculative until a more thorough study of the two texts is undertaken, though some of what is discerned in the present study may provide some evidence. For now, the evidence to support it comes from the earlier dating of the *Summa de bono* treatise (1240–1244). Given this dating, it is not entirely unjustified to assume that much of what was explicated in this early treatise influenced his writing of the later *Divine Name* commentary.

37. As he states in his prologue to the *Commentary*, the Saracen translation is “better” than other available translations. Cf. Grabmann, *Mitterlalterliches Geistesleben*, 460; Caramello, “Peter Caramello’s Introduction,” 88. A more thorough consideration of this translation vis-à-vis the original and Eriugena translation can be found in ch. 12 below.

38. Gamba, “Commenti latini al *De Mystica Theologia*,” 260–70.

39. Caramello, “Peter Caramello’s Introduction,” 88.

40. On this influence, see De Libera, *Introduzione all Mistica Renana*.

41. Cf. Burrell and Moulin, “Albert, Aquinas and Dionysius,” 106.

extrinsically given nor wholly intrinsically emergent.<sup>42</sup> Rather, mingling both Dionysius and Aristotle,<sup>43</sup> his position involves a “calling forth,” or “eduction,” of forms. These forms exist in matter in a state of potency and remain as nothing unless infused by the divine *καλόν*. Form, then, is both extrinsically given and internally emergent, preserving the transcendence of divine substance while allowing the divine substance to be received in a multiform way.<sup>44</sup>

This idea that God is both beyond the world even as he is fusing it with his substance provides the foundation of the view that Albert expresses in chapter 4, lectures 5 and 6 (*De pulcro et bono*). The fundamental triad that runs throughout Albert’s commentary derives from chapter 4 of the Dionysian text, namely, the triad of “good, light and beauty.” Similar to the configuration of beauty in the *Summa de bono*, Albert’s primary thesis is that beauty is the synthesis of the true and the good, or the good as it opens itself to being received as truth. This is established in the opening question, which concerns the relation between *verum*, *bonum* and *pulcrum* insofar as they are processions from God that are given to the formal constitution of creatures.<sup>45</sup> As Albert describes it, the divine processions are first discovered by the intellect. They exist in the mind as an apprehension of truth, that is to say, as the good insofar as the good is apprehended within the limits of human cognition. Insofar as the good is limited, it is apprehended under the *ratio* of truth, but insofar as it is the *good* thus apprehended, it enflames the mind as it opens the mind toward more of the good.<sup>46</sup> Albert is no doubt writing under the influence of Aristotle’s dictum in the *Metaphysics* that “all human beings desire to know.” And if, as Burrell and Moulin have observed recently, Aristotelians tend to stress the “know” more than the “desire,”<sup>47</sup> Albert’s treatment here sets him apart

42. Albert therefore rejects the image of God as *Dator Formarum*, the “Giver for Forms,” since in his view this image, which he attributes to “Plato and Avicenna” (*DN* 4, 194, l. 56–65), requires preexisting matter to be eternal (*DN* 2, 73, l. 39–40).

43. *DN* 1, 15, l. 61; *DN* II, 73, l. 41–42.

44. *DN* I, 15, l. 48–49; *DN* I, 15, l. 59. *DPB* q. 11, a. 1.

45. *De Pulcro et Bono* (hereafter *DPB*) q. 1, a. 1, sol: Dicendum quod ea, de quibus intendit determinare in opposito Dionysius, sunt quaedam processionis divinae, idest quaedam bona procedentia a Deo in creaturis, quibus proficiuntur in divinam assimilationem, cum procedunt formali processione, sicut calido primo calida alia; et ideo secundum ordinem processionis debet attendi ordo istorum de quibus hic agitur.

46. *DPB* q. 1, a. 1, sol: Prima autem processio, quae est in mente, est secundum apprehensionem veri, deinde illud verum excandescit et accipitur in ratione boni, et sic deinde movetur desiderium ad ipsum.

47. Burrell and Moulin, “Albert, Aquinas and Dionysius,” 108.

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from this group. By configuring beauty as the synthesis of the good and the true, Albert focuses on the aspect of knowledge associated with desire. As the good is apprehended under the *ratio* of truth, Albert says, it is necessary that desire's momentum "enflame" a two-fold apprehension: the first is the *ratio* of truth ordered toward the speculative intellect, and the second is the *ratio* of the good ordered toward the practical intellect.<sup>48</sup> For this reason, desire will first exist as a fuller momentum toward the good before it is determined as the *ratio* of truth in the same way that the fuller power of nature is prior to the more determined power of medicine.<sup>49</sup> Based upon this relation, Albert gives his interpretation as to why Dionysius structures his fourth chapter of the *Divine Names* with the sequence Good, Light, Beauty, and Love. Good names the plenitude upon which desire grounds its momentum and identifies the ethos in which ontological emergence takes shape. Light names the fullness of truth itself by which the good becomes intellectually "visible" as a radiance constituting the conditions of visibility. Beauty names the Good distilling itself through the radiance of Light as together they become determined truth; that is to say, Beauty is the apprehension of the *ratio* of the good through Light. Love is the particular response and names the momentum of desire toward the Good-Light-Beauty.<sup>50</sup> To put it in more modern parlance, as the synthesis of true and good beauty occupies a "space" of happening between the two where the divine plenitude gives itself over to the act of human determination.

Beauty, then, is really an event wherein the divine substance diversifies itself into a plurality of intelligibilities. In its *ratio*, beauty includes many components.<sup>51</sup> The most important for Albert is that beauty is the

48. *DPB* q. 1, a. 1, sol: oportet enim motum desiderii accendere duplicem apprehensionem, unam, quae est in intellectu speculativo, quae est ipsius verbi absolute; alteram autem, quae est in intellectu practico per extensionem de vero in ratione boni, et tunc primo erit motus desiderii ad bonum.

49. *DPB* q. 1, a. 1, sol: Sicut enim ars medicinae non consequitur effectum in operando, nisi adiuvetur virtute naturae; sic desiderium non movetur, nisi dirigatur per apprehensionem praecedentem apprehensioni.

50. *DPB* q. 1, a. 1, sol: Igitur ipsi vero absolute respondet processio luminis, apprehensioni autem veri secundum quod habet rationem boni respondet processio pulcri, motui vero desiderii respondet processio diligibilis; et ideo primo de lumine, secundo de pulcro, et tertio de diligibili erit dicendum.

51. *DPB* q. 1, a. 2, sol: Dicendum quod pulcrum in ratione sui plura concludit: scilicet splendorem formae substantialis vel actualis supra partes materiae proportionatas et terminatas, sicut corpus dicitur pulcrum ex resplendentia coloris supra membra proportionata, hoc est quasi differentia specifica complens rationem pulcri.

splendor of substantial, or actual, form over (i.e., inclusively transcending) the proportioned and limited parts of matter. Albert designates this as the plenitude component of beauty's *ratio*: *hoc est quasi differentia specifica complens rationem pulcri*.<sup>52</sup> A second component is the way in which beauty draws desire to itself, which it has insofar as it is a good and an end.<sup>53</sup> Thirdly, beauty is a gathering power that makes things resplendent. Fourthly, beauty harbors in itself the power to provide beauty to all things, thus diversifying without diminishing itself (like light).<sup>54</sup>

Based on these components, Albert distinguishes beauty from the good. The first component, which identifies the *ratio* of beauty as the plenitude of form that shines over the material parts, separates beauty from the good, while the second component, which identifies beauty as the drawing of desire, signals their similarity. By virtue of the third component, beauty and the good are considered in terms of cognition. As he has explained in the *Summa de bono*, the gathering power of beauty enables the good to assume a concrete form. This form provides the grounds for intelligibility and the subsequent cognitive act that intelligibility provokes. Albert explains here that as they are in the subject, beauty and the good agree in form and therefore are the same *quantum ad subiectum*. They differ, however, in *ratio* by virtue of two distinct modes of form: resplendence and destination. Insofar as form is resplendent over the parts of matter, it is the fullness of the *ratio congregandi* and is identified as beauty. Insofar as the form is the "destination" (*finis*) of matter, it identifies the reception of the *ratio congregandi* and is identified as the good.<sup>55</sup> As he does in the *Summa*

52. Although the word "*complens*" can be understood generally as "completing" or "perfecting," its primary definition is a "filling up," or "occupying of a space." Because it appears to designate a "specific difference" that derives from a contrast with the phrase "*proportionatas et terminatas*," it seems to us valid to stress this sense of fullness; that is to say, the resplendence of substantial form over (i.e., inclusively transcendent of) the limitations of matter identifies beauty's plenitude, here characterized as the specific difference of beauty's *ratio*.

53. *DPB* q. 1, a. 2, sol: Secundum est quod trahit ad se desiderium, et hoc habet in quantum est bonum et finis.

54. *DPB* q. 1, a. 2, sol: Tertium est quod congregat omnia, et hoc habet ex parte formae cuius resplendentia facit pulcrum. Quartum est ipsius pulcritudinis primae, quae per essentiam suam causa est pulcritudinis, scilicet omnem pulcritudinem facere.

55. *DBP* q. 1, a. 2, sol: Quantum igitur ad primum, separatur ratio pulcri a ratione honesti et boni: quantum vero ad secundum, non separantur aliquo modo, quia illud accedit pulcro secundum quod est in eodem subiecto in quo est bonum: quantum vero ad tertium, convenit quidem quantum ad subiectum, quia et pulcro et bono accedit secundum quod est forma utriusque. Omnis enim cognitio pertinet ad formam, quae est determinans materiae potentialium multipliciter; differt autem ratione, quia

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*de bono*, Albert here views beauty as the event by which the good is given visibility and intelligibility. To venture beyond Albert's *ipsissima verba*, it might be said that the good is that which all things desire, and so must always remain ever at a distance. But if desire for the good is to have any reality, that is to say if it is to be oriented toward something real, it must have some mode of presence that does not collapse the distance necessary to preserve desire *qua* desire. This Albert identifies with the resplendence of form over the material parts, and so identifies it as beauty.

Beauty corresponds to the perception of being as a desirable and moveable good. As de Bruyne suggests, it is the moment where pure perception is driven by desire, corresponding to the discovery of the value in the form.<sup>56</sup> This discovery of formal value corresponds to the true and is a recurring event since beauty is the plenitude of desired good that shines over the various parts of a discovered thing. The discovery of value that is associated with the true is the fundamental ground of human cognition. Thus, it is surely correct to observe that while it is valid to say that beauty, for Albert, is the *truth of the good*, it is not valid to say that beauty is the *goodness of truth*; the *truth of the good* refers to the recurring event of all cognition where the good is perpetually being determined as true, while the *goodness of truth* wrongly implies that the conceptual closure associated with truth precedes and exceeds the good as an object of intellectual desire. This is a point where Albert and Aquinas will differ, though only slightly. Albert is certainly more Neoplatonic in maintaining the final superiority of the Good. Albert does not characterize beauty in terms of a relationship to actual knowledge as firmly as Aquinas does. For Albert, there is a complexity that shifts the emphasis of beauty away from its communication of actual knowledge toward its more independent dimensions. Even though *claritas* characterizes that attribute of beauty that illuminates whether or not it is known, it nevertheless carries with it an aptitude toward cognition. This aptitude is why beauty is also identifiable

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secundum quod forma est finis materiae, sic bonum accipit rationem congregandi. Secundum autem quod resplendet super partes materiae, sic est pulchrum habens rationem congregandi. Sic igitur dicimus quod pulchrum et honestum sunt idem in subiecto. Differunt autem in ratione, quia ratio pulcri in universali consistit in resplendentia formae super partes materiae proportionatas, vel super diversas vires vel actiones; honesti autem ratio consistit in hoc, quod trahit ad se desiderium: decus vero dicitur secundum proportionem potentiae ad actum.

56. Cf. de Bruyne, *Études d'esthétique médiévale*, 2:163.

with *honestum*, which marks a lower, or more derivative, degree of illumination that provokes a cognitive response.<sup>57</sup>

So although Albert stresses beauty's independence from the cognitive faculties in *claritas*, he does nonetheless recognize the significant cognitive dimension of beauty and its importance for divine communication. God is named both beauty and the beautiful not because these name two distinct realities, but because in the first cause there must be both simplicity and perfection. Beauty names the simplicity of God as the source of the beauty of all beautiful things. Under this condition, beauty is the form of all beautiful things and the divine presence in a given thing's *ratio*. Thus, Albert cites Boethius who says that God, being the most beautiful thing, carries the beauty of the world in his mind, and Augustine who, echoing Hillary, says that the highest beauty is the Son of God.<sup>58</sup>

Albert addresses the objections that could be brought against this view. If the beautiful consists in due proportion or harmony, it would seem that it could not be in the first cause as simple. Moreover, beauty and the beautiful are two different words. If they are not synonymous expressions then they must signify two distinct realities. And if they signify two distinct realities, then beauty and the beautiful differ in reality. Albert's response emphasizes the distinction between God's simplicity in himself and his multiplicity in his attributes asserting that by virtue of the proportion between the multiplicity (*motus*) and the simplicity (*act*) the highest beauty reverberates (*resultat*).<sup>59</sup> In a subtle way, this assertion identifies

57. *DPB* q. 4, a. 1, ad. 3: Ad tertium dicendum, quod virtus claritatem quandam habet in se, per quam pulcra est, etiam si a nullo cognoscatur; ex qua tamen aptitudinem habet, ut cum quadam claritate in notitiam veniat: et propter hoc dicit Tullius, quod dicitur pulcrum et honestum, secundum quod respectu alterius dicitur, clarescit.

58. *DPB* q. 2, a. 1, sed contra et sol: Ad oppositum est quod dicit Boethius, in libro de consolatione philosophiae, de Deo loquens, mundum mente gerens pulcrum, pulcherrimum. Ipse autem Augustinus, exponens verba Hilarii, dicit quod in filio Dei est summa pulcritudo. Dicendum quod pulcritudo est in Deo, et est summa, et prima pulcritudo, a qua emanat natura pulcritudinis in omnibus pulcris, quae est forma pulcrorum: sicut dictum est de natura cognitionis supra. Est enim sua pulcritudo, et haec est conditio primi agentis, quod agat per suam essentiam, sed exemplariter in omnibus aliis.

59. *DPB* q. 2, a. 1, ad. 1: Deus quamvis sit simplex in substantia, est tamen multiplex in attributis; et ideo ex proportionemotus ad actum resultat summa pulcritudo, quod sapientia non discordat a potentia, et sic de aliis. Posset tamen dici, quod pulcritudo dicitur de ipso sicut de causa pulcritudinis; sed secundum hoc non esset in ipso pulcritudo, nisi ageret pulcritudinem sicut causa univoca: et sic non pertinet ad praesentem intentionem, et ideo oportet redire ad primam solutionem.

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the way in which a divine procession, i.e., a divine name, is constituted by beauty.

God is both beauty and the beautiful, which are the same in reality but different in their *modus significandi*. Albert's explanation draws from the final chapter of Dionysius's *Divine Names*, which treats of the names One and Perfect. It is necessary, Albert contends, that a first cause be both simple (One) and perfect. He explains that the name beauty signifies the divine in its simplicity. Because the name beauty derives from an abstract way of naming, however, it does not identify the divine perfection.<sup>60</sup>

It is important to underscore that Albert's point is a linguistic one that concerns the medieval logic of signification. In this context, the issue of naming God "beauty" and "beautiful" concerns the complexity of identifying something real—divine beauty—while also granting substantive existence to beautiful things both presently existing, having existed in the past, and all possible beautiful things yet to come. Cast in the context of medieval logic, the name "beautiful" signifies and supposits the thing that is beautiful, while simultaneously having "*appellatio*" with respect to "beauty" even though it does not directly signify or supposit beauty itself. Beauty, in turn, has the property of "*ampliatio*" in that its supposits, being beautiful, amplify beauty to past instances and to all possible future instances of beauty. The term beautiful, then, both signifies the beautiful *suppositum* and calls for the form of beauty.<sup>61</sup> In other words, Albert's explanation for identifying God as both beauty and beautiful intends to capture the perfect actuality of the divine radiance. But to do so, it is not enough to use the name beauty, since this name signifies in the abstract. As an abstract signifier, it implicates of necessity a subject or *suppositum*. The name "beautiful," as noted above, overcomes this problem since it signifies and supposits a singular thing.

Together, the two names also provide a cognitive mechanism harmonizing *cataphasis* with *apophasis*. The name beautiful does not convey simplicity but rather shapes, or more literally "forms the boundaries of" (*terminat*), the mode of cognition enabling positive determinations of the

60. *DPB* q. 2, a. 1, ad. 2: Ad secundum dicendum, quod vere dicitur de Deo quod est pulcrum et quod est pulcritudo, non tamen oportet quod differant re, sed tantum secundum modum significandi. Unde dicendum ad tertium, quod ille modus habet aliquid respondens in re: oportet enim quod in causa prima sit simplicitas et perfectio, si prima est. Id autem quod significatur in abstracto, non significatur ut ens perfectum; quia vero dicit aliquid in se perfectum, et ideo ad significandam perfectionem causae primae, quae vere est in ipsa, oportet dicere de ipsa pulcrum, et ad significandum eius simplicitatem oportet dicere quod est pulcritudo.

61. Böhner, *Medieval Logic*, 10–12; 27–36.

good (i.e., truth). The beautiful brings cognition into the determination of form. The countermovement that pushes cognition out of this determination is beauty as simplicity. Identifying the surplus beyond the multiple determinations, beauty as simplicity negates—that is to say “opens” or renders porous—the positive determinations of the beautiful by its excess. Through the continual oscillation of beauty as simplicity and the beautiful as determinate forms, the two can be conceived as being the same thing.<sup>62</sup>

After establishing these foundational dimensions of beauty, Albert proceeds to examine its proper characteristics. The first is the way in which beauty is said to create beauty, a point that draws upon the Aristotelian distinction between an actuality and a movement.<sup>63</sup> Similar to the distinction in Thomas between *Ipsum Esse Subsistens, esse commune*, and a particular *esse*, Albert distinguishes between the beauty of the first agent, beauty as the universal form of all beautiful things, and the beauty in a particular beautiful thing.<sup>64</sup> Only the beauty of the first agent can be said to properly create beauty as an efficient cause acting through its essence.<sup>65</sup> The beauty that identifies the universal form of all beautiful things, the *communis omnibus pulcris*, is said to “create” beauty only insofar as it stimulates desire for the fullness of the beauty of the first agent. Insofar as it does this, it becomes the motive aspect of the first agent, which is itself an actuality. But this creative power is only manifest insofar as it is concretized in a particular beautiful thing. The union of these three modes of beauty—the (1) particular beauty giving concrete visibility to (2) *pulchrum commune*, which illuminates the *ratio* of (3) divine beauty—describes the

62. *DPB* q. 2, a. 1, ad. 2: Pulcrum enim non importat simplicitatem, sed ipse terminat modum cognitionis. Simplicitas etiam eius exigit, ut haec duo sint eadem res in ipso: *participationem causae facientis pulcra, tota pulcra*, idest omnia pulcra. Hoc intelligitur de natura pulcritudinis, quae est forma pulcrorum, quae participatur ad esse omnium pulcrorum, et facit ea pulcra, sicut albedo alba. Si vero intelligatur de prima causa effectiva, sicut particulari, intelligetur per effectum ipsius: *supersubstantiale vero pulcrorum*.

63. This point is treated in *DPB* q. 3, a. 1. For the distinction between actuality and movement, see Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 9, 6 (1048b). An actuality is “a movement in which the end is already present.” Examples include seeing, understanding, and thinking. A movement, in contrast, names a process that seeks some extrinsic end.

64. In other words, *DPB* q. 8, a. 1, ad. 4: pulcritudo dicit participationem, et sic formam, pulcrum autem dicit participans; et sic nihil addit nisi maiorem recipientem.

65. *DPB* q. 3, a. 1, ad. 1: Ad primum ergo dicendum, quod pulcritudo quae est forma pulcrorum facit pulcritudinem vel pulcra formaliter, licet non effective; pulcritudo vero quae est forma primi agentis, facit pulcritudinem etiam effective: primum autem pulcrum effective efficit pulcritudinem, non actione physica, sed agendo per suam essentiam.

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first metaphysical condition of beauty, namely, *claritas*. *Claritas* signifies the *ratio* of beauty that shines over (again, as inclusively transcendent of) the proportioned parts of a material entity, wooing desire more fully into the simplicity of the perfect beauty. Because beauty as the beautiful is also constitutive of the entity itself, it is of its essence (*per se*) to proceed.<sup>66</sup>

The procession of beauty, insofar as it is named the beautiful, constitutes the beauty of all created entities. In the same way that light (*lumen*) is the effect of luminous source (*lux*), which becomes diversified without ever relinquishing its unity with the source, beauty is the effective principle of all things beautiful.<sup>67</sup> In this context Albert reads Dionysius as positing a second metaphysical condition of beauty, namely, *consonantia*. The challenge he faces is to explain how *consonantia*, which requires some kind of proportion and so multiplicity, can be consubstantial with *claritas*, which is simple, in the *ratio* of beauty. His solution in many ways resembles the position of Robert Grosseteste, for whom beauty is an illumination deriving from the degree of proximity among the members of a given entity. For Grosseteste, as noted in chapter 8 above, beauty is a “harmony of proportion” illuminated as a thing’s form. The greater perfection of proportion that an entity possesses, the simpler is its form and thus the greater is its illumination. Albert holds a very similar view. Where Grosseteste prioritizes the proportional component, however, Albert stresses illumination.<sup>68</sup> Caution should be taken, though, not to over contrast these two thinkers. Albert’s position recognizes the priority of the concrete thing for any communication of beauty’s *ratio*. This means that the due proportion of an entity’s members, or the entity’s *consonantia*, has equal existential importance as *claritas*.<sup>69</sup> The relationship is analogous to that of a subject and its essence, where *consonantia* is the subject and *claritas* the essence.<sup>70</sup>

66. *DPB* q. 3, a. 1, ad. 3: Ad tertium dicendum, quod formae comparatio ad materiam non sufficit ad rationem pulcritudinis, ubi imitatur forma luminis per quod resplendet super partes materiae, et ideo habet per se processionem pulcritudo.

67. *DPB* q. 9, exp.: Ipsum enim, scilicet pulcrum, est principium effectivum omnium pulcrorum, et est movens tota, idest omnia pulcra.

68. Cf. de Bruyne, *Études d'esthétique médiévale*, 2:16.

69. *DPB* q. 4, a. 1, sol: Dicendum quod sicut ad pulcritudinem corporis requiritur quod sit proportio debita membrorum, et quod color supersplendet eis, quorum si altera deesset, non esset pulcrum corpus: ita ad rationem universalis pulcritudinis exigitur proportio aliquorum ad invicem, vel partium, vel principiorum, vel quorumcumque quibus supersplendet claritas formae.

70. *DPB* q. 4, a. 1, ad. 1: Decendum quod sicut ad esse similitatis concurrat nasus sicut subiectum, et concavitas sicut essentia simi, et similiter ad rationem pulcritudinis concurrat consonantia sicut subiectum, et claritas sicut essentia eius: et similiter

The use of *nasus* and *concavitas* indicates that Albert's thinking borrows from Aristotle's *Metaphysics* VI, 1, and VII, 4 and 5. In these chapters, Aristotle explains that "all natural things are analogous to the snub in their nature."<sup>71</sup> This is the foundation for his view that all natural entities, being composites in which a thing has an addition not by accident but by nature (form and matter), require both for their definition. That is to say, in trying to define a natural thing, one faces the same difficulty in trying to define "snub." "Snub" can only qualify one kind of substance, namely, the nose. But to understand what qualifies a nose as "snub" one cannot avoid mentioning noses.<sup>72</sup> To define "snub" or any naturally occurring composite of matter and form, then, one's account must contain two different things simultaneously and in equal measure. Albert's use of this example suggests that his understanding of beauty must also contain two different things simultaneously and in equal measure, namely, *claritas* and *consonantia*. This second metaphysical condition of beauty identifies the way that these two aspects constitute the *ratio* of beauty and the beautiful.

A third metaphysical condition involves the way beauty identifies that attribute of the good that calls all things to itself. The difficulty with this condition is that it appears to propose a redundancy; if the good is that which all things desire and beauty is that which calls all things to itself, two words are used to signify one substantial attribute. Albert in part concedes this objection, explaining that this condition of beauty does not concern beauty's own internal differentiation but rather its "external" relation to the good.<sup>73</sup> Rather than establishing an insurmountable difference of kind between the good and beauty, this relation is most accurately conceived in terms of degrees of the good's manifestation. The good names that which all things desire, which is to say it names an end or finality. Insofar as this end is reachable through desire, it spans the ontological distance inherent within what could be called the dialectic of desire. This dialectic arises from the paradoxical nature of desire's object: as the experience of an end that is not yet present, desire somehow gives presence to that end.<sup>74</sup> The

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dicendum ad secundum.

71. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* VI, 1, 1026a.

72. Cf. Hare, "Aristotle and the Definition of Natural Things," 168–79.

73. *DPB* q. 5, a. 1, sol: Dicendum quod hoc non convenit pulcro secundum propriam differentiam, qua completur sua ratio, sed ratione subiecti sui, in quo communicatur cum bono quasi ex natura generis: et ideo non sequitur quod sit in eo quod dividatur ab ipso per differentiam aliam quae est ultima conditio.

74. Although not explicitly stated, this is the sense behind Albert's response at *DPB* q. 10, a. 1, ad. 4: Ad quartum dicendum, quod quaedam participant pulcrum et bonum

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end desired is both absent as end and present as constitutive of the desire for that end. For Albert, the good responds to this dialectic of presence and absence through various modalities. The substance of these modalities remains the same while each modality names a different *ratio* assumed by the good. The good is that which all things desire; *honestas* increases the presence of the good by naming the strength and dignity in the good to draw all things to itself; the beautiful increases the good further still by adding a certain resplendence and clarity.<sup>75</sup> By virtue of this resplendence and clarity, beauty communicates the good as a present intelligibility.

The fourth and final metaphysical condition of beauty concerns the way in which the beautiful, by communicating the good as a present intelligibility, identifies a gathering power that comes together as the whole. There are two primary problems with this condition that Albert addresses. The first concerns a redundancy between this condition of beauty and light.<sup>76</sup> The second concerns the way that a “coming together” (*congregata*) appears to fall short of the pure unity of beauty.<sup>77</sup> Albert’s response distinguishes beauty as an end from beauty as form. As an end, it is fitting to beauty to “call all things to itself.” But as form itself, it is fitting that beauty be identified with a “coming together.”<sup>78</sup> Form alone bears the capacity to

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perfecte et simpliciter, quaedam vero secundum quid et imperfecte. Cum quidem imperfecte participant, non est dubium quia desiderant perfectionem in pulcro et bono; quod vero simpliciter et perfecte participant, possunt dupliciter considerari: aut absolute in se, et sic non desiderant cum habeant; aut secundum capacitatem ad exemplar, et sic semper possunt proficere in pulcritudine et bonitate, secundum accessum ad exemplar; et ideo semper desiderant perfectum in pulcro et bono. Concedimus autem quod secundum illud, quod participant, non desiderant.

75. *DPB* q. 5, a. 1, sol: Unde sciendum est, quod de ratione boni est quod sit finis desiderii movens ipsum ad se; et ideo diffinitur a philosopho, quod bonum est quod omnia optant. Honestum vero addit supra bonum hoc scilicet quod sua vi et dignitate trahat desiderium ad se: pulcrum vero ulterius super hoc addit resplendentiam et claritatem quandam, super quaedam proportionata.

76. *DPB* q. 6, a. 1, ad. 1: At videtur, quod haec non debeat esse conditio pulcritudinis. Duorum enim differentium non debet esse unus actus substantialis; sed lumen et pulcrum sunt differentia, alioquin simul de eis determinaretur; cum igitur congregare sit essentialis actus, videtur quod non sit actus pulcritudinis.

77. *DPB* q. 6, a. 1, ad. 2: Praeterea, cum congregata non sint simpliciter unum, sic esset enim simpliciter unus actus; pulcritudo autem est splendor ipsius formae; videtur quod pulcritudinis potius sit unire quam congregare.

78. *DPB* q. 6, a. 1, sol.: Dicendum quod sicut vocare ad se, convenit pulcritudini in quantum est finis et bonum, sic etiam congregare convenit sibi in quantum est forma; et secundum hoc non convenit lumini. Nihil enim proprii congregare habet nisi forma, quae multiplices positiones materiae concludit in uno, secundum quod terminat ad ipsam.

determine numerous positions of matter into a single entity giving shape and limitation to the good. Consequently, it is fitting to beauty rather than light to be identified with a “coming together” because beauty is, as it were, the very form of form. As form, beauty diversifies light by adding specific differentiation, which is why beauty is also signified by the name “beautiful.” Insofar as light identifies the radiant emissions from the luminous source, it is similar to the beautiful. And because they both derive from the same essence, it is not unfitting to attribute the same act to both.<sup>79</sup> Like light, beauty differentiates itself as the beautiful without ever relinquishing its original unity. In this sense, the *ratio* of beauty is a proportion, which seeks after some diversity in itself. As such, it would not be fitting for beauty to designate a pure unity, since such a designation would fail to account for beauty’s inherent diversity.<sup>80</sup>

Although both light and beauty bear the capacity to diversify their content without relinquishing their original unity, the diversity of beauty goes further than the diversity of light. Light multiplies itself as a diversity of luminous content, but it is by virtue of beauty that this luminous content acquires diversity of shape and form, that is to say, intelligibility destined for determination. Light provides the conditions wherein the beautiful’s advance ontologically specifies the inherent diversity of being’s beauty. But it is by virtue of beauty that light becomes determined more fully into truth.

## Conclusion

Albert the Great’s treatment of beauty’s relation to God is the most metaphysical of any thinker up to that time. Beauty is clearly identified with God’s very self, and Albert’s examination into beauty provides valuable insight into the divine identity. Beauty is simple in itself and identifies the way that all beautiful things are in God in a uniform way: *Dicendum quod omnia pulcra uniformiter (sunt) in Deo*.<sup>81</sup> In the same way that a circle is

79. *DPB* q. 6, a. 1, ad. 1: Ad primum igitur dicendum, quod lumen est de essentia pulcri; tamen pulcrum addit super lumen differentiam specificam, per quam diversificatur ab ipso. Lumen enim non dicit nisi emissionem radii a fonte luminis: pulcrum vero dicit splendorem ipsius super partes materiae proportionatas: et ideo non est inconveniens, si idem actus attribuitur utrique.

80. *DPB* q. 6, a. 1, ad. 2: Ad secundum dicendum, quod ratio pulcritudinis est proportio, quae requirit in se diversitatem aliquam; et ideo si dixisset unio, esset contra rationem pulcritudinis.

81. *DPB* q. 8, a. 1, sol.

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one even though, in both reality and in thought, it consists of an infinite multitude of radii extending from a midpoint to circumference, beauty is the simple uniformity of all beautiful things.<sup>82</sup> As such, beauty is a final cause insofar as it names the gathering power that calls all things to itself, and so limits or shapes a given entity's finality.<sup>83</sup> Beauty is the form of all form, and so is a principle of determination providing *esse* to all things as the exemplar cause in which all things beautiful participate.<sup>84</sup> And because beauty is the principle effect of all beautiful things, it is a "moving whole" that calls all things back to itself as an efficient cause.<sup>85</sup> Beauty is above all the simplicity of *claritas* that shines beyond the determined, or proportionate, parts of a concrete, material entity. *Claritas* accounts for beauty's analogical power insofar as it identifies the universal form that shines forth from every beautiful thing. By virtue of this shining, it attracts desire beyond the particular thing to the universal form of beauty and beyond this to God himself. But beauty is also a principle of determination. As *consonantia*, beauty arises in the proportionate parts of matter. Beauty calls things to itself as an end and in so doing it gathers things together into a determinate form. It thus provides a mode of intelligibility beyond the specified determination.

Thomas takes the majority of his own account of beauty from Albert's, but with a few minor alterations and additions. Along with *claritas* and *consonantia*, Thomas stresses a particular thing's *integritas*, a feature of beauty that is latent in Albert but that Thomas identifies in a more metaphysical sense. Thomas also emphasizes beauty's orientation toward knowledge more than Albert does. For Albert, the beauty of a thing is wholly independent of whether or not it is known. Although Thomas in no way makes beauty knowledge dependent, he pushes the "middle" sense of beauty—as that which is between the good and the true—to a deeper level than Albert is willing to go.

82. *DPB* q. 8, a. 1, ad. 1.

83. *DPB* q. 9, exp.: *Ipsium enim, scilicet pulcrum, est principium effectivum omnium pulcrorum, et est movens tota, idest omnia pulcra, aut sicut efficiens, aut sicut finis; et continens omnia amore propriae pulcritudinis. In quantum enim unumquodque naturaliter amat suam pulcritudinem, quam in se habet, operatur ad continentiam et conservationem sui esse quantum potest: et est finis omnium sicut finalis causa, sicut supra habitum est.*

84. *DPB* q. 9, exp.: *et est causa exemplaris, quoniam secundum ipsum, scilicet pulcrum, cuncta determinantur sicut exemplar: quantum enim unumquodque habet de pulcritudine, tantum habet de esse.*

85. *DPB* q. 9, exp.: *ex isto pulcro immateriali, quod Deus est, omnibus existentibus singulorum esse pulcra secundum propriam rationem: idest sicut ex efficiente primo.*

# IO

## Thomas Aquinas and the Tradition of the Divine Names

WHEN THOMAS ENCOUNTERS DIONYSIUS'S *ON THE DIVINE NAMES* FOR the first time, ostensibly under the tutelage of his teacher Albert, he encounters a mode of theological discourse that would have appealed both to his scriptural and his philosophical interests. From the time of his first encounter up to the time he writes his commentary, Thomas believes Dionysius to be a thinker in the tradition of Aristotle. This fact serves to indicate the complexity in which Thomas engages the Dionysian text. In this chapter, this complexity will be examined in order to secure a foundation upon which Thomas's commentary may be read. Recent efforts examining Thomas's relationship to Neoplatonism have made it possible to perceive a clearer picture of how he engages this tradition. The first two sections of the present chapter provide a brief overview of the concerns associated with this picture. The first examines Thomas's relationship to Neoplatonism and Dionysius, while the second examines the translation that Thomas used to read Dionysius.

The second part of this chapter explores the preliminary issues found in the opening two sections (*Proemium* and book 1) of *On the Divine Names*. The primary issue here is the way in which Thomas conceives the nature of a divine name. In part 2 above, the examination of the Dionysian text focused on the original Greek text, which obviously Thomas is not reading. Nevertheless, it is used in order to bring greater clarity to the parallels that correspond to Thomas's commentary despite the fact that he is reading the Saracen's translation. As this chapter demonstrates, Thomas's understanding of the nature of a divine name is very much consistent with Dionysius's own account. Thomas's style certainly reflects the product of a scholastic mind—that is to say, of a mind concerned with order and clarity of form. But, as will be shown, his style and form do not interfere with the complexity and mystery of the Dionysian text.

## Thomas's Relation to Dionysius, Platonism, and Neoplatonism

Recent developments within the scholarship on Thomas's relationship to Neoplatonism provide important insight into Thomas's relationship to Dionysius. The general tendency within this development is not to emphasize Thomas's Neoplatonism by minimizing his so-called "Aristotelianism," but rather to locate it with greater accuracy. Given the ambiguity surrounding the term "Aristotelianism" resulting from its inherent historical nuances and inaccuracies,<sup>1</sup> the recent attention to Thomas's Neoplatonic dimensions serves to provide a more accurate portrait of his intellectual inheritance.<sup>2</sup>

The more accurate portrait of Thomas presented by these authors serves to illuminate Thomas's Neoplatonism in terms of his metaphysics,<sup>3</sup> his methodology<sup>4</sup> and his historical context.<sup>5</sup> Much of the data that

1. See Van Steenberghen, *Aristotle in the West* and *Thomas Aquinas and Radical Aristotelianism*.

2. See Jordan, "Alleged Aristotelianism of Thomas Aquinas," 73–106.

3. Among the most notable is Cornelio Fabro, whose work has demonstrated the central significance of participation as a theme in Thomas. See, *inter alia*, *La nozione metafisica di partecipazione; Participation et causalité*; "Intensive Hermeneutics of Thomistic Philosophy," 449–91; "Platonism, Neo-Platonism and Thomism," 69–100; "Transcendentality of Ens-Esse and the Ground of Metaphysics," 389–427. Equally significant contributions to Thomas's metaphysics of participation include Louis-Bertrand Geiger, *La participation dans la philosophie de s. Thomas d'Aquin*; Clarke, "Limitation of Act by Potency in St. Thomas," 167–94, and by the same author, "Meaning of Participation in St. Thomas," 147–57; te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas*. Also notable is the work of Fran O'Rourke, whose primary contribution may be the textual discovery in Aquinas of *esse intensivum*, a principle that Fabro had suggested but had not textually verified. See, *inter alia*, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas*; "Virtus Essendi," 55–78; "Aquinas and Platonism," 247–79; "Unity in Aquinas' Commentary on the *Liber de Causis*," 230–71.

4. Most notable with respect to this particular theme is Henle, whose work has opened many doorways into dimensions of Aquinas that were formerly obscure. See, *inter alia*, *Saint Thomas and Platonism*, though it should be noted that (1) Henle did not have the advantage of the current status of textual dating in Thomas. Thus, e.g., he wrongly believes that Thomas's reading of Proclus' *Elements of Theology* informed his *Commentary on the Divine Names*; (2) Henle limits his examination only to *explicit* mention of Plato and the Platonici to the neglect of any implicit Platonism in Aquinas. An article that somewhat overcomes this lacuna is his "Saint Thomas' Methodology," 391–409.

5. Many authors can be included in this category, but in recent years few have been as comprehensive as Hankey. See, *inter alia*, *God in Himself*; "Aquinas and the Platonists," 279–324; "Denys and Aquinas: Antimodern Cold and Postmodern Hot,"

emerges from this work is significant for any approach to Thomas's *Commentary on the Divine Names*.

In terms of Thomas's metaphysics, attention to Thomas's Neoplatonic inheritance provides a more well-rounded and complete picture of Thomas's view of *esse*. For example, drawing attention to Thomas's view of being as *esse intensivum*, attention to Thomas's Neoplatonic inheritance demonstrates how Thomistic *esse* aligns with the Dionysian view of being as an intensive depth of perfections.<sup>6</sup> For Thomas, in its highest mode *esse* identifies infinite divine being, or as he refers to it following the Damascene, *pelagus substantiae infinitum*.<sup>7</sup> In its overfullness it spills out—as volitional, or willed, creation rather than Neoplatonic emanation—into other modes of *esse*. One may speak, then, of the common *esse* that all actually existing entities share (*esse commune*), or one may speak of the individual *esse* of a given thing. *Esse* is so full for Thomas that it even accounts for ontological differences that in some mysterious way are bound up with negation, or relative non-being.

In terms of methodology, Thomas's Neoplatonic inheritance provides him with a technique of reading and thinking that resembles more the open or inclusive dialectic of Dionysius than the elenchus-like thinking of Aristotle.<sup>8</sup> Thomas hovers in between these two modes, to be sure, but recognition of this dimension of his thought is vital for a more complete understanding of his *Denkform*. An Aristotelian Thomas without Dionysius gives rise to the Thomas of the neoscholastic manuals, painting a portrait of a thinker for whom determination and definition supersede mystery and unknowing. Such a portrait is simply incomplete, since Thomas's genius in part derives from his synthesizing these two dimensions.

In terms of the historical dimensions surrounding Thomas's thought, there is evidence that in Thomas one may speak of both a conscious and an unconscious Neoplatonism.<sup>9</sup> Thomas is an heir to its exegetical and commentary tradition, which shapes his hermeneutical horizon. It is a tradition

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139–84; “Pope Leo’s Purposes and St. Thomas’ Platonism,” 39–52; “Dionysian Hierarchy in St. Thomas Aquinas,” 405–38.

6. As noted, *esse intensivum* is a metaphysical principle first posited by Fabro, and textually supported by O’Rourke. See note 8 in the introduction to part 3.

7. *STh* I, q. 13, a. 11, resp.: “an infinite ocean of substance.” It is found in Damascene’s *De fide orthodoxa* I, 9, 2 [PG 94, col. 836].

8. Henle’s work demonstrates this in detail, and has been qualifiedly endorsed by Hankey in “Denys and Aquinas: Antimodern Cold and Postmodern Hot,” 154; see also Torrel, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 1:67.

9. This is Hankey’s thesis in “Aquinas and the Platonists.”

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into which Thomas grows throughout his career. His understanding of it at first is laden with difficulties; Thomas depends for his knowledge of this tradition on the Neoplatonists of late antiquity both pagan and Christian, and, lacking a historical vision of Neoplatonism, he treats it as if it were an ahistorical system.<sup>10</sup> This point is significant for two reasons. First, it sheds important light on the *development* of Thomas's relationship to Dionysius. Thomas's problematical understanding of the Neoplatonic tradition may be why he is at first unable to recognize the Neoplatonism of Dionysius, seeing him instead as a devotee of the Aristotle who erupts onto the scene in the high middle ages. Part of the reason that Aquinas reveres Aristotle, then, may perhaps be due to the quasi-apostolic authority of Dionysius.<sup>11</sup> The fact that all of this changes by the time he writes his *Commentary on the Divine Names* means that the Dionysius Aquinas meets in the treatise is both familiar and unfamiliar. Thomas reads him as a Neoplatonist but with Aristotle always in the background. This is necessary to bear in mind in order to avoid reading Thomas's commentary as nothing but an Aristotelian transformation of Dionysius. Rather it is more likely that in the commentary, Thomas's Aristotle is being transformed by Dionysian ideas; *scientia* is being opened by *mysterium*, *ratio* is being opened by *intellectus*, and *essentia* is being opened by *hierachia*. A second reason the historical points are significant concerns the reception of Thomas in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Under the interpretive Thomism of the Leonine revival, not only is Thomas's relationship to his Neoplatonic sources obscured, but so too is the general understanding of these sources in themselves.<sup>12</sup> Under the inspiration of this revival some thinkers assert that, despite the over 1,700 citations of Dionysius in Thomas's work, the Dionysian *Denkform* never actually penetrates Thomas's mind.<sup>13</sup> This revival gives an almost totalizing place to Aristotle that obscures not only the portrait of Thomas, but of Aristotle as well. Overcoming the consequences of this revival, which in large part is made possible by the historical Thomas that emerges in the twentieth century, makes a more complete portrait of Thomas's relationship to Dionysius possible.

Finally, it may be worth while to ask "why *The Divine Names*?" Among the five treatises in the Dionysian corpus (four treatises and the

10. Cf. Hankey, "Aquinas and the Platonists," 283–84.

11. Hankey, "Dionysian Hierarchy in Aquinas," 405.

12. Ibid.

13. See, e.g., Ewbank, "Remarks on Being in St. Thomas Aquinas' *Expositio de Divinis Nominibus*," 123.

epistles), why does Thomas choose only this text to comment upon? A few responses suggest themselves. The most obvious concerns the fact that his teacher, Albertus Magnus, not only introduces him to the text but already furnishes Thomas with sufficient substance upon which to build. This is certainly true but it cannot be the only reason. Even though he is Albert's student, Thomas does not hesitate to distance himself from his teacher on certain issues.<sup>14</sup> Nor does Thomas hesitate to engage texts ignored by all other commentators, as his *Commentary on the De Trinitate* attests. It seems likely, then, that through Albert Thomas is awakened to the importance of this treatise but engages the text for reasons that go beyond this awakening. Thomas must therefore have other reasons for selecting *On the Divine Names* as an object of commentary.

The nature and object of the treatise itself stands as a plausible reason. Thomas sees in the text a number of issues related to his broad interests: the divine nature; revelation as a communication of this nature; the metaphysical dimension of divine communication; the sensible, intellectual, and spiritual response that this communication evokes; and the final gathering of all things through their responses into the One God. In this light, there is a discernable Trinitarian dimension insofar as the *Divine Name* treatise embodies a unity of plural modes of divine communication and self-disclosure. Is it possible that the treatise presents itself to Thomas as a Trinitarian theology of creation, that is to say, a doctrine of creation in the form of cosmic theology? Or perhaps given the way the treatise embodies a comingling of Creator and creation, divine communication and human receptivity, Thomas recognizes a subtle though significant Christological dimension in the treatise.<sup>15</sup> It is a treatise that unites the most important aspects of the Christian faith and presents it as an encounter between human reason and divine revelation. Admittedly, these are questions that yield no definitive answer. However, they do suggest that the treatise harbors many parallels to the nature of *Sacra Doctrina* that occupies the primary subject matter of Thomas's *Summa Theologiae*.<sup>16</sup> It is no coincidence that the writing of the commentary occurs around the same time Thomas writes the *Prima Pars* of the *Summa Theologiae*.

14. Most famously, perhaps, is the difference in views of the beatific vision. On this see Tugwell, *Albert & Thomas*, 94–95.

15. It is not insignificant that Thomas cites Dionysius over eighty-five times in the *Tertia Pars* of the *Summa Theologiae*.

16. Cf. te Velde, *Aquinas on God*, ch. 1.

## On the Translation of John the Saracen

A word on the translation of *On the Divine Names* that Thomas uses for his commentary is necessary before proceeding. As already noted, Albert believes that the Saracenus translation of Dionysius is “better” than the so-called *vetus translatio* of Eriugena or, more likely, Hilduin. It is no surprise then that Aquinas also uses this translation. A few different factors at the time influence the belief that this translation is superior, and awareness of this is critical to understanding the Dionysius that Thomas encounters and manifests in his commentary. First, there are concerns with the general presentation of Dionysius as filtered through his primary mediators—Hugh of St. Victor, Thomas Gallus and most notably Eriugena. Eriugena’s transmission of Dionysius comes under severe scrutiny with the condemnations of 1225. Coupled with the general lack of knowledge of the Greek language among the thirteenth-century schoolmen, this scrutiny makes it necessary to compose a new translation and interpretation of Dionysius’s ideas. John the Saracen, one of the leading Hellenists at the time, is commissioned by John of Salisbury to perform this task. Another more specific factor concerns the Saracen’s consistent effort to render the Greek terms *καλὸν* and *κάλλος* as *pulchrum* and *pulchritudo* rather than *bonum* or *bonitas* as sometimes was the case with the Hilduin translation.<sup>17</sup> No doubt this indicates a penchant for consistency, but it also speaks to an awareness of Dionysius’s sense of beauty.

Scholars continue to question whether the Saracenus translation is an authentic presentation of Dionysius or whether it is really a translation of Eriugena, softened in order to make it more palatable for the scholastic taste.<sup>18</sup> Whether Théry is correct to suggest that the Latinization of many of the Greek terms used by Eriugena obscures, if not altogether eliminates, the Eastern character of the Areopagite largely depends on how one understands not only the original Greek terms and their Latin counterparts, but the Eastern character they presuppose.<sup>19</sup> In any case, it is likely that some degree of exuviation occurs in the transmission from the Greek to the Latin since language is frustratingly difficult to replicate between

17. See the unpublished dissertation by Bychkov, *Propos of Medieval Aesthetics*, 67–70.

18. This issue is found most fully explored in the work of Théry. See, *inter alia*, “Jean Sarrazin, Traducteur de Scot Erigene,” 359–81. On pages 372–73, Théry includes a long list of terms that John Saracenus alters from the Greek into a Latinized form. See also his “Documents concernant Jean Sarrazin,” 45–87.

19. Théry, “Jean Sarrazin, Traducteur de Scot Erigene,” 377.

contexts. Especially when concepts without already existing counterparts require neologisms, as is the case with the Dionysian transmission into the Latin West, the task becomes especially daunting. Nevertheless, it is unnecessary to assume that Thomas's reading of the Areopagite is therefore merely a scholastic (that is to say, a "dry systematization" as it is often pejoratively conceived) of a rich, mystical theology. As the present study hopes to demonstrate, Thomas is able to capture the Dionysian mystical spirit in a unique way. Part of recognizing this requires a critical awareness of the general shift of meaning and interpretation that the transmission entails.

In general, the transmission from Dionysius to Eriugena to John the Saracen introduces a more determinate sense to terms that were originally more porous to divine transcendence. Or to put it another way, the Latinization of terminology signals a metaphysical shift taking place wherein the degree of the God-World unity expressed in Dionysius and Eriugena is tempered by a more determinate vocabulary—a way of speaking and thinking that aspires after clearer distinctions but in so doing also tends toward closure, stagnation, and univocity. This in turn generates a greater emphasis on the distance between Creator and creatures. For example, where Eriugena translates *nous* as "animus" or "intellectus," the Saracen translates as "mens"; where Eriugena translates *ousia* as "essentia," the Saracen translates as "substantia"; where Eriugena translates *hypostasis* as "substantia," the Saracen translates as "persona"; and where Eriugena translates *hyparxis* as "subsistentia," the Saracen translates as "essentia."<sup>20</sup> Each of the words used by the Saracen convey a more determinate, or closed, sense than the Eriugena terminology. This is further demonstrated by the way that the two differ in terms of how they understand Dionysius's views of the relationship between the divine essence and creation. Where Eriugena translates the Dionysian term *eis* as "in," the Saracen translates as "ad," conveying a greater sense of distance between God and creation than conveyed in Eriugena (and Dionysius).

So what does all this mean for Thomas's commentary? Is it the case that the Dionysius Thomas encounters in the Saracen's translation is not the authentic Dionysius, but one that is more palatable to the speculative interests of Western metaphysics?<sup>21</sup> Does it necessary follow that a more determinate (or, to put it more negatively, a more closed, stagnant, or univocal) vocabulary engenders a more closed way of thinking? Indeed,

20. Théry, "Jean Sarrazin, Traducteur de Scot Erigene," 377.

21. As Théry suggests in "Documents concernant Jean Sarrazin, reviseur de la traduction érigénienne du Corpus Dionysiacum," 79.

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one of Thomas's unique attributes as a thinker is his ability to speak with definitive closure without in any way clogging the porosity to the mystery he is interrogating. Thomas, it seems, uses a more determinate vocabulary in concert with, rather than in opposition to, the porosity incumbent upon the human pursuit of divine mystery. Or is it the case that any allusion to the "authentic Dionysius" is misleading since, as noted earlier, the *Corpus Dionysiacum* refers neither to a concrete historical figure, nor even a collection of texts, but rather a reception of a tradition? Could it be that Thomas's approach to Dionysius establishes an indispensable dimension that constitutes the burgeoning Dionysian tradition? In any case, such questions elicit important considerations for any approach to Aquinas's commentary. Even though the *Corpus Dionysiacum* refers to the reception of a tradition, it is important for subsequent receptions to build upon preceding receptions. So while there may be no "authentic Dionysius" the overall portrait that the *Corpus* presents includes indelible dimensions that correspond to themes especially stressed in the early Eastern tradition: the mystical beyond understanding, theology as praise and worship, names as opposed to concepts, etc. So the question is not whether Thomas encounters the authentic Dionysius, but rather to what extent does Thomas's reading of the treatise convey the portrait of Dionysius that appears throughout the tradition of reception, a tradition that is dominated by Eastern interests? The answer to this question can only be validly proffered within the linguistic and conceptual context of St. Thomas himself. As the ensuing analysis of beauty as a divine name demonstrates, Thomas maintains a great deal of the Eastern dimension even though it is dressed in the interests and terminology of his Western context.

### **Thomas Aquinas on Divine Naming: In *De Divinis Nominibus Proemium* and Book 1**

The most complete treatment of the issue of beauty as a divine name is found in book 4, lectures 5 through 8. Lectures 5 and 6 contain the most significant examination, in which Thomas considers how God is named beauty (l. 5) and what things divine beauty causes (l. 6). Lecture 7 considers beauty's capacity to move minds and souls toward God, and lecture 8 extends this by considering how beauty, along with the good, distinguishes motion and rest and all other differences.

Before proceeding with a detailed examination of these sections of the text, it will be helpful to briefly summarize the doctrine of names

that Thomas employs throughout his commentary. This doctrine runs throughout the text, but it is most concisely expressed in the *Proemium* and book 1.

### *Proemium*

In the opening section of the commentary, Thomas makes two basic points. The first concerns the four ways that Dionysius divides what is said of God in Scripture, while the second briefly expounds Dionysius's methodology. Despite its brevity, the *Proemium* contains several key elements for Thomas's entire commentary.

Thomas expounds the four Dionysian divisions of what is said of God in Scripture by the way each corresponds to a *similitudo*. The first division includes that which is said of God for which there is *no similitudo* among created things. This is the unity of essence and distinction of persons in the Trinity, which is a mystery exceeding every faculty of natural reason and contained in Dionysius's *De divinis Hypotyposibus* (*On Divine Distinctions*).<sup>22</sup> The second division includes things said of God for which there is *some similitudo* found in creatures. These are of two kinds: (1) similitudes understood according to something translated from creatures to God, and (2) similitudes understood according to something derived from God to creatures.<sup>23</sup> The first kind describes symbolical naming and is contained in Dionysius's *De symbolica theologica*, while the second is the theme of the present work *De divinis nominibus*. The fourth division, classically named the *via remotionis*, concerns what might be considered *similitudo as dialectic* insofar as it involves the recognition that, since they necessarily require some created mediation, all similitudes are deficient as divine communications. They must therefore be removed or negated by

22. *In De divinis nominibus* [hereafter *DN*], pr.: nam in libro quodam, qui apud nos non habetur, qui intitulum de divinis hypotyposibus id est characteribus, ea de Deo tradidit quae ad unitatem divinae essentiae et distinctionem personarum pertinent.

23. *DN*, pr.: Quae vero dicuntur de Deo in Scripturis, quarum aliqua similitudo in creaturis invenitur, dupliciter se habent. Nam huiusmodi similitudo in quibusdam quidem attenditur secundum aliquid quod a Deo in creaturas derivatur. Sicut a primo bono sunt omnia bona et a primo vivo sunt omnia viventia et sic de aliis similibus. Et talia pertractat Dionysius in libro de divinis nominibus, quem prae manibus habemus. In quibusdam vero similitudo attenditur secundum aliquid a creaturis in Deum translatum. Sicut Deus dicitur leo, petra, sol vel aliquid huiusmodi; sic enim Deus symbolice vel metaphorice nominatur.

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the processes of remotion and unknowing, which Dionysius speaks of in his *De mystica theologica*.<sup>24</sup>

The nature and application of a similitude in Thomas is as complex as his conception of *esse*. Like *esse*, it is an analogous phenomenon and so must be thought analogously.<sup>25</sup> The evidence presented in the *Proemium* suggests as much, since Aquinas uses the term to name four distinct modes of the divine-creature relation. The first and fourth modes express the way in which something is communicated of God by the dialectical nature of a similitude—the first by absolute denial of any similitude of the divine union-distinction, and the fourth by negation of all other extant similitudes. Of more specific concern are the second and third modes. Thomas uses two distinct verbal characterizations when describing these

24. *DN*, pr.: Et de huiusmodi tractavit Dionysius in quodam suo libro quem de symbolica theologia intitulavit. Sed quia omnis similitudo creaturae ad Deum deficiens est et hoc ipsum quod Deus est omne id quod in creaturis invenitur excedit, quicquid in creaturis a nobis cognoscitur a Deo removetur, secundum quod in creaturis est; ut sic, post omne illud quod intellectus noster ex creaturis manuductus de Deo concipere potest, hoc ipsum quod Deus est remaneat occultum et ignotum.

25. When an agent shares a specific formality (*species*) with its effect, it will yield a univocal similitude in that effect as when man begets man. When an agent shares only a generic formality (*genus*) with its effect, it will yield a non-univocal (Aquinas does not say “equivocal”) similitude as when the sun produces heat in something. But when the agent is beyond the genus of the effect, the similitude is also beyond generic or specific formality and can only be spoken of according to “some sort of analogy” (*aliqualem analogiam*). The intentional ambiguity in Thomas’s phrasing (*aliqualem*) is significant since it stresses that, unlike generic or specific formality, analogy cannot be taken as a determinate intelligibility—indeed, to take it as such would be to univocalize analogy. And since analogy identifies the fundamental modality of similitude, neither can similitude be conceived ultimately as a determinate intelligibility. This does not mean that similitude never names something determinate; in its specific and generic forms it does. Rather, it means that as one’s analysis proceeds to the more fundamental levels of similitude, there is a complex relativity happening that, although recalcitrant to determinate definition, is not unintelligible. Cf. *STh* I, q. 4, a. 3: Cum enim omne agens agit sibi simile in quantum est agens, agit autem unumquodque secundum suam formam, necesse est quod in effectu sit similitudo formae agentis. Si ergo agens sit contentum in eadem specie cum suo effectu, erit similitudo inter faciens et factum in forma, secundum eandem rationem speciei; sicut homo generat hominem. Si autem agens non sit contentum in eadem specie, erit similitudo, sed non secundum eandem rationem speciei, sicut ea quae generantur ex virtute solis, accedunt quidem ad aliquam similitudinem solis, non tamen ut recipiant formam solis secundum similitudinem speciei, sed secundum similitudinem generis. Si igitur sit aliquod agens, quod non in genere contineatur, effectus eius adhuc magis accedent remote ad similitudinem formae agentis, non tamen ita quod participant similitudinem formae agentis secundum eandem rationem speciei aut generis, sed secundum aliqualem analogiam, sicut ipsum esse est commune omnibus. Et hoc modo illa quae sunt a Deo, assimilantur ei in quantum sunt entia, ut primo et universali principio totius esse. Cf. also *STh* I, q. 44, a. 3.

two modes. The symbols of the third mode are *translated from creatures to God* (a “way up” as it were) while the perfections of the second mode are *derived from God to creatures* (a “way down” as it were).<sup>26</sup> It is important to stress that the two are not the same.<sup>27</sup> One misreads the *Commentary* if the divine processions, which constitute the substance of the various theonyms, are taken as nothing more than a creaturely similitude standing as the equivocal other to the divine essence. It is clear that Thomas follows Dionysius in insisting that in every divine communication the divine essence remains “unparticipated and uncommunicated.”<sup>28</sup> But it is far less clear whether this assertion ought to be interpreted equivocally, dialectically or in some other way. Given the analogous nature of a similitude in Thomas’s general thinking, a procession of a divine perfection, i.e., a theonym, is best conceived as a *communication of analogous content*. In other words, a divine name is the procession of a divine perfection from out of the divine essence becoming intelligible as the formal constitution of creaturely similitude. It is an intelligible form that remains porous to the divine essence that is ever beyond it.

Thomas’s rejection in his other works of the position of Moses Maimonides provides further evidence for his refusal to read the divine names in an equivocal way.<sup>29</sup> Maimonides maintained that any name signifying the divine essence must be understood as indicating a likeness of effect, or of negating the name’s opposite. The former means that if God is said to be

26. It is noteworthy that Thomas uses a present passive verb to express the “way down” (*derivatur*) while he uses a perfect passive participle to express the “way up” (*translatum*). The “derivation” of divine perfections, so it would seem based upon this linguistic structure, is an *act* (as verb) that involves cognitive *receptivity* (passive voice) between the past and future, that is to say, at *every present instance* (present tense). In contrast, the “translation” of creaturely attributes to God involves a *determined “this”* (perfect tense) also *received* by cognition (passive voice) in a way *derived from a more original act* (participle). While Thomas is not known for being so poetically technical with his terms, it is difficult to deny that this contrast does stand out.

27. A difference between a procession and a similitude is suggested in *DN* 1, 2: et, similiter, res simpliciter supernaturalis et infigurabilis multipliciter componitur per varietatem divisibilium signorum, inquantum scilicet ipse Deus, qui est supernaturalis et simplex per diversa nobis manifestatur in Scripturis *sive sint diversae processiones sive diversae similitudines*. Emphasis added.

28. *DN* 3, 2: sed in processione creaturam, ipsa divina essentia non communicatur creaturis procedentibus, sed remanet incommunicata seu imparticipata.

29. *De Pot.* q. 7, a. 5; *STh* I, q. 13, a. 2. Cf. also Wippel, *Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 523–25. The scholarly consensus is that the *De Potentia* was written between 1265 and 1266, a dating that would put it in the same literary period as the *Commentary on the Divine Names* and the *Prima Pars* of the *Summa*.

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wise, for example, it means only that in his effect God acts like a wise man rather than that wisdom is something in him. The latter means that if God is said to be living, it means only that God does not have inanimate existence. Thomas characterizes this view as *insufficiens et inconveniens* since the former allows for anything to be said or denied of God with equal reason, while the latter renders divine attributes dependent upon created existence. Thomas returns to a more detailed explanation of this in book 1.

The second point Thomas highlights in the *Proemium* concerns Dionysius's methodology. Thomas appears to be primarily concerned with both acknowledging Dionysius's Neoplatonism while distancing him from those aspects of it that are contrary to faith. He acknowledges Dionysius's use of an "obscure style" (*obscurum utitur stilo*) but credits this as a diligent or industrious (*industria*) manner of hiding the truth from those unworthy to receive it. Thomas's explanation includes a brief account of the Neoplatonic view of separated species and first principles, asserting that while the former disagree with the truth of the Catholic faith, the latter "is most true and consonant with the Christian faith."<sup>30</sup> His final thoughts in the *Proemium* concern the personal style of Dionysius. Thomas recognizes the difficult nature of Dionysius's "efficacious reasoning to demonstrate a proposition," often implying the truth of a demonstration "with few words or even one word." At other times, according to Thomas, Dionysius reasons with a multiplicity of words that, while appearing superfluous, are actually "found to contain a great profundity of opinion to those who diligently consider them."<sup>31</sup> These final thoughts indicate that Thomas in some sense reads the treatise from the perspective of theological argumentation rather than liturgical celebration. This would appear to confirm certain criticisms of Thomas in this regard.<sup>32</sup> However, the last of Thomas's observations, which implicitly recommends a more contemplative, prayerful diligence in reading Dionysius, along with the content of Thomas's first book, at the very least softens such a criticism.

30. *DN* pr: Haec igitur Platoniorum ratio fidei non consonat nec veritati, quantum ad hoc quod continet de speciebus naturalibus separatis, sed quantum ad id quod dicebant de primo rerum principio, verissima est eorum opinio et fidei Christianae consona.

31. *DN* pr: Secunda autem difficultas accidit in dictis eius, quia plerumque rationibus efficacibus utitur ad propositum ostendendum et multoties paucis verbis vel etiam uno verbo eas implicat. Tertia, quia multoties utitur quadam multiplicatione verborum quae, licet superflua videantur, tamen diligenter considerantibus magnam sententiae profunditatem continere inveniuntur.

32. Most significantly the criticism put forth by Jones, "(Mis?)-Reading the Divine Names as a Science."

## **Book 1**

There are three issues that occupy Thomas in this opening book, namely, Dionysius's mode of procedure (lecture 1), the *ratio* of a divine name itself (lecture 2), and an account of how Dionysius maintains that God can in fact be named (lecture 3).

In describing Dionysius's mode of procedure, Thomas reads the text from the perspective that Dionysius's fundamental concern is to demonstrate the truth of its contents. This perspective is in no way foreign to Dionysius, but is stated in the very first line of the Dionysian treatise:

But let the rule of the Oracles be here also prescribed for us, namely, that we shall establish the truth of the things spoken concerning God, not in the persuasive words of man's wisdom, but in the demonstration of the Spirit moved power of the theologians, by aid of which we are brought into contact with things unutterable and unknown, in a manner unutterable and unknown, in proportion to the superior union of the reasoning and intuitive faculty and operation within us.<sup>33</sup>

This passage provides the justification for the approach Aquinas takes to the entire text, as his explication of book 1 demonstrates. Dionysius maintains that although the things spoken concerning God are beyond the normal mode of human cognition they are not unintelligible. Rather, their intelligibility appeals to a higher mode of intellect within human cognition in which reason unites with the intuitive faculty and operation. The teaching of faith proposes certain "unknowable and unspeakable" things that exceed knowledge and explanation. Human beings cling to these things, as Thomas recognizes, not by conceptualizing them but by dwelling in them, that is, by living in faith.<sup>34</sup> Thomas is in full agreement with Dionysius when he asserts that this clinging is a better union than mere human knowledge. "For we are conjoined through faith to things higher than those are to which the natural reason pertains and we inhere

33. Dionysius the Areopagite, *On the Divine Names*, 1, 1 (585B): "Ἐστω δὲ καὶ νῦν ἡμῖν ὁ τῶν λογίων θεσμὸς προδιωρισμένος τὸ τὴν ἀλήθειαν ἡμᾶς καταδείσασθαι τῶν περὶ θεοῦ λεγομένων "οὐκ ἐν πειθοῖς σοφίας ἀνθρωπίνης λόγοις, ἀλλ' ἐν ἀποδείξει" τῆς πνευματοκινήτου τῶν θεολόγων "δυνάμεως," καθ' ἣν τοῖς ἀφθέγκτοις καὶ ἀγνώστοις ἀφθέγκτως καὶ ἀγνώστως συναπτόμεθα κατὰ τὴν κρείττονα τῆς καθ' ἡμᾶς λογικῆς καὶ νοεραῆς δυνάμεως καὶ ἐνεργείας ἔνωσιν.

34. *DN* 1, 1: Sed in doctrina fidei proponuntur quaedam homini ignota et indicibilia quibus habentes fidem inhaerent, non cognoscendo aut perfecte verbo explicando, licet certius eis inhaereant et altior sit huiusmodi inhaesio quam aliqua cognitio naturalis. In doctrina igitur fidei non possumus inniti principiis humanae sapientiae.

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in them more certainly, to the extent that divine revelation is more certain than human cognition.”<sup>35</sup> Scripture is therefore the *sine qua non* of that which can be handed down in this teaching.

The reasoning Thomas uses to explain this, which at this point goes beyond the *ipsissima verba* of the treatise, indicates a savvy awareness of the Dionysian *Denkform*. He explains that concerning God, one ought not think, pray, or speak in his heart something that is above all substance. This is because if it is above substance, it is entirely hidden from all thought since for Thomas all knowing and speaking comes through a proportionality of created substance. Only through the divine self-expression of Scripture can these things be communicated. But here is where Thomas demonstrates a keen insight. He is fully aware that Dionysius does not confine all speculative thought to the exact wording or syntax of Scripture. Rather, as Thomas explains:

Significantly he (Dionysius) does not say *in* holy speech, but *according to* (ex) holy speech, since whatever can be elicited from these things which are contained in Holy Scripture, even though they are not contained in Holy Scripture, are not foreign to this teaching.<sup>36</sup>

Scripture is itself an excess, or plenitude, of intelligibility that releases more than appears in the exact words and syntax. This excess of scriptural truth, then, is in some way capable of communicating aspects of the holy teaching of the divine names. This does not mean that Thomas sees anything even remotely connected to Scripture as fitting to this teaching. The light of Scripture, which extends far beyond human reason, nevertheless serves as a limiting force:

And thus, while we do not extend ourselves to the knowing of divine things more than the light of Holy Scripture extends itself, we are constricted through this, as if constrained by certain limits, concerning divine things, by temperance and sanctity: by sanctity while we preserve the noble truth of Holy Scripture from all error; by temperance when we do not press on to things more than is given us.<sup>37</sup>

35. *DN* 1, 1: *Altioribus enim per fidem coniungimur quam sint ea ad quae ratio naturalis pertingit et certius adhaeremus, quanto certior est divina revelatio quam humana cognitio.*

36. *DN* 1, 1: *Signanter autem non dicit: in sanctis eloquiis, sed ex sanctis eloquiis, quia quaecumque ex his quae continentur in sacra Scriptura elici possunt, non sunt aliena ab hac doctrina, licet ipsa etiam in sacra non contineantur Scriptura.*

37. *DN* 1, 1: *Et sic, dum nos non plus extendimus ad agnoscendum divina, quam*

The general sense of this opening book indicates that Thomas reads the text not from the perspective of theology as a science in any simple Aristotelian sense. As Aquinas understands it, *scientia* is a mode of cognition that concludes from principles immediately known and therefore “seen.”<sup>38</sup> Situated on one end of the spectrum of cognition, *scientia* stands opposite to *opinio*. *Opinio* is a mode of cognition associated with a judgment based on contingent, rather than necessary, knowledge in which the result often derives from a fear of the alternative.<sup>39</sup> In contrast, *scientia* is a mode of cognition derived from seeing the essence of necessary principles. This is precisely why, as some have argued, *Sacra Doctrina* as understood by Thomas cannot be conceived as a *scientia* in any normal, Aristotelian, sense.<sup>40</sup> As book 1 of Thomas’s commentary on the Dionysian text indicates, the primary mode of cognition used to read Dionysius is faith, which for Aquinas stands in between *scientia* and *opinio*.<sup>41</sup> Clearly, Thomas employs elements derived from conventional *scientia*. But these are secondary to the primary matter, which concerns the way in which divine communication becomes intelligible through the divine names. He recognizes a mode of intelligibility beyond what can be conceptually or discursively determined by human reason. It might even be suggested that for Thomas faith is a kind of *logos* of the *μεταξὺν*.

He therefore takes up the *ratio* of a divine name in the second lecture of book 1, an examination in which beauty plays a significant role. The divine names radiate like illuminations from a “realm” of beauty, or “splendor,” where holy people and angels venerate the “hiddenness of divinity which is above mind and substance.”<sup>42</sup> And while this illumination

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lumen sacrae Scripturae se extendit, *simus* per hoc *constricti*, quasi certis limitibus coarctati, *circa divina*, quadam *temperantia et sanctitate: sanctitate* quidem dum sacrae Scripturae veritatem mundam ab omni errore conservamus; *temperantia* vero, dum ad eas non magis nos ingerimus, quam nobis est datum.

38. *STh* II-II, q. 1, a. 5; *In Post. Analytic* I, 4, 32, 42.

39. *STh* II-II, q. 2, a. 1.

40. E.g., Chenu, *Theologie Comme Science*. Chenu’s thesis is that *Sacra Doctrina* can only be considered a quasi-*scientia*. For a response to this and an alternative theory, see Jenkins, *Knowledge and Faith in Aquinas*.

41. *STh* II-II, q. 1, a. 2 Here Thomas follows Hugh of St. Victor who, in *De Sacramentis* I, 10, 2 [PL 176, col. 330] states that “faith is a form of mental certitude about distant realities that is greater than *opinio* and less than science.”

42. *DN* 1, 2: Dicit ergo primo quod nos *sequentes has*, scilicet praedictas *thearchicas*, idest divinas *leges*, ut scilicet commensurate secundum nostram mensuram et firmiter et cum amore, divinis illuminationibus nos immittamus; *quae* quidem *leges* non solum homines sanctos, sed etiam *gubernant supercoelestium ordinum et*

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is communicated through Scripture, it remains for human beings to “send themselves out to these illuminations by following the aforementioned divine laws firmly and with love.” Aquinas is clear that knowledge of the divine names cannot be acquired through reason alone. Rather, such knowledge can only be received through an act of veneration, in which, through a chaste silence, the human mind does not scrutinize these illuminations. Concretely, Thomas explains that “this comes from the chastity and sanctity of the soul not extending itself beyond its own boundaries.”<sup>43</sup> What exactly constitutes these boundaries is not clear. Most likely, though, they refer to one’s individual and relative participation in, or grasp of, human reason. In following this admonition not to extend oneself beyond one’s boundaries, human beings are extended into the divine illumination where they are themselves illuminated:

Thus, I say, venerating divine things according to the result of the divine laws, we are extended toward splendors dawning upon us in holy expressions, that is, to the truths of holy scripture revealed to human beings, and by the same splendors of holy scripture we are illuminated to the thearchic hymns, that is, to knowing the divine names, by which God is praised.<sup>44</sup>

As the *inquam* indicates, this is clearly Thomas’s own interpretation. Moreover, Aquinas’s use of *cognoscere* here, rather than either *scire* or *intellegere* is instructive since it indicates that the kind of knowledge associated with this illumination is neither the *scientia* that results from knowing causes better than effects (*scire*), nor a kind of intuited understanding (*intellegere*). Rather it is a willed opening of oneself to the otherness of form, that is to say, a will to becoming in-formed by the object (*cognoscere*). As Aquinas proceeds to explain, although this illumination occurs beyond the virtue of natural reason (*super virtute naturalis rationis*), since it derives from the faith enunciated in the holy hymns that hand down this knowledge of the

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*substantiarum sanctos ornatus*, idest, ornant pulchras et ordinatas dispositiones Angelorum; *venerantes per hoc et occultum* deitatis, *quod quidem est super mentem et substantiam*, *reverentiis mentis inscrutabilibus*, idest habitis ad Deum in hoc quod non scrutamur occulta Dei.

43. DN 1, 2: et hoc quidem ex sanctitate et castitate animi provenit, non se extra suas metas extendentis.

44. DN 1, 2: sic, *inquam*, venerantes divina, secundum sequelam divinarum legum, *extendimur ad splendores nobis illucentes in sanctis eloquiis*, idest ad veritates sacrae Scripturae hominibus revelatas *et ab ipsis* sacrae Scripturae splendoribus, *illuminamur ad thearchicos hymnos*, idest ad divina nomina, quibus Deus laudatur, cognoscenda.

divine names, the purpose is to provide the capacity to see, that is to say, to provide in-forming knowledge:

I say illuminated and figured in this respect: that through hymns of this kind we might see according to our measure the divine lights given to us, and also in this respect that we might praise the principle of the entire holy apparition of spiritual light, which principle not only bestows spiritual light to minds, but universally the Good, as the principle itself hands down concerning itself in holy expressions.<sup>45</sup>

These passages clearly reveal that for Aquinas, a more hymnic approach holds priority over any discursive mode of human reasoning. Nor obviously is this to say that he abandons reason. When he insists that “the sense of the foregoing” means that “we desist from the investigation of divine things according to our reason,”<sup>46</sup> he is not insisting that one must relinquish any use of reason. As would be the case in any teaching dependent on revealed content exceeding what philosophical reason could uncover, it is better understood as a call to strategically reposition reason so that, rather than leading the investigation, it serves in a supporting role.

Aquinas views the divine names not as things in themselves but rather as conduits of both the gifts of God and the principles of those gifts.<sup>47</sup> Through the names of God handed down in Scripture, two things are made known: (1) the diffusion of holy light, goodness and perfection, and (2) the *principle* of that diffusion. This significance of this distinction ought not be eclipsed by its subtlety. The divine name tradition reveals principles and effects bound up in one simultaneous disclosure. Knowledge of the principles tends toward *scientia*, while knowledge of the effects tends toward *opinio*. Knowledge of the divine names is therefore

45. DN 1, 2: *Illuminati, inquam, et figurati ad hoc, scilicet, quod per huiusmodi hymnos videamus, secundum nostram mensuram, thearchica, idest divina lumina nobis data et ad hoc quod laudemus principium totius sanctae apparitionis luminis spiritualis; quod quidem principium non solum spirituale lumen tradit mentibus, sed universaliter bonum, sicut ipsum principium de seipso tradit in sacris eloquiis.*

46. DN 1, 2: *Est igitur sensus praemissorum, quod desistamus a perscrutatione divinatorum secundum rationem nostram.*

47. DN 1, 2: *Est igitur sensus praemissorum, quod desistamus a perscrutatione divinatorum secundum rationem nostram, sed inhaereamus sacrae Scripturae, in qua traduntur nobis nomina divina, per quae manifestantur nobis dona Dei et donorum principium. Per divina igitur nomina, quae nobis in sacris Scripturis traduntur, duo cognovimus, scilicet: diffusionem sancti luminis et cuiuscumque bonitatis seu perfectionis, et ipsum principium huius diffusionis, utpote cum dicimus Deum viventem, cognoscimus diffusionem vitae in creaturis et principium huius diffusionis esse Deum.*

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primarily the knowledge of faith. The content of the divine names involves both principles and effects and so requires a mode of cognition in between *scientia* and *opinio*, which as noted above is faith.

Knowledge of the principle does not reveal God as he is in himself, but rather knowledge of God *as* principle and cause. Thomas distinguishes between principle and cause in terms reminiscent of the distinction between the good and beauty. Both principle and cause derive from the perspective of an end, a point that Thomas believes Dionysius himself makes in the text. “Cause” refers to an end that is also the first cause, while “principle” refers to an end as an *acting cause* from which operation and motion begin.<sup>48</sup> Because it remains distant as both final and original, *cause* signifies an end that resembles the good. Because it signifies an end that is more present as an acting cause that initiates motion and operation, *principle* signifies an active presence of that end that resembles beauty.

In Thomas’s reading of Dionysius, the acting causality of a principle takes the form of a power of determination generating concrete effects.<sup>49</sup> It provides ontological stability by instituting things in substance and life. But it also provides for the “melioration” (*meliorationem*) of things in the spirit through a threefold process of purgation, illumination and perfection. Thomas proceeds to expound on this threefold process, and by doing so he introduces into the Dionysian treatise content that is contained in the *Celestial Hierarchy*. It is possible that the extraction of Thomas Gallus is also influencing Thomas here. In the third chapter of his extract on the *Celestial Hierarchy*, Gallus emphasizes this threefold process in order to express the relation of the affect to the intellect.<sup>50</sup> The process is an analogical one that uplifts the intellect more profoundly into the beauty of the divine where the “sinner’s” unity is more firmly established. In greater stability, the will is more directly ordered and excited to the good that appears as an illumination perfecting both intellect (knowledge) and affect (love). Perfection arises from attaining the end, both proximate and ultimate, which together preexist in God. This is the process in which and

48. *DN* 1, 2: Et ad manifestandum huius principii rationem, primo ponit quaedam quae pertinent ad universalem rationem principii, cum dicit: *sicut quod est omnium causa et principium*, ut causa referatur ad finem, quae est prima causarum et principium ad causam agentem, a qua incipit operatio et motus.

49. *DN* 1, 2: Consequenter autem ponit quae pertinent ad rationem principii respectu determinatorum effectuum.

50. Gallus’s *Extractio* can be found in Denis the Carthusian, *Opera Omnia*, vols. 15–16, ch. 5.

by which one encounters the divine names. Gallus describes it in the following way:

According to our view, hierarchy is a holy congregation of rational persons properly divided by order through grade and ministerial office; a holy congregation assimilated to conformity with God, as far as possible, by knowledge and activity fitting itself; a holy congregation raised up to an imitation of God (according to the capacity of each) through divine enlightenments pouring down upon it. Divine beauty, to which the hierarchies of angels and humanity must be assimilated, is simple and good and the principle of perfection, just as it is completely cleansed of all that is not fitting and generous with its own light in accordance with the capacity of each of those illuminated. Through the distribution of the light itself it is perfected by that perfection which makes the perfect assimilated to God. And in accordance with their intransmutable conformity to God, they are perfected in a way that befits the divine beauty that is the divine inheritance.<sup>51</sup>

When Thomas ponders the possible ways in which the divine names can be understood, Gallus's *Extractio*, as the preceding passage indicates, provides key insights that link it to beauty. Beauty is a principle of perfection that perfects things according to their capacity to be conformed to God. Gallus proceeds to explain how "a hierarchy reaches to God by means of constant gazing, desiring, insofar as it can, to be made like and united to God. It has God himself as leader of all holy knowledge and activity. It looks in unwavering fashion to divine beauty and, by contemplating it, is shaped by this as if it were forming beauty itself."<sup>52</sup> Beauty is here described as an acting principle that shapes the one contemplating it. Beauty is the end to which every hierarchy is assimilated, a process that occurs through a unity of knowledge and activity. Hierarchical activity is energized by gazing at and contemplating divine beauty, which is to say that beauty constitutes the activity that generates the various beings related in any given hierarchy. What Gallus draws out of the Dionysian approach is the way in which beauty bears an ontologically efficacious power, or what was earlier referred to as a "principle of determination." In this light, the divine names identify the relation between God and his created effects that constitute this principle.

51. Gallus, *Extractio, On the Celestial Hierarchy*, ch. 3, 223.

52. *Ibid.*, ch. 3.

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Insofar as in Aquinas's reading the *ratio* of a divine name is constituted by significant elements of beauty, he appears to follow Gallus. Beauty as the intelligibility and visibility of divine self-disclosure is the foundation for the tradition of the divine names. God is the supersubstance beyond substance, the superprinciple beyond principle and "the good tradition of that which is hidden."<sup>53</sup> God's hiddenness is never overcome. However, because God gives himself to be participated by creatures, whatever is made intelligible or visible in creaturely existence preexists in God in a superlative or most eminent way. With a striking resemblance to Eriugena, the Victorines and Albert, Thomas registers an observation that appears to make the divine name "tradition" a portal through which the divine hiddenness of superlative existence becomes manifest:

For it was shown that whatever things are in creatures preexist in God more eminently. Now creatures are manifest to us, but God is hidden. So it is the case, too, that just as the perfections of things flow into creatures from God in the manner of participation, *there comes to pass a "handing down" that renders manifest what was hidden.*<sup>54</sup>

The perfections of being that preexist in God become visible as they are participated by creatures. This visibility also renders them intelligible and so nameable.

In his description of these names, Aquinas utilizes Dionysian symbolism. His stress is on the quietude of the intellect that is necessary to receive the hidden things of God. Although he structures the Dionysius text in the form of an argument ("first he proposes a doubt; second he solves it") his treatment does little, if anything, to reduce the efficacy of the original Dionysian content.<sup>55</sup> The fact is that Dionysius does indeed

53. *DN* 1, 2: Non solum autem a Deo communicatur rebus quod in se subsistant et meliorentur, sed etiam quod aliis sint principium seu causa existentiae et meliorationis; et quantum ad hoc, subdit quod est *supersubstantialiter superprincipale principium universi principii*. Non enim eodem modo est principium quo alia, sed eminentius; sic enim eminentius habet esse. Et ut universos Dei effectus simul comprehendat, subdit quod est *bona traditio occulti*.

54. *DN* 1, 2: Manifestum est enim quod quaecumque in creaturis sunt, in Deo praeexistunt eminentius. Sed creaturae quidem manifestae sunt nobis, Deus autem occultus. Sic igitur, secundum quod rerum perfectiones a Deo per quamdam participationem derivantur in creaturas, *fit traditio in manifestum eius quod erat occultum*. Emphasis added.

55. It is from this passage where Jones focuses the primary thrust of his critique, "(Mis?)-Reading the Divine Names as a Science," 151ff. Jones's claim is that Aquinas interprets the *Divine Names* "entirely in the framework of a 'science,'" thus offering "at

best a one-sided picture of the structure of the *Divine Names* as well as Dionysius' 'state of mind' while composing the work"(168). Jones's reasoning derives primarily from the fact that, in his view, Aquinas "effectively downplays and, indeed, disregards the hymnological dimension of the *DN*" and that he "also misses the liturgical context of the *Divine Names* that grounds its hymnological character"(154, 155). Jones provides a lengthy citation from Dionysius's *DN* treatise, ch. 1, lect. 3, as evidence. He contends that this passage clearly indicates the hymnological sense through the repetition of the refrain "God is all as cause of all but nothing as beyond all," which is repeated later in *DN* 7.3. Part of the hymnological character as Jones understands it requires the presence of the "ineffable, mystical and symbolic theological tradition"(153). Jones also notes that while Dionysius uses terms meaning "to demonstrate" only 14 times in the *Divine Names*, he uses terms meaning "to hymn" more than 60 times "both to describe what he is undertaking or what the theologians are doing" (153-54). Jones criticizes both Albert and Aquinas for apparently ignoring or entirely missing this feature of Dionysian thought since they never *explicitly* mention it (154). Rather, according to Jones, Aquinas emphasizes "the exclusively cognitive dimension of 'seeing'"(154). Drawing from *STh* II-II, 91, 1 and 2, Jones notes that although Aquinas "regards verbal praise as necessary in worshiping God," and even recognizes the usefulness of musical praise, for him preaching and teaching are superior. Aquinas also seems to ignore the fact that Dionysius's use of the phrase "holy things for the holy," which occurs in all ancient Greek and Byzantine divine liturgies, is fundamentally liturgical (155). As noted, the full thrust of Jones's argument comes from the evidence he puts forth regarding *DN* 1, 3. Where Dionysius employs a "to-and-fro" motion as a hymnic praise to God's mutual indwelling and beyond-ness, Aquinas, Jones points out, "divides this text into raising a doubt, providing a solution to the doubt, and justifying the solution"(153). While Jones's understanding of Dionysius is quite accurate, several questions could be raised concerning Jones's understanding of Aquinas, who Jones regards as an equivocal thinker of the highest order. It might even be suggested that Jones's reading of Aquinas actually betrays Jones's own tendencies to think equivocally about Aquinas. Furthermore, the question could be raised as to what extent Jones is drawing judgments over content based upon outward form. Is there only one mode of hymnology? Can the scholastic idiom be considered a mode of praise as well? Is *explicit* mention of Dionysius's hymnology the only determination of its presence? To what extent is Jones's charge predicated upon holding Aquinas (and Albert) to a historical standard of textual analysis that simply was not part of the scholastic hermeneutic? These are important questions that space does not allow to be answered. Rather, what can be pointed out are some of Jones's possible (mis?)-readings of Aquinas. A first possible misreading arises when he contends that "according to Aquinas, Dionysius proceeds in terms of revelation and not human reason"(147). This judgment must be called into question since Thomas does not equivocate in this way (either revelation or reason). A close reading of Thomas's text reveals that Thomas's reading of Dionysius walks a very fine line between revelation and reason. Thomas rightly emphasizes the revelatory side of Dionysius's interests, but also rightly recognizes the important, supplementary dimension of human reason (as is his normal *modus operandi*). On Jones's equivocal reading, Aquinas becomes a thinker for whom there is *only* divine simplicity *or* creaturely multiplicity, *only* divine essence *or* creaturely existence, each standing in their unmediated differences. Commenting upon his own all-too-brief exposition of Aquinas's eschatology, Jones writes, "This view, of course, assumes that because of divine simplicity, whatever is not identical to the divine essence is created"

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open section 5 of chapter 1 by expressing a doubt and he does indeed proceed to solve the doubt. That Aquinas opts to structure his commentary in this section by emphasizing the argumentative nature of the Dionysian text may cause him to pay less attention to its hymnological and liturgical dimensions, but it is by no means a reduction of the content.<sup>56</sup> Even hymnology assumes some theory of sign/referent mediation, which Dionysius clearly indicates is a primary interest. As Dionysius contends throughout his treatise, God is such that he preholds all existing things in the superfullness of his excessive being. No word, nor thought, nor action can possibly measure what God is. But if God is above all naming and thinking, it follows that God is also above all hymning, praising and even remotion. How, then, can a discourse on the divine names possibly be orchestrated by human beings?

Thomas's analysis of the Dionysian solution is a prototype of his later doctrine of theological language. According to Thomas, Dionysius responds by doing two things. First, he shows how God can in fact be named. Second, he demonstrates how human beings can treat this naming.

The naming of God is made possible by virtue of three modes of nomination. Before explaining these, however, Thomas stresses the point that Dionysius makes in his *De divinis hypotiposibus* (*On the Theological*

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(166). But as Jones shows in his citation of Gregory Palamas, who is used as a contrast to Aquinas's supposed either/or, what Jones really means is that for Aquinas whatever is not the divine essence is therefore an accident (166). Certainly for Aquinas there is on some level a distinction between these categories. But in no way does Aquinas elevate them to an absolute status. His whole life's work is an effort to mediate between these and other like categories. So it seems that *prima facie*, Jones begins with a rather stereotypical view of the Angelic Doctor. Underneath all of this, however, is the tacit assumption that for Aquinas being is univocal to all things, which is of course not the case. Thomas's doctrine of *analogia* already rectifies any equivocity in his own thinking because all equivocation assumes an underlying univocity at play. For Aquinas the divine essence is not some *a priori*, determinate structure or being that, like the Plotinian One, stands entirely beyond its others detached from all relativity. Rather, with respect to eschatology, Thomas conceives the divine essence as a dynamic mode of being in relation that gives itself to be shared *via* the *lumen gloriae* as described in texts like the *Summa Contra Gentiles* (hereafter SCG) III, 51, 2; SCG III, 53; *STh* I, 12, 5, etc. This element of Thomas's thought is either unknown to or ignored by Jones. In any case, as we intend to show, the charge that Aquinas reduces Dionysian thought to an exclusively "demonstrative science" does not seem consistent with a thorough and careful reading of Thomas's commentary.

56. Note in particular his comments at the beginning of *DN* 5, 1: Non est ergo praesentis intentionis ut manifestetur ipsa Dei essentia, per quam omnia substantificantur, secundum quod in se est, sed quod laudetur processus essendi a divino principio in *omnia existentia*.

*Outlines*), namely that God as he is in himself is not capable of being named or spoken not because the divine essence is bereft of nameable or speakeable content, but because it is an absolute excess of all things. The angels may see the essence and in doing so become themselves what is for human beings ineffable and unspeakable, but even they do not comprehend it.<sup>57</sup> Aquinas recognizes the importance of clarifying the excess substance of the *res significata* that the divine names aspire to signify. Where an indeterminate emptiness beyond relations, like the Plotinian One, would require human language to impose structure and content upon it—an impossible task—a divine excess or plenitude not only generates the nameable content that is to be received, but it establishes the very possibility of its reception.

Thus, the first mode of nomination is the way of remotion (*per remotionem*). The minds of the saints that are conformed to the divine immisions, Thomas explains, praise God most properly through removal of all existents. Every determinate form that the divine surplus takes in its act of communication is a volitional surrender on the part of God to finite limitations. The way of remotion is a method that aspires to eliminate those finite limitations in order to allow the divine excess to flow more freely. Aquinas indeed recognizes this as a mode of praise rather than a demonstrative proof.

For those who praise God in this way through remotion through the illumination of God truly and supernaturally are taught this from a most blessed conjunction with God, that God, since God is the cause of all existents, is nothing among existents, not as if defecting from being, but supereminently segregated from all things.<sup>58</sup>

Thomas proceeds to explain that because of this divine supersubstantiality, God cannot be praised for what he is, since such praise would require comprehension. Rather, it is possible to comprehend, and so to praise, the divine excess as surpassing all positive conceptualizations and substance

57. *DN* 1, 3: Et licet Angeli videant essentiam, tamen etiam sunt nobis *ineffabiles et ignotae sanctarum virtutum unitiones* quae conveniunt *Angelis*, quibus scilicet ununtur per cognitionem ad divinam essentiam, ipsam aliquantulum attingendo, sed non comprehendendo.

58. *DN* 1, 3: etenim illi qui sic laudant Deum per remotionem, per illuminationem Dei *vere et supernaturaliter* sunt *hoc edocti ex beatissima* coniunctione *ad* Deum; qui Deus, cum sit *omnium existentium causa*, ipse *nihil* est existentium, non quasi deficiens ab essendo, sed supereminenter *segregatus ab omnibus*.

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through remotion.<sup>59</sup> A second mode of nomination designates God insofar as God is the cause of all things. Without doubt, Thomas emphasizes more of the metaphysical dimensions involved in causality than the Dionysian text contains. But in so doing, Thomas only expands what Dionysius himself already presents.<sup>60</sup> A cause prepossesses in itself the similitudes of its effects. When something is the cause of another according to nature or species, the ensuing similitude will also be one according to nature, as when a human being begets another human being. When something causes another by means of a “superadded disposition” then the cause will in some way participate along with the effect in the given similitude. The example Thomas gives is of an architect who, through the superadded disposition of art, causes a house.<sup>61</sup> The house that is caused is only similar to the artificer by virtue of art, which is a disposition added to the artificer from a source beyond the artificer. The similitude is therefore in the art and not in the artificer, who acts only in the capacity of a secondary cause.<sup>62</sup> Analogously, because God is the good itself, he is the “superadded disposition” of all that is caused. There is no disposition beyond God that can be “superadded” to his creative act. Consequently, “in God’s own *esse* itself God prepossess the similitude of all God’s effects.”<sup>63</sup>

Now a cause can be named by virtue of its effects insofar as the effect is the bearer of the similitude of the cause. When the effect bears the similitude according to an identity of *ratio*, the same name befits the cause and the thing caused and the name is said *univocally*. But when the effect bears a similitude that is contained in the cause supereminently, the name is said *supereminently*.<sup>64</sup> Aquinas later on in the *Summa Theologiae* refines this

59. Cf. *Super Lib. de causis*, p. 6.

60. Dionysius the Areopagite, *On the Divine Names* 1, 5 (593B): Ἐπειδὴ δὲ ὡς ἀγαθότητος ὑπαρξίς αὐτῶ τῷ εἶναι πάντων ἐστὶ τῶν ὄντων αἰτία, τὴν ἀγαθαρχικὴν τῆς θεαρχίας πρόνοιαν ἐκ πάντων τῶν αἰτιατῶν ὑμνητέον. “But since, as sustaining source of goodness, by the very fact of its being, it is cause of all things that be, from all created things must we celebrate the benevolent providence of the Godhead.”

61. *DN* 1, 3: Si vero sit causa alterius secundum aliquam dispositionem superaditam, secundum hoc etiam habebit similitudinem sui effectus. Aedificator enim est causa domus, non secundum suam naturam, sed secundum suam artem, unde similitudo domus non est in natura aedificatoris, sed in eius arte.

62. Cf. *Super Lib. de causis*, p. 11.

63. *DN* 1, 3: Sic igitur in ipso sua causa praehabet similitudinem omnium suorum effectuum.

64. *DN* 1, 3: Omnis autem causa intantum potest nominari ex nomine sui effectus, inquantum habet in se similitudinem eius. Si enim sit similitudo secundum identitatem rationis, nomen illud conveniet causae et causato, sicut nomen hominis, generanti

mode of naming into the distinctions of equivocal and analogical naming, since supereminence can be interpreted in both senses.<sup>65</sup> A final mode of naming derives from created beings, whereby a particular created thing is used to metaphorically describe the divine. This is the metaphorical mode of naming that Dionysius describes in his *De theological symbolica*.

In book 2, Thomas explains how the divine name tradition elucidates the unions and distinctions in God. Apart from book 4, book 2 is the longest of the treatise and too dense to analyze in any detail here. Nevertheless, there are some points of significance for the present purpose. Dionysius's primary objective in this section of his text, according to Aquinas, is to demonstrate how each name is common to the whole Trinity. Thomas's analysis involves some of his most detailed Trinitarian theology. Beginning from Scripture's recognition of God's absolute goodness (Luke 18:19), Thomas explains that, since it is of the essence of goodness to determine or distinguish, goodness is the most fitting nomination for the divine essence. What Thomas means is that, since the divine essence is the Trinity—that is to say, a perfect circumincession of union and distinction—its essence is the good and vice versa.<sup>66</sup> The divine essence cannot be thought as only a unity if by this all distinction is removed. Rather, the divine essence must be thought and spoken in such a way that signifies both its unions and distinctions in perfect simultaneity. Aquinas uses the

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et generato. Si vero non sit similitudo secundum eandem rationem, sed sit supereminentius in causa, non dicitur nomen de utroque secundum unam rationem, sed supereminentius de causa, sicut calor de sole et igne. Sic igitur, quia similitudo omnium rerum praeexistit in divina essentia non per eandem rationem, sed eminentius, sequitur quod *providentiam* deitatis, sicut *principem* totius boni, idest, principaliter in se totum bonum habentem et aliis diffundentem, *convenit laudare ex omnibus causatis*; non tamen univoce sed supereminenter, quod contingit propter convenientiam creaturarum cum ipsa.

65. *STh* I, q. 13, a. 5. It is also worth noting that in *STh* I, q. 13, a. 1, Aquinas refers to the way of "excellence" (*modum excellentiae*) alongside the way of discerning God as cause through creatures (symbolism) and the way of remotion. What is missing from this particular question, which addresses whether a name can be given to God (apparently in general), is the way of naming from a theology of divine names/perfections. However, in the very next question (*STh* I, q. 13, a. 2)—whether any name can be applied to God substantially—this way of divine names/perfections is specifically considered.

66. *DN* 2, 1: Dicit ergo, primo, quod *per se bonitas laudatur ab eloquiis*, idest sacris Scripturis, sicut *determinans*, idest distinguens ab aliis *et manifestans totam* divinam *essentiam, quodcumque est*, quia cuicumque convenit divina essentia, convenit ei per se bonitatem esse et e converso. Et hoc probat per hoc quod in sancta Scriptura inducitur ipsa divinitas, in persona filii, dicens: *quid me interrogas de bono? Nullus bonus nisi solus Deus* ut habetur Luc. 18; quod intelligendum est de bonitate per se.

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names *perfect* and *integral*: perfect to signify the superfluous excess of divine perfections, and integral to signify the removal of any diminution that the name perfect might imply.<sup>67</sup> The divine essence is a union of all distinct perfections that are unified in God's superlative excess.

In communicating the divine excess, Scripture hands down two kinds of names. The first includes names said "remotively" on account of the divine superexcess, as "supergood," "superliving," "superwise," etc. This mode of naming comes closest to expressing union and distinction together, even though such a task strains the capacity of verbal communication. The various, distinct perfections are united by the common prefix "super," thus communicating to the extent it is possible the superexcess of the divine essence as a union-distinction. The second mode of naming, which begins to tend toward the distinction side of the divine essence, includes names designating the divine as cause of the various perfections. But as Aquinas insists, these are to be "connumerated" with the divine excess signified by the first names. This second mode of naming designates God as the principle of the procession of perfections. From both of these kinds of naming, Aquinas says rather surprisingly, the "magisterial rule" can be understood: "that all names designating an effect in creatures pertain to the divine essence."<sup>68</sup> This analysis demonstrates the fine line between essence and communication where Thomas locates the divine names, and in many ways opposes conventional Thomist thought. The divine essence remains uncommunicated and unparticipated not as a static, determined

67. *DN* 2, 1: Et hoc modo divinitas dicitur perfecta, in quantum maxime est in sua natura et virtute. Integrum autem et perfectum idem videntur esse; differunt tamen ratione: nam perfectum videtur dici aliquid in attingendo ad propriam naturam, integrum autem per remotionem diminutionis, sicut dicimus aliquem hominem non esse integrum, si postquam attingit propriam naturam, aliquo membro mutiletur. The name "integrum" overcomes something missing. But since in the divine nature nothing is missing, Thomas must surely mean only what is missing in human conception of the divine nature via the name "perfect," which can imply the sense of "being made." *Intergrum* overcomes any deficiency in the word *perfectum*.

68. *DN* 2, 1: et dicit quod *unita totius deitatis*, id est communia toti Trinitati, ut dictum est in libro de divinis hypotyposisibus et probatur per multas auctoritates a sacris Scripturis acceptas, sunt duo genera nominum: primo quidem, ea quae dicuntur de Deo, remotive per excellentiam quamdam, ut *superbonum*, *supersubstantiale*, *supervivum*, *supersapiens* et *quaecumque* alia dicuntur de Deo per remotionem, propter sui excessum; cum quibus, dico, connumeranda sunt *omnia nomina causalia*, id est quae designant Deum ut principium processionis perfectionum quae emanant ab ipso in creaturas, scilicet: *bonum*, *pulchrum*, *existens*, *vitae generativum*, *sapiens* et *quaecumque* alia per quae *causa omnium bonorum nominatur* ex dono suae bonitatis. Et ex hoc potest accipi regula magistralis quod omnia nomina designantia effectum in creaturas, pertinent ad divinam essentiam.

structure beyond relation, but as that element of the divine that remains in excess of every communication. This is the point he further develops in the second lecture of book 2. The divine union designates the divine essence in itself, which “the holy teachers of our theological tradition, namely the apostles and their disciples,” called “hidden and ingressive divine supercollocations which are of the divine singularity, superineffable and superunknown.”<sup>69</sup> Thomas draws again from a metaphysics of causality to explain what he means. A source is only known insofar as it communicates itself. But in so doing, there is an element of that source that remains in excess of its communication even as it remains united to that communication. To consider a first principle in itself is to consider its union, which is both hidden and ingressive:

*Hidden*, since as such God can be known by us insofar as we know the participations of God’s goodness, but insofar as God is in Himself, god is hidden to us; but he says *ingressive*, since insofar as it is in itself, the first principle is communicated to nothing and thus it does not go out from itself. And because of this also, divinity itself thus considered, through the excellence distinguishing it from all things, he calls singularity, since what is singular is incommunicable.<sup>70</sup>

There is a complicated philosophy of identity latent in Thomas’s analysis here. What is being expressed is the idea that an identity is a phenomenon that is both always in communication and always “hidden” in that element that remains in excess of this communication. It is therefore a “moving” excess, whose “movement” is like a cascade over the boundary between excess and communication. Pouring itself out in its act of self-communication, the surplus source is continually “pushed further back” as it continually pours itself out. To offer a crude image, the dynamic is similar to a waterfall where the cascading water images the communication and the still water ever standing above the cascade images the divine

69. DN 2, 2: Dicit ergo, primo, quod, sicut in aliis suis libris dixerat, scilicet in libro de divinis hypotyposibus, *sancti magistri nostrae theologiae traditionis* idest Christianae doctrinae, scilicet apostoli et eorum discipuli *vocant unitiones divinas*, quasdam *occultas et ingressibiles supercollocationes divinas quae sunt singularitatis* divinae, *superineffabilis et superignotae*.

70. DN 2, 2: *occultam* quidem quia intantum Deus potest a nobis cognosci, inquantum participationes suae bonitatis cognoscimus; secundum autem quod est in se, est nobis occultus; *ingressibilem* autem dicit, quia secundum quod in seipso est primum principium nulli communicatur et sic quasi a seipso non egreditur: et propter hoc et ipsam divinitatem sic consideratam, per excellentiam distinguentem ipsam ab omnibus, vocat *singularitatem*, quia singulare est quod est incommunicabile.

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hiddenness. Static categories like “objective” and “subjective” fail to capture the dynamic implications in Thomas’s explanation. Thomas does not view the relation between hidden essence and manifest communication as an equivocal unmediated difference. Rather, there is an active intermediation that occurs between them preserving their distinction while manifesting their union.

Within the divine union itself, the divine distinction occurs by means of an intra-Trinitarian procession. Thomas interprets the Dionysian text in terms of the scholastic maxim contending that Dionysius wants to demonstrate that the procession of creatures from God is also a divine distinction. But where the intra-Trinitarian procession of divine persons is a distinction that communicates the divine essence to the person proceeding, the procession of creatures from God is a communication, not of the divine essence (since this remains uncommunicated and unparticipated), but of divine similitude. The divine similitude, in being communicated by God’s creative act, is propagated and multiplied in creatures. Although Thomas is cautious as he approaches the issue from within Trinitarian thought, his analysis here resembles the divine-creaturely continuity that preceded him in thinkers like Eriugena, the Victorines, the Chartrians and Albert. Where Thomas separates himself from his predecessors is in his continual insistence upon a principle of distinction, whether this is expressed by an insistence on the divine excess and hiddenness or by his doctrine of similitude. But it would be in error to characterize his thinking as establishing an equivocal, unmediated difference between God and creatures.

## Conclusion

The configuration of a divine name established in Thomas’s *Commentary on the Divine Names* bears within its exposition a prototype of what he will later write in the *Summa Theologiae* I, question 13. It is even possible to discern a pattern within the sequence of articles (at least from article 1 through article 6) that reflects the layout of his *Commentary*. The first article, whether a name can be given to God, appears as a general inquiry into names. However, a close reading reveals that the only names under consideration in this article are those that belong to the way of symbolism (knowing God from creatures as their cause), the way of excellence (supereminence), and the way of remotion. These three modes of naming God, which are possible by virtue of the analogical relation of

thing-thought-word, are all granted insofar as “we can give a name to anything in as far as we can understand it.”<sup>71</sup> Each of these three ways concerns some direct dependency on creatures.

In the second article, Thomas considers whether any name can be applied to God substantially, and it is in this article where Thomas presents a theology of divine names/perfections. The explanation that Thomas provides begins immediately with a distinction between the kinds of names that are said either negatively or which signify his relation to creatures, and the kinds of names said *absolute et affirmative*. After explaining how these kinds of names have been misunderstood by others (Moses Maimonides and Alain of Lille), Thomas firmly responds by explaining how these names are in fact said of God substantially. Knowledge of the perfections of God comes through creatures, but because God prepossesses the perfections of all his creatures, this way of divine perfections through creatures is substantial knowledge. Creatures do not represent God’s perfections univocally, “but as the excelling source of whose form the effects fall short, although they derive some kind of likeness thereto.”<sup>72</sup> The perfections derived from creatures signify the divine substance, though in an imperfect manner.

Again, in the following article Thomas continues his explanation of a theology of the divine names/perfections. At this point, however, he introduces yet another distinction: namely, that between *the perfections themselves* signified by the divine names and their *mode of signification*. He proceeds to assert that the perfections that the names signify belong properly to God, at least more properly than they belong to creatures. With respect to their mode of signification, however, they do not properly and strictly apply to God. It is at this point where the middle sense of a divine name is crystalized in Thomas’s theological synthesis. Creatures are bearers of the divine perfection. Hence, looking to them for knowledge of God enables a proper knowledge of God’s own perfections, though it does so through an imperfect mode.

The following three articles (articles 4, 5, and 6) involve further consideration of the complexity involved in the idea that a divine name/perfection properly belongs to God even while its communication is through creatures. Article 4 explains how these names (that is, all names) are not synonymous since the divine perfection, being in excess of any

71. *STh* I, q. 13, a. 1: Secundum igitur quod aliquid a nobis intellectu cognosci potest, sic a nobis potest nominari.

72. *STh* q. 13, a. 2: sed sicut excellens principium, a cuius forma effectus deficiunt, cuius tamen aliqualem similitudinem effectus consequuntur.

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single mode of communication, requires many diverse modes to be made intelligible. Article 5 then proceeds to expand on this by explaining how only a mode of analogical predication is possible between creatures and God. And article 6 explains that since these names of God are predicated analogically, those that signify through creatures find their *ratio proprio* in creatures while those names that signify through divine perfections find their *ratio proprio* in God himself (in the way that “healthy” has its *ratio proprio* in the person rather than in medicine or urine).

Thomas’s understanding of the divine names establishes the foundation for his exposition on beauty. As it is for Dionysius, a divine name for Thomas is a divine perfection that proceeds from the divine essence itself and enters into the formal constitution of creaturely existence; a position that Thomas expands and develops more metaphysically in his *Summa*. Within the context of his commentary, however, insofar as a divine name provides determinate intelligibility, it corresponds to a divine similitude. But insofar as it derives from the divine essence, it is porous to its source granting a mode of intelligibility beyond what is determinate. As it appears in determinate entities, a divine name is knowable by way of abstraction only insofar as the various properties of that entity are known *per se*. But in its porosity to the divine essence, that is to say, in its intelligibility beyond what is determinate, it is only knowable by way of participation. In Thomas’s general theory of knowledge, the ontological disproportion between the knower and a thing known is overcome through the abstraction of the intelligible species, an onto-epistemic act that elevates the thing known to the level of the knower. This is predicated on the often repeated dictum *cognitum est in cognoscende secundum modum cognoscentis* (or variations on this).<sup>73</sup> But because a divine name, insofar as it is a procession from the divine essence, exceeds the mode of being of the knower it cannot be made part of the knower. Rather, the knower must be made part of it. Thus, as Aquinas says, cognition of the divine names can only come about through participation.<sup>74</sup> This is precisely the foundation that must be born in mind in the following exposition of beauty as a divine name.

73. This is a common mantra for St. Thomas as found in, e.g., *STh* I, q. 12, a. 4; *STh* I, q. 84, as. 4, 7; *STh* I, q. 85, a. 1; *STh* II-II, q. 1, a. 2, etc.

74. *DN* 2, 4: Dicit ergo, primo, quod *omnia divina* etiam *quae nobis manifestata sunt, cognoscuntur a nobis solum participationibus*. Cuius ratio est, quia nihil cognoscitur nisi secundum quod est in cognoscente. Sunt autem quaedam cognoscibilia, quae sunt infra intellectum nostrum, quae quidem habent simplicius esse in intellectu nostro, quam in seipsis, sicut sunt omnes res corporales, unde huiusmodi res dicuntur cognosci a nobis per abstractionem. Divina autem simplicia et perfectiora sunt in seipsis quam in intellectu nostro vel in quibuscumque aliis rebus nobis notis,

# II

## Beauty as a Divine Name in Thomas Aquinas

### *In de Divinis Nominibus Expositio*

AS THE LAST CHAPTER SOUGHT TO DEMONSTRATE, A DIVINE NAME FOR Aquinas, although configured within the scholastic style of his day, retains most if not all of the dimensions expressed in the original Dionysian treatise. As with Dionysius, a divine name for Aquinas hovers in between the symbolic names translated from creatures to God and the ineffable essence of God himself. They can be discerned through the formal qualities of created natures, but knowledge of them also requires a participation in the life of faith. In this chapter, the focus will be sharpened to examine how Thomas reads the name beauty. Much like a divine name, the name “beauty” cannot be treated in isolation as if, in the idiom of modern aesthetics, one could single out “beauty” and examine it in itself. The Dionysian treatise does not view beauty as an object of inquiry available to the curiosity of detached knowing. Rather, as Thomas makes clear in his commentary beauty must be examined in the sequence of divine names as explicated by Dionysius; which is to say, examined in its relation to other names, and to various divine activities and attributes.

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unde divinatorum cognitio dicitur fieri non per abstractionem, sed per participationem. Sed haec participatio est duplex: una quidem, secundum quod divina in ipso intellectu participantur, prout scilicet intellectus noster participat intellectualem virtutem et divinae sapientiae lumen; alia vero, secundum quod divina participantur in rebus quae se intellectui nostro offerunt, in quantum scilicet per participationem divinae bonitatis, omnia sunt bona et per participationem divini esse seu vitae, res dicuntur existentes seu viventes. Et secundum utramque istarum participationum divina cognoscimus. Ostensum est autem supra, quod Deus ita participatur a creaturis per similitudinem, quod tamen remanet imparticipatus super omnia per proprietatem suae substantiae. Unde, si divina non cognoscuntur a nobis nisi solis participationibus, consequens est quod ipsa divina, qualia sunt et secundum propriam rationem principii et secundum quod divina collocantur in seipsis, sunt super omnia, sicut supra omnem mentem et supra omnem substantiam et supra omnem cognitionem.

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Understanding how Thomas reads beauty in the context of a theology of divine names involves a few preliminary steps. First, examining how Thomas understands the structure of the treatise will set the foundation for understanding how he reads the name beauty. Second, it is necessary to examine the names good and light insofar as they serve as a propaedeutic to the name beauty. Once these initial steps are in place, the name beauty can be examined in terms of how it serves to nominate God in himself and in his activity.

### **The Good and Light as Propaedeutic: Book 4, Lectures 1–4**

As will be seen, Thomas reads the names good and light as propaedeutic to the name beauty. Both names prefigure what the name beauty identifies in God, but in a more general sense. It is possible to discern in this reading a rudimentary presentation of the way Thomas understand the intensive depth of being itself. The contraction of names that occurs as the sequence progresses from good, to light, to beauty indicates not a sequence of detached hypostases, but an excavation of an ontological depth. Before examining these names more closely, an exposition of the way Thomas reads the structure of the text will serve as the starting point.

#### *Discerning the Structure of the Treatise*

In the Dionysian *On the Divine Names* treatise, beauty occupies a position where it is preceded by the first two names Dionysius examines, namely, the “Good” and “Light.” In Thomas’s reading of the text, this is much more than either an arbitrary ordering of names or an ordering for the sake of textual efficiency. Rather, the fact that beauty follows the names “Good” and “Light” is read as an ontologically significant feature of the way in which being manifests its intensive depths of perfection as it simulates (as the first similitude) the divine in its act of self-communication. For Thomas, the Good, Light, and Beauty are all modes that express the divine self-disclosure. Hence, they possess mutually intelligible constitutions. The consideration of Beauty as a divine name, then, begins with the names “Good” and “Light” insofar as they serve as preliminary instruction.

Thomas opens book 4 by explaining the priority of the good and the way in which this priority illuminates the structure of the entire text. Because whatever God communicates to creatures derives from God’s

goodness, the good names the common source of all the processions that are communicated. Thomas therefore reads the remainder of the entire treatise as treating the good and all those things that pertain to the Good, which is to say, to the divine communication or distinction.<sup>1</sup> Every theonym examined in the *Divine Names*, Thomas implies, can be reduced to some relation to the Good. His explanation structures the text into a tripartite schematic, which he believes corresponds to the three things that the divine goodness communicates to created entities.<sup>2</sup>

First, the Good communicates to a created thing that thing's identity both as it is in itself and as it is in its process of being perfected. The most common attribute found in a thing based on this communication is "to be," which is the name treated in *Divine Names* chapter 5. Following this are the names dealing with the perfection of a being. These are treated in *Divine Names*, chapters 6, 7 and 8, namely, "to live," "to know" (i.e., Wisdom), and "to be just or virtuous" respectively.<sup>3</sup>

Second, the Good communicates subsistent relation to things, which accounts for the attribute by which it may be brought into relations or comparisons. This communication takes two forms. The first is a comparison according to something *intrinsic* to a thing, by which one thing is said to be similar or different to another due to conformity or disparity in substance, quantity and quality. All of these attributes are treated in *Divine Names*, chapter 9. The second is a comparison according to something *extrinsic*, by which things are contained under one part or measure. The names that befit this attribute are Almighty and Ancient of Days, both of which are treated in *Divine Names*, chapter 10.<sup>4</sup>

1. *DN* 4, 1: Principium autem commune omnium harum processionum bonum est, ut in 3 cap. dictum est, quia quidquid a Deo in creaturas procedit, hoc creaturae suae propter suam bonitatem communicat. Et ideo primo, agit in hoc 4 cap. de bono et etiam de his quae ad considerationem boni pertinent.

2. *DN* 4, 1: Si autem singulae processionem considerentur, quas divina nomina manifestant, tria videmus ex divina bonitate esse rebus attributa: primo quidem, ut in se sint et perficiantur; secundo, ut ad invicem comparentur; tertio, ut ordinentur in finem.

3. *DN* 4, 1: Si autem ipsae res in se considerentur: primum et communius, quod in eis invenitur, est esse; secundo, vivere; tertio, cognoscere; quarto iustum esse vel virtuosum. Et secundum hunc ordinem, de divinis nominibus prosequitur: primo quidem post bonum, de ente in 5 capitulo; secundo, de vita in 6; tertio, de sapientia in 7; quarto, de virtute et iustitia in 8.

4. *DN* 4, 1: Comparatio autem rerum ad invicem attenditur secundum duo: primo, secundum aliquid intrinsecum, prout una res dicitur alteri similis vel aequalis, eadem vel diversa, propter convenientiam in substantia, quantitate aut qualitate et de his agit in 9 capitulo; secundo vero, secundum aliquid extrinsecum, sive secundum quod

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Finally, the Good communicates to a created entity its ordination toward an end. Since peace and tranquility of order follow this ordination, chapter 11 of the *Divine Names* treats the name Peace. Insofar as this ordination requires a governor, *Divine Names* chapter 12 treats the names King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Finally, *Divine Names* chapter 13 considers the end itself by treating the names Perfect and One.<sup>5</sup>

It is possible to discern in Thomas's reading of the textual structure an analysis that follows the original Neoplatonic emanational scheme. Chapter 4 treats the names that concern God in himself as that in which all things "live and move and have their being." The names contained in this first section of theonyms (Good, Light, Beauty, Love) reflect the *monos* aspect of the Neoplatonic *monos-prodos-epistrophe*. As noted in previous chapters, the *monos* identifies the originary and originating ontological excess that enables the very occurrence of procession and return. The names treated in this first section reflect this insofar as they provide the context of ontological excess in which procession and return occur, but also in that they are present—at times explicitly and at times implicitly—throughout the remainder of the treatise. The next section of names treats the way in which the Good communicates the divine self-disclosure in its act of creation. Entities receive the being of their respective identities both in themselves and in their relation to other beings. This section of the treatise, then, reflects the *prodos* or procession aspect of the Neoplatonic triad. Entities proceed from the divine good insofar as they receive the good in their very identities and in their relations to other entities. Finally, Thomas reads the remaining chapters as a return insofar as the names treated signify those attributes of the good that guide created entities back to the original source. In this way, this final section of names identifies the *epistrophe*, or return, aspect of the Neoplatonic triad. As Thomas reads it, the good in this final section is named as the guide that leads created entities back to what can now be named the "perfect" and the "one." The fact that Thomas views all names inasmuch as they bear some relation to the name good indicates the way in which for him the *monos* aspect of the

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continentur sub una parte sive secundum quod continentur sub una mensura et de his agit in 10, ubi agitur de omnipotente et antiquo dierum.

5. DN 4, 1: Hanc autem ordinationem sequitur pax et tranquillitas ordinis, unde in 11 agitur de pace. Sed circa ordinem rerum in finem, duo sunt consideranda, scilicet providentia gubernantis et ordinantis in finem et de hoc agitur in 12 capitulo, ubi agitur de rege regum et domino dominorum, et ipse finis ad quem res per providentiam et gubernationem perveniunt et hoc pertinet ad 13 capitulum, in quo agitur de perfecto et uno.

Neoplatonic structure is always present. As the *monos*, the good enables procession (*prodos*) and return (*epistrophe*) by being a continual presence that distills itself and draws what is distilled back to itself.

### *The Names in Relation to the “Good”*

In taking up the more specific themes of book 4, Thomas continues to determine the names treated as they relate to the good. Only at this point, his consideration turns from the extensive breadth of the *monos-prodos-epistrophe*, in which the good accounts for procession and return of all things, to the intensive depth of the good itself. In other words, the good as *monos* becomes the focus of Thomas’s consideration. Since the good is what all things desire, whatever includes in itself an appetible *ratio* pertains to the good. Thus, light and beauty, which include in themselves an appetible *ratio*, are treated in this book. Since the good is the proper object of love, book 4 also treats the name love and its effect, which is named ecstasy. And because opposites are of the same consideration, it falls to the book on good to determine evil.

Thomas’s examination of the name good considers it from two perspectives. The first explains why the name good is attributed to God. Basing his response upon scriptural testimony (e.g., Luke 18:29), Thomas notes two reasons: (1) because the divine essence is goodness itself, and (2) God extends goodness to all beings because God is substantially good. All other creatures are good insofar as they relate to God who is essentially good. In his earlier *Expositio libri Boetii De hebdomadibus*, Thomas examines the issues that Boethius’s text raises with respect to the relation of divine goodness to creaturely goodness.<sup>6</sup> If God is the essential goodness it seems creatures cannot be good. Creatures can only be good, according to Boethius, by participation or by substance. If by participation, then it follows that, being good only accidentally, they are not good substantially and so not good. If they are good by substance, then they are identical to God and the result is pantheism.

6. See Aquinas, *Exposition of the “On the Hebdomads” of Boethius*. While the exact dating of this text remains uncertain, there is certainty that it is later than his *Commentary on the De Trinitate* (1257–1259). Given that his *Commentary on the Divine Names* contains ideas that appear to be more refined than those worked out in his *Commentary on the De Hebdomadibus*, it is likely that the latter was composed before 1265–1268. See also the insightful analysis of this text in te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas*, 1–83.

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In attempting a solution to this issue, Thomas is confronted with ideas that are used in his *Commentary on the Divine Names*, and that demonstrate the sort of inclusive or open dialectic that marks the Dionysian *Denkform*. As chapter 4 of his *Commentary on the De Hebdomadibus* shows, Thomas's ultimate solution derives from employing an analogical strategy in place of Boethius's univocal/equivocal strategy.<sup>7</sup> As Thomas maintains, like health, and like being itself, "good" can be said in many ways.<sup>8</sup> In creatures there is a twofold goodness; one insofar as they are related to the first good, according to which their being and whatever is in them is good; the other, insofar as they are themselves complete in being and in operating, which belongs to them by virtue of something superadded. This latter mode distinguishes creaturely goodness from divine goodness since God's being is good, not by virtue of something superadded, but by virtue of its essence.

The idea that creatures are good by virtue of a superadded goodness constitutes Thomas's second perspective of God's goodness in his *Commentary on the Divine Names*. God is good insofar as goodness is communicated to creatures; which is to say God causes goodness in things because he is good.<sup>9</sup> Thomas's explanation considers this communication insofar as it is oriented toward angels, rational souls, irrational creatures and prime matter. In each consideration, various aspects of beauty are implemented: proportion, order, hierarchy, anagogy, desire *per se* and,

7. I.e., Goodness is spoken in one sense only (univocity). Therefore creatures can only be Good *either* by substance *or* by participation (equivocity).

8. *Exp. lib. De Hebd.*, ch. 4: Redit ergo eius solutio ad hoc quod esse primi boni est secundum propriam rationem bonum, quia natura et essentia primi boni nihil aliud est quam bonitas; esse autem secundi boni est quidem bonum, non secundum rationem propriae essentiae, quia essentia eius non est ipsa bonitas, sed vel humanitas, vel aliquid aliud huiusmodi; sed esse eius habet quod sit bonum ex habitudine ad primum bonum, quod est eius causa: ad quod quidem comparatur sicut ad primum principium et ad ultimum finem; per modum quo aliquid dicitur sanum, quo aliquid ordinatur ad finem sanitatis; ut dicitur medicinale secundum quod est a principio effectivo artis medicinae. Est enim considerandum secundum praemissa, quod in bonis creatis est duplex bonitas. Una quidem secundum quod dicuntur bona per relationem ad primum bonum; et secundum hoc esse eorum, et quidquid in eis a primo bono, est bonum. Alia vero bonitas consideratur in eis absolute, prout scilicet unumquodque dicitur bonum, in quantum est perfectum in esse et in operari. Et haec quidem perfectio non competit creatis bonis secundum ipsum esse essentiae eorum, sed secundum aliquid superadditum, quod dicitur virtus eorum, ut supra dictum est. Et secundum hoc, ipsum esse non est bonum, sed primum bonum habet omnimodam perfectionem in ipso suo esse, et ideo esse eius est secundum se et absolute bonum.

9. *STh I*, q. 13, a. 2.

reflecting what appeared in the *De Hebdomadius*, an end that is present *in esse et in operari*.

### *The Names in Relation to Light*

In his examination of the name light (book 4, lectures 3 and 4) the subtle presence of beauty that marked the preceding two lectures on the name good becomes more pronounced. This pronouncement follows from the fact that, as Thomas states, the name light is a prerequisite to the name beauty.<sup>10</sup> Thomas reads Dionysius's treatment of the name light from two perspectives: first from the perspective of *sensible light* as a metaphor expressing a similitude of divine goodness, and second from the perspective of *intelligible light* as an attribution of intelligibility to God.

In the same way that an image expresses its archetype, light expresses the divine goodness. Thomas refers to an image in this regard as "an expressed similitude" (*expressa similitudo*). Thus, the sun and its emitted rays are an expressed similitude of divine goodness and its effects.<sup>11</sup> The stress in Thomas's interpretation here is on "expressed"; light is unique as a similitude in that it is the very condition that allows a similitude to appear. Thomas's focus in this regard falls upon light as a *manifestation* of similitude, which pertains to those things that proceed from the divine goodness. There are three points that arise when light, via the metaphor of the sun, is considered as the manifestation of a similitude derived from the divine goodness.

The first pertains to universal causality.<sup>12</sup> Just as the sun causes heat in even those things furthest from it while remaining in itself beyond all

10. *DN* 4, 5: Postquam Dionysius tractavit de lumine, nunc agit de pulchro, ad cuius intellectum praexigitur lumen.

11. *DN* 4, 3: Dicit ergo primo, quod sicut praedicta ex divina bonitate habent esse et bene esse, ita et radius solaris per se consideratus, est ex bonitate Dei et est quaedam imago, idest expressa similitudo divinae bonitatis. Inde est quod ipsum *bonum*, quod est Deus, *laudatur nominatione solaris luminis*, eo quod manifestatur bonitas divina in tali lumine, *sicut archetypum*, idest principalis figura vel principale exemplar *in impressa imagine*.

12. *DN* 4, 3: Primo, ergo, ponit ea quae ad divinam bonitatem pertinent, secundum quod res ab ipsa procedunt; et circa hoc, ponit tria: primo quidem, universalem causalitatem ipsius et dicit quod *bonitas divinitatis super omnia existentis transit*, causando, *a supremis* et perfectissimis *substantiis usque ad ultimas*. Posset autem aliquis credere quod transiret per omnia sicut eis permixta et in eis conclusa et ad hoc excludendum, subdit quod, quamvis per omnia transeat tradendo similitudinem suam rebus, adhuc tamen *super omnes est*, per suae substantiae singularitatem. Posset etiam aliquis credere quod, quamvis excedat omnes substantias, tamen *supremae substantiae usque*

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things and entirely unmixed with anything in which heat is caused, so too does the goodness of divinity produce substance in things while remaining entirely beyond, and completely unmixed with, the substances produced. Again, this reflects the Neoplatonic conception of *monos* as an excess that distills itself without ever diminishing itself. Second, just as the sun provides illumination to all things that are visible, so too does the divine goodness illuminate all substances by giving them *esse*.<sup>13</sup> A thing's *esse*—its “to be” or its “is-ness”—is conceived most fundamentally not as the dispensation of material substance but as an entity's capacity to show itself, that is to say, as an entity's perceptive content. It is always given from the divine *ipsum esse subsistens*, but its givenness in many ways reflects the Albertine education of form, calling out what becomes a unique mode of reception in a given *modus essendi*. Thirdly, in the same way that the sun generates the energy that stabilizes and preserves a creature, the divine good provides *habitude* to entities. *Habitude* in this sense reflects a given entity's momentum toward the good as that entity more and more becomes itself by tending toward its unique and particular end in the good. It is at this point where Thomas makes a clear appeal, though with modification, to a tradition of interest in (what could be considered in modern terms) “aesthetic themes” by describing *habitude* in terms of measure, number and place. As the chapter on Albert above explained, the “aesthetic” tradition derives these features of determination from the Book of Wisdom, only there the triad consists of measure, number, and weight. Why Aquinas says “place” (*locus*) rather than the traditional weight is unclear; as used by his predecessors, weight signifies the particular “space” occupied by an entity's mass or manifest substance. That Aquinas alters this to “place” may indicate his desire to imbue this component with a more explicitly external relationality.<sup>14</sup> In any case by providing *habitude* to creatures in

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ad eam attingant per modum quo corpus inferius attingit suum superius; et ad hoc excludendum, subdit quod superiores substantiae non pertingunt *ad excessum* divinae bonitatis. Posset iterum aliquis credere quod quaedam, quae sunt infima in rebus, non sunt a Deo creata propter eorum imperfectionem, sicut Manichaei posuerunt corpora corruptibilia non esse creata a Deo et ad hoc excludendum, subdit quod inferiora non transeunt ambitum causalitatis eius.

13. *DN* 4, 3: Secundo; ibi: *sed et illuminat* et cetera, postquam posuerat quod causalitas eius se extendit ad omnes substantias, ostendit quid substantiae ex divina bonitate consequuntur; et dicit quod divina bonitas illuminat omnia quae illuminari possunt, scilicet rationales substantias; universaliter autem omnes substantias creat, dans eis esse; et vivificat omnia quae vivunt et *continet*, idest conservat; et perficit, dans eis suas perfectiones.

14. Professor Boehner, in his *Medieval Logic*, 2, observes that it is thanks to the

these three ways, God is described as a *principle of determination*: “But God not only has the habitude of measure toward things produced, but also the habitude of acting cause and end.”<sup>15</sup> The formal properties of a created entity, in their active appearing, conform to their respective momentum toward the good, resulting in a process of determining the thing as a unique “this.” The resulting determination, appearing by means of measure, number and place, announces the desired good as a present *res* available to the appetitive faculties. Drawing from Albert, it can be said that for Aquinas, at least here in his commentary, the good under these conditions is beauty’s sensuous form.

As Thomas notes, much of what appears in this account of sensible light is examined in Dionysius’s *De theologica symbolica*. This treatise, as noted already, examines metaphorical names of God translated from creatures. Because *On the Divine Names* treats the intelligible names of

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*Liber sex principiorum*, commonly attributed to Gilbert de la Porée (d. 1154) (a.k.a. Gilbert of Poitiers) that a realistic interpretation of such categories of “time” and “place” was adopted by certain scholastics. The *Liber sex principiorum* was authoritative among the scholastics and was often read alongside Aristotle’s writings on logic. Whether Gilbert was the actual author of this work is suspect, with some scholars, such as Msgr. Wippel, contending that he was not (*Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 225n98). In any case, such a work may have contributed to Thomas’s alteration regarding the biblical triad of measure, number and weight into measure, number and place. Clearly, the alteration involves many of the complex metaphysical issues surrounding Thomas’s interpretation of the predicaments.

15. DN 4, 3: Tertio; ibi: *et mensura et cetera, ostendit quam habitudinem habeat divina bonitas ad res iam productas; et dicit, primo, quod habet habitudinem mensurae. Est enim mensura existentium, quia ex hoc potest sciri quantum unumquodque existentium habeat de nobilitate essendi, quod appropinquat ei vel distat ab eo, sicut si dicamus albedinem esse mensuram omnium colorum, quia unusquisque color est tanto nobilior, quanto albedini propinquior. Specialiter autem descendit ad quasdam speciales mensuras: mensura autem durationis motus et mutabilium rerum est tempus; esse vero immobilium rerum non mensuratur tempore nisi per accidens, ratione motus adiuncti sed propria mensura essendi est aevum; duratio autem uniuscuiusque esse praefigitur et mensuratur a Deo et secundum hoc Deus dicitur omnium existentium aevum. Invenitur etiam, inter species quantitatis, aliqua mensura quae est numerus et haec etiam mensura attribuitur Deo qui est numerus rerum omnium; et determinatio multitudinis earum, quod ad rationem numeri pertinet, a divina sapientia procedit. Rationem autem tam temporis quam numeri sequitur ordo, quia una species numeri naturaliter est alia prior et tempus est etiam numerus motuum secundum prius et posterius. Unde consequenter dicit, quod Deus est ordo omnium, in quantum omnia quae ab ipso sunt, ordinata sunt. Est etiam inter species quantitatis, aliqua mensura quae est locus: locus quidem mensurat ambiendo corpus localiter, et hunc etiam Deo attribuit, qui immediate omnia ambit. Non solum autem habet ad res productas habitudinem mensurae, sed etiam habitudinem causae agentis et finis et ideo subiungit: *et causa et finis*.*

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God rather than the metaphorical ones, it is necessary to proceed to an examination of light insofar as it identifies the divine causality of intelligibility.<sup>16</sup> That Thomas makes this an explicit point of his commentary reveals two important features of his interpretation. First, it indicates his conscious awareness of Dionysian anagogy. The material efficacy of light, which not only illuminates but in some way provides the conditions for visibility through formal determination, opens the process of determination toward the higher realm of intelligible light. Second, it demonstrates the first level of beauty's association as a plenitude of intelligibility.

According to Thomas, Dionysius does three things in order to demonstrate the way in which intelligible light in God designates its causality. He examines the causality of light, shows how God is related to those things in which light is caused, and shows what the end of the diffusion of light is.

First, indicating the analogous nature of causality as it applies to intelligible light, Dionysius, Aquinas says, examines the different effects that the intelligible light has upon angels and rational souls. As it is given to angels, God as intelligible light "opens the supercelestial minds," "filling them" with full cognition of truth. Perfect cognition of this truth, which is the proper effect upon an angelic mind, corresponds to the fullness or plenitude with which God "fills" the angelic mind.<sup>17</sup> Insofar as God gives this truth to rational souls, Aquinas explains, it cannot be described as a "filling." Rather, Dionysius refers to it as a "handing down of holy lights." It is holy because it derives from God, and it is handed down, rather than filled, on account of the imperfection of a rational soul's mode of cognition. Unlike the angels whose perfect cognition of truth corresponds directly to truth's plenitude of intelligibility, a rational soul's act of cogni-

16. DN 4, 4: Dicit ergo primo quod *haec* quae dicta sunt per praedicationem sensibilis luminis de Deo et de similitudine eius ad ipsum, dicta sunt *in libro de symbolica theologia*, sed *nunc* oportet considerare quomodo laudetur bonum divinum, nomine intelligibilis luminis. Non enim est intentio huius libri, tractare de nominibus sensibilium translatis in Deum, sed de nominibus intelligibilibus. Deinde, cum dicit: *et dicendum* et cetera, prosequitur intentum, scilicet de intelligibili lumine, quod signat in Deo causalitatem intelligibilis luminis; unde circa hoc, tria facit: primo tangit causalitatem luminis; secundo, ostendit quomodo Deus se habeat ad ea in quibus lumen causatur; ibi: *igitur* et cetera; tertio, ostendit quis est finis diffusionis huius luminis; ibi: *et intellectualia* et cetera.

17. DN 4, 4: Dicit ergo primo quod Deus, qui est per essentiam suam bonus, nominatur intelligibile lumen; Ioan. 8: *ego sum lux mundi, propter hoc, quidem, quod implet omnem supercoelestem mentem*, idest angelicam, *intelligibili lumine*, quod nihil est aliud quam cognitio veritatis. In hoc autem quod dicit: *implet*, designat perfectam veritatis cognitionem, Angelis a Deo datam.

tion must resort to abstractions of universal forms, discursion and other epistemic mechanisms of this sort. The rational soul therefore possesses only an indirect correspondence with the plenitude of intelligibility, which is why elsewhere Aquinas judges discursive reason as “most imperfect.”<sup>18</sup> But it is on account of this imperfection that the plenitude of intelligibility given in light performs a second function in rational souls, namely, to expel all ignorance and error. In this function, a negative and a positive movement are mutually enacted. In expelling ignorance, the plenitude of intelligibility reveals itself more fully and so positively acts against the “remotion of truth” that Thomas identifies as ignorance. In expelling error, it negates any adherence to falsity that may arise in a rational soul.<sup>19</sup>

In describing the mode by which this expulsion occurs, Thomas implicates the attribute of beauty as a hierarchical power. The darkness of ignorance renders a soul squalid, immobile and closed in on itself. In correcting these maladies, light takes the form of a cleansing activity, a power of mobility and an anagogical opening, constituting the first level of luminous activity. By virtue of this first level of luminous activity, the second level is made possible, namely, the ordering by desire. Light is handed down to each soul according to a determinate measure of desire. “For the effects of divine grace are multiplied according to the multiplication of desire and love.”<sup>20</sup> Thomas calls this a “certain circulation” (*quaedam circulatio*) that is perpetual according to its own nature.<sup>21</sup> Light, therefore,

18. Cf. *STh* I, q. 55, a. 3, ad. 2; *STh* I, q. 5, a. 3, ad. 4; *STh* I, q. 26, a. 2; Comm. In I Meta., L. I; Gilby, *Poetic Experience*, 46–51.

19. *DN* 4, 4: Duorum autem quae facit divinum lumen in animabus, primum est: quod *ab omnibus animabus* quibus innascitur, *expellit omnem ignorantiam et errorem*. Ignorantia pertinet ad remotionem veritatis, sed error ad inhaesionem falsitatis; dicit autem: *ingignitur*, ut alludat ei quod dicitur II Petri, 1: *donec dies illucescat et Lucifer oriatur in cordibus vestris*. Unde patet quod hoc de Angelis non dixit, in quibus ignorantia et error locum non habent, licet in eis sit aliquorum nescientia, a qua purgantur, ut dicit Dionysius VII cap. coelestis hierarchiae. Non enim omnis nescientia ignorantia dici potest, sed solum nescientia eorum ad quae quis natus est et debet scire. Secundum est: quod *tradit sanctum lumen*; et nota quod dicit: *sanctum lumen*, tum quia a Deo immittitur, tum quia ad Deum cognoscendum nos ordinat. Et notandum quod non fuit usus verbo impletionis, sed simplicis traditionis, ad ostendendum quod cognitio veritatis est imperfecta in animabus in comparatione ad illam plenitudinem quam Angeli a Deo possident.

20. *DN* 4, 4: effectus enim divinae gratiae multiplicantur, secundum multiplicationem desiderii et dilectionis, secundum illud Luc. 7: *dimissa sunt ei peccata multa, quoniam dilexit multum*.

21. *DN* 4, 4: sic enim *quaedam circulatio* attenditur, dum ex lumine crescit desiderium luminis et ex desiderio aucto crescit lumen. Circulatio autem secundum suam naturam perpetua est et sic *semper* divinum lumen *extendit* animas *ad anteriora* per

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establishes an ordering through desire, indicating the preliminary aspects of beauty's anagogical and hierarchical activity.

The intelligibility of light in God designates causality, secondly, by establishing a relation between God and those things in which light is caused. This relation occurs by way of diffusion, excess and comprehension. God is the supersubstantial light and so is above every light both sensible and intelligible. God is named intelligible light, however, by virtue of the fact that, remaining above all light as a plenitude of luminous content, God effuses his light like a fountain to everything illuminated. Thomas therefore identifies God as an excess, or plenitude, of intelligibility insofar as God remains beyond every light in the divine act of illumination. And insofar as light is associated with truth, God is said to precomprehend in himself all that is knowable.<sup>22</sup>

When Aquinas explains the third way in which the intelligible light designates divine causality, namely as the end of luminous diffusion, he draws even more explicitly upon the tradition of "aesthetic" thought. Through illumination, the divine light "gathers together" all intellectual and rational beings. In so doing, the divine light also unifies these beings

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profectum, non tamen in omnibus aequaliter, sed *secundum proportionem ipsarum ad respectum* luminis: quaedam enim diligentius respiciunt ad lumen immissum, quae magis desiderant et magis proficiunt.

22. DN 4, 4: Quantum ad primum ergo dicit quod supersubstantiale *bonum*, licet sit *super omne lumen* et sensibile et intelligibile, tamen nominatur *lumen intelligibile*, in quantum est quidam *radius* et fons omnis intellectualis luminis: et ne intelligatur fons in se solo consistens, subdit quod est *effusio luminis* desuper manans; et ut sciatur ad quos manat, subdit quod ex sua plenitudine illuminat *omnem mentem supermundanam*, quantum ad Angelos assistentes et *circamundanam* quantum ad ministrantes, quorum ministerio mundus iste gubernatur, et *mundanam*, quantum ad animas; et non solum a principio illuminat mentes, naturalem cognitionem eis praebendo, sed etiam renovat omnes intellectuales virtutes ipsarum, novum lumen superfundendo gratiae et gloriae et novarum revelationum. Secundo, ponit id quod pertinet ad excessum et dicit quod lumen divinum excedit omnes mentes, licet in eas diffundatur, quia semper superexcessus est per suam substantiam. Tertio, ponit id quod pertinet ad comprehensionem, et dicit quod Deus omnia comprehendit quae sunt in praedictis mentibus, in quantum superiacet eis, sicut causa superior praehabet in se quod in effectibus inferioribus invenitur; unde, ad hoc exponendum, subdit quod ipse Deus, universaliter, *omnem dominationem*, seu potestatem *illuminativae virtutis*, idest quidquid pertinet ad cuiuscumque cognitionem vel ad quamcumque virtutem docendi, Deus in se *coassumens*, idest simul assumens, non per diversas virtutes diversa cognoscens, sicut nos colores visu et sonos auditu cognoscimus, sed secundum unam virtutem cognoscit omnia; et superhabet, quia excellentius unumquodque cognoscit quam ab aliquo cognoscatur; et praehabet, quia non acquirit cognitionem virtutis vel virtutem docendi ab aliquo, sed omnes ab ipso; et hoc competit ei, in quantum est principalis lucens, ut principium luminis et in quantum est super omnia lucens.

by strengthening them through a deeper union to each other in the one truth. The truth in this sense is a perfective end, and so also provides a revocative power that calls all entities back to its plenitude and fullness, converting those whose individual determinations or judgments (*opinionēs*) are not founded upon truth.<sup>23</sup>

Aquinas maintains that the preceding account of the name light is a prerequisite to the following account of the name beauty. It is not surprising to find aspects of beauty already being used to expound upon light. Two of these are more pronounced than others, namely beauty as a plenitude of intelligibility and beauty as an analogical power. Both of these are developed further in Thomas's exposition on beauty as such.

## Beauty as a Divine Name: Book 4, Lectures 5 and 6

As many scholars maintain, lectures 5 and 6 of book 4 of Thomas's *Commentary on the Divine Names* marks the turning point of his considerations of beauty.<sup>24</sup> Several new insights into beauty present themselves to Thomas in this section of Dionysius's treatise: beauty can be understood as Grace; beauty is to be ascribed to God and to creature analogously; the differences between divine and creaturely beauty become apparent; the quintessence of the theory of participation—how it is adapted to beauty and the transcendentality of beauty; the double defect that creaturely beauty implies; the causality of divine beauty, etc.<sup>25</sup> These are the funda-

23. DN 4, 4: Deinde, cum dicit: *et intellectualia* et cetera, ostendit finem et fructum causalitatis luminis; et dicit quod, per illuminationem congregat *omnia intellectualia*, idest Angelos *et rationalia*, idest homines *et facit ea indestructibilia*, quia dum uniuntur in veritate, in ea conservantur. Et hoc, consequenter, exponit ex opposito: *sicut enim ignorantia est divisiva eorum qui in errorem* inducuntur, *ita praesentia intellectualis luminis*, per quod cognoscitur veritas, congregat eos *qui illuminantur*, ad invicem et unit eos in una veritate cognita; manifestum est enim quod circa unum non contingit nisi uno modo verum dicere, sed multipliciter errare a veritate contingit. Et ideo illi qui cognoscunt veritatem, conveniunt in una sententia, sed illi qui ignorant, dividuntur per diversos errores. Est etiam praesentia luminis *perfectiva*, in quantum constituit in fine rei cognitae, quae est veritas et est etiam *conversiva*, idest revocativa ad veritatem, *convertens homines a multis opinionibus* quae non habent firmitatem veritatis; et non solum ab opinione ad certam scientiam transfert, sed etiam a veritate ad uniformitatem; et hoc est quod subdit, quod *congregat varias visiones vel ut magis proprie dicatur phantasias ad unam veram cognitionem*, per oppositum falsitatis. Et non solum convertit ad lumen veritatis sed etiam replet ipso lumine veritatis, quod in se est unum et aliorum unitivum.

24. This is most emphasized in Kovach, *Dei Ästhetik des Thomas von Aquin*, 49–51.

25. Kovach, *Dei Ästhetik des Thomas von Aquin*, 51. As Kovach helpfully illustrates,

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mental themes by which Thomas structures the Dionysian text in lectures 5 and 6 of his commentary.

### *Lecture 5: Beauty as Divine Causality and Possession*

Thomas immediately opens his account of beauty by establishing scriptural evidence *that* the name beauty is attributed to God. This attribution, by which the Good is praised as beauty, takes two primary forms. The first is through the *causality* of beauty, from which derives the beautiful and beauty as found in Canticles 1, and Psalm 95 respectively. The second is through the *possession* of beauty, from which derive love and loveable as found in 1 John 4 and the Canticles respectively.<sup>26</sup>

The remainder of the lecture consists of an examination of how *beauty* (*pulchritudo*) is attributed to God. Thomas's analysis is predicated upon an analogical foundation that establishes the distinction between beauty as attributed to God and beauty as attributed to creatures. In God, beauty and the beautiful are not at all divided, because, being simple and perfect, the first cause comprehends all things in one. Thomas's explanation appears to follow from Albert's use of the terms "simple" and "perfect" to describe why God is called both beauty and the beautiful, but does not go so far as to include the abstract/concrete distinction. As Albert explains, *id autem quod significatur in abstracto, non significatur ut ens perfectum*.<sup>27</sup> Therefore God must also be called "the beautiful" in order to signify the perfection, or concrete completion, of the first cause. Thomas's explanation and use of the terms "simple" and "perfect," however, make no reference to this sort of explanation pertaining to abstract and concrete.<sup>28</sup> That Thomas does

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within the period from 1260–1268, Thomas produces nine written works, which contain twenty-five variations on his doctrine of beauty up to that time. Twenty of those twenty-five appear in the *Commentary on the Divine Names*.

26. DN 4, 5: Dicit ergo, primo, quod hoc supersubstantiale bonum quod est Deus laudatur a sanctis theologis in sacra Scriptura sicut pulchrum; Cant. I: ecce tu pulcher es, dilecte mi; et sicut pulchritudo; Psalm. 95: confessio et pulchritudo in conspectu eius; et sicut dilectio: I Ioan. 4: Deus caritas est, et sicut diligibile, ut in auctoritate canticorum inducta; et quaecumque aliae sunt convenientes Dei nominationes, ad pulchritudinem pertinentes: sive per causalitatem pulchritudinis, quod dicit propter pulchrum et pulchritudinem; sive secundum quod pulchritudo *gratiose* habetur, quod dicit propter dilectionem et diligibile.

27. Albertus Magnus, *De pulchro et bono*, q. 2, a. 1, ad. 2.

28. DN 4, 5: Dicit ergo primo quod *in causa* prima, scilicet Deo non sunt dividenda pulchrum et pulchritudo, quasi aliud sit in eo pulchrum et pulchritudo; et hoc ideo quia causa prima propter sui simplicitatem et perfectionem sola comprehendit tota,

not use these terms in this way may indicate a subtle difference of opinion with his teacher derived, perhaps, from the differences in their spiritual dispositions.<sup>29</sup> Both thinkers implement a metaphysic of participation to describe the relation between beauty and the beautiful. But the absence in Thomas of any reference to abstract signification as such may indicate that Thomas aspires to root his doctrine of participation more in the real than the logical order. In created beings, as Thomas explains, beauty and the beautiful are distinguished according to participating and participated; the beautiful is that which participates beauty, while beauty identifies the participation of the first cause that makes all beautiful things beautiful. “For the beauty of the creature,” writes Aquinas, “is nothing other than the similitude of the divine beauty participated in things.”<sup>30</sup>

It seems that by avoiding reference to divine beauty as an abstract signifier, Thomas implies the kind of participation he has in mind. There are three fundamental modes of participation in Aquinas.<sup>31</sup> Participation can be logical or intentional, as when a limited intelligibility (e.g., human) shares in a less limited intelligibility (e.g., animal) without exhausting it. Participation can apply, secondly, to the act whereby something concrete participates in something abstract, as when a being (*ens*) participates in *esse*. Finally, when a receiving principle such as matter or substantial subject participates in a received form, the result is participation as real or ontological. It is this third mode of participation that Aquinas may perhaps have in mind with respect to beauty. Beauty cannot be considered a limited intelligible form, nor can it be considered an indeterminate abstraction. Rather, it is a real form, constituted by a fullness of determinate content unified in and as the superexcess of divine being. Aquinas’s refusal to associate beauty with the abstract/concrete distinction may also indicate the way in which beauty is unlike abstract qualities like whiteness or humanity. Abstract qualities such as these cannot subsist completely in any one suppositum in which they inhere. So although Socrates may be

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id est omnia in uno, unde etsi in creaturis differant pulchrum et pulchritudo, Deus tamen utrumque comprehendit in se, secundum unum et idem.

29. Cf. Dondaine, “Cognoscere de Deo ‘quid est,’” 77–78.

30. *DN* 4, 5: Deinde, cum dicit: *haec enim* et cetera, ostendit qualiter attribuuntur creaturis; et dicit quod *in existentibus*, pulchrum et pulchritudo distinguuntur secundum participans et participatum ita quod *pulchrum* dicitur hoc quod *participat pulchritudinem*; pulchritudo autem participatio primae causae quae omnia pulchra facit: *pulchritudo enim creaturae nihil est aliud quam similitudo divinae pulchritudinis in rebus participata*. Emphasis added.

31. See Wippel, *Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 94–131; Fabro, *La nozione metafisica*, 145–50; te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality*, 76–83.

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properly called “white” or “man” he cannot be properly called “whiteness” or “humanity.” In contrast, beauty is such that it subsists completely in each supposit that participates it. Quite literally, to be beautiful is to be “full of beauty” or “to be beauty in fullness.”

In parting ways with Albert’s explanation as to why both *beauty* and *beautiful* are attributed to God, Thomas is forced to offer a different explanation. On this matter, his text is not at all clear. One passage is somewhat suggestive:

(Dionysius) says first therefore that God, who is the supersubstantial beautiful, is called beauty because God gives to all created beings beauty according to the property of each; for the beauty of the spirit is other than that of the body, and it differs for this and that body. And in what the *ratio* of beauty consists he shows, adding that thus God hands down beauty insofar as God is the cause of consonance and brightness in all things.<sup>32</sup>

The explanatory phrase distinguishing the beauty of the spirit from the beauty of the body suggests that beauty is attributed to God insofar as it relates to spirit. As will be seen below, though, Thomas’s explanation of *beautiful* is not predicated upon the relation to the corporeal that this distinction requires. It could be that Thomas’s opening distinction between beauty as causal and beauty as possessed is more fitting to this matter. With no explicit indication in the text, however, it remains a matter of conjecture.

Despite no explicit explanation of the distinction between beauty and the beautiful in God, Thomas’s account reads the Dionysian text as attributing beauty to God both as *beauty* and as *beautiful*. As the above excerpt indicates, beauty signifies the supersubstantial mode of the beautiful that gives beauty to all created beings, according to the property of each. The two attributes of beauty’s *ratio* that Thomas stresses in his explanation at this point are *consonantia* and *claritas*. God causes *claritas* by giving the “testimony (*traditiones*) of God’s luminous ray, which is the fountain of all light.”<sup>33</sup> When this passage is read in concert with the account of the

32. *DN* 4, 5: Dicit ergo primo quod Deus qui est *supersubstantiale pulchrum*, dicitur *pulchritudo* propter hoc quod *omnibus* entibus creatis dat *pulchritudinem*, secundum *proprietaem uniuscuiusque*: alia enim est pulchritudo spiritus et alia corporis, atque alia huius et illius corporis. Et in quo consistat pulchritudinis ratio, ostendit subdens quod sic Deus tradit pulchritudinem, inquantum est *causa consonantiae et claritatis* in omnibus.

33. *DN* 4, 5: Quomodo autem Deus sit causa claritatis, ostendit subdens, quod Deus immittit omnibus creaturis, cum quodam fulgore, *traditionem sui radii luminosi*,

name light, *claritas* can be understood to identify the plenitude of intelligibility that God distills, or perhaps “surrenders” (*traditiones*), from his divine excess. As Aquinas further explains, these *traditiones* are given to be understood by the brightness that emanates from a participating similitude. The *traditiones* are “testimonies of divine beauty” and so make things to be beautiful. Insofar as they illuminate the concrete form of a given similitude they attract desire both sensible and intellectual. *Claritas* therefore denotes an intellectually oriented *ratio*.

Beauty is also attributed to God insofar as he causes *consonantia* in things. Aquinas distinguishes two orders by which *consonantia* is present in created entities. The first designates *consonantia* insofar as created things are ordered to God. Here, Thomas appears to follow via Dionysius the ancient Greek sense of beauty as “call.” By calling all creatures to himself God converts them to the good by turning them to himself as their end. The second designates *consonantia* insofar as created things are ordered to each other. Here, Thomas appears to invoke a principle of hierarchy, indicating how his conception of beauty identifies a unity-in-plurality:

This can be understood according to the statement of the Platonists that superior things are in inferior things by participation, but the inferiors are in the superiors through a certain excellence, and thus all things are in all things. And because all things in all things are found in a certain order, it follows that all things are ordained to the same end.<sup>34</sup>

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*qui est fons omnis luminis; quae quidem traditiones fulgidae divini radii, secundum participationem similitudinis sunt intelligendae et istae traditiones sunt pulcherrimae, id est facientes pulchritudinem in rebus.* Emphasis added to distinguish quoted text. The word *traditiones* is difficult to translate in this passage. It can mean either “a surrender(ing),” an “account” or a “tradition.” Given that the word “tradition” today carries several implications, a word that captures the senses of “surrender” and “account” seems more fitting. The word “testimony,” which implies an account of something that is handed over, or surrendered, seems more appropriate with the sense of the text.

34. DN 4, 5: Rursus exponit aliud membrum, scilicet quod Deus sit causa consonantiae in rebus; est autem duplex consonantia in rebus: prima quidem, secundum ordinem creaturarum ad Deum et hanc tangit cum dicit quod Deus est causa consonantiae, *sicut vocans omnia ad seipsum*, in quantum convertit omnia ad seipsum sicut ad finem, ut supra dictum est et propter hoc pulchritudo in Graeco callos dicitur quod est a vocando sumptum; secunda autem consonantia est in rebus, secundum ordinationem earum ad invicem; et hoc tangit cum subdit, quod congregat omnia in omnibus, ad idem. Et potest hoc intelligi, secundum sententiam Platonicorum, quod superiora sunt in inferioribus, secundum participationem; inferiora vero sunt in superioribus, per excellentiam quamdam et sic omnia sunt in omnibus; et ex hoc quod omnia in omnibus inveniuntur ordine quodam, sequitur quod omnia ad idem

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The end that Thomas has in mind is the divine plenitude or excess. It is an end, therefore, that exceeds all finite determinations and so cannot be accurately understood univocally. Rather, it is the ground for the analogical *ratio* of all being, a principle that permeates the whole of Thomas's thought. The distinction of orders here reflects both the transcendental relation between creatures and God, and the "predicamental" relation between creatures themselves.<sup>35</sup> It is by virtue of the transcendental order in the divine excess that the predicamental order of creatures among themselves can allow for the addition of differences into being. Because non-being cannot introduce anything into being, the differences necessary for the distinction of forms can only arise out of the divine surplus of beauty. Beauty is therefore attributed to God insofar as he gives the *claritas* and *consonantia* constitutive of the formal properties of each created entity.

As was suggested above, if the attribution of beauty to God identifies beauty's causality, the attribution of *the beautiful* (*pulcher*) to God identifies the way in which the divine possesses beauty. To reiterate, Aquinas does not explicitly indicate this, although his opening remarks of book 4, lecture 5 are suggestive. As a distinction, it is helpful for drawing a relation between the attributes beauty and the beautiful. Aquinas distinguishes two ways in which "the beautiful" is attributed to God.

The first way attributes "the beautiful" to God according to excess. God is "the beautiful" insofar as God is excessively full of beauty, not as possessing something beyond himself but as being that fullness itself. This is made clear by the twofold sense of excess that Aquinas attributes to the Dionysian text. An excess can be attributed in a *genus* signified through the comparative or superlative modes of possession. For example, boiling water is said to be hotter than tepid water, or fire is said to be the hottest element there is. Thus fire is excessively hot by an excess in genus. But an excess can also be attributed "outside of a genus" signified by the addition of the prefix *super*. The sun is therefore called "superhot" because it explodes the comparative and superlative categories of heat derived from generic specifications.<sup>36</sup>

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ultimum ordinentur.

35. The term "predicamental" as used to signify the order of creaturely relation is first introduced by Fabro, *Participation et causalité selon s. Thomas d'Aquin*, 510–23.

36. *DN* 4, 5: *Excessus autem est duplex: unus in genere, qui significatur per comparativum vel superlativum; alius extra genus, qui significatur per additionem huius praepositionis: super; puta, si dicamus quod ignis excedit in calore excessu in genere, unde dicitur calidissimus; sol autem excedit excessu extra genus, unde non dicitur calidissimus sed supercalidus, quia calor non est in eo, eodem modo, sed excellentiori.*

A crucial implication of Thomas's explanation involves how the cognitive powers relate to the difference between these two modes of excess. Because it falls within the limits of a given genus, excess attributed through genus is conceptual and so capable of being positively thought. But because it falls outside any generic measure, excess attributed outside of a genus cannot be positively thought with concepts. It rather corresponds to the way of remotion involved in a negative way of thinking (*apophasis*). The prefix "super" then should not be taken in any positive sense. Thomas suggests as much when he explains that the two modes of excess are not found simultaneously in any caused thing. In God, however, they are found simultaneously insofar as God is both the most beautiful and the superbeautiful.<sup>37</sup>

The beautiful is attributed to God according to excess both as most beautiful and as superbeautiful. Thomas proceeds to examine the Dionysian explanation of these two modalities of excess. The degree of beauty in any created entity is subject to defect by virtue of its transient nature. To be a creature means to be subject to alteration and composition. Since beauty in creatures both constitutes and derives from the ontological foundations of creaturely transience, it is subject to defect. Because God is not subject to defects deriving from alteration and composition, God is said to be most beautiful in every respect and simply.<sup>38</sup> Aquinas's explanation does not explicitly mention concern for the distinction between abstract and concrete, however some correspondence is suggested. God

37. *DN* 4, 5: Et licet iste duplex excessus in rebus causatis non simul conveniat, tamen in Deo simul dicitur et quod est pulcherrimus et superpulcher; non quod sit in genere, sed quod ei attribuuntur omnia quae sunt cuiuscumque generis.

38. *DN* 4, 5: Est autem duplex defectus pulchritudinis in creaturis: unus, quod quaedam sunt quae habent pulchritudinem variabilem, sicut de rebus corruptibilibus apparet et hunc defectum primo excludit a Deo, dicens quod Deus semper est pulcher secundum idem et eodem modo et sic excluditur alteratio pulchritudinis; et iterum, non est in eo generatio aut corruptio pulchritudinis, neque iterum augmentum vel diminutio eius, sicut in rebus corporalibus apparet. Secundus autem defectus pulchritudinis est quod omnes creaturae habent aliquo modo particulatam pulchritudinem sicut et particulatam naturam; hunc defectum excludit a Deo, quantum ad omnem modum participationis: et dicit quod Deus non est in aliqua parte pulcher et in alia turpis, sicut in rebus particularibus contingit quandoque; neque etiam est in aliquo tempore et in aliquo non, sicut contingit in his quorum pulchritudo cadit sub tempore; neque iterum est pulcher quantum ad unum et non quantum ad aliud, sicut contingit in omnibus quae sunt determinata ad unum determinatum usum vel finem: si enim applicentur ad aliud, non servabitur consonantia unde nec pulchritudo; neque iterum est in aliquo loco pulcher et in alio non pulcher, quod quidem in aliquibus contingit propter hoc quod quibusdam videntur pulchra et quibusdam non videntur pulchra, sed Deus quoad omnes et simpliciter pulcher est.

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is named the beautiful according to excess by being called, according to generic specification, “most beautiful.” Certainly, this mode of signification derives in some way from a comparison with the concreteness of creaturely being. Aquinas adds to this, however, why Dionysius also calls God “superbeautiful.”

And he says that God is called superbeautiful insofar as God has in Godself excellently and before all others the fountain of all beauty. For in God’s simple and supernatural nature itself all beauty and every beautiful element of all beautiful things derived from it preexist, not indeed in a divided state, but uniformly through the mode in which multiple effects preexist in a cause.<sup>39</sup>

Unlike Albert, Thomas is not concerned whether this mode of excess admits only of abstract signification. For Thomas, the excess of God’s superbeauty is the fountain source of all beautiful things. Its excess does not make it less concrete than the beautiful things into which it distills itself. Rather, beauty is itself an excess of concretion.<sup>40</sup>

A second way in which “the beautiful” is attributed to God is according to cause. The causality associated with “the beautiful” corresponds to the more determinate elements of things than does the causality of beauty that Thomas previously examined. Thomas examines the causality of the beautiful in terms of *esse*, which identifies a more subject oriented, or crystalized, form of the *claritas* and *consonantia* of beauty’s causality. This inaugurates a significant development beyond Albert, insofar as this focus significantly develops the foundation for what will later become a third

39. *DN* 4, 5: Ostendit qua ratione dicatur Deus superpulcher, in quantum in seipso habet excellenter et ante omnia alia, fontem totius pulchritudinis. In ipsa enim *natura simplici et supernaturali* omnium *pulchrorum* ab ea derivatorum praexistunt *omnis pulchritudo et omne pulchrum*, non quidem divisim, sed *uniformiter* per modum quo multiplices effectus in causa praexistunt.

40. Cf. *Super Lib. De Causis*, p. 22: Tota ergo virtus huius probationis ad hoc redit quod Proclus breviter tangit, quod scilicet Deus et est ipsa unitas, non unitum aliquid sicut completa quae sunt apud nos, et tamen est per se perfecta, a quo deficient diminuta, id est formae non subsistentes quae apud nos sunt. Ex quo hic ulterius concluditur quod causa prima est altior omni nomine quod a nobis imponitur, quia omne nomen a nobis impositum, vel significat per modum completi participantis sicut nomina concreta, vel significat per modum diminuti et partis formalis sicut nomina abstracta. Unde nullum nomen a nobis impositum est condignum divinae excellentiae. Here, Aquinas includes a distinction between concrete and abstract signification, asserting that abstract signification “signifies after the manner of a diminished thing.” This may be why he does not include this distinction with regard to beauty and the beautiful.

component of beauty for Thomas, namely, *integritas*. Thomas's explanation without question infers his own developing ideas of *esse* beyond what the original Dionysian text contains.

Thomas begins by exposing the way that the beautiful is a cause. From the beautiful, Thomas says, comes *esse* to all existing things insofar as "every form, through which a thing has *esse*, is a certain participation of the divine *claritas*."<sup>41</sup> Thomas is evidently aware that Dionysius does not explicitly say anything about a thing's *esse*. But he justifies his inference by alligning *esse*, insofar as it identifies a thing's *form*, with the *ratio* that Dionysius claims grounds the beauty of a singular thing.<sup>42</sup> This is significant since in the *nova translatio* of John the Saracen, the greek word "όν" becomes latinized as *esse*. But here Thomas links his conception of *esse* with "the beauty of a thing's proper *ratio*" rather than "όν." Thomas also incorporates *consonantia* into a thing's *esse*, as form, insofar as by virtue of the beautiful's causality all rational creatures are brought into intellectual concord. The beautiful in this sense is the ground of unity for all creatures: it is the substance in which all judgments (*opiniones*) agree; it is the bond of friendship for all common affection; and it is the condition that grounds the possibility of external activity and communication.<sup>43</sup>

After Dionysius establishes the general sense of the beautiful's causality, Thomas explains, he expounds more deeply on the meaning of this causality. As Thomas reads this exposition, there are three modes of causality that pertain to the beautiful, namely, efficient, final, and exemplar.<sup>44</sup>

41. DN 4, 5: Dicit ergo primo quod ex pulchro isto provenit esse omnibus existentibus: claritas enim est de consideratione pulchritudinis, ut dictum est; omnis autem forma, per quam res habet esse, est participatio quaedam divinae claritatis.

42. DN 4, 5: Et hoc est quod subdit, quod singula sunt pulchra secundum propriam rationem, idest secundum propriam formam; unde patet quod ex divina pulchritudine esse omnium derivatur.

43. DN 4, 5: Similiter etiam dictum est quod de ratione pulchritudinis est consonantia, unde omnia, quae, qualitercumque ad consonantiam pertinent, ex divina pulchritudine procedunt; et hoc est quod subdit, quod propter pulchrum divinum sunt omnium rationalium creaturarum concordiae, quantum ad intellectum; concordant enim qui in eadem sententiam conveniunt; et amicitiae, quantum ad affectum; et communionem, quantum ad actum vel ad quodcumque extrinsecum; et universaliter omnes creaturae, quantumcumque unionem habent, habent ex virtute pulchri.

44. Causality is a ubiquitous theme in Aquinas, especially as it pertains to the nature and existence of God. For example, he applies the threefold Dionysian approach to knowledge of God to the four arguments for God's existence in his *Commentary on the Sentences*, d. 3. Causality also enters into Thomas's ideas of divine existence in *De ente et essentia*, ch. 4; *De Veritate*, q. 5, a. 2; *SCG I*, ch. 13, ch. 15; and in his famous "five ways" argument in *STh I*, q. 2, a. 3. For an insightful and helpful analysis of Thomas

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It is out of a proper love for beauty that the beautiful, which is God, is an effective, moving and containing cause.<sup>45</sup> As such, the causality of the beautiful corresponds to the three necessary components corresponding to an efficient cause: (1) that it give *esse*; (2) that it move; and (3) that it preserve, or contain, those to which it gives *esse* and moves.<sup>46</sup> As the beautiful, God is an acting cause and, as Thomas explains, every acting cause acts out of desire for an end. The acting cause is imperfect if it acts for an end that it does not yet have. In contrast, the acting cause is perfect if it acts out of its love for that which it already has.<sup>47</sup> Thomas identifies divine causality as an efficient cause insofar as it designates the act by which God communicates his own similitude out of a love for its beauty.

The beautiful that is God is also a final cause insofar as God is the end of all things. Since all things are given *esse*, and so efficiently caused, by a communication of a divine similitude given out of God's love for his own beauty, all things are made in order to imitate the divine beauty in some way.<sup>48</sup> As it relates to beauty, final causality designates the end insofar as that end is given presence through a given entity's participation in beauty. In the beauty of a created thing's *esse*, the final divine beauty is illuminated via the particularity of form. Although this imitation does not exhaust the divine beauty, it does affect the analogical process increasing the intensity of illumination. For, an end cannot be a cause unless it moves that which is caused.<sup>49</sup>

Finally, the beautiful as God is also an exemplary cause. This element in Thomas's thinking has generated some debate. At the heart of the issue is whether Aquinas gives any philosophical justification for the foundational principle for exemplar causality, namely, *omne agens agit sibi simile*, or whether he takes it as self-evident. At times in his corpus, the

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on all modes of causality, see Wippel, *Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, chs. 10–12.

45. *DN* 4, 5: Propter hoc subdit quod pulchrum, quod est Deus, est causa effectiva et motiva et continens, *amore propriae pulchritudinis*.

46. *DN* 4, 5: Haec enim tria videntur ad rationem causae efficientis pertinere: ut det esse, moveat et conservet.

47. *DN* 4, 5: Sed causa agens, quaedam agit ex desiderio finis, quod est agentis imperfecti, nondum habentis quod desiderat; sed agentis perfecti est ut agat per amorem eius quod habet . . . Quia enim propriam pulchritudinem habet, vult eam multiplicare, sicut possibile est, scilicet per communicationem suae similitudinis.

48. *DN* 4, 5: Secundo ait quod pulchrum, quod est Deus, est *finis omnium sicut finalis causa* omnium rerum. Omnia enim facta sunt ut divinam pulchritudinem qualitercumque imitentur.

49. Cf. *De Veritate*, q. 5, a. 2; *STh* I, q. 2, a. 3.

principle is established inductively, but more frequently Thomas attempts to establish it deductively.<sup>50</sup> In any case, he does little to develop the issue here. He merely asserts that since all imitation is necessarily an imitation of the beautiful, the beautiful is a principle of distinction and determination for all things.<sup>51</sup>

The exposition of the causality of “the beautiful,” as Thomas reads Dionysius, brings the discourse back to the good. In this regard, Thomas reads the Dionysian text as inferring a corollary (*infert quoddam corollarium*): since the beautiful is the cause of all in so many ways (*tot modum*) the beautiful and the good are the same. This is because all things desire the beautiful and the good as a cause in all ways (*omnibus modis*) and because, since all things are beautiful and good according to proper form, there is nothing that does not participate in the beautiful and the good. Thomas even declares—“boldly” (*audacter*) as he puts it—that even non-existence, i.e., *materia prima*, participates in the beautiful and good.<sup>52</sup> The similarity between the beautiful and the good, however, applies only in terms of subject (*sunt subiecto*). They differ in *ratio* for this reason: “beyond the good, the beautiful adds an order to the cognitive power that it (the good) is of this kind.”<sup>53</sup> The phrasing is not without a degree of ambiguity. To what exactly does *illud* refer? Some translations take it as a reference to the

50. Cf. Wippel, *Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 517–19. Wippel cites Mondin, *Principle of Analogy in Protestant and Catholic Theology*, 86–88, and “Il principio ‘mone agens agit sibi simile,’” 336–48, who proposes SCG III, ch. 69, as an example of Thomas’s attempt to establish the principle inductively. As Wippel further explains, Mondin suggests that Thomas “implicitly deduces” the principle from sufficient reason “because he regards it as an explanation of the meaning of action and causality” (518n60).

51. DN 4, 5: Tertio, est causa *exemplaris*, quia omnia distinguuntur secundum pulchrum divinum et huius signum est quod nullus curat effigiare vel repraesentare, nisi ad pulchrum.

52. DN 4, 5: et dicit quod, quia tot modis pulchrum est causa omnium, inde est quod bonum et pulchrum sunt idem, quia omnia *desiderant pulchrum et bonum*, sicut *causam* omnibus modis; et quia nihil est *quod non participet pulchro et bono*, cum unumquodque sit pulchrum et bonum secundum propriam formam; et ulterius, etiam, *audacter hoc dicere poterimus quod non-existens*, idest *materia prima participat pulchro et bono*, cum ens primum non-existens habeat quamdam similitudinem cum pulchro et bono divino: quoniam pulchrum et bonum *laudatur* in Deo per *omnium ablationem*; sed in *materia prima*, consideratur ablatio per defectum, in Deo autem per excessum, in quantum supersubstantialiter existit.

53. DN 4, 5: Quamvis autem pulchrum et bonum sint idem subiecto, quia tam claritas quam consonantia sub ratione boni continentur, tamen ratione differunt: nam pulchrum addit supra bonum, ordinem ad vim cognoscitivam illud esse huiusmodi.

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particular thing that is known.<sup>54</sup> But the word's case, gender and number align it with the good in the antecedent clause. If one takes *illud* to be a reference to a thing known rather than the good, one ends up interpreting Thomas to be saying that beauty adds to the good a capacity to know *a given thing* is of a certain kind. This seems to raise a difficulty, however, since it implies that the good somehow already contains a multitude of already determined discrete things that are merely awaiting cognitive reception. Interpreted this way, it is very unclear how beauty differs at all from truth.<sup>55</sup> But for a thing to be known as a thing at all, it must already be of such a kind, that is to say, it must already be a determined "this." Translating the *illud* as a reference to particular things introduces into Thomas's explanation a redundancy that is not there. There simply are no indeterminate *things* presented to the intellect in its quest for knowledge—"thing" is already a determination. The good, however, exceeds all determination not as indeterminate, but as too-determinate; it is an excess of being-yet-to-be-determined. Therefore, in order for the good to be known it must in some way be ordered toward the determinative capacity of the cognitive powers. This is precisely what Aquinas understands is unique to beauty: it is between the hyper-determination associated with the good and the cognitive determination associated with truth. The *illud* therefore makes more sense when taken as a reference to the good.<sup>56</sup> Some scholars view this observation as Thomas's most original contribution to "aesthetic" thought.<sup>57</sup> It is the key to interpreting Thomas's analysis in the following lecture, which examines the various things that the beautiful, along with the good, causes.

54. E.g. Eco, *Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*, 31; Jan Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals*, 343.

55. This difficulty is, appropriately, pointed out by Eco, *Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*, 36. Although Eco proposes an explanation, it appears only to confuse the issue rather than clarifying it.

56. This view, which is supported by other texts in Thomas (e.g., *STh* I-II, q. 27, a. 2, ad. 3), finds agreement with thinkers like Jacques Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism and the Frontiers of Poetry*, 167–70; Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics*, 2:259; de Bruyne, *Études d'esthétique médiévale*, 2:281–86.

57. E.g., de Bruyne, *Études d'esthétique médiévale*, 2:281; Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics*, 2:246.

## *Lecture 6: Beauty as the Given*

Although the beautiful and the good are one, Thomas explains, Dionysius says that they are the cause of all good and beautiful things that are many.<sup>58</sup> Thomas's focus in this lecture is directed to the beautiful rather than the good, although the two are mentioned together in the opening of the lecture. In order to examine the causality of the beautiful one must proceed by means of distinguishing through singulars, by which Thomas means the way in which formal perfections are constituted in a singular entity. When singulars are so considered, four distinctions present themselves: being, one, order and rest/motion.

The first distinction caused by the beautiful pertains to a singular's being (*ens*). Because every essence is either a simple form, or is completed through form, and because form is a certain irradiation coming from the *claritas* of beauty's *ratio*, all substantial essences of beings are caused from the beautiful.<sup>59</sup> *Claritas*, therefore, grounds the essential constitution of a singular entity insofar as *claritas* is the ground of a thing's form. The remaining three distinctions, namely, the one, order, and rest/motion, pertain to the *consonantia* of beauty's *ratio*.

Thomas first interprets Dionysius's explanation of unions from the perspective of the "one." And although Thomas's account of the one may have resonances with the spiritual approach to the One found in Neoplatonism, Thomas's configuration is much more metaphysical in a way that relocates "one-ness" within the parameters of creaturely determination. At the very least, this suggests that in Dionysius, Thomas sees a treatment of the name "one" that had already begun to move away from the piety of the Neoplatonic treatment of the matter. The beautiful causes the one-ness of all things insofar as the beautiful causes the unions and distinctions in things. Beyond the *ratio* of being, the "one" adds the *ratio* of indivisibility. And because, for Aquinas, the negation of a term is included in the

58. *DN* 4, 6: Dicit ergo, primo, quod *bonum et pulchrum*, quamvis sit *unum esse*, est tamen *causa omnium bonorum et pulchrorum*, quae sunt multa. This is an expression of a position Thomas had expounded in his *Commentary on the De Trinitate* of Boethius, q. 4, a. 1, whereby, contrary to what was held by ancient thinkers, a plurality may indeed be generated from a single source immediately.

59. *DN* 4, 6: Dicit ergo, quod ex pulchro causantur *omnes essentiae substantiales* entium. *Omnis enim essentia vel est forma simplex vel habet complementum per formam; forma autem est quaedam irradiatio proveniens ex prima claritate; claritas autem est de ratione pulchritudinis, ut dictum est.*

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understanding of another term,<sup>60</sup> distinction or discretion immediately follow the *ratio* of “one.”

So the beautiful causes the unions, or “one-ness,” and distinctions in all things, primarily at the rudimentary levels of substance, quality and quantity. Oneness of *substance* generates sameness, while distinction in *substance* generates diversity. Oneness in *quality* produces similarity, while distinction in *quality* produces dissimilarity. Oneness in *quantity* gives rise to equality, while distinction in *quantity* gives rise to inequality. As Thomas interprets it, Dionysius does not make specific reference to these since they are the themes treated later in *Divine Names*, chapter 9.<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless because they are reducible to beauty’s *consonantia*, Thomas includes them here.

The power of the beautiful to cause order in things indicates the way in which the beautiful communicates a dimension of divine providence and so Thomas interprets Dionysius’s account of “divine providing” in terms of the order that the beautiful causes in things. There are three aspects of this ordering. The first concerns the activity by which superiors provide for inferiors, and inferiors are converted to the perfection and rule of superiors. Secondly, the causality of the beautiful produces order as far as the existences of things themselves. The beautiful, as Thomas understands it, provides conservation enabling a thing to remain in the limits of its own nature. Thirdly, the beautiful causes order insofar as one thing dwells in another. This is necessary, as Thomas explains, for a few different reasons. In the created order, beings are, in part, constituted by

60. *De Trinitate*, q. 4, a. 1: unde in primis terminis propositiones negativae sunt immediatae, quasi negatio unius sit in intellectu alterius.

61. *DN* 4, 6: Deinde, cum subdit: *uniones* et cetera, ponit ea quae pertinent ad considerationem unius. Ubi considerandum est quod unum addit supra rationem entis, indivisionem: est enim unum, ens indivisum; unde unitati distinctio sive discretio opponitur; et ideo, primo, ponit *uniones* et *discretiones* rerum a divina pulchritudine causari. Unum autem in substantia facit idem, distinctio autem in substantia facit diversitatem et ideo subiungit: *identitates* et *alteritates* idest diversitates. Ex uno autem in qualitate causatur simile, ex discretionem autem dissimile et ideo subiungit: *similitudines*, *dissimilitudines*. Similiter autem, unum in quantitate causat aequalitatem et discretio inaequalitatem, sed de his mentionem non facit, quia pertinent ad commensurationem rerum, de qua post aget. Observatur autem hoc in rebus, quod et dissimilia in aliquo conveniunt: sicut contraria, in genere et materia; et quae uniuntur secundum aliquid, manent distincta: sicut partes in toto; et ideo subdit: *communiones contrariorum*, quantum ad primum; et *incommixtiones unitorum*, quantum ad secundum. Haec autem omnia ad causalitatem pulchri reducuntur, quia pertinent ad consonantiam, quae est de ratione pulchritudinis, ut supra dictum est.

the coming together of various parts. Thomas recounts Dionysius's words in this regard and reads it in terms of a hierarchical structure:

from the beautiful are the dwellings of things in themselves, but also the communion of all things according to the property of each one. For all things are not in all things in one way, but the superiors are in the inferiors by participation and the inferiors in the superiors by excellence, and nevertheless all things have something common with all things.<sup>62</sup>

For Thomas, composition of parts means that diverse things can be composed with one another. But such composition requires mutual aid between superiors and inferiors: the superiors provide perfection to inferiors, while the inferiors give manifestation to the superiors.<sup>63</sup> This mutual enrichment and aid can only come about through a due proportion among all members so as to constitute a foundation that can accommodate all parts. It is by virtue of universal accommodation that the universe of all concrete things is constituted.<sup>64</sup> The concretion of parts of the universe arises from a twofold process. The first is through the mode of local coherence in which superiors are in beings insofar as they contain the inferiors in an indissoluble order. The second is by means of a succession of time, by which the posterior succeed the prior. This interpretation of

62. *DN 4, 6*: et hoc ideo dicit, quia non solum ex pulchro sunt mansiones rerum in seipsis, sed etiam *communiones omnium in omnibus* secundum proprietatem uniuscuiusque; non enim uno modo omnia sunt in omnibus, sed superiora quidem in inferioribus participatione, inferiora vero in superioribus excellenter et tamen omnia cum omnibus aliquid commune habent. This passage is reiterated with similar phrasing in *Super Lib. De Causis*, p. 12: Sic igitur illud quod est essentialiter in primo, est participative in secundo et tertio; quod autem est essentialiter in secundo, est in primo quidem causaliter et in ultimo participative; quod vero est in tertio essentialiter, est causaliter in primo et in secundo. Et per hunc modum omnia sunt in omnibus.

63. *DN 4, 6*: Secundo, requiritur in partibus quod in hoc etiam quod diversae sunt, invicem coaptari possint; non enim ex coemento et lapide fieret domus, nisi invicem coaptarentur et similiter partes universi coaptantur, in quantum possunt cadere sub uno ordine; et hoc est quod dicit: *et adaptationes*. Tertio, requiritur quod una pars iuvetur ex alia: sicut paries et tectum sustentantur ex fundamento et tectum cooperit parietem et fundamentum et similiter in universo superiora dant perfectionem inferioribus et in inferioribus virtus superior manifestatur; et hoc est quod dicit: *et inconfusae amicitiae*, quia mutuum iuvamentum est absque praeiudicio distinctionis rerum.

64. *DN 4, 6*: Quarto, requiritur debita proportio in partibus, ut scilicet tale sit fundamentum quod congruat aliis partibus; et hoc est quod dicit: *et harmoniae cunctae rei*, id est omnium partium universi. Harmonia enim causatur in sonis ex debita proportione numerorum. Partibus ergo sic dispositis, sequitur earum compositio in toto, secundum quod ex omnibus partibus universi constituitur una rerum universitas; et hoc est quod subdit: *in omni*, id est in universo, *concretiones*.

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Dionysius's view of the causality of the beautiful, which emphasizes the order that derives from the beautiful, reflects the hierarchical activity that corresponds to Dionysian beauty. When Aquinas takes up the matter, this hierarchical activity gives rise to a relational, or analogical, account of being. The order of the "whole," that is the universe, consists in the mutual enriching interaction of superiors and inferiors, the integral existence of things in themselves, and the mutual indwelling of things in each other. All of these elements derive from beauty: "All these things are caused from beauty insofar as they pertain to the *ratio* of *consonantia*, which is from the *ratio* of beauty."<sup>65</sup>

Finally, the beautiful causes all rest and motions in things insofar as they include some habitude to each other. More specifically, from the beautiful that is God, all rest and motion of minds, souls and bodies are actualized. This is because the beautiful, which is above every rest and motion, is the cause of every rest and motion insofar as it collocates each one in its own proper *ratio* in which a thing has its station and moves all things to the divine motion. Every motion of every thing is ordained to other motions by which they are moved toward God, in the same way that a motion ordained to a secondary end is also ordained to an ultimate end through its ordination to that secondary end. Insofar as a thing has a station, or rest, it pertains to beauty's *claritas*. Insofar as a thing has movement, it tends toward an end by virtue of beauty's *consonantia*.<sup>66</sup>

65. DN 4, 6: Haec autem concretio partium in universo attenditur dupliciter: primo quidem per modum localis continentiae, secundum quod superiora sunt in entibus, aliquo modo, locus inferiorum vel spiritualis vel corporalis; et hoc est quod subdit: *indissolubiles continentiae existentium* secundum scilicet quod superiora continent inferiora, indissolubili ordine. Secundo, quantum ad temporis successionem, sed tamen in generabilibus et corruptibilibus, in quibus posteriora prioribus succedunt; et hoc est quod subdit: *indeficientes successiones eorum quae fiunt*. Dicuntur autem indeficientes successiones rerum, non quia in perpetuum durent genera, sed quia absque interpolatione succedunt quaedam quibusdam, quamdiu durat iste cursus mundi. *Haec autem omnia dicit ex pulchritudine causari, inquantum pertinent ad rationem consonantiae, quae est de ratione pulchritudinis*. Emphasis of last line added to denote quotation in the main body.

66. DN 4, 6: Deinde, cum dicit: *stationes omnes* et cetera, prosequitur de quiete et motu, quae etiam, inquantum important aliquam habitudinem unius ad alterum, pertinent ad rationem consonantiae et pulchritudinis; et circa hoc, tria facit: primo, proponit causalitatem pulchri, respectu quietis et motus; secundo, exponit quosdam motus qui videbantur non motus; ibi: *et moveri* et cetera; tertio, concludit propositum; ibi: *igitur* et cetera. Dicit ergo primo quod ex pulchro divino causantur *omnes stationes*, idest quietes, *et motus* sive sint *mentium* sive *animarum* sive *corporum*. Et hoc ideo dicit, quia illud plerumque *quod est super omnem quietem et motum* est causa omnibus et quietis et motus, inquantum collocat *unumquodque* in propria sua *ratione* in qua

## Beauty as a Divine Name: Book 4, Lectures 7 and 8

The final two lectures of Thomas's treatment of the name beauty examine more specifically the way in which the causality of the beautiful operates by causing movements in angelic substances, or minds, and rational souls. Thomas begins his explanation of Dionysius's text with a reference to Aristotle's distinction between an actuality and a motion.<sup>67</sup> Aristotle distinguishes an actuality, which identifies a kind of movement in which the end is present, from a motion, which identifies a kind of movement seeking something that has yet to be possessed. Thomas describes this difference as perfect and imperfect motion, respectively, and implements this difference in order to illuminate the way in which the beautiful causes the movements of angelic minds and souls.<sup>68</sup>

### *Lecture 7: Rest and Motion*

Angelic minds derive their movement from their attraction to the beautiful and the good. By virtue of this attraction, they are drawn into a revolution around the beautiful and the good. This elicits in them a uniform movement through illuminations proceeding from the divine beautiful and good. Since these illuminations are without beginning and without end, the movement in the angelic minds that are elicited are *circular* in nature, being united with their intellection of God. This circular movement is the perfect mode of movement derived from their attraction to the divine beautiful and good. But they also move imperfectly in their act of providing for inferiors. This movement has its principle in the angelic mind itself and its end in that which the providence attains, and

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res habet suam stationem et in quantum movet omnia *ad divinum motum*, quia motus omnium ordinantur ad motum quo moventur in Deum, sicut motus qui sunt ad fines secundos, ordinantur ad motum qui est ad finem ultimum. Forma autem a qua dependet propria ratio rei, pertinet ad claritatem; ordo autem ad finem, ad consonantiam; et sic motus et quies reducuntur in causalitatem pulchri.

67. Aquinas's reference is from *De Anima*, probably 406a–407b 25; 408a 30ff. and 412a 23. It also appears in *Metaphysics* IX, ch. 6 (1048b 22–25).

68. *DN* 4, 7: Considerandum est autem quod, sicut dicit philosophus in III de anima, duplex est motus: unus qui est actus imperfecti, idest existentis in potentia et talis est motus rerum corporalium quae secundum hoc moveri dicuntur sive secundum substantiam sive secundum quantitatem sive secundum qualitatem sive secundum locum, in quantum exeunt de potentia in actum; alius autem est motus perfecti, secundum quod ipsa operatio existentis in actu, manens in ipso operante, motus dicitur, ut sentire, intelligere et velle.

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is therefore described as a *straight* movement. This straight movement, however, in no way interferes or diminishes the angel's circular movement. Insofar as angelic minds oscillate between these two movements, they move in a third *oblique* kind of movement. Aquinas describes this as the mode of movement that takes the shape of a "crown" encircling the divine beautiful and good.<sup>69</sup>

In his explanation of the movement of the rational soul, Aquinas provides the grounds for his "intellectual" and "angelical" interpretation of beauty. He first reiterates the distinction between the angelic mode of knowing from the mode that pertains to the rational soul. An angel understands, not by receiving truth from things, but by receiving light from the first simplicity, i.e., God. Their circular movement in this regard is evident. In contrast:

It is connatural to the soul that it understand by receiving from exterior things which are multiform and divided. Whence in this reception its circular motion can not be perceived, but more in the fact that it is recalled from exterior things: first converted

69. *DN* 4, 7: Sic igitur accipiens motum, distinguit angelicarum mentium motum in tria ad similitudinem motus localis, qui est perfectior inter motus corporeos, scilicet in circularem, rectum et obliquum. Est autem in motu circulari duo considerare: unum, scilicet, quod est uniformis; aliud vero, quod motus circularis est sine principio et fine. Intellectualis ergo operatio qua mentes angelicae Deum contemplantur circulari motui comparatur, quia uniformiter se habent in Dei contemplatione et ipse Deus est sine principio et fine; et ideo dicit quod *mentes* angelicae, quae sunt divina participatione uniformes, *dicuntur moveri circulariter* intelligendo Deum, in quantum moventur *unite*, idest uniformiter, per illuminationes ex pulchro procedentes et bono, quae sunt sine principio et sine termino. De proprietate autem motus recti est quod inveniatur in eo principium et finis et quod sit in eo ordo et difformitas secundum propinquitatem ad principium et finem; unde motus rectus in eis dicitur, secundum quod intendunt ad providendum inferioribus: cuius quidem providentiae principium fit ab ipso Angelo providente, terminus autem est in eo ad quod ultimo providentia pertingit. Et in hoc motu, non invenitur uniformitas, quia propinquioribus perfectiva prius provident; et hoc est quod dicit quod *in directum* moventur per hoc quod *procedunt* ad providendum inferioribus: eorum enim providentia transit per omnia inferiora, ad modum cuiusdam rectae lineae. De proprietate autem motus obliqui est quod sit medius inter circularem et rectum, habens aliquid de utroque; et hic motus convenit Angelis, in quantum regulariter moventur ad providendum inferioribus (quod ad motum rectum pertinet) ex ipsa contemplatione Dei (quod pertinet ad motum circularem); et hoc est quod dicit, quod *oblique* moventur angelicae mentes per hoc quod, dum provident inferioribus, non egrediuntur ab uniformitate sui motus; quae quidem uniformitas vel identitas eis convenit ex hoc quod *indesinenter* circumeunt, quasi chorizantes, per uniformem contemplationem, *circa causam* totius identitatis, quae est *pulchrum et bonum* divinum. A similar view is expressed later in his *Super Lib. de causis*, p. 9.

to itself, second elevated to consideration of angelic powers, but third even to God himself.<sup>70</sup>

The *circular* motion of the soul, which is not as evident as that of an angel, consists in the soul's entry into itself from exterior things where it is "uniformly rolled up just as in some circle according to its own intellectual powers."<sup>71</sup> For Aquinas, this "convolution" is incapable of error insofar as it is ultimately guided by the first principles of human reason. Even though the soul "ratiocinates" (*ratiocinatur*) in many ways, whether by discursing from effect to cause or similar to contrary (where it can indeed err), it is always judged through a resolution into first principles where the soul finds refuge from error. The simple intellect knows the first principles without any discursion, that is to say, it knows them intuitively. Similar to the way an angel encircles the divine illuminations, Aquinas appears to imply that the human soul encircles the first principles of human reason. Through this convolution, however, Thomas asserts that the soul only knows what it has in its own nature (*considerans id quod in natura sua habet ut cognoscat*).<sup>72</sup> This circular mode of knowing gathers the soul together to itself and, made uniform in itself, becomes united to the angelic powers and led toward the beautiful and the good, i.e., God.<sup>73</sup>

70. *DN 4, 7*: *Animae autem connaturale est quod intelligat accipiendo a rebus exterioribus quae sunt multiformes et divisae, unde in hac receptione non potest attendi circularitas motus eius, sed magis in hoc quod a rebus exterioribus revocatur: primo quidem, in seipsam conversa; secundo, elevata in considerationem angelicarum virtutum; tertio autem, usque ad ipsum Deum.*

71. *DN 4, 7*: *Hoc est ergo quod dicit, quod motus circularis animae est secundum quod ab exterioribus intrat ad seipsam et ibi uniformiter convolvitur, sicut in quodam circulo, secundum suas intellectuales virtutes.*

72. This assertion is significant, since it demonstrates that Aquinas is not committing himself here to some sort of rationalism. While these first principles of human reason are always necessary for any "translation" of truth into human terms, they become supplemental as the human soul aspires for truth beyond or outside the limits of its own nature—as in theology and *Sacra Doctrina*, for example.

73. *DN 4, 7*: *quae quidem convolutio dirigit virtutem animae, ut non erret: manifestum est enim quod anima, discurrendo de uno ad aliud sicut de effectu in causam vel de uno simili ad aliud vel de contrario in contrarium, ratiocinatur multipliciter; sed omnis ista ratiocinatio diiudicatur per resolutionem in prima principia, in quibus non contingit errare, ex quibus anima contra errorem defenditur, quia ipsa prima principia simplici intellectu absque discursu cognoscuntur et ideo eorum consideratio, propter sui uniformitatem, circularis convolutio nominatur. Per hanc ergo convolutionem, primo congregatur ad seipsam, considerans id quod in natura sua habet ut cognoscat; deinde, sic uniformis facta, unitur per huiusmodi convolutionem, unitis virtutibus, scilicet angelicis, in quantum per similitudinem huius uniformis apprehensionis, uniformitatem Angelorum aliquo modo considerat; et ulterius per istam convolutionem,*

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*Oblique* movement in rational souls differs from that found among the angels. The oblique movement in angelic minds identifies the providential movement to inferior things from their encircling uniformity. Consequently, for an angel, multiformity is an accidental addition derived from the will to provide for inferiors.<sup>74</sup> For the rational soul, in contrast, the multiformity is natural to its mode of knowing insofar as it knows by discursion through diverse things.<sup>75</sup> But this knowledge is also uniform in that it is the one divine beautiful and good that is known through the discursion of diverse things. “Thus therefore oblique motion,” writes Aquinas, “composed from uniformity and multiformity, is perceived in souls in that it receives the uniform illuminations of God not uniformly, but multiformly according to its own mode.”<sup>76</sup> Therefore the soul is moved obliquely by being illuminated with divine cognitions according to its own diverse mode of knowledge.

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manuducitur *ad pulchrum et bonum*, idest Deum, *quod est super omnia existentia* et est maxime *unum et idem* et est *sine principio et interminabile*, quae pertinent ad rationem circuli, ut dictum est; et ideo circularitas motus animae, completur in hoc quod ad Deum manuducit.

74. This assertion may appear inconsistent with the idea that for Thomas, each angel knows through a multiplicity of intelligible species. However, as he explains in *STh* I, q. 55, a. 2: *Respondeo dicendum quod species per quas Angeli intelligunt, non sunt a rebus acceptae, sed eis connaturales*: “I answer that the species whereby the angels understand are not drawn from things, but are connatural to them.” Thomas adds to this later in *STh* I, q. 57, a. 1, when he writes: *Sic igitur omnia materialia in ipsis Angelis praeexistunt, simplicius quidem et immaterialius quam in ipsis rebus; multiplicius autem et imperfectius quam in Deo*: “Thus, all material things preexist in the angels more simply and less materially than in the things themselves, yet in a more manifold manner and less perfectly than in God.” Finally, he asserts firmly in *STh* I, q. 57, a. 2: *Et ideo aliter dicendum est quod, sicut homo cognoscit diversis viribus cognitivis omnia rerum genera, intellectu quidem universalis et immaterialia, sensu autem singularia et corporalia; ita Angelus per unam intellectivam virtutem utraque cognoscit*: “Therefore it must be said otherwise that just as man, by his various powers of knowledge knows all classes of things, apprehending universals and immaterial things by his intellect, and things singular and corporeal by the senses, so an angel knows both by one intellectual power.” Moreover, as Thomas explains in the next article (*STh* I, q. 55, a. 3): *Sic igitur quanto Angelus fuerit superior, tanto per pauciores species universitatem intelligibilem apprehendere poterit*: “Thus the higher the angel is, by so much the fewer species will he be able to apprehend the whole realm of intelligible objects.” Thus, an important difference between human and angelic intelligence, aside from the mode of mind, also has to do with the multiplicity of objects.

75. Cf. *STh* I, q. 58, a. 3 and a. 4.

76. *DN* 4, 7: *Sic ergo motus obliquus ex uniformitate et difformitate compositus, in anima attenditur secundum quod uniformes Dei illuminationes recipit non uniformiter, sed differenter secundum suum modum*.

The soul has multiformity in its act of cognition from its own *ratio*. It is through this multiformity that the soul receives more simple and uniform cognitions. And it is from this dynamic that the soul's straight motion derives. According to Thomas, Dionysius says that the soul moves straight, not when it enters into itself such that it is affected by a certain single, simple intellectuality. This is the motion associated with the soul's circular movement noted above. Rather, it moves straight when it "goes forth to exterior things which are around it, from which just as from variable and multiple signs it is elevated to the contemplation of simple and united things."<sup>77</sup> This is the grounding of the analogical dimension of Dionysian beauty as interpreted by Aquinas. Attracted to the beautiful and good, the soul is moved first in a circular way to things of the world in which the beautiful and good are present as formal constituents. But the beautiful and good are perceived according to the mode of the knower, that is to say, diversely. This perception involves a continual oscillation between these diverse communications and the uniformity of truth found in the first principles. In this oscillation, the soul is moved obliquely as it begins to straighten itself out from the circular diversity toward the single uniformity of truth beyond the first principles of human reason. As this oblique motion proceeds, it becomes a straight motion that elevates the soul closer and closer to the divine beautiful and good without ever forcing the soul to relinquish its prior circular and oblique movements.

### *Lecture 8: The Cause of Difference*

The schema outlined in the previous lecture sets the foundation for the causality of all other created things. The beautiful and good, which are above all rest and motion, produce all rest and motion insofar as they initiate rest and motion as a productive origin, preserve rest and motion as a containing cause, and attract rest and motion as a final end. The motions that the beautiful and good elicit in angelic minds and rational souls are also elicited among non-rational entities, and so among all sensible things. A circular motion is elicited among heavenly bodies, a straight motion is elicited in the heaviness or lightness of bodies, and an oblique motion is

77. DN 4, 7: *sed quando progreditur ad res exteriores, quae sunt circa ipsam, a quibus sicut a quibusdam signis variis et multiplicibus elevatur ad contemplandum res simplices et unitas.*

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elicited in animals that move about freely. In this sense, the beautiful and the good cause the differences of all things pertaining to rest and motion.<sup>78</sup>

Beyond the differences of rest and motion, however, the beautiful and good cause all differences among things. This is due to the fact that all differences derive ultimately from the difference between rest and motion.<sup>79</sup> This includes the differences in continual quantity, that is, both smallness, equalities and magnitudes of all corporeal things, as well as more specific determinations of measure like bicubit, tricubit etc. It also includes the difference in discrete quantity, that is to say, the difference that accounts for a thing's unique singularity, or oneness. Finally, the causality of the beautiful and good also includes the differences of diverse genera and the differences within various actions.

All of this derives from the fact that in the beautiful and good the principle of every mode of causality preexists, "just as effects are in the virtue of their cause."<sup>80</sup> Whether exemplary, final, efficient, formal or elementary (i.e., material), the foundation for the causal power that these principles possess is reducible to the attraction generated by the beautiful and good. Explaining Dionysius's intention in this regard, Thomas states:

He says therefore first that universally speaking all that is is from the beautiful and good, which is God, just as from an effective

78. DN 4, 7: Dicit ergo, primo, quod *pulchrum et bonum est causa* ipsorum motuum mentium et animarum, de quibus iam dictum est et etiam *trium motionum sensibilium*, quae sunt *in hoc* universo: quia etiam in rebus sensibilibus invenitur motus circularis, ut in corporibus coelestibus; et motus rectus, ut in gravibus et levibus; et motus obliquus, ut in animalibus; et cum immobilia et quieta sint priora secundum naturam, his quae moventur, cum primum cuiuslibet motus sit ab aliquo immobili, *pulchrum et bonum multo prius est causa mansionum uniuscuiusque*, quae quidem attenditur secundum quod una res dicitur esse in alia *et stationum*, secundum quod una res quiescit in alia *et collocationum*, secundum quod una res per aliam conservatur et firmatur. Horum, autem, *pulchrum et bonum* divinum *quod est super omnem stationem et motum* creaturarum, causa est non solum productiva, sed etiam *contentiva*, idest conservativa et causa finalis *et ad quod et cuius gratia*, sicut in causam finalem: ad finem enim consequendum movemur et eius gratia operamur; unde quod dicit: *ad quod* pertinet ad ipsam nominationem finis; quod autem dicit: *cuius gratia* respicit intentionem secundum quod volentes unum, tendimus in illud quasi in finem.

79. DN 4, 7: primo, ponit substantiales differentias, dicens; ideo oportet quod omnis statio et motus causetur ex pulchro et bono, quia ex ipso causantur omnes rerum differentiae: *ex ipso* enim sicut ex causa activa *et per ipsum*, sicut per causam exemplarem, secundarie est omnis *substantia* cuiuscumque.

80. DN 4, 7: Deinde, cum dicit: *et in ipso* et cetera, ostendit quod omnis causalitas aliarum causarum, in ipso praeeexistit; et dicit quod *in ipso* est *omne principium* tam *exemplare*, quam *finale, efficiens, formale et elementale*, idest materiale, sicut effectus sunt in virtute suae causae.

principle, and is in the beautiful and good as in a containing or preserving principle, and toward the beautiful and good it is converted, desiring that very thing as an end, and not only is it an end as something desired, but also insofar as all substances and actions are ordained to that one as to an end. And for this reason he adds, “and all things whatsoever that are and become, are and become because of the beautiful and the good, and all things look toward it” as toward an exemplary cause, which they have as a standard for their operation, and from it they are moved as if from a moving cause, and are contained and preserved in its motion and action. But (the beautiful and good) does not move a thing because of some extraneous end, but for the sake of itself, with respect to its own intention, and in order that it be attained by things.<sup>81</sup>

The perfection of causality that Aquinas associates with the beautiful and good is indicated by the fact that all modes of causality pertain to the beautiful and good. The various dimensions of beauty that are found in Dionysius become, in Aquinas’s interpretation, part of an ontological dynamic arising from God’s creative causality. Without question this indicates an emphasis in Thomas’s interpretation of the text that corresponds to the speculative interests of his scholastic metaphysics. However, it is not *necessarily* a reduction of the mystical, or hymnological, dimensions of the Dionysian text. That judgment depends on what one has already decided counts as corresponding to hymnological form. If such a judgment excludes *a priori* the scholastic style and method from any association with hymnology, then it will be nearly impossible to defend Thomas against the charge that he ignores the hymnological dimension of Dionysius’s thought. At least with respect to the dimension of beauty in the commentary, Thomas ought to be exonerated from such a charge. For while it is true that Thomas says nothing explicit about the hymnic details of Dionysius’s treatise, the exposition on the name beauty is written as praise to God beyond the cognitive limitations derived from the rational impulse of *scientia*.

81. DN 4, 7: Dicit ergo, primo, universaliter loquendo: *omne quod est, est ex pulchro et bono quod est Deus, sicut ex principio effectivo; et in pulchro et bono est, sicut in principio contentivo vel conservativo; et ad pulchrum et bonum convertitur, ipsum desiderans, sicut ad finem, et non solum est finis ut desideratus, sed etiam in quantum omnes substantiae et actiones ordinantur in ipsum, sicut in finem; et hoc est quod subdit: et omnia quaecumque sunt et fiunt, propter pulchrum et bonum sunt et fiunt et ad ipsum omnia inspiciunt, sicut ad causam exemplarem, quam habent ut regulam suae operationis; et ab ipso moventur, sicut a causa movente; et continentur et conservantur in suo motu et actione. Non autem movet res propter aliquem finem extraneum, sed gratia sui ipsius, quantum ad suam intentionem, et propter ipsum attingendum a rebus.*

## Conclusion

How much of Thomas's views of beauty, and its relation to God, can be determined from his *Commentary on the Divine Names*? There has long been debate about whether and to what extent a medieval commentary provides insight into an author's original thought. With respect to Aquinas, this debate has focused primarily on his relationship to Aristotle.<sup>82</sup> This suggests that the debate may be less about commentary as genre and more about the relation between theology and philosophy in Thomas's overall thought. As the debate has continued, the issue concerning Thomas's fidelity to Aristotle's thought has also come to the fore with historians becoming more and more critical of Thomas in this regard. Despite this Aristotelian focus, this debate remains helpful for understanding how the commentary as genre with respect to Dionysius ought to be approached.

It is certainly the case that as a commentary, the thoughts that Thomas expresses are limited by the contents of the original text. However, this limitation must also be viewed in relation to the less limited scope of texts available to Thomas for commentary. Significant in this regard is his commentary on Boethius's *De Trinitate*, since Thomas alone among all thirteenth-century commentators treated this text. The *Commentary on the De Trinitate* is evidence that Thomas is not only aware of the broad selection of texts available to him to comment upon, but also that he is not reluctant to venture out on his own. His choice to comment on the *Divine*

82. For brief accounts of this debate, see Torrel, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 1:236–39, and Wippel, introduction to *Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*. As Torrel puts it, this debate concerns “the question of the use that can be made of these commentaries to reconstruct Thomas's thought” (237). Following Grabmann's analysis (“Die Aristoteleskommentare, 266–313) he summarizes three Thomistic responses. The first contends that in his commentaries Thomas almost never offers his own opinions but speaks in them according to the original author. E.g., Jourdain, *La philosophie de saint Thomas d'Aquin*, and, according to Wippel, *Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, xix, Etienne Gilson, as well, who in, e.g., *Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas*, maintains that Thomas writes his commentaries on Aristotle as an expositor, not as an original philosopher. Torrel will include Gilson under the third category. A second position contends that these commentaries are in effect conduits of Thomas's own original opinions, which he does not refrain from expressing, and can therefore be used to reconstruct Thomas's thought. E.g., Rolfes, *Die Philosophie von Thomas von Aquin*. Torrel also mentions Ludwig Schütz as a member of this group. A third position, which Torrel locates “between these first two groups,” “maintains that there is basically an objective fidelity in the interpretation, but since Thomas also expresses his point of view, we can use these commentaries to reconstruct his own thinking each time that it matches a doctrine expressed in other works” (237). Torrel places Grabmann, Eschmann, Chenu, and, as noted, Gilson in this third group.

*Names*, then, must also be considered when discerning the extent to which the commentary expresses his original thinking. As some scholars note, the occasion and purpose for its composition remain obscure.<sup>83</sup> Nevertheless, others suggest that “from the standpoint of the living substance of his [i.e., Thomas’s] theology conceived as a science of God, [Thomas] found in Dionysius an outstanding ingredient. A literal commentary on his text would, in his opinion, give an adequate preparation for a later personal elaboration.”<sup>84</sup> The *Prima Pars* of Thomas’s *Summa Theologiae* reflects elaborations of many of the themes found within the commentary. So while it is the case that the commentary limits Thomas’s freedom of original thinking, the fact that the treatise is selected at all indicates a broader kind of freedom and originality that the commentary allows.

The content of the commentary with regard to beauty as a divine name might be summarized in the following way. First and foremost, beauty is identified with the divine nature itself. It is the plenitude of divine being that transcends all thought and knowledge even as it gives itself over to be thought and known; beauty is a plenitude of intelligibility.<sup>85</sup> Beauty is identical to the good insofar as it names the various modes of causality that can be attributed to God (exemplar, efficient, final, formal, and material). Like the good, beauty is beyond these modes of causality where it identifies the divine surplus in a way that exceeds linguistic communication. Also like the good, beauty “descends” into the created order by means of desire. However, beauty differs from the good insofar as it orientis this “descent” toward the cognitive powers.

Consequently, Thomas distinguishes between beauty and the beautiful as references to the divine beauty. The ground of this distinction is not clear. Unlike Albert, Thomas makes no reference to the abstract/concrete dichotomy. Rather, he attributes “beauty” to God in terms of the divine causality with regard to beauty’s *ratio* as *claritas* and *consonantia*. He attributes “the beautiful” to God both according to excess—in genus and outside genus—and in terms of a causality more associated with ontological determination distinguished in singulars. Thomas’s elaboration of the beautiful’s power of ontological determination follows an ascending sequence that begins with *esse*, proceeds to *unum*, followed by *ordo* and concludes with *quies et motus*. The causality of the beautiful with respect

83. E.g., Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas D’Aquino*, 174.

84. Chenu, *Toward Understanding St. Thomas*, 227.

85. Cf. *Super Lib. de causis*, p. 10. In this proposition, Aquinas expounds how the intelligences are plenitudes of forms.

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to *quies et motus* marks the point at which Thomas's analysis returns to the *claritas* and *consonantia* of beauty. One significant feature that follows from this is that for Thomas beauty is not an abstract quality like whiteness or human. Rather, in a unique way every subsistent form that beauty takes, that is to say every beautiful thing, is fully and completely beauty. This is not to say that every beautiful thing is the exhaustive fullness of beauty. Rather, in being beautiful a thing does not possess a part of a whole, but rather possesses the whole in a unique and particular way.

Insofar as beauty identifies the ineffable divine excess beyond thought and word, it names the power that attracts all movement and that provides all rest. Thomas grounds the whole of creation upon the interplay of movement and rest elicited by divine beauty. The creative power of divine beauty cascades from higher angelic minds, to rational souls, to irrational creatures to all material entities in its providence of rest and movement. This downward cascade of the causality of divine beauty prompts a response in each kind of being. Angels and rational souls respond with differing oblique movements: angels move obliquely by encircling the divine beauty while they move straight in their providence for inferior creatures; rational souls move obliquely by encircling the diversity of things and the uniformity of first principles, which enables the straight ascent to higher knowledge. Beauty's power to attract in this way is also its anagogical power to elevate creatures more deeply into the divine excess. Since creatures respond in different ways, beauty's anagogical power is also the ground of its hierarchical activity.

Thomas's account of beauty as a divine name emphasizes many of the same themes found in Dionysius: beauty as the good, beauty as simplicity and light, beauty as a plenitude of intelligibility, beauty as a principle of determination, beauty as an anagogical power, and beauty as hierarchical activity. Each theme undergoes the treatment unique to Thomas's developing way of thinking, but in the process they enter into Thomas's theological mindfulness and become thematic for his understanding of God.

The primary aspects of beauty as a divine name elaborated in Thomas's later work concern all of these dimensions in some way. The following chapter examines relevant sections of the *Summa Theologiae* in order to discern the extent to which the contents of Thomas's *Commentary on the Divine Names* influences his later thinking on the relation between beauty and God.

# I 2

## Beauty as a Divine Name in Thomas Aquinas

### *Beyond the Commentary on the Divine Names*

AS ALREADY NOTED, WHILE SCHOLARLY ATTENTION TO THOMAS'S INTEREST in beauty is minimal in comparison with his many other interests, enough literature has been put forth since the mid-twentieth century to provide a helpful foundation for further development. These studies can be divided according to the method with which they treat the thought of the Common Doctor in a general sense. The majority of these studies approach beauty in Thomas from an absolute rather than an exegetical perspective, emphasizing a more philosophical rather than theological/historical analysis.<sup>1</sup> What this means is that among many of these studies, beauty is abstracted from the textual context and treated as if it were for Thomas an object of inquiry removed from the other dimensions of the text in which it is embedded. This is not the case with all such studies, however. The so-called "genetic analysis" found in Kovach's remarkable study provides a wealth of important data valuable for understanding the development of Thomas's thoughts on beauty.<sup>2</sup> A brief survey of his findings will provide important features of the foundation for what follows.

1. E.g., Callahan, *Theory of Esthetic*; Eco, *Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*; Gilby, *Poetic Experience*—Gilby is something of an exception since his essay situates Thomas's consideration of "aesthetic" themes and beauty in the context of love, which focuses on the more theological components of Thomas's views; Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism*; Maurer, *About Beauty*; Czapiewski, *Das Schöne bei Thomas von Aquin*.

2. Kovach, *Dei Ästhetik des Thomas von Aquin*, 1–83.

## General Development of Beauty in Aquinas: Kovach's Genetic Analysis

The genetic analysis of Thomas's work undertaken by Kovach reveals that there is both a formal and a material development of thought with respect to Thomas's views on beauty.<sup>3</sup> Using the chronology proposed by Grabmann,<sup>4</sup> Kovach distinguishes five periods of Thomas's literary activity. Prior to these five periods, however, one may speak of a preliminary period (1244 or 1245) in which Thomas writes *De propositionibus modalibus* and *De fallaciis ad quosdam nobiles artistas*. During this time there is no mention made of beauty. The first reference to beauty occurs in 1252 when Thomas, the new "baccalarius biblicus," uses the word *decorus* when he quotes Ezekiel (16:13), a term which in the thirteenth century is used interchangeably with *pulchrum*.<sup>5</sup> His *De Ente et Essentia* (1252–1256) contains nothing new about beauty. It is only in his *Commentary on the*

3. Kovach, *Dei Ästhetik des Thomas von Aquin*, 33–41. Kovach goes into some detail regarding what he means by a "development of thought." A formal development can include any qualitative change or alteration over a period of years. A material development, in contrast, indicates a countable accumulation and fortification of the written material concerning a particular question. Kovach argues that if a thinker often treats a problem in several works, there is a necessary material development of thought (*sonst würde er praktisch zu jeder Zeit dasselbe sagen!*). With respect to beauty in Thomas, the evidence of a material development is clear. Less clear is the formal development. Kovach first points out certain arguments against finding any formal development of beauty in Aquinas: (1) Albert already provided him enough substance with respect to the question of beauty; (2) Thomas himself copied Albert's *De Pulchro*, indicating that he is content to follow his master; (3) the frequency with which Thomas cites Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, Cicero, Proclus, Augustine, Dionysius, and perhaps Alexander of Hales—thinkers whose views of beauty were at the time authoritative—suggests that he was content with the body of literature available to him. More measurable is the evidence of Thomas's texts: he only mentions beauty in 665 places (57 percent of his writings), the longest of which is only 150 lines, 45 of which are only trivial references, 340 are only citations, and only 130 are entirely his own. Thomists who follow Gilson's belief that Thomas has followed his fundamental principles from the beginning seem to have a strong position from this data. However, against this Kovach's detailed research demonstrates the importance of these texts as well as their substantive alterations and changes, indicating a formal development of Thomas's thoughts on beauty.

4. Kovach addresses the possible objection that his reliance on Grabmann might undermine his analysis should Grabmann's dating ever be called into serious question (57ff.). As Kovach makes clear, his analysis follows more or less a general chronology rather than an exact one, which maintains that the primary works serve as the "scaffolding" of the other secondary works. So long as the scaffolding holds, his position remains supported.

5. See Bychkov, *A Propos of Medieval Aesthetics*, 104.

*Sentences* where Thomas begins to treat beauty as a theme of philosophical and theological inquiry.

The initial years of his writing of the *Sentences* commentary constitutes the first period of Thomas's literary activity (1254–1256), in which he treats the theme of beauty twenty-four different times. This treatment focuses primarily on the following: (1) the beauty of the church; (2) a reference to Dionysius that draws *bonum* and *pulchrum* together; (3) several passages that indicate a preliminary definition of beauty; (4) a first statement asserting that God is beautiful; (5) an important passage about the essence of beauty as "*decor speciei*"; (6) references to creaturely beauty as following the order of its creator; (7) the beauty of angels; (8) the beauty of good works; (9) the beauty of virtue; (10) the beauty of art especially sculpture; (11) and the beauty of different historical ages. He also mentions (12) how physical beauty is a condition for marriage; (13) that beauty for the soul means an absence of sin; (14) that there is beauty in the person, (15) more specifically a spiritual beauty derived from mercy; (16) and the beauty of the heavenly spheres as a *pulchritudo visibilis* perfective of the act of seeing.<sup>6</sup>

In the following eight-year period (1256–1264),<sup>7</sup> there are many repetitions of the themes just mentioned, and only about 6 new additional considerations. These include: (1) a division of beauty into the spiritual and the exterior and the idea that beauty is pleasurable and desirable; (2) that there is beauty of particular things in nature; (3) the desirability of *bonum*, *pulcrum* and *pax*; (4) a first mention of immaterial and invisible beauty;

6. These references are, respectively, (1) *In I Sent.* Prol.; (2) *In I Sent.* d. 2, exp. ad. 2. Kovach believes that this citation "initiates and indicates" his later doctrine of the transcendentality of beauty: "mit disem Zitat wird seine spätere Lehre über die Transzendentalität der Schönheit eingeleitet und angedeutet" (47); (3) e.g., *In I Sent.* d. 3, a. 2, exp.; *In I Sent.* d. 31, q. 2, a. 1, ad. 4; (4) *In I Sent.* d. 46, q. 1, a. 4, 1a and ad. 1; (5) *In I Sent.* d. 46, q. 1, a. 4, ad. 1; (6) *In II Sent.* Prol.; (7) *In II Sent.* d. 6, q. 1, a. 1, sc.; (8) *In II Sent.* d. 27, q. 1, a. 4, sol.; *In II Sent.* d. 38, q. 1, a. 2, sol.; (9) *In II Sent.* d. 42, q. 1, a. 5, sol.; (10) *In III Sent.* d. 1, q. 1, a. 1, ad. 3.; (11) *In III Sent.* d. 1, q. 1, a. 4, sol.; (12) *In III Sent.* d. 2, q. 2, a. 1, sol.; (13) *In III Sent.* d. 3, q. 1, a. 2, sc.; (14) *In III Sent.* d. 13, q. 3, a. 1, sol.; (15) *In IV Sent.* d. 1, q. 1, a. 2.; (16) *In IV Sent.* d. 48, q. 2, a. 3, sol; and *In IV Sent.* d. 50, q. 2, a. 4, sol.

7. Included in this period are *Contra impugantes de culutn et religionem* (1256–1259); *In evangelium Mattaei* (1256–1259); *De Veritate* (1256–1259); *In Boethii De Trinitate* (1257–1258); parts of the *Summa Contra Gentiles* and parts of the *Quodlibetal*. One can also include those texts written between 1256 and 1264, though some of these cross over with the following period: *In Pauli ep. Ad Corinth., Galat., Ephes., Coloss.*, (I and II), *Timoth.* and *Hebr.*; as well as *Exp. In Isaiam* (1259–1261); and toward the end of this period (1261–1264) *Expos. in Iob., Catena aurea in Matt.*

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(5) the only reference where Thomas interprets the Platonic-Augustinian concept of *numerus* as beauty (from Wis 11:21); and (6) the assertion that pleasure beautifies an action.<sup>8</sup> Also during this period, Thomas begins to explicitly identify the different elements of beauty either in themselves or in relation to beauty, something he had done only implicitly earlier on the *Commentary on the Sentences*.<sup>9</sup>

The third literary period identified by Kovach, marks the period in which Thomas writes his *Commentary on the Divine Names*, along with 8 other texts.<sup>10</sup> Within these 8 other texts, Kovach explains, there are only a few new ideas expressed beyond what is found in the Dionysian commentary: (1) a relativity derived from the comparative foundation of beauty; (2) the beauty of truth; (3) the beautiful ability; (4) the beauty of happiness; (5) the beauty of the name of Christ; and (6) the beauty of movement.<sup>11</sup>

Thomas's fourth literary period follows his writing of the *Summa Contra Gentiles* and the *Commentary on the Divine Names* and marks the time in which he writes the most on beauty (1264–1269). This period includes the writing of the *Prima Pars* and the *Prima Secunda* of the *Summa Theologiae*, along with the completion of 8 other texts.<sup>12</sup> In the many passages where he mentions beauty in *Expositio in Ieremiae*, *In Physicam*, and *Responsio ad Ioannem Vercellensum*, not one new thought on beauty is presented. It is primarily in his *Prima Pars* and *Prima Secundae* where one finds the greatest number of new ideas on beauty. In sum, these include: (1) the affiliation of beauty with the good, as well as (2) the difference between beauty and good; (3) the idea that God desires above all perfection and beauty in his creatures and that evil is only an accidental contribution to the beauty of the universe; (4) the idea that the beauty of an image is

8. These references are, respectively: (1) *Contra Imp.* II, ch. 6, 2ad. 9; (2) *In Evang. Matt.* III: 1; (3) *De Ver.* q. 22, a. 1, ad. 12; (4) SCG III, 80; (5) SCG III, 97; (6) *Quodlib.* VIII, q. 9, a. 1.

9. *Claritas* is the first to be identified in *In Ev. Mat.* 13, 4. Cf. *In IV Sent.* d. 16, q. 2, a. 2, ad. 1.

10. *Expositio in Iob* (1261–1264); *Officium de festo corporis Christi* (1264); *Catena aurea in Matt., Marc., Luc., Ion.*, (1261–1267); *De regno* (1265–1266); *De pot.* (1265–1267).

11. These references are, respectively: (1) *In Iob.*, ch. 25, l. 1; (2) *Catena aurea in Matt.* 13, 10; (3) *Catena aurea in Luc.*, 6, 3 (*decora potentia*); (4) *Catena aurea in Luc.*, 6, 11 (*decora felicitatis*); (5) *Catena aurea in Luc.*, 10, 7; (6) *Catena aurea in Luc.*, 10, 7; 23, 6.

12. *In Lamentationes Ieremiae* (1264–1269); *Responsio ad Ioannem Vercellensem de art.* 108 (1265–1266); *In Politicam*, bk. 3, l. 6 (1266–1268); *In Ethicam* (1266–1269); *In Physicam* (1268); *In Post Anal.* (1268); *De Malo* (1268–1269).

dependent upon the degree of perfection in its representation; (5) that only human beings out of all living things can enjoy beauty *per se*; and (6) that the ordination of people is beautiful.<sup>13</sup> The new ideas of beauty presented in the other works include: (1) that the beauty of the soul is more difficult to recognize than that of the body; (2) that there is beauty in utility; (3) that there is a contrariety between the beautiful and the ugly; (4) that beauty cannot be loved without being seen; and (5) two remarks about geometrical beauty and the degree of ugliness.<sup>14</sup>

The final period of Thomas's literary work is focused mainly on the final components of his *Summa Theologiae*, though several other writings emerge alongside this.<sup>15</sup> There are only three fundamentally new ideas of beauty expressed during this time: (1) that all manifestation derives from beauty (and the good); (2) that physical beauty can be opposed to virtue; and (3) that the contemplative life is spiritually beautiful.<sup>16</sup>

As Kovach makes clear in his analysis of this data, and what is important for the purpose at hand, is that the *Commentary on the Divine Names* is pivotal for the development of Thomas's thought thereafter. It is perhaps best regarded as a causeway in the flow of his thinking on beauty, a passage through which beauty is channeled into other dimensions of his theological thought. As a treatise, it plays a primary role in not only Thomas's doctrine of beauty and its development, but also in Thomas's overall conception of God and God's communication.<sup>17</sup> Dionysius forti-

13. These references are, respectively: (1) *STh* I, q. 5, a. 4; (2) *STh* I, q. 5, a. 4; (3) *STh* I, q. 19, a. 9, ad 2; (4) *STh* I q. 39, a. 8, sol.; (5) *STh* I, q. 91, a. 3, ad. 3; (6) *STh* I-II, q. 105, a. 1, sc.

14. These references are, respectively: (1) *In I Pol.*, l. 3, n. 73; (2) *In II Pol.*, l. 4, n. 200; (3) *In VIII Eth.* L. 8, n. 1654; (4) *In IX. Eth.*, l. 5, n. 1824; (5) *In I Post. Anal.* L. 15; *De Malo* q., 2, a. 9, sol.

15. *De perfectione vitae spiritualis* (1269); *In Perihermeneias* (1269–72); *In evangelium Ioannis* (1269–72); *De virtutibus in communi and De virtutibus cardinalibus* (1269–72); *In Liber de causis* (1269–73); *De unitate intellectus contra Averroistas* (1270); *In Psalmos David* and *In Aristotelem De Anima* (1270–72); *Compendium theologiae* (1271–73); *In Arist. De caelo et mundo* (1272); *Quaestiones quodlibetales* lib. XII (1272); *In epis. Pauli ad Rom.* and *De substantiis separatis* (1272–73); *Expositio in Symbolum Apostolorum* (1273); *In Salutationem Angelicam* (1273); *De decem praeceptis* (1273).

16. These references are, respectively: (1) *STh* II-II, q. 103, a. 1, ad. 2; (2) *STh* II-II, q. 145, a. 2, ad. 3; (3) *STh* II-II q. 180, a. 2.

17. Kovach, *Dei Ästhetik des Thomas von Aquin*, 52–58; “in einem bestimmten maß wurde der Dionysius-Kommentar ein Wendepunkt in der literarischen Aktivität des Thomas, indem er von seiner Abfassungszeit an, wo er das Problem der Schönheit überdenken mußte, bereitwilliger geworden ist, das schwierige Thema der Schönheit

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fies for Thomas what had been for him, prior to his *Commentary on the Divine Names*, somewhat latent and undeveloped—namely, the way in which beauty names the divine and the role that beauty plays in the whole of divine work. Beauty becomes a primary component not only for the foundation of theological discourse and language, but also as a critical component to other primary areas of his thought. With respect to Thomas's metaphysics, for example, the Dionysian notion of hierarchy, which in large part derives from the theonym beauty, can be considered a prototype for Thomas's metaphysical doctrine of *analogia*.<sup>18</sup> Insofar as Thomas's metaphysics, expressed through his original views on *esse*, penetrate the other primary areas of his thinking, beauty is also present. The *Summa Theologiae* marks a point at which all of these themes and issues come together into one unified theological synthesis. A brief examination of the primary areas in which beauty is prominent will help to understand how beauty as a divine name is worked out within this monumental theological synthesis.

### The Two Formulae of the *Summa Theologiae*

Thomas makes many elliptical references to beauty throughout his *Summa Theologiae*, but there are two specific passages that tend to draw the most attention among scholars. The citation of these passages has become so prevalent that they have acquired a certain formulaic status, at times formulated in various ways. Part of their formulaic character derives from the way that other statements on beauty throughout the *Summa* in some way correspond to the fundamental ideas these formulae express. Given the proximity between the writing of the *Prima Pars* and the *Commentary on the Divine Names*, there is a likelihood that these expressions of beauty in the *Summa* derive in large measure from what Aquinas encounters in the Dionysian text. An examination of these two primary formulae will throw light on how the views Thomas expresses in his *Commentary on the Divine Names* correspond to those expressed in his *Summa Theologiae*.

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gelegentlich zu behandeln" (56).

18. This has recently been noted by te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas*, 169.

### The Placent Formula

Quaestio 5 of the *Prima Pars* of the *Summa Theologiae* considers the relationship between the good and final causality. The first objector bases his position on a transitive interpretation of a point made in Dionysius's *Divine Names*.<sup>19</sup> Dionysius asserts that the good is the same as beauty, and that beauty is a formal cause. Therefore, insists the objector, the good is a formal cause rather than a final cause. Thomas's reply draws from his *Commentary on the Divine Names*, but expresses what is drawn with greater concision.

To the first, therefore, I say that the beautiful and the good are the same in any subject, since they are established upon the same thing, namely upon form, and because of this the good is praised as beautiful. But they differ in *ratio*. For the good especially provides for the appetite; for the good is that which all things desire. And therefore it has the *ratio* of an end; for appetite is a kind of movement toward a thing. The beautiful, however, bears upon a knowing power: *for things are called beautiful which please when seen*. Wherefore beauty consists in due proportion, because the senses are delighted in rightly proportioned things as things similar to themselves; for the sense is also a certain kind of reason as is every cognitive power. And because knowledge occurs through assimilation, while likeness considers form, beauty properly belongs to the *ratio* of a formal cause.<sup>20</sup>

The particular details of the exact wording of the italicized segment of the passage ought not be overlooked.<sup>21</sup> Thomas is speaking about the beautiful

19. *STh* I, q. 5, a. 4, obj. 1: Videtur quod bonum non habeat rationem causae finalis, sed magis aliarum. Ut enim dicit Dionysius, IV cap. de Div. Nom., *bonum laudatur ut pulchrum*. Sed pulchrum importat rationem causae formalis. Ergo bonum habet rationem causae formalis.

20. *STh* I, q. 5, a. 4, ad. 1: Ad primum ergo dicendum 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. 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.

21. Cf. Phelan, "Concept of Beauty in St. Thomas Aquinas," 162: "*Pulchra dicuntur*

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rather than beauty, a distinction that he elaborated in his *Commentary on the Divine Names*.<sup>22</sup> Those things that please when seen do so because, as participants in beauty, they are full of beauty—that is to say, they are concrete, particular instances of beauty. The word beautiful indicates a *suppositum* that participates beauty. This is a crucial distinction that requires diligent observation if one's understanding of Thomas's views of beauty is to avoid the same mistakes that have been made with regard to Thomas's views of being (*esse*).<sup>23</sup> Overlooking this distinction between beauty and the beautiful, some scholars conclude that the beautiful is a categorical concept drawn from things and then superimposed upon God in an attempt to discern divine beauty.<sup>24</sup> The result is that, rather than an *onto-theo-logia*, Thomas is read as advancing a *kalo-theo-logia*. But if the charge against Thomas's so-called "ontotheology" is thrown into relief by his doctrine of *analogia*, so too would the charge against any "kalothology." Like being, beauty for Thomas is "spoken in many senses" as his *Commentary on the Divine Names* and his distinction between beauty and the beautiful demonstrates.

The *placent* formula expresses how beauty, in the mode of the beautiful, communicates itself as an event happening in between the real order

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*quae visa placent* is not a haphazard description of the beautiful, but a statement that has been carefully weighed and carefully worded."

22. See ch. 12 above. Jacques Maritain, in *Art and Scholasticism*, 23, 161n47, reformulates this to read *id quod visa placet* and applies it as a definition for beauty *per effectum*. This alteration rightly recognizes the distinction between beauty and the beautiful, but it nevertheless risks conflating the two since, on its own, the altered phrasing wrongly conveys the idea that "beauty" is a "determinate entity" that pleases when seen. Rather, as Maritain's explanation indicates, that which pleases when seen identifies the beautiful as an *effect* of beauty, which is itself beyond determination.

23. Perhaps the most well-known example is found in the work of Jean-Luc Marion. In the first edition of his *God Without Being*, Marion, neglecting Thomas's distinction between *ipsum esse subsistens* and *esse commune*, included Thomas among those ontotheologians he criticized for implementing being as a conceptual category that is applied to all things univocally, even God. For Marion's own account of this matter and a list of the original responses to his first edition, see Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being*, xxii–xv; 199–200, notes 5 and 6.

24. E.g., de Munnynck, "L'esthétique de St. Thomas d'Aquin," concludes that all things are beautiful, not for us, but only for God. Based upon the pleasure of seeing that Aquinas alludes to here, de Munnynck concludes that it is a mistake to believe that beauty is a transcendental property of being either in Aquinas or in reality. Taking the *visa placent* as referring to beauty *per se*, de Munnynck holds that divine beauty is utterly unknowable since our only knowledge of beauty derives from beautiful things. He therefore collapses "the beautiful" into beauty *per se*, and appears to interpret beauty in Aquinas similar to how Marion originally interpreted being in Aquinas.

and the order of thought. Beauty is “seen” as the beautiful, that is to say, in the beauty of beautiful things. The delight that is evoked is the assurance of beauty’s efficacy in those beautiful things. Thomas follows Dionysius in beginning with beauty as a perfection of being communicated from the divine plenitude. Beauty is first and foremost real, that is to say emergent from the extra-mental order. In Thomas’s view, as Mauaer rightly observes, beauty “is the actuality of being and form”<sup>25</sup> and so is a principle of determination. For this reason it is also called “the beautiful” “as having a necessary reference to a subject.”<sup>26</sup> This is precisely what the *placent* formula conveys: a reality in between the divine plenitude *per se* and human cognition of the communication that flows from this plenitude.

Beauty, insofar as it is communicated as the beautiful, signals the event by which the good conforms to the cognitive powers. There is a sense of the relation between beauty and intuition, then, conveyed in the *placent* formula.<sup>27</sup> But where modern aesthetics tends to associate intuition with a “confused” conception,<sup>28</sup> for Thomas the intuitive dimension of beauty’s communication pertains to its plenitude of intelligibility. In the Aristotelian image he often invokes, it is the sun’s light penetrating the eyes of the owl.<sup>29</sup> Given his analysis in the *Commentary on the Divine Names*, the result of this light is anything but confusion. The divine light attracts, entices and uplifts—often overwhelmingly so—but it does not confuse. The pleasure that Thomas links to the intuited experience of the beautiful does not derive from confusion but from the divine presence.

The formula itself indicates the development in the *Summa Theologiae* of Thomas’s intellectual interpretation of beauty with an emphasis on the anagogical dimension.<sup>30</sup> The first line of encounter between the cogni-

25. Maurer, *About Beauty*, 16.

26. Phelan, “Concept of Beauty in St. Thomas,” 162.

27. Cf. Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism*, 163n56.

28. Cf. Baumgarten, *Aesthetica*, prol. §6; part 1, §5–§18, etc.; Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, pt. 1, div. 1, bk. I, §15.

29. *ST* I, q. 1, a. 5, ad. 1: “Ad primum ergo dicendum quod nihil prohibet id quod est certius secundum naturam, esse quoad nos minus certum, propter debilitatem intellectus nostri, qui se habet ad manifestissima naturae, sicut oculus noctuae ad lumen solis, sicut dicitur in II *Metaphys.* Unde dubitatio quae accidit in aliquibus circa articulos fidei, non est propter incertitudinem rei, sed propter debilitatem intellectus humani. Et tamen minimum quod potest haberi de cognitione rerum altissimarum, desiderabilius est quam certissima cognitio quae habetur de minimis rebus, ut dicitur in XI de animalibus.” *Summa Contra Gentiles* I, 11; Cf. also, *ST* I, q. 64, a. 1, obj. 1; *ST* I-II, q. 102, a. 6, ad. 1. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* Ia, 1 (993b 9).

30. Cf. de Bruyne, *Études d’esthétique médiévale*, 2:281.

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tive faculties and beauty is the immediacy, or intuition, of delight issued from beautiful things. Although there is a temptation to read Thomas through the lens of a modern idiom, his use of the verb *placere* does not mean to give priority to the sensation associated with aesthetic experience. Of course, sensation is involved given the Aristotelian dimension in Thomas's theory of knowledge, but the delight so derived from sensation is continuous with that spiritual component to which it opens.

More instructive for understanding Thomas's use of *placere*, perhaps, is the content of chapter 1, book 2 of his *Summa Contra Gentiles*. The dating of this text is significant for establishing the possible correspondence here. It is certain that SCG book 2 could not have been completed before 1261.<sup>31</sup> As Kovach rightly notes, this would locate it in the same literary period as both the *Commentary on the Divine Names*, and the writing of the *Prima Pars* of the *Summa Theologiae*. Some scholars have proposed dating the *Commentary on the Divine Names* around 1261, allowing it to coincide with the writing of SCG book 2 and to be viewed as preparatory for the *Prima Pars*.<sup>32</sup> However, Wiesheipl suggests that the commentary text derives from lectures given to Dominican students in Rome between 1265 and 1268.<sup>33</sup> In any case, it appears most accurate to assert broadly that these texts all belong to a similar period in Thomas's literary career. This means that it is likely that some significant themes continually orbit the center of Thomas's intellect during this period.

Another significant fact to be taken into consideration with respect to how SCG book 2 might help to understand the meaning behind the *placent* is that the subject matter of this second book—Creation—corresponds to Thomas's account of “the beautiful” in his *Commentary on the Divine Names*, along with a great deal of how he configures *Sacra Doctrina* as a *scientia*. The Psalm citation with which Thomas opens the first chapter indicates the fact that all the works of divine creation are a delight: “I meditated upon all your works; I meditated upon the works of Your hands.”<sup>34</sup> Thomas's interpretation of this passage, which reflects the Dionysian distinction of God in himself and God in his act of creation, is made clear in the final section of the first chapter:

31. Cf. Torrel, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 1:102; Wiesheipl, *Friar Thomas D'Aquino*, 359–60.

32. E.g., Walz, *Saint Thomas d'Aquin*, 132–34.

33. Wiesheipl, *Friar Thomas D'Aquino*, 382.

34. SCG II, ch. 1: *Meditatus sum in omnibus operibus tuis, et in factis manuum tuarum meditabar*, Psalm 142.5.

In fact, this order we can gather from the words quoted above. For the Psalmist first speaks of meditation upon the first type of operation, when he says: "I have meditated on all Thy operations;" thus, operation is here referred to the divine act of understanding and will. Then he refers to the meditation on God's works: "and I meditated on the works of Thy hands;" so that by "the works of Thy hands" we understand heaven and earth, and all that is brought into being by God, as the handiwork produced by a craftsman.<sup>35</sup>

The distinction indicated in Thomas's reading of the Psalm reflects the distinction that appears in Thomas's reading of Dionysian beauty: on the one hand God's understanding and will (God in himself), and on the other hand all that is brought into being by divine handiwork (God in his act of creation). This is not to say that the distinction itself is anything unique to Thomas; it had become fairly common by the high Middle Ages. However, Thomas's use of this distinction to read the Psalm passage the way he does reflects a unique application of the Dionysian *Denkform*.

This reading also exhibits what becomes a primary element of Thomas's configuration of *Sacra Doctrina* as a *scientia*. The whole first question of the *Summa* sets to drawing out the various contours of this configuration. However, the final two articles bear particular significance for the point in question. In these final two articles Thomas examines issues that concern the way in which created things may become doorways into higher, more divine, phenomena. Article nine considers whether it is fitting for Scripture to use metaphors, while article ten considers the way in which the words of Scripture open to several senses. In both responses the Dionysian *Denkform*, represented both through Dionysius and St. Paul, provides the foundation.

In his response to the question of Scripture's use of metaphors (a. 9), Thomas reiterates an Aristotelian principle that forms the fundamental basis of his theory of knowledge: *omnis nostra cognitio a sensu initium habet*. Taken in itself there is little remarkable or extraordinary in his use of this principle. However, what is rather remarkable is the fact that he interprets this principle here through Dionysian symbolism without any

35. SCG II, ch. 1 [6]: Quem quidem ordinem ex praemissis verbis sumere possumus. Praemittit namque primae operationis meditationem, cum dicit, *meditatus sum in omnibus operibus tuis*: ut operatio ad divinum intelligere et velle referatur. Subiungit vero de factionis meditatione, cum dicit, *et in factis manuum tuarum meditabar*: ut per facta manuum ipsius intelligamus caelum et terram, et omnia quae procedunt in esse a Deo sicut ab artifice manufacta procedunt.

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reference to Aristotle. Immediately following the principle, Thomas continues: “Hence in Holy Scripture spiritual truths are fittingly taught under the likeness of material things. This is what Dionysius says: We cannot be enlightened by the divine rays except they be hidden within the coverings of many sacred veils.”<sup>36</sup> And, as he explains in his response to the second objector, communicating these higher, spiritual truths through sensible imagery does nothing to darken the illuminating ray of divine revelation embodied in the sensible imagery. Quite to the contrary, as he explains in the following article (a. 10), the sensible imagery communicates an abundance, or plenitude, of intelligible content.

The question addressed in article 10 is whether a word used in Holy Scripture may have several senses. The primary objection contends that a plurality of senses only leads to confusion and obscurity of the truth resulting in fallacy, which is unfitting for Scripture. Thomas’s response to the entire question exhibits the anagogy of *Sacra Doctrina* conceived as a *scientia*. “So whereas in every other science,” writes Thomas, “things are signified by words, this science has the unique property that the things signified by the words also signify something else.”<sup>37</sup> This sequence of signification, in which a word signifies an object of *Sacra Doctrina* and that object itself signifies something higher, demonstrates not only how in Thomas’s mind sensible images drawn from material things open to higher realities, but also how Dionysian anagogy is given a hermeneutical priority over Aristotelian *scientia*. To be sure, Thomas does not prioritize the plurality of senses in itself but rather firmly maintains that each of the senses is founded on the literal. In this case, the literal is a sort of *ratio proprio* for determining the other senses. The result, however, is neither a univocalizing of the literal nor an equivocating of the plurality of sense. Rather, it is a unity in plurality founded upon the literal sense.

Both the opening Psalm citation in book 2 of the *Contra Gentiles* and the Dionysian reading of *scientia* in the *Summa Theologiae* provide the most fitting foundation for understanding exactly what Thomas means by *placent*. What is it that pleases when seen, and what is the nature of such pleasure? Thomas takes it for granted that the encounter between the intellect and its object is *per se* a pleasure and that, as Dionysius himself

36. *STh* I, q. 1, a. 9: Unde convenienter in sacra Scriptura traduntur nobis spiritualia sub metaphoris corporalium. Et hoc est quod dicit Dionysius, I cap. caelestis hierarchiae, *impossibile est nobis aliter lucere divinum radium, nisi varietate sacrorum velaminum circumvelatum*.

37. *STh* I, a. 1, a. 10: Et ideo, cum in omnibus scientiis voces significant, hoc habet proprium ista scientia, quod ipsae res significatae per voces, etiam significant aliquid.

asserts, all things can become a help to contemplation.<sup>38</sup> Everything, then, has the potential to please when seen because everything opens to loftier, divine things. Those things that open more easily are therefore more beautiful, but Thomas is not declaring some universal rule as to what precisely such things might be. In other words, Thomas's *placere* formula neither reduces to something like modern subjectivity nor does it stress something like modern objectivity in the thing. Rather, there is a harmony between donation and recipient, between the given object and the perceiving subject. This harmony provokes the intellect into the type of contemplative meditation referred to by the Psalm that opens the *Contra Gentiles*, book 2 and therefore issues the activity of *scientia*. The extent to which this process reaches the level of *Sacra Doctrina* depends upon the object itself—that is to say, depends upon whether the object in question is in fact an object of divine revelation. But there is no reason to maintain that for Thomas, just as for Dionysius, ordinary objects cannot carry the intellect to loftier, other truths beyond their material constituency where various dimensions of divine revelation may be illuminated.

The contemplative dynamic of being, present in both Dionysius and Aquinas, derives from the correspondence between beauty and being. All that is created, that is to say all that is and therefore has being, is given to be by God through the power of beauty. In the beautiful, beauty's *claritas* and *consonantia* actualize themselves as a power of determination. This power is the very ground of all perception, both physical and intellectual. The beautiful is the manifestation of being's beauty, which is wholly bound up with being's status as the first similitude created by God. It is knowable in a way that exceeds determinate cognition, expressed for example in Thomas's notion of connatural knowledge acquired through habitude.<sup>39</sup>

As previous chapters explained, being for Dionysius is an intensive depth of perfection. This characterization derives from various hierarchical schema in Neoplatonic thought, most importantly "being," "life," and "intellect." In chapter 5, section 3 of his treatise, Dionysius responds to an objection that distinguishes the perfections being, life and wisdom so much as to infer a separation between them and to establish these modalities as if they were discrete hypostases. This objection misconceives the relation among these perfections of being in terms of extensive breadth

38. Dionysius the Areopagite, *On the Celestial Hierarchy*, 2, 4 (141D).

39. *STh I*, q. 1, a. 6 ad. 3; *STh II-II* q. 45, a. 2. On this mode of knowledge in Aquinas, see Maritain, *Degrees of Knowledge*, 260–63; *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry*, 117–25; *Range of Reason*, ch. 3.

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with no inner relativity. Dionysius corrects this by explaining that things with life also have being, only more fully, and things with wisdom also have being and life, only more fully. By virtue of its beauty, being is for Dionysius an intensive depth of perfection rather than an extensive breadth of discrete hypostases.

In Aquinas, this element is characterized by some scholars as *esse intensivum*, whereby the “ascending” extension of being into higher modes (being—life—wisdom) reflects the interior, intensive depth of being itself.<sup>40</sup> As Aquinas reads the matter, every higher level of being signifies a greater share or participation in the intensive depth of being’s perfections.<sup>41</sup> This is

40. Some of the earlier twentieth-century scholars who discovered this Dionysian influence upon Thomas’s notion of *esse* include Solignac, “La doctrine de l’esse chez saint Thomas,” 339–52; Fabro, *Participation et Causalité*, 229: “La source principale de la notion thomiste d’esse intensif est donc avant tout le mystérieux Auteur des *Areopagitica*”; and 508: “Toute la métaphysique thomiste de la participation est basée sur cette notion simple et inépuisable de l’esse: l’esse est l’acte premier intensif qui embrasse et contient tout.” As O’Rourke points out (*Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas*, 181), this confirms Fabro’s earlier view, expressed in *La nozione metafisica di partecipazione*, 89–90: “L’Angelico ama riferire all’*Areopagita* alcuni degli aspetti più profondi del suo sistema quali la nozione ‘intensiva’ dell’esse.” O’Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas*, 180–87; te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas*, 271.

41. *DN* 5, 1: *Secundo*, *ibi*: *sed si et cetera, solvit praemissam obiectionem; et dicit quod sermo praedictae obiectionis recte se haberet, si ea quae sunt intellectualia supponeret esse aliquis non existentia vel non esse viventia; tunc enim sicut esse praeemineret vitae et vita sapientiae, ita existentia praeeminerent viventibus et viventia sapientibus. Sed divinae mentes Angelorum non carent esse, quinimmo habent excellentius super alia existentia creata et habent vitam super alia viventia et intelligunt et cognoscunt super cognitionem sensus animalium et rationis humanae; et quantum ad ordinem ad bonum, super omnia existentia desiderant pulchrum et bonum; et non solum magis desiderant, quasi perfectius ordinatae in ipsum, sed eo magis participant, perfectiorem bonitatem actu habentes. His enim duobus modis, bonum in creaturis invenitur: aut secundum participationem actualem boni aut secundum ordinem ad bonum, sicut supra dictum est in 4 cap. quod bonum se extendit etiam ad non-ens actu. Unde rationabiliter substantiae angelicae magis sunt circa bonum divinum per quamdam appropinquationem ad ipsum, quasi abundantius ipso divino bono participant, quasi possidentes ab eo plura et maiora bona quam alia: plura quidem, quia habent intelligentiam quod multa non habent; maiora vero, quia ipsum esse et vivere quod alia habent, perfectius ab Angelis possidentur. This point also resonates in his *Super Lib. de causis*, p. 12 : Sed quia auctor huius libri non videtur ponere formas separatas, quod hic dicitur esse et vitam et intelligentiam in se invicem esse, est intelligendum secundum quod inveniuntur in habentibus esse, vivere et intelligere; quia in ipso esse secundum propriam rationem invenitur causaliter vivere et intelligere, secundum illum modum quo in 1 propositione dictum est quod esse est causa prima, vivere et intelligere posteriores causae. Non tamen ita est intelligendum sicut verba sonant, quod *intelligentia et vita sint in ipso esse duo esse*, sed quia haec duo, prout sunt in ipso*

why, as noted above, Thomas comes to conclude that only human beings, that is to say only rational souls, can fully enjoy beauty.<sup>42</sup> As that *ratio* of being that orients the good to the cognitive faculties, beauty can only be fully experienced by a creature whose cognitive faculties are created to respond to the good in this way.<sup>43</sup> Non-rational animals may respond to the good via sensation, but they cannot go further. Nor can they, therefore, experience truth since truth derives from a more complete orientation of the good through beauty to the cognitive powers.

But the rational soul may still enjoy the good on a purely sensible level. As a fullness or plenitude of intelligibility, the whole of being insofar as it is good appeals to the “lower” faculties of desire in order to continually woo the creature toward the good itself. Insofar as the good appeals to “higher,” more intellectual oriented faculties, it assumes the *ratio* of beauty as “the beautiful.” Thomas expresses this in a reiteration of the *placent* formula later in the *Summa Theologiae*:

The beautiful is the same as the good, only differing in *ratio*. For since the good is that which all things desire, concerning its *ratio* it is that in which the appetite comes to rest; but with respect to the *ratio* of the beautiful pertains that in which the appetite comes to rest in its cognitive aspect. Wherefore those senses especially provide for the beautiful, which are the most cognitive, viz. sight and hearing, as ministering to reason; for we speak of beautiful sights and beautiful sounds. But in reference to the other objects of the other senses, we do not use the name “beauty,” for we do not speak of beautiful tastes, and beautiful odors. And thus it appears that the beautiful adds upon the good, a certain order to the cognitive power, so that good is called that which is pleasing to the appetite; however, that, the apprehension of which itself gives pleasure, is called the beautiful.<sup>44</sup>

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esse, non sunt aliud quam esse, et similiter esse, prout est in vita, est ipsa vita, cum vita nihil addat supra esse nisi determinatum modum essendi seu determinatam naturam entis. Et idem intelligendum est in aliis comparationibus secundum quas unum istorum dicitur esse in alio.

42. *STh* I, q. 91, a. 3, ad. 3.

43. *De Veritate* q. 22, a. 1, ad. 13.

44. *STh* I-II, q. 27, a. 1, ad. 3: Ad tertium dicendum 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. Unde et illi sensus praecipue respiciunt pulchrum, qui maxime cognoscitivi sunt, scilicet visus et auditus rationi deservientes, dicimus enim pulchra visibilia et pulchros sonos. In sensibilibus autem aliorum sensuum, non

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This passage implies a certain ordering of the sense faculties reflective of being's intensive depth. In one way, all five sense faculties mark an initial point of encounter between the rational soul and the extra-mental world. Since *bonum* corresponds to the appetitive powers and *pulchrum* corresponds to the cognitive powers, to the extent that appetite is distinct from cognition *bonum* is equally distinct from *pulchrum*. The lower senses of taste, touch and smell respond to the good. The higher faculties of seeing and hearing, however, respond to beauty, which is a more intensive depth of being's perfection. Seeing and hearing are intensifications of the sense power by which perceptive content is elevated toward the even higher intellect. It is through these sense faculties that being can be contemplated as a communication of beauty, indicating the ascent into being's depth that beauty provides to the intellect. This ascent becomes completed more fully in the adequation between being and mind identified as the essence of truth. It might be said that truth is the *ratio* of being whereby a more complete determination of being's plenitude is given over the structures of discursive, conceptual reason.<sup>45</sup>

When situated within the context of the *Divine Names* commentary, Thomas's *placent* formula corresponds to the beautiful as referring to that which participates beauty, and to beauty through its participants. It is a way of establishing the "middle" sense in which beauty communicates itself through the beautiful. As a principle of determination, the beautiful identifies the divine power as a mode of being that gives form to all created entities. By virtue of this determination, being not only attracts desire more profoundly into its intensive depth, but it communicates the necessary content allowing it to be rendered knowable. By rendering being knowable, however, the beautiful actualizes its anagogical power initiating the intellect's ascent into being's intensive depth. Thomas's second formula from the *Summa Theologia* corresponds to this moment.

### *The Tria Requiritur Formula*

Perhaps Thomas's most well-known passage on beauty is found in his treatise on the Trinity, *Prima Pars*, question 39, article 8. In a part of the *respondeo*, Thomas provides the necessary conditions for beauty, which

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utimur nomine pulchritudinis, non enim dicimus pulchros saporis aut odores. Et sic patet quod pulchrum addit supra bonum, quendam ordinem ad vim cognoscitivam, ita quod bonum dicatur id quod simpliciter complacet appetitui; pulchrum autem dicatur id cuius ipsa apprehensio placet.

45. Cf. *De Veritate* q. 15, a., 1; *STh* I, q. 16, a. 1; q. 39, a. 8.

is to say the conditions necessary for beauty both to manifest itself and to become perceivable. *Tria requiruntur* is a phrase commonly used by the schoolmen to designate the conditions that, rather than being merely sufficient, are the *sine qua non* for the particular phenomenon in question.

The popularity of Thomas's configuration of beauty found in this passage is evident from its widespread use and application among modern scholars interested in Thomas's views of beauty. What justifies characterizing it as a "formula" is the fact that almost every scholar who appeals to it abstracts it from its broader context. It is then applied as if Thomas were, in modern fashion, speaking philosophically about beauty as such, attempting to provide a definition for what is beautiful. As a result of its becoming formulaic, it acquires an "aesthetic" sense in the modern understanding of the term. This modern understanding of the *tria requiruntur* formula renders the formula primarily a philosophical doctrine intended to establish the aesthetic conditions within which beauty may be perceived. However, a closer examination of the passage reveals the way in which this formula stands upon a Trinitarian, and so theological, foundation that includes a significant divine names dimension.

Adopted primarily from Hilary of Poitiers,<sup>46</sup> beauty in Thomas's explanation is most fundamentally a metaphysical dynamic applied to the second person of the Trinity (the Son) enabling a *logos* of the *μεταξὺ*. That is to say, beauty is not applied to the Son *ab extra*, as if the Son were simply the most beautiful of all in creation. Rather, beauty is itself a metaphysical matrix in which the complex association between an image and its archetype may be illuminated insofar as this association—in all of its creaturely modes—originates in the Son's relation to the Father. As will be explained in what follows, it is by virtue of the tradition of beauty, especially insofar as it is presented in the tradition of divine names theology, that thinking may be transfigured into a *logos* of the *μεταξὺ* so as to become capable of examining loftier theological mysteries.

Question 39 of Thomas's *Prima Pars* concerns the persons of the Trinity in reference to the essence.<sup>47</sup> One of the general themes that runs

46. See Hilary of Poitiers, *De Trinitate*, bk. II [PL 10, col. 51A], in which he explains the Son as the image of the Father through a metaphysic of beauty.

47. *STh* I, q. 39, proemium: Post ea quae de personis divinis absolute tractata sunt, *considerandum restat de personis in comparatione ad essentiam*, et ad proprietates, et ad actus notionales; et de comparatione ipsarum ad invicem. Quantum igitur ad primum horum, octo quaeruntur. Primo, utrum essentia in divinis sit idem quod persona. Secundo, utrum dicendum sit quod tres personae sunt unius essentiae. Tertio, utrum nomina essentialia praedicanda sint de personis in plurali vel in singulari. Quarto, utrum adiectiva notionalia, aut verba vel participia, praedicari possint de nominibus

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throughout this question involves how human thought is capable of naming, that is to say thinking and signifying, the persons and essence of the Trinity. Thomas's final article of the question inquires whether or not the Holy Doctors, of whom Thomas means Hillary,<sup>48</sup> Augustine<sup>49</sup> and the authors of Scripture (John 14:6; Ps 39:9; Isa 65:1), fittingly appropriate the essential attributes to the persons of the Trinity. His response, in which the *tria requiruntur* formula is situated, involves a remarkable effort to unify these various appropriations of attributes to the persons of the Trinity.

The principle that Aquinas uses to unify these various appropriations, a principle that again reflects the metaphysical analogy of the *placent* formula and is one that he often invokes, is the fact that "it is necessary for our intellect, which is led to knowledge of God from creatures, to consider God according to the mode derived from creatures."<sup>50</sup> He proceeds to specify more precisely just what this consideration of God derived from creatures involves:

Now, in considering any creature four things occur to us by a particular order. First, the thing itself is considered absolutely insofar as it is a certain being. Secondly, there is a consideration of the thing insofar as it is one. Thirdly, there is a consideration of the thing according to what is in it by its power of operating and causing. In a fourth way, there is a consideration of the thing according to its habitude toward what it causes. Hence, this fourfold consideration occurs to our mind concerning God.<sup>51</sup>

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essentialibus concretive acceptis. Quinto, utrum praedicari possint de nominibus essentialibus in abstracto acceptis. Sexto, utrum nomina personarum praedicari possint de nominibus essentialibus concretis. Septimo, utrum essentialia attributa sint approprianda personis. Octavo, quod attributum cuique personae debeat appropriari. Emphasis added.

48. As noted already, Hillary of Poitiers, *De Trinitate*, bk. II [PL 10, col. 51A].

49. Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, bk. I, 5 [PL 34, col. 21]; *De Trinitate*, bk. VI, ch. 10 [PL 42, col. 932].

50. *STh* I, q. 39, a. 8: Respondeo dicendum quod intellectus noster, qui ex creaturis in Dei cognitionem manuducitur, oportet quod Deum consideret secundum modum quem ex creaturis assumit.

51. *STh* I, q. 39, a. 8: In consideratione autem alicuius creaturae, quatuor per ordinem nobis occurrunt. Nam primo, consideratur res ipsa absolute, inquantum est ens quoddam. Secunda autem consideratio rei est, inquantum est una. Tertia consideratio rei est, secundum quod inest ei virtus ad operandum et ad causandum. Quarta autem consideratio rei est, secundum habitudinem quam habet ad causata. Unde haec etiam quadruplex consideratio circa Deum nobis occurrit.

This fourfold division bears a notable resemblance to Thomas's explanation of the causality of the beautiful outlined in his *Commentary on the Divine Names* 4, 6. There, it will be recalled, Thomas describes the causality of the beautiful in a fourfold sense: as concerns being (*esse*), one or unity, order (i.e., action, existence of a thing in itself and mutual indwelling) and rest/motion. The above scheme he implements in the *Summa* contains a slight alteration in terminology most significantly with respect to the fourth consideration. However, as noted earlier, rest/motion as it appears in the *Divine Names* commentary concerns the relation that God has to what is caused by the beautiful. The terminological alteration does not appear, then, to introduce an alteration of meaning.

Already a few conclusions may be drawn concerning the context in which the *tria requiruntur* formula is given. If a measure of the degree of fittingness is to be acquired with respect to how Hillary, Augustine, and Scripture appropriate essential attributes to the persons of the Trinity, one must begin—as is often the case with Aquinas—from what is given in creatures. However, given the correspondence between the fourfold consideration that Thomas uses here and the fourfold causality of the beautiful that appears in the *Divine Names* commentary, it might prove helpful to inquire what this correspondence means with respect to the consideration of God through creatures. What, if anything, does the beautiful reveal about the way to God through creatures being invoked in this passage?

First of all, as it did with *scientia* in the opening question of the *Summa*, this way to God indicates in this passage the prevailing influence of Dionysian symbolism constituted by an inherent anagogical dynamic. Creatures, in this sense, uplift the intellect toward God insofar as they serve as channels for the divine communication itself. In the *Proemium* of his *Divine Names* commentary, when Thomas distinguishes the method of the *Symbolic Theology* from the method of *On the Divine Names*, he in effect distinguishes the two ways by which the divine communicates through created beings.<sup>52</sup> One way, which marks the method of Dionysius's treatise *Symbolic Theology*, translates (*translatum*) symbols from creatures to God. Another way, which marks the method of Dionysius's treatise *On the Divine Names*, investigates the perfections in creatures that are derived (*derivatur*) from God. The question then becomes, is Thomas here employing a "theology of symbolism" or a "theology of divine names"? The terminology itself offers no clear answer. In the *Summa* passage under consideration, Thomas uses the verb *assumere*, rather than either *trans-*

52. See ch. 10 above.

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*lare* or *derivare* that were used in his *Commentary on the Divine Names*. The only data available for a sufficient conjecture would be the fact that Thomas could not have read the *Symbolic Theology* (a lost treatise) and the fact that he writes a commentary on the *Divine Names*. This evidence may not be sufficient to conclude with absolute certainty that Thomas is using a “theology of divine names” over and against a “theology of symbolism.” However, it does provide sufficient evidence to conclude that Thomas’s way up here is not exclusive to a “theology of symbolism.” It is therefore plausible to suggest that Thomas’s thinking in this passage may include a synthesis of both (a suggestion that seems verified by what he writes about the divine names in the *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 13, as. 1–6).

Second, if the way to God derived from creatures in the *Summa* passage under consideration is read in terms of a divine name theology—that is to say, if it is not an exclusive, unilateral movement from creatures to God—then the use of the fourfold causality of the beautiful indicates the role that God performs in the anagogical process. The causality of the beautiful is such that the beautiful things that are caused participate in beauty as such, not in such a way that the beautiful thing shares only a part of beauty. Rather, the fullness of beauty, or beauty in its entirety, is participated by every beautiful thing. This means that creatures can be both objects in themselves available for the philosophical inquiry of unaided reason, but they can also be symbols of divine communication available for the theological inquiry through grace. As beautiful, which is to say as objects of beauty, creatures provoke both the natural impulse that constitutes the activity of normal *scientia* but also the desire to go beyond this to the *scientia* that constitutes *Sacra Doctrina*. Creatures become objects of inquiry both in themselves but also insofar as they communicate divine things. In so provoking such a desire, however, the beauty of creatures reveals the way in which cognition opens toward the more unifying power of love. In this context, then, it might also be said that as beautiful, creatures provoke not only the activity of the mind but also the receptivity of the heart. Both knowledge and love become necessary in this way to God through creatures, not as two separate activities but as one continuous activity of the intellect.<sup>53</sup>

With his fourfold scheme in place, Thomas aligns the various Holy Fathers’ appropriations with each of the four ways in which God is considered. The appropriation mentioned by Hillary—that *aeternitas* is in the

53. See *STh* I-II, a. 22, a. 2; II-II, q. 27, a. 2, ad. 2; II-II, q. 27, a. 4, ad. 4; *SCG*, 4:19; *De Ver.* q. 22, a. 3, ad. 4; q. 22, a. 11, ad. 5 & 7.

Father, *species* in the Son, and *usus* in the Holy Spirit—applies to the first consideration, God considered absolutely in his being. The *tria requiruntur* formula is found in Thomas's explanation as to why *species* or beauty (*pulchritudo*) has a proper similitude with the Son:

For with regard to beauty, there are three necessary conditions. First, certainly, wholeness or completeness, for some things which are impaired are ugly because of this; second, due proportion or harmony; and third clarity from which some things have a bright color, and thus are said to be beautiful.<sup>54</sup>

In order to further explain these three necessary conditions, Thomas applies the threefold scheme of nature, image and word. Each of the three necessary conditions corresponds to one of the elements in this threefold scheme: *integritas* corresponds to nature, *proportio* or *consonantia* corresponds to image, and *claritas* corresponds to word. A closer examination of these pairings will throw light on the *tria requiruntur* formula as a whole.

*Integritas*, he explains, has a likeness to the property of the Son insofar as the Son has in himself truly and perfectly the nature of the Father.<sup>55</sup> This is the only place where Aquinas uses the term *integritas* to refer to beauty or the beautiful, though there are areas of his corpus where similar ideas appear.<sup>56</sup> Some claim that these other passages have misled scholars into erroneous interpretations of what Aquinas means by *integritas*, wrongly believing that beauty somehow involves quite literally having a great size, or possessing the capacity to impress the faculties.<sup>57</sup> Others

54. *STh* I, q. 39, a. 8: Nam 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.

55. *STh* I, q. 39, a. 8: Quantum igitur ad primum, similitudinem habet cum proprio filii, in quantum est filius habens in se vere et perfecte naturam patris.

56. E.g., *In Comm. Eth.* bk. 4, l. 8, n. 4, where Thomas explains Aristotle's assertion regarding the relation between beauty and size. Also, *In I Sent.* d. 31, q. 2, a. 1, contains a prototype, one might say, of what appears here in the *Summa Theologia* I, q. 39, a. 8. In this Sentences passage, Aquinas equally exposit Hillary's appropriation of attributes to the person of the Trinity. From Dionysius he takes *claritas* and *consonantia*, but states "his duobus addit tertium philosophus ubi dicit, quod pulchritudo non est nisi in magno corpore; unde parvi homines possunt dici commensurati et formosi, sed non pulchri."

57. E.g., Eco, *Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*, 248n85, asserts that de Bruyne wrongly interprets *integritas* as a superabundance of being based upon the Sentences commentary passage, and that Cardinal Mercier "crudely" claims that *integritas* means

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claim that *integritas* indicates the necessity of apprehending a thing in its wholeness, which, according to some interpretations means isolating it from the perpetual flux and fluidity of its being.<sup>58</sup> Each of these appears to bring something important to understanding *integritas* in this regard. It is also possible to examine, as Kovach does, other areas where Aquinas discusses *perfectio* to discover clues as to what is meant by *integritas* in this *Summa* passage.<sup>59</sup>

When the Trinitarian context is taken into consideration, however, the Son's manifestation of the nature of the Father becomes normative for interpreting *integritas* as a necessary condition of beauty. The question then becomes what is particular to the Son with respect to the persons of the Trinity? The answer according to Thomas is that among the persons of the Trinity, it is unique to the Son to be the one that proceeds. In thus proceeding, the Son "speaks" the whole Trinity as well as every creature that was, that is, or that will be.<sup>60</sup> In this sense, the Son has in himself truly and perfectly the nature of the Father, though without being identical to the Father. In the Son, the full and complete nature of the Father proceeds without merely duplicating the Father (such that there would be two Fathers) or being simply identical to the Father (such that there really is no Son). Nor is it the case that in the Son everything of the Father is immediately and exhaustively revealed (such that there really is no longer a Father).

So what precisely is the dynamic within this relation that makes it most fitting with respect to beauty? In proceeding from the Father, the Son stands as a complete communication of the Father without either being identical to the Father or exhausting everything of the Father. The Son precisely is the *integritas* (wholeness) of the Father because his concrete manifestation is a perfect showing of the Father. The perfection of its showing consists in its single, concrete communicated form but only as this form derives from the Fatherly plenitude to which it analogically refers and upon which it ontologically depends.

As the archetype of beauty, the Son's dynamic is normative for all events of beauty. This dynamic is repeated in a creaturely context when

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a beautiful object must be "spacious and potent and able to stimulate the faculties vigorously."

58. This is the view advanced by James Joyce as evident in his *Stephen Hero* and his *Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man*, both cited in Eco, *Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*, 249n85.

59. Kovach, *Die Ästhetik Des Thomas von Aquin*, 108–9.

60. *STh* I, q. 34, a. 2, ad. 3.

any beautiful thing participates beauty. What makes the participant beauty-filled, one might say, is a procession from beauty itself as a creaturely recapitulation of the Son's procession. Like the Son's relation to the nature of the Father, the beautiful thing *qua* beautiful has truly and perfectly the nature of beauty though in a way that neither merely reduplicates beauty nor is identical to beauty itself. As the Son's procession communicates a distinction in the Father while being the true and perfect nature of the Father, so a beautiful thing communicates a distinction in beauty even as it communicates the true and perfect nature of beauty.

This allows the other interpretations noted above to be brought into a synthesis: *integritas* indicates the superabundant plenitude that somehow appears in the proceeding beautiful thing and it is an appearance that proceeds into conditions necessary for the conception of the perceiving subject.<sup>61</sup> Thus beauty, insofar as it involves *integritas*, conveys a likeness to the Son insofar as a thing's beauty communicates truly and perfectly the nature of beauty by proceeding. Such a procession refers inherently to both the one proceeding (the beautiful thing, the discrete entity isolated from the flux of its fluidity) and that from which it proceeds (beauty itself, the superabundance of its being). Thomas's explanations of *perfectio* found elsewhere can be synthesized along with this interpretation. *Perfectio*, as Thomas understands it, involves completion. A thing is called perfect to the extent that it lacks nothing it ought to have by virtue of its nature.<sup>62</sup> A thing's beauty involves a communication of its perfection. The superabundance of a thing's being, from which it proceeds, is not always present and perceivable. In its being beautiful, however, a given entity always discloses the excess of its being wherein lies its greater perfection. Thomas's identification between a thing's perfection and its goodness, then, also makes sense within such an interpretation.<sup>63</sup>

In examining the second necessary condition, Thomas explains that *proportio* or *consonantia* "agrees with the Son's property, inasmuch as he

61. Cf. *STh* III, q. 3, a. 8, where Thomas characterizes the Son as the "eternal concept" of the Father: Respondeo dicendum quod convenientissimum fuit personam filii incarnari. Primo quidem, ex parte unionis. Convenienter enim ea quae sunt similia, ununtur. Ipsius autem personae filii, qui est verbum Dei, attenditur, uno quidem modo, communis convenientia ad totam creaturam. Quia verbum artificis, idest *conceptus eius*, est similitudo exemplaris eorum quae ab artifice fiunt. Unde verbum Dei, quod est *aeternus conceptus eius*, est similitudo exemplaris totius creaturae. Emphasis added.

62. *STh* I, q. 4, a. 1; *STh* I, q. 91, a. 3, ad. 2.

63. *SCG* I, ch. 38; *STh* I, q. 5, a. 1; *STh* I, q. 4, preamb.

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is the express image of the Father.”<sup>64</sup> In explaining this necessary condition, Aquinas provides what is perhaps one of his most overtly “aesthetic” assertions: “Wherefore we see that something is said to be beautiful if it perfectly represents the thing, even if the thing is ugly.”<sup>65</sup> Once again, in order to discern the depths of meaning behind this necessary condition, some have searched every passage where Thomas discusses *proportio* and *consonantia*.<sup>66</sup> However, it might be more revealing to look to his explanation regarding the relation between the image and the Son.

Thomas explains that the *ratio* of an image includes a similitude of species, or at least some sign of the species,<sup>67</sup> which is to say, a manifestation of the difference that the image bears from its exemplar or archetype. However, beyond this, an image must also contain the intelligible content of its origin, for as Augustine remarks, one egg cannot be an image of another egg despite bearing a similitude of species.<sup>68</sup> Thomas concludes that “for a true image it is required that one thing proceed from another like to it in species, or at least in specific sign.”<sup>69</sup> What this means, as evident from Thomas’s citation of Augustine, is that an image must bear both the difference carried by the species, but also the unity to the origin from which the image derives. In the absence of either of these, the image falls short of conveying the truth it is supposed to convey. As Thomas elsewhere indicates, his understanding of image does not understand it as a perfect likeness.<sup>70</sup> An image, in other words, is not a univocal communication but rather an analogical one. To understand an image as a perfect likeness is to employ some idealized abstract norm (which as ideal has no referent in actual existence) that is then used to measure all images. For Thomas, the Son is the perfection of image insofar as the Son proceeds as a distinction

64. *STh* q. 39, a. 8: Quantum vero ad secundum, convenit cum proprio filii, in quantum est imago expressa patris.

65. *STh* q. 39, a. 8: Unde videmus quod aliqua imago dicitur esse pulchra, si perfecte repraesentat rem, quamvis turpem.

66. E.g., Eco, *Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*, 71–98; Kovach, *Die Ästhetik Des Thomas von Aquin*, 116–22.

67. *STh* q. 35, a. 1: de ratione imaginis est similitudo. Non tamen quaecumque similitudo sufficit ad rationem imaginis; sed similitudo quae est in specie rei, vel saltem in aliquo signo speciei.

68. *STh* q. 35, a. 1: Sed neque ipsa similitudo speciei sufficit vel figurae; sed requiritur ad rationem imaginis origo, quia, ut Augustinus dicit in libro octoginta trium quaest., unum ovum non est imago alterius, quia non est de illo expressum.

69. *STh* q. 35, a. 1: Ad hoc ergo quod vere aliquid sit imago, requiritur quod ex alio procedat simile ei in specie, vel saltem in signo speciei.

70. *STh* q. 35, a. 2, ad. 1.

of the Father but with the complete nature of the Father. Thomas's understanding of image, then, must begin and end in his Trinitarian theology of the Son; no other image exists outside the Son that could be imported so as to measure the image-ness of the Son. The Son is, one might say, image-ness itself, or subsistent image.

As the image than which no greater image can be thought, the Son also perfectly communicates *proportio* or *consonantia* as a perfection of representation—not according to some abstractly conceived blueprint of a given thing, but according to that nature of a thing itself—what it is intended to be in the divine mind. This divine intention, however, always necessarily includes the thing's superabundant excess of being. This is why an image can be beautiful even if it represents something ugly. For even if a thing is ugly, there remains a beauty embedded within its potential, or as-yet-to-be-realized, image(s) insofar as any such image, in proceeding, manifests—in its harmony between distinction and unity—the thing's proportion to its superabundant origin (*integritas*). Its ugliness, in other words, is not part of the thing's nature, but itself derives from a failure of *proportio* or *consonantia*.

Finally, *claritas* agrees with the Son insofar as the Son is the Word of the Father. Aquinas follows John of Damascus when he explains that a word is the “light and splendor of the intellect.”<sup>71</sup> A word, as Aquinas explains elsewhere, is both that which is conceived in the mind and that which communicates what is thus conceived. As it is in the mind, a word is “representative of everything that is understood.”<sup>72</sup> Although in the human mind, many words are necessary to represent all that is understood, in God “His one only Word is expressive not only of the Father, but of all creatures.”<sup>73</sup> Although the Word's expressivity in God does not have a corresponding causal operation (the Word does not cause the Father to be), insofar as the Word is expressive of creatures it also causes creature to be.

71. *STh* q. 39, a. 8: Quantum vero ad tertium, convenit cum proprio filii, in quantum est verbum, quod quidem lux est, et splendor intellectus, ut Damascenus dicit. Et hoc tangit Augustinus cum dicit, *tanquam verbum perfectum cui non desit aliquid, et ars quaedam omnipotentis Dei*, et cetera.

72. *STh* q. 34, a. 3: Verbum autem in mente conceptum, est repraesentativum omnis eius quod actu intelligitur.

73. *STh* q. 34, a. 3: Unde in nobis sunt diversa verba, secundum diversa quae intelligimus. Sed quia Deus uno actu et se et omnia intelligit, unicum verbum eius est expressivum non solum patris, sed etiam creaturarum. Et sicut Dei scientia Dei quidem est cognoscitiva tantum, creaturarum autem cognoscitiva et factiva; ita verbum Dei eius quod in Deo patre est, est expressivum tantum, creaturarum vero est expressivum et operativum.

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If, then, *claritas* agrees with the property of the Son insofar as the Son is the Word, and if as the Word the Son is expressive of the Father and causally expressive of all creatures, it follows that as a necessary condition for beauty *claritas* refers to that same dynamic in an analogous way: a thing is beautiful when it expresses its intelligible content and when such expression generates creative causality. Perceiving a thing's beauty, in other words, is an encounter that stimulates an intellectual union between knower and thing known allowing the intellect to engage in causal activity. It is the beauty of the thing that not only illuminates the perceiving intellect but that also elevates the perceiving intellect more profoundly into the beautiful thing's intelligible content where its potential to generate images of itself resides.

One final aspect of the Trinitarian context is worth noting. In the same way that nature, image and word are not three separate features of the Son but are unified in the Son, so too are the three necessary conditions of beauty unified in the beautiful object. As providing the necessary conditions for beauty, Thomas's *tria requiruntur* formula could give the impression that it is intended to be a conceptual instrument of the mind used to determine whether something is or is not beautiful. The Trinitarian context in which the formula is embedded suggests otherwise. In the same way that no notion of nature, image, or word external to the Son can be used to measure these attributes as they exist in the Son, so neither can a notion of *integritas* or *perfectio*, *proportio* or *consonantia*, and *claritas* external to beauty be used to measure beauty's communication of these necessary conditions. Rather, these necessary conditions arrive with beauty's appearance.

Similar to the Son's incarnation, beautiful objects surprise in their appearing, often disrupting an otherwise conventional flow of events. In so doing, they announce beauty by means of the three necessary conditions that Thomas proposes. An encounter with a beautiful object is an encounter with an event in which *integritas*, *proportio*, and *claritas* are communicated. It is an event that is marked by a procession analogous to the procession of the Son from the Father. A thing proceeds out of the original surplus of being that is its ontological source. As a procession, the beautiful thing communicates, in whatever capacity it is able, this excess of original content—the fullness or completeness of its being, the perpetual well spring of its existence. It communicates this, however, as a perpetual conception available to the limitations of the intellect. It therefore bears the first necessary condition of *integritas* insofar as its manifestation as a

conceptual possibility also conveys the superabundant excess of its origin. And in this sense, it is also an image in that it communicates a likeness or similitude of this original superabundant excess of being. As an image of its original exemplar, its procession engenders and manifests a *proportio* that includes a specific difference, an origin, and the harmony between the two. The beautiful thing, therefore, bears the second necessary condition of *proportio*. Finally, this *proportio* between the integral thing and its original excess is also a manifestation of the thing's intelligible content. In revealing this intelligible content, the beautiful thing imitates the Word not only by expressing its own intelligible content but also by expressing it in such a way so as to prompt creative causality. The beauty of the thing is precisely that excess of intelligible content that stimulates cognitive union between itself and the percipient. This union, then, gives rise to the perceiving intellect's desire to be creatively causal, to the extent it can, by generating images from the excess of the beautiful object's intelligible content. The beauty of a tree, for instance, can give rise to an image as an ornamental symbol of a holiday (Christmas), an image of a useful support for various activities (table), or perhaps material participation in the image of a house (as wood). No matter the example, the various images that any given thing is capable of manifesting reside latent in the surplus of its intelligible content. Through the three necessary conditions, this intelligible content reveals itself as beautiful.

One final noteworthy aspect of the *tria requiruntur* formula merits mention. The three necessary conditions it stipulates apply in equal measure to both beauty and the Son. The context is one in which Thomas sets out to explain how Hillary's appropriation of *species* to the Son is in fact fitting. His explanation boils down to the fact that the three necessary conditions for beauty are found in their most superlative mode in the person of the Son, which is to say, in the Son's relation to the Father. This at once identifies the Son as beauty itself. The three necessary conditions, then, reveal not only the presence of beauty but the presence of the divine in the person of the Son. Consequently, the *tria requiruntur* formula can be said to implement both a theology of symbols and a theology of divine names. In this sense, beauty for Aquinas can also be said to be in between the divinity of the Son and the createdness of creatures, not in a sense as being removed from both, but in the sense of reciprocity between the two.

## Conclusion

Beauty as a divine name is an important as well as complex issue in the thought of Thomas Aquinas. His intellectual inheritance bequeaths to him a relation between beauty and God that establishes both the way in which God communicates with the world, and the way in which the world receives this communication. The whole of the *Divine Name* treatise centers on this fundamental theological element. As the *Corpus Dionysiacum* travels from the world of late antiquity into the high Middle Ages, this issue undergoes significant development. The various dimensions of beauty that are present in the *Divine Names* become a metaphysical foundation for understanding the divine/creaturely mediation that stands at the heart of Christian theology. Beauty is understood as the divine perfection by which God makes himself visible and intelligible in the formal constitution of all created entities.

Albert the Great examines this issue with more precision than most thinkers of his time. Through his analysis, beauty reveals a dialectic by which the divine descent into formal constitution draws a given entity ever higher back toward the divine source itself. Beauty is conceived as a principle of determination, but also as a plenitude of intelligibility and an analogical power. In his *Commentary on the Divine Names*, Albert brings beauty into closer identity with God by locating it between the good and the true—beauty, for Albert, is the truth of the good, or to put it another way, the good insofar as the good is in process of acquiring the *ratio* “truth.”

Aquinas’s reading of the *Divine Names* remains faithful to the fundamental Dionysian content even if Aquinas does dress it in the clothing of scholastic expression. As a thinker of the high middle ages, Aquinas brings to his reading concerns and issues that occupy the general consciousness of this epoch. Quite clearly, he is not going to recognize every possible dimension of the text. Thomas therefore emphasizes what he believes is a central concern for Dionysius in writing the treatise—namely, to illuminate the intelligibility of the divine names.

With respect to the name beauty, Thomas builds upon the work of many of his predecessors, especially Albert. He adds a crucial cognitive dimension to beauty, however, not because he wants to rationalize it but because beauty is an indelible dimension of Thomas’s metaphysical approach to God. For Thomas, as for Albert, beauty is in between the good and the true. Beauty for Aquinas is the *ratio* of being that allows the good to be ordered toward the cognitive powers of the rational intellect. Beauty

is a principle of determination insofar as it provides the necessary conditions wherein a thing's intelligibility becomes perceivable.

Based on all this, beauty as a divine name in Aquinas is a fundamental feature of not only his metaphysics, but of his entire theology. Most significantly, although it is possible to abstract Thomas's doctrine of beauty from Thomas's theological thought in an effort to fashion a Thomistic philosophy of beauty, the result is something far from Thomas's own teaching. What is revealed in the *Summa* is a properly theological account of beauty rooted in Thomas's Trinitarian theology. In beauty, God communicates himself to creation by ordering the excess or plenitude of divine goodness so as to be visible or intelligible to the human intellect. This stimulates the cognitive desire that expresses itself as one singular, intellectual momentum toward God. This intellectual momentum consists of two interrelated moments of knowledge and love. Beauty, then, is the divine name that unites the love of the heart with the knowledge of the head in the single pursuit of the divine.

# I 3

## Conclusion

### *Beauty as the Between*

THE PRECEDING EXAMINATION OF BEAUTY AS A DIVINE NAME HAS GENERATED a multiplicity of ways of understanding more precisely the nature of beauty, as well as the nature of a divine name. The primary argument that has guided this study, which contends that these two dimensions interpenetrate one another, can be summarized as follows: given the degree of the Dionysian influence on the development of theology in the Latin West, and given the transmission of beauty through the divine name tradition contained therein, beauty in the Christian intellectual tradition is most fundamentally a theological phenomenon—beauty has, that is, an inherent and essential association with God.

Beauty's association with the divine begins as early as the Platonic origins of philosophical reflection, and carries on through Plato's posterity in Aristotle and Neoplatonism. However, despite the numerous remarkable achievements of Greek philosophy, beauty remains for these philosophers elusive and ambiguous on account of its inherent association with both the spiritual and the material. Indeed, as this study has suggested, one of the great contributions of Greek thought to reflections on beauty includes the way that it draws out with startling clarity the ambiguity that permeates the phenomenon of beauty especially in its association with the divine. Lacking a principle by which the inherent spiritual and material dimensions of beauty may be intermediated—that is to say, mediated within itself rather than by means of a higher ideal—Greek thought oscillates within the confines of its own unbidden equivocity on the matter. Plato tends toward a more spiritual emphasis, while Aristotle's thought develops toward a more material emphasis. Neither figure, however, concludes decisively on the issue and beauty remains suspended in between the eternal, spiritual world of ideas and essences, and the transient, material world of

every day phenomena. With the more religious configuration of Platonic and Aristotelian thought in Neoplatonism, this suspension itself is crystallized as a paradigmatic middle. As such, however, it never directly and unequivocally comes to identify the One Good, but remains an ontologically secondary principle.

Throughout the biblical Judeo-Christian account of God's personal relationship with the world, beauty plays an important though textually subtle role. Many of the dimensions of beauty that are found in Greek philosophical reflection can be discerned throughout the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. From the Genesis account of creation, to the Exodus account of God's personal name, to the Wisdom account of divine ordering, to the various account of divine light, to the Pauline account of anagogy, the many dimensions of "beauty" drawn out in Greek thought are present throughout. But this biblical account is not intended as a systematic, theoretical reflection upon ideas. It is rather a testimony of God's loving intimacy with what he creates. Quite naturally, the task of discerning its contents in terms of ideas, principles, and concepts bears unique challenges and difficulties.

In the Dionysian project, the synthesis between Greek philosophy and biblical thought marks a unique achievement for theological inquiry into, reflection on, and contemplation of beauty. This is not because he is the first to attempt and achieve such a synthesis; from as early as John's Gospel, Greek and biblical thought are brought together in Christian reflection. Rather the uniqueness of the Dionysian achievement must be located in the identification of God as beauty itself through the addition of beauty to the list of divine names. When Dionysius develops the Neoplatonic configurations of the One and the *nous* into the two dimensions of the one Judeo-Christian God, beauty, which had become a paradigmatic middle in Neoplatonism, now becomes identified with God himself. And it is an identification that does not undermine the "middle-ness" or "between status" that had come to mark beauty within Greek reflection. Rather, beauty's between status is appropriated to God himself insofar as it identifies the two dimensions of God as he is in himself and God as he is in his self-communication. Beauty's sense of being between, it might be said, moves from an equivocal either/or in Greek thought to a more inclusive both/and in Dionysius held together by a God whose very "substance" is a Trinitarian unity-in-plurality. The impact that beauty's "between" status or "middleness" has upon Christian theological reflection and discourse has

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yet to be explored, but it is hoped that this project provides a glimpse into the value of such an exploration.

As the Dionysian doctrine of beauty as a divine name is bequeathed to the Latin West, beauty not only remains configured as a between, but also undergoes development that further illuminates its between-ness. For both Albert and Thomas, beauty is that modality of being in between the good and the true: beauty is the good, insofar as the good orients itself toward the cognitive powers of the intellect that eventually conceptualize it as truth. To use more modern terminology, beauty is being's intelligibility prior to its becoming determined as truth but after its being only vaguely intuited through desire. Beauty's between-ness is understood in this sense not as a spatial metaphor but as an ontological modality permeating the whole of being's intensive depths. Without beauty's between status in this regard, as perhaps the Kantian project could be said to demonstrate, the good and the true are severed from one another leaving knowledge of the good to a categorical imperative and knowledge of the true to the secure path of science. That is to say, the good remains beyond any understanding while the true remains completely within understanding. Consequently, the good must be engaged by an act of obedient will, while the true must be conformable to human conceptualization. But when beauty remains in its rightful place, it allows the harmony that is necessary for an account of the good that opens to understanding and an account of truth that opens to mystery. Obedience to the good (ethics), in this respect, involves the concrete experiences through which understanding of the world is derived, and engagement with the true (science) is an analogical enterprise that is ever engaging a mysterious other that continually uplifts the intellect into being's intensive depths. At this point, it may be helpful to conclude this study by identifying some more specific configurations of beauty that can be discerned from the Dionysian-Thomistic account of beauty as a divine name.

1. *Beauty is a transcendent plenitude.* This configuration of beauty, implicated in both the Dionysian and Thomist accounts, signifies the way in which beauty identifies God as the endless "ocean of substance" to borrow the famous phrase from John Damascene. As a transcendent plenitude, God as beauty is present *et intime* (as Aquinas puts it) to all things at all times not in terms of materiality but rather in terms of cause and principle of intelligibility. In this way, beauty identifies the promise of knowability that is woven into the very fabric of all created entities. The word "promise" is important since it identifies not potency or potential,

but an actuality yet to be actualized; that is to say, promise identifies something that, because its actualization is predicated upon divine decree—the “will that must be,” as Dante calls it<sup>1</sup>—its potential to this actualization is more than mere possibility. This is the sense of possibility encountered in *Exodus* when God identifies himself with the *Ehyeh asher Ehyeh*, “I will be what I will be.” As chapter 3 explained, this is not God identifying himself with potential but rather with promise as the interval between divine knowing and divine making; God, as both Dionysius and Thomas maintain, knows more than he makes. But this interval derives not from a real distinction between God’s knowledge and God’s power, but from the mystery of divine self-communication and providence. Hence the language of promise rather than potential or possibility becomes necessary to hold together divine transcendent plenitude without necessitating potential. So it is not the case that as beauty God is the potential of all existing things, since for Aquinas God has no potency. Rather, identifying God as beauty itself identifies the way in which all things that were, that are, and that will be *in actuality* are held in a preexisting state in God. This of course opens the question regarding whether possible things that have not and may not exist are also contained in this plenitude, and it is a question that exceeds the scope of the present work. However, the issue may be relieved somewhat by casting it in the context of the divine ideas. To the extent that the divine beauty as a transcendent plenitude relates to the divine ideas, it identifies the way in which the divine ideas are preheld in the divine intellect. God’s association with beauty as a transcendent plenitude can be conceived in terms similar to God’s association with the divine ideas in that “a divine idea is not merely the divine essence taken as such, or the divine essence taken as an object of God’s understanding; it is the divine essence understood by God together with the particular relationship of imitation a particular creature bears to it.”<sup>2</sup> As a transcendent plenitude, God as beauty identifies the infinite fullness and completeness of the divine being both in itself and as this fullness bears in itself the origins of God’s relation to all creatures—not in terms of potential but in terms of promise. In this latter sense God as beauty begins to open to beauty as a principle of determination.

2. *Beauty is a principle of determination.* Although neither Dionysius nor Aquinas uses the expression “principle of determination,” it is an expression that draws together those features of beauty that, originating in

1. Dante, *La Divina Commedia, Inferno, Canto III*, 91–92.

2. Wipple, *Thomas Aquinas on the Divine Ideas*, 19.

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both Greek and biblical thought (though indirectly in the latter), account for beauty's capacity to provide symmetry, proportion, measure, number, weight, place—in effect, those features of beauty that account for form. The reason the expression *principle of determination* is employed is to draw attention to the continuity that this dimension of beauty bears with beauty as a transcendent plenitude. As a *principle*, beauty remains “en-sourced” in its status as a transcendent plenitude. But as a principle of *determination*, beauty gives itself to be as determinate form in the many determinate forms, or perhaps it is better to say as a formal or forming power that enables determination. It is also this configuration of beauty that grounds its inherent relation to the intellect: beauty allows the intelligibility of being that exceeds determination to come to be determinate. One aspect of beauty that appears common throughout the history of its development, from Plato to Aquinas, is its association with the act of cognition—not insofar as cognition results in a determination of something intelligible, but insofar as cognition relates to an intelligibility in excess of its eventual determinate form. Again, these may be more modern expressions but they rightly convey the way in which, from the *Phaedrus* to the *Enneads* to divine name theology, beauty identifies the attraction of intelligibility prior to its coming to be determinate. That is to say, beauty is the way in which God uplifts the intellect into ever-higher modes of being as being, modes that conform to the capacity of the intellect insofar as the intellect is in touch with being in a way that exceeds determination cognition.

When beauty is conceived in this way, it also allows for a renewal of the important role that love performs in the activity of the intellect. For when beauty is resituated in between the good of indeterminate desire and the truth of determined intelligibility, love is itself configured as an excess of cognition at the point where the cognitive act is spontaneously drawn to its object. Again to put the matter in more modern terminology, love is the point at which the determination of cognition opens to the surplus or fullness of determinate promise that is first encountered through the indeterminacy of desire. The intellect as love is more fully engaged with its object as it stands ahead of its eventual determinate activity of cognition. As Aquinas explains it, a thing is loved more than it is known because love is simpler, nobler and more powerful than knowledge.<sup>3</sup> There is a bond between the intellect and the object of its desire that is stronger and more secure prior to the cognitive act that transforms the known thing into a thought. Knowledge of that thing, insofar as it depends upon the

3. STh I-II, q. 27, a. 2, ad. 2; *De Veritate* q. 22, a. 11, ad. 5 and ad. 7.

thing as an abstracted thought-form, confronts its own intrinsic limits *as* knowledge. But these limits do not portend the end of the intellect's union. For as Aquinas further explains, love begins where knowledge ends.<sup>4</sup> As a principle of determination, beauty identifies this crucial dimension of the cognitive activity by identifying that dimension of any knowable thing that remains always beyond its determination. Love is the response of the intellect to the surplus of intelligibility that corresponds to a thing's beauty. Consequently, love is the broader intellectual activity in which the more contracted mode of determinate cognition comes to fruition.

3. *Beauty is the good in the process of becoming true.* To draw the previous two fundamental dimension of beauty into a more concise articulation, beauty may be identified as the event whereby the good becomes contracted or distilled as the true. What prevents this configuration of beauty from drawing the divine identity into a more overarching process—as happens, for example, in process philosophy or theology—is that with beauty the process is an event happening within the divine identity as a transcendent plenitude. Where process thought reads any divine happening as taking place within a matrix of indeterminacy, and so configures the divine identity to include a lack somehow in rapport with some indeterminacy beyond it, beauty as a divine name configures the process of beauty's event as a contraction or distillation of an endless divine fullness. It is the event whereby the fullness of divine beauty, conceived as the infinite good itself, is contracted or distilled for the sake of the finite intellect into the more determinate modalities of truth. And insofar as this event is conceived as a process, it must account for the continuity between the overfull origin of the good and the eventual determinate form of truth. Both Dionysius and Aquinas read beauty as the happening in between the good and true, though with Aquinas this development becomes more pronounced. As he puts it, beauty is the good insofar as the good is oriented to the cognitive faculties.

Here beauty is configured as an ontological middle where human knowing and human being find their fullest union. To be sure, neither figure makes this claim, at least not explicitly. However, when the Dionysian-Thomistic account of beauty as a divine name is viewed within the practices of every day experience, the validity of this claim can be discerned. Beauty as this middle between the good and the true is most fundamentally where human beings live, move, and have their being. Although the good, either as an ideal always being sought or as an end pursued through utility, and

4. STh I-II, q. 27, a. 4, ad. 1.

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the true, as the final cognitive capture of the good, are both operative in the practices of every day experiences, their presence in such practices and experiences is normally encountered between these two modalities. That is to say, because most persons are neither ethicist nor scientists in the strict senses of the terms, and because most persons nevertheless think and act ethically and aspire to know in some scientific sense, the good and the true present themselves as a middle where daily encounters with goods and values must be thought and understood. To put the matter in terms of Thomas's configuration of beauty, most people live their every day experience in beauty insofar as they are in a continual process of orienting the good to the cognitive faculties. In this sense, then, beauty can be conceived as the very conditions of every day experiences.

4. *Beauty is the anagogical power that enables intellectual ascent.* This configuration of beauty derives primarily from the schematic of Dionysian symbolism, in which every created thing is a communication in some mode of divine beauty. As part 2 of this study explained, Dionysian symbolism is integral to understanding his appropriation of beauty to the divine identity. As beauty, the divine substance is an ocean of intensive depth. Created things, then, are dissimilar similitudes of this depth and serve as doorways into the divine substance. By repurposing Neoplatonic emanation, Dionysius views every created thing as a creaturely recapitulation of emanation, a very image of God insofar as it shines forth the beauty of God. Aquinas implements this schematic of symbolism in a variety of ways, but nowhere more succinctly than in his Trinitarian theology of the Son in whom resides the *ratio proprio* of all imaging. Through the attraction of the excess of intelligibility imaged in a given image, the intellect is drawn ever higher, or ever deeper perhaps, into being's intensive depths.

In order to illustrate how this point is more than mere theoretical speculation, two historical examples offer themselves as evidence—one from the world of mathematics and the other from the world of natural science. The first hearkens back to seventeenth-century France, where what is known as “the world's greatest mathematical problem” was born. Pierre de Fermat was a mathematician who, it might be said, had “mathematical visions,” by which is meant that he allegedly saw glimpses of the plenitude of mathematical intelligibility that could not yet be determined by seventeenth-century mathematical concepts.<sup>5</sup> He was a great admirer of Pythagoras, and in one such “vision” he saw how a derivative of the

5. For an illuminating account of Fermat and his mathematical theory, see Singh, *Fermat's Enigma*.

Pythagorean theorem— $x^n + y^n = z^n$ —fails for any value of “ $n$ ” greater than 2. It is said that in his edition of the *Arithmetica*, Fermat had scribbled in the margins the following statement: “I have a truly marvelous demonstration for this proposition, which the margin is too narrow to contain.”<sup>6</sup> Many speculate as to whether Fermat really had a proof or whether his demonstration was something more intuited. Whatever the case may be, for the next thirty years up until he died he never took it upon himself to sketch out any semblance of a demonstration. In fact, it would be some 350 years and many failed attempts by the world’s greatest mathematical minds before Andrew Wiles, a twentieth-century British mathematician, would prove this theorem. Wiles’ proof could not have come about without the many developments in mathematics that occurred between the seventeenth and the twentieth centuries. Such mathematical development involved not only the discovery of new mathematical truths like the imaginary number and the natural logarithm, but also new mathematical images like graph theory and modular forms. It was a development that can validly be characterized as a contraction of the excess of mathematical intelligibility into more determinate concepts and symbols. But it was Fermat’s “vision” of the beauty of mathematics—that is, his vision of mathematical intelligibility beyond the determinate form it takes in concepts and symbols—that drove mathematicians to discover more and loftier mathematical truths in order to prove, or conceptually determine, what Fermat had seen. To be sure, this is not an aesthetic assertion. Rather, it is an assertion whose veracity derives from the fact that, on the one hand Fermat believed he saw the mathematical truth of his famous theorem and, on the other hand, could not conceptually or symbolically communicate his vision. He saw beyond what language could express, the proof of which itself derives from the fact that some 350 years later it becomes conceptually and symbolically expressible. What began as a vision of something beautiful quickly became the object of attraction for many of the greatest mathematical minds in history. And in that attraction, in the beauty that Fermat had beheld, individual intellects and the collective intellect of mathematics ascended more deeply into (mathematical) being’s intensive depths.

A second example comes from the world of twentieth-century science. Recent research has sought to examine and demonstrate the significance of beauty in the scientific process.<sup>7</sup> One account that is cited

6. Singh, *Fermat’s Enigma*, 62.

7. See, e.g., Weinberg, *Dreams of a Final Theory*; Heisenberg, *Across the Frontier*.

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involves Einstein's discovery of the principles that would form his General Theory of Relativity. Before the experiments were performed to verify Einstein's theory, in a letter to Arnold Sommerfeld Einstein himself wrote: "Of the general theory of relativity you will be convinced, once you have studied it. Therefore I am not going to defend it with a single word."<sup>8</sup> With no evidence whatsoever, Einstein believed his theory was convincing. As Weinberg contends, Einstein's conviction came from the beauty of the theory itself, that is to say it was the intrinsic beauty of the theory rather than any data derived from reason or experiment that sustained Einstein's pursuit of its truth.<sup>9</sup> A few years and several experiments later this beauty would become conceptually determined by scientific analysis. As Rhodes explains Weinberg's contention, "Even before Einstein came across a geometry that would accommodate his theory, when reason would justifiably have resisted further pursuit, . . . he persevered in his work, Weinberg contends, because the beauty of the theory was so awe-inspiring and captivating."<sup>10</sup> In this case, it was beauty that inspired and prompted the intellects of those involved to pursue higher truths, offering evidence of how beauty provides an anagogical power that uplifts the intellect more profoundly into the intensive depth of being.

As the British theologian and physicist John Polkinghorne fittingly remarks, "In fundamental physics it is an actual technique of discovery to look for equations that have about them the unmistakable character of mathematical beauty."<sup>11</sup> For both a mathematician like Fermat and a physicist like Einstein, the beauty of being's intensive depths provoked the intellect beyond the intellect's own conceptual limits. The history of beauty's association with the divine verifies how both these examples demonstrate a fitting continuity between beauty and mathematics, or beauty and natural science. For when beauty is configured as a divine name, it can be configured as an anagogical power that uplifts the intellect by drawing the intellect's cognitive faculties into closer relation with the excess good that it seeks.

5. *Beauty is the intelligibility of being prior to its becoming determinate.* This configuration of beauty has been examined in the preceding

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For these references and insights into this matter, I am indebted to Rhodes, "Sense of the Beautiful and Apophatic Thought," 535–52.

8. Weinberg, *Dreams of a Final Theory*, 102.

9. *Ibid.*, 102.

10. Rhodes, "Sense of the Beautiful," 537.

11. *Science and the Trinity*, 63.

configurations, but it deserves its own focus. Stating the issue in terms of intelligibility and determination no doubt locates beauty in a more modern context. Nevertheless, so long as these terms remain broadly understood, they may maintain continuity with their premodern notional counterparts. The configuration of beauty as being's intelligibility prior to its becoming determinate indicates its historical roots in Plato and Plotinus where beauty is associated with the intellectual principle, or *nous*. It is also another way of expressing the idea that beauty is the good insofar as the good is oriented to the cognitive faculties. Expressed in the context of the terms *intelligibility* and *determinate intelligibility*, however, beauty bears a more practical application. Amidst the practices of every day experience, the human person engages phenomena that are intelligible even though they are not determinately intelligible. The simple use of technology, for example, is an engagement with something intelligible for its user even if the user cannot determinately conceive of every dimension of the technology being used. As artificial works, or works of artifice, all technology involves artistic agency. Encounters with art, whether in the form of technology or in the form of the various so-called "fine arts," are an encounter with something whose intelligibility exceeds its communicability. It is this excess of intelligibility that allows art works of every sort to be interpreted a number of different, though valid, ways. Laughter could still be considered another example. When a person laughs, he or she has encountered something intelligible in ways that exceed its determination in concepts or analysis. Indeed, to subject the humorous thought, word, or deed to conceptual analysis is to risk destroying what made it humorous. As a mode of beauty, humor inhabits the excess of intelligibility that marks so much of daily life. Laughter is the spontaneous reaction that occurs when the intellect encounters humor's excess of intelligibility. Love is still another example. Few would argue that love is difficult if not impossible to conceptually determine. This does not, however, make love simply unintelligible. Indeed, the very attraction in love that elicits so much human desire indicates that it is a plenitude of intelligible content. Unintelligible things do not attract the intellect thirsting for the intelligible. But if love's intelligibility cannot be communicated as effectively through conceptual analysis as it can other languages like poetry, music, or drama, it indicates the way in which, like humor, love inhabits the excess of intelligible content that dwells beyond determination. This excess of intelligible content that is always beyond its more determinate contraction is beauty.

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Aside from these everyday phenomena and experiences, natural history also provides concrete evidence that beauty is intelligible in ways that exceed determination. In the last one hundred years or so archeological research has uncovered a significant amount of data concerning Acheulian handaxes.<sup>12</sup> These artifacts are hand-held stones carved into a spade, or pointed leaf-like, shape. They are called Acheulian from the region named after St. Acheul in France, where, beginning in the nineteenth century, they were first unearthed. From that time on, thousands of them have been discovered all over Asia, Europe, and Africa. The sheer number of those discovered, and the fact that they rarely have any wear on the blade, have led archeologists to conclude that they could not have been designed merely for the killing and preparing of animals. So the archeological consensus is that these tools were in fact the earliest works of art, instruments that actually served as objects of aesthetic contemplation. One of the more fascinating bits of data uncovered is that these handaxes, crafted some 1.4 million years ago, originated long before human beings developed language. Yet even without the precision of determination enabled by linguistic communication, this evidence more than suggests that the early human ancestors that crafted and enjoyed these handaxes inhabited a context of intelligibility. These handaxes symbolize the origins of the human organism's entry into a world of intelligible beauty prior to making that intelligible beauty determinately intelligible through language.

6. *Beauty is the whole in the part.* This configuration of beauty is present in both Dionysius and Aquinas, and derives most fundamentally from the Trinitarian theology of the Son. In Aquinas's *Commentary on the Divine Names*, this feature of beauty is most concisely articulated in his account of how the beautiful participates beauty. As noted in chapter eleven, his account of the way in which a beautiful thing participates beauty is neither the logical mode of participation (where a limited intelligibility shares in a less limited intelligibility), nor the kind of participation of a concrete thing in an abstract thing. In both cases, the participated source only ever shares a part of itself with the acting participant. For Thomas, however, a beautiful thing is a thing that is literally full of beauty; it bears a real or ontological participation in beauty. Beauty is a form that can be fully received in a plurality of modes without holding itself back in any way. Each recipient mode, that is to say each mode of participation, involves the reception of the whole of beauty. A given entity's beauty, then, is a

12. Cf. Mithen, "Handaxes," 261–78; Kohn, *As We Know It*; Dutton, *Art Instinct*.

creaturely imitation of the Son, whose being is constituted as the complete reception of God.

A corollary to this sixth configuration of beauty is that it is also the universal communicated through the particular. Again, this is not an explicit description in either the Dionysian or the Thomist account, although Thomas's necessary conditions for beauty—*integritas*, *consonantia*, and *claritas*—exemplify this relation. Especially when these three conditions are cast against the backdrop of the Dionysian account of beauty, the way in which they may be validly appropriated in terms of the relation between the universal and the particular becomes possible.

For Aquinas, a universal is in between something in reality (as Plato held) and something merely in thought (as Aristotle held). It is, rather, something that is formally perfected in thought but that has a *fundamentum in re*, a “foundation in reality.”<sup>13</sup> This already casts Thomas's understanding of the universal in a much different mode from many modern theories, and there is a strong likelihood that Thomas's doctrine of beauty performs an important role in his understanding of universals. For when conceived in the context of beauty, the universal is no longer a set of abstract categories, neutral homogeneity, or logical constructs that must of necessity jettison the singular or the particular. Rather than the Hegelian universal that ultimately flattens the significance and unrepeatability of the particular, the Dionysian-Thomistic understanding of the relation of the universal to the particular in the context of beauty is closer to what William Desmond calls an “intimate universal”<sup>14</sup>: the togetherness of intimacy and universality that follows almost necessarily from one's relation to God. Belief in God entails both what is most intimate to oneself (*interior intimo meo*, as Augustine put it) and what one holds to be true in some way for everyone. As Desmond describes it, “This universal is the community of the middle, the space where being ceases to be an anonymous thereness, where self and other, each in their self-communication and their communication with the other, cross and crisscross. . . . This universal is a community of being wherein . . . particulars meet, in a meeting that is not a logical conjunction or an empirical contiguity, but a mindful being-together.”<sup>15</sup> Within the context of beauty as a divine name, the universal can be reconceived as the overflowing fullness of particular content. As

13. See Wipple, “Truth in Thomas Aquinas,” 296–98, 550–56; *Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 27.

14. See Desmond, *Is There a Sabbath for Thought?*, ch. 1; *God and the Between*, 152–54; *Perplexity and Ultimacy*, 55–63.

15. Desmond, *Perplexity and Ultimacy*, 63.

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such it naturally lends itself to the abstract concepts and categories that are common to any given class, which in turn tend to deflate the significance of the particular. But it is important to note that the relation that one conceives between universal and particular derives from one's more primordial conceptualization of prior principles be it God, the good, the One, the true, the beautiful, etc. Hence, the way the universal is conceived depends upon this more primordial conceptualization of prior principles. Beauty as a divine name provides the foundation whereupon the universal as such may be rethought as intimate to the particular rather than merely its opposite. As both Dionysius and Aquinas understood, there is a universality to beauty that, given its intimacy with the beautiful thing, does not lend itself to abstract concepts and categories. Beauty is, to put it simply, the universal communicated in and through the particular, the whole communicated in and through the part.

7. *Beauty is the community of being.* This final configuration of beauty is something of a culmination of the preceding six configurations. For if beauty is a transcendental plenitude that gives itself as a principle of determination, through which the good may be continually received as the truth that fuels the anagogical ascent of the intellect as it perceives an intelligibility beyond a determinate form as a whole perceived in the part, then the configuration of beauty as the community of being follows almost necessarily. Beauty identifies both the divine in itself as a transcendent plenitude and the divine in its act of self-communication. In this sense, beauty as a gathering power that brings the many into the one without denigrating either the many or the one is central to this final configuration.

In both Dionysius and Aquinas, this communal configuration of beauty is explicit. Not only does it account for the relation between creatures and God, nor only for the relation of creatures with each other, but also a creature with itself. For Dionysius, the individual creature as a substance is not some isolated, static entity. It is rather a dynamic relation to otherness. As chapter five explained, although Dionysius does not express it in specific metaphysical terms, substance consists of a unique coalescence of difference, identity, diversity, similarity etc. As beautiful, that is to say as a giving to be from beauty as a principle of determination, every given thing (substance) embodies beauty's unity in diversity. In Aquinas, for whom substance takes on a much more Aristotelian character, this dynamic feature of substance is not eliminated. In both his Dionysian commentary and in his Trinitarian theology of the Son, in which a thing's *integritas* always already relates through *consonantia* to the *claritas* shining over it,

Thomas's doctrine of beauty demonstrates the way in which substance is conceived as a unity in relation to diversity. This dimension of Thomas's thought has not been emphasized in the commentary tradition nor within contemporary Thomistic scholarship, perhaps due to a general lack of attention and awareness of his doctrine of beauty and its importance in his overall metaphysics. In any case, for both Dionysius and Aquinas, beauty can be configured as a community of being, that is to say, as ontological community operative with respect to God's relation to creatures, creatures' relations among themselves, and creaturely self-relativity.

In each of the preceding six configurations, the common attribute of each configuration of the Dionysian-Thomistic beauty is the way in which it serves as a middle, or "between," phenomenon. While it provides for numerous configurations, it is most fundamentally a metaphysical phenomenon that bears relevance for all levels of theological thought. As concerns God, beauty's middle or between sense provides a way to think God as he is in himself and God as he is in his self-communicative act. As concerns the relation between God and the world, beauty is a middle that enables the union between the finite and the infinite, the material and the spiritual, the transient and the eternal, to be more fully and carefully thought. For both Dionysius and Thomas, beauty is an integral dimension of theology's overall task. For Dionysius theology concerns God and how human beings may speak or think God insofar as that thinking and speaking is expressed through naming (and not naming). For Aquinas, theology concerns above all God and how all things relate to God. For both, the inherent attraction of God and the theological task it provokes indicates on a primordial level the significance that beauty has for theological discourse. And if the tradition of Western theological thought is any indication, the influence of both figures serves to indicate how their thought, concerned with a God who is beauty, itself becomes beautiful.

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When, in the sixth century, Dionysius the Areopagite declared Beauty to be a name for God, he gave birth to something that had long been gestating in the womb of philosophical and theological thought. In doing so, Dionysius made one of his most pivotal contributions to Christian theological discourse. This contribution was enthusiastically received by the schoolmen of the Middle Ages, and it came to permeate the thought of scholasticism in a multitude of ways. But nowhere is the Dionysian influence more pronounced than in the thought of Thomas Aquinas. *The God Who is Beauty* examines the historical development of beauty's appropriation as a name for God in Dionysius and Aquinas, and what it means.

The argument that emerges from this study is that the phenomenon of Beauty as a divine name indicates the way in which beauty is conceived in the Christian theological tradition as a theological theme. The concept of beauty proved itself to be enigmatic and elusive to even the sharpest intellects in the Greek philosophical tradition. When it is absorbed within the Christian theological synthesis, however, its enigmatic content proves to be a powerful resource for theological reasoning.

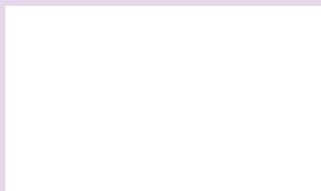
I warmly recommend Brendan Sammon's impressive contribution to theological aesthetics. The work is engaging, lucid, insightful, and well laid out in fitting structure. It importantly responds to the surprising lack of full treatment of Beauty as a divine name. Informed about Greek philosophical sources, it offers a rich narration of Beauty as a divine name in the work of Dionysius and Aquinas, also impressively bringing to our attention the crucial place of Dionysius in the thought of Aquinas. The ambiguity he detects in Greek treatments as oscillating between the spiritual and material he sees as more fittingly resolved in the Christian thought of Dionysius and Aquinas where justice can be done to the truth of beauty as a middle between the spiritual and the material, a saturated between. An admirable debut by Sammon with a significant contribution to the field of theological aesthetics.

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**Brendan Thomas Sammon** received his PhD in Systematic Theology from The Catholic University of America and is currently an Assistant Professor of Systematic Theology at St. Joseph's University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He is the author of the forthcoming book, *Theology and Beauty: An Introduction to Theological Aesthetics*.

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