The Beauty of God:
Beauty as a Divine Name in Thomas Aquinas and Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite

A DISSERTATION

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Does beauty have an inherent association with the divine? If so, what sort of impact does such a claim have upon the field of contemporary 'theological aesthetics'? The present study addresses these questions by investigating the historical, philosophical and theological dimensions of beauty insofar as it is conceived as a divine name. It is a conception that first appears in the thought of the fifth century figure Dionysius the Areopagite. Dionysius's thinking on beauty achieves widespread influence throughout the Middle Ages demonstrated by the numerous commentaries written on his treatises. This dissertation examines Dionysius's doctrine on beauty found in his celebrated treatise On the Divine Names along with the commentary put forth by Thomas Aquinas. The argument advanced in this study is that the Dionysian-Thomistic approach to beauty, an approach that is foundational for the origins of the Western understanding of beauty, reveals that beauty is inherently and therefore indispensably associated with the divine. In Dionysius, the association between beauty and the divine that long gestates in the womb of Western thought explicitly enters the Christian theological tradition when it is appropriated to the status of a divine name. Dionysius’s doctrine of beauty exercises extraordinary influence on Thomas’s understanding of beauty, which shapes his understanding of God in significant ways. More broadly, the Dionysian-Thomistic view of beauty as a divine name crystallizes in unique ways a more general understanding of beauty’s inherent association with the divine. Contemporary theology, in the last fifty years or so, has rediscovered the fundamental inspiration that beauty provides to its intentions. Even a brief glance at the publications reveals a notable surge of work being done in what is now called ‘theological aesthetics.’ However, this
rediscovery of beauty is beset with difficulties concerning not only the place and role of beauty, but the very question as to what beauty is. It is a primary goal of this study to demonstrate the importance that a Dionysian-Thomistic configuration of beauty has for theological aesthetics, not only with respect to the past but also with respect to the field’s future direction.
This dissertation by Brendan Thomas Sammon fulfills the dissertation requirement for the doctoral degree in Theology approved by Regis Armstrong, O. F. M. Cap., Ph.D, as Director, and by Timothy Noone, Ph.D, and Susan Wessel, Ph.D, as readers.

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Regis Armstrong, O. F. M., Cap., Ph.D, Director

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Timothy Noone, Ph.D, Reader

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Susan Wessel, Ph.D, Reader
To Chiara, Liam, and Raffaele; 
the greatest beauty I have ever known.
Table of Contents

Introduction

I. Status Quaestionis
II. Dionysius and Thomas: The State of Contemporary Research
III. Methodology

Chapter 1. Sources

1.1. Plato
1.2. Aristotle
   1.2.1. Beauty and the Final Cause
   1.2.2. Beauty and the Origin
1.3. Plotinus

Chapter 2. Beauty as a Divine Name in Dionysius the Areopagite

2.1. The Tradition of the Divine Names
2.2. Divine Names as the Procession of Divine Perfections
2.3. Beauty as a Divine Name: On the Divine Names, Chapter 4.
   2.3.1. Beauty as Transcendent Plenitude
      2.3.1.1. Beauty as the Good
      2.3.1.2. Beauty as Simplicity and Light
      2.3.1.3. Beauty as Intelligibility
   2.3.2. Beauty as a Principle of Determination
      2.3.2.1. Beauty as Emanation
      2.3.2.2. Beauty as Unity in Plurality
      2.3.2.3. Beauty as Hierarchy
   2.3.3. Beauty and the One

Conclusion

Chapter 3. Beauty as a Divine Name in Thomas Aquinas

3.1. From Dionysius to Aquinas
   3.1.1. The Passage of Dionysius into the Latin West
   3.1.2. The Interpretive Tradition of the Divine Names
   3.1.3. The Journey of Beauty as a Divine Name
      from the Sixth to the Thirteenth Century
From the fifth to the eighth century: Augustine to Bede.  
John Scotus Erigena.  
Early Scholasticism: The Cistercians, the Victorines, and the School of Chartres.  
The Early Thirteenth Century Scholastics.  

3.2. Beauty as a Divine Name in Albert the Great  
3.3. Beauty as a Divine Name in Thomas Aquinas’s Reading of Dionysius  
3.3.1. Thomas’s Relation to Dionysius, Platonism and Neoplatonism  
3.3.2. A Note on the Translation of John the Saracen  
3.3.3. Beauty as a Divine Name: In de Divinis Nominibus Expositio  
3.3.3.1. On Divine Naming: Proemium and Book I.  
3.3.3.2. The Good and Light as Propaeude tic: Book IV, Lectures 1 – 4  
3.3.3.3. Beauty as a Divine Name: Book IV, Lectures 5 and 6  
3.3.3.4. Beauty as a Divine Name: Book IV, Lectures 7 and 8.  
3.3.3.5. Summary of Beauty as a Divine Name in the Commentary on the Divine Names  

3.4. Beauty as a Divine Name In Thomas Aquinas: Beyond Dionysius  
3.4.1. General Development of Beauty in Aquinas  
3.4.2. The Two Formulae of the Summa Theologiae  
3.4.2.1. The Placent Formula  
3.4.2.2. The Tria Requiruntur Formula  

Conclusion

Chapter 4. Conclusion: Beauty as a Divine Name and Contemporary Theological Aesthetics

4.1. Introduction  
4.2. Infinite Beauty and Rhetoric Without Reserve: David Bentley Hart  
4.2.1. Being as Divine Plenitude: Beauty and the Sublime  
4.2.2. For or Against Metaphysics? Rhetoric and Dialectic  
4.3. Beauty and the Transcendental Turn: Richard Viladesau  
4.3.1. The Transcendental Conditions of the Aesthetic  
4.3.2. Beauty as a Way to God  
4.4. Beauty as Community: Alejandro García-Rivera  
4.4.1. The Incarnation: From Form to Sign  
4.4.2. Beauty as the Truly Different  

Conclusion

General Conclusion  
Bibliography
Acknowledgements

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τὴν γὰρ παροιμίαν ὃτι ποτὲ λέγει, τὸ “χαλεπὰ τὰ καλὰ,” δοκῶ μοι εἰδέναι.
- Hippias Major, 304c

πρὸς τὸν πιθὸμενον διὰ τὶ τοῖς καλοῖς πολὺν χρόνων ὁμιλοῦμεν, “τυφλοῦ,” ἔφη, “τὸ ἐρώτημα.”
- On Aristotle 5, 1, 20.

Ταῦτα οὖν ἀγάμενοι καὶ φιλοῦντες πῶς αὕτα λέγομεν καλὰ;
- Plotinus, Enneads 1.6.5

Τοῦτο τάγαθον ὑμνεῖται πρὸς τῶν ἱερῶν θεολόγων καὶ ὡς καλὸν καὶ ὡς κάλλος

“Deus quoad omnes et simpliciter pulcher est.”
- Thomas Aquinas, In de divinis nominibus 4, 5
Introduction

Does beauty have an inherent association with the divine? If so, what sort of impact does such a claim have upon a purely ‘this-worldly’ beauty? How would such a claim affect the field of thought that is now known as ‘aesthetics’? Or, more to the point, how would such a claim affect the field of contemporary ‘theological aesthetics’? The present study addresses these questions by investigating the historical, philosophical and theological dimensions of beauty insofar as it is conceived as a divine name. The argument advanced in this study is that not only does beauty have an inherent and, therefore, indispensible association with the divine, but also that this association is at the very origin of every Western understanding of beauty. Any configuration of beauty that neglects, ignores or rejects this association offers only ever an incomplete portrait of beauty. From the first moment it becomes an object of inquiry, beauty almost spontaneously seems to provoke the issue of mediation between the divine and creation in some way or another. It is fitting, then, that beauty eventually enters into the grammar and thought-structure of Christian theological discourse providing the necessary tools to think beyond the limits of discursive reason where much of theology’s subject and objects reside.

Contemporary theology has, in the last fifty years or so, rediscovered the fundamental inspiration that beauty provides to its intentions. Even a brief glance at the publications in the field of theology reveals a notable surge of work being done in what is now being called ‘theological aesthetics’ However, this rediscovery of beauty is beset with difficulties that concern not only the place and role of beauty, but the very question as to what beauty is. It is a primary goal of this study to demonstrate the importance that a Dionysian-Thomistic configuration of beauty has to the development of theological
aesthetics, not only with respect to the past but also with respect to the field’s future
direction.

I. Status Quaestionis

Beauty as a divine name is a theme whose consideration falls, though not exclusively,
within the parameters of theological aesthetics. As a specified mode of theological discourse,
theological aesthetics is a relatively new field. Its frontiers are attracting more and more
attention thanks to the work of many twentieth century theologians, among whom the most
notable are Karl Barth¹ and Hans Urs Von Balthasar.² In its broadest conceptualization,
theological aesthetics takes its primary impulse from a marriage between theology and what,
after Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten’s Aesthetica (1750), has come to be called ‘aesthetics’.
This marriage is not always an easy one mostly due to the ambiguity that has
shadowed the relationship between ‘aesthetics,’ since its inception as a separate science, and
beauty as an extra-mental phenomenon and ‘object’ of inquiry. In his 2004 Presidential
Address to the American Society for Aesthetics, 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.”³ 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 the most

¹ Barth’s works are far too numerous to list here. Rather we will cite his magnum opus, Church Dogmatics, in 14

² Most significant within his abundant corpus is his Herrlichkeit trilogy, which in English includes The Glory of the
Lord: A Theological Aesthetics in 7 Volumes, Theo-Logic in 3 Volumes, Theo-Drama in 5 Volumes, and Epilogue, all
of which are published with Ignatius Press, 1982 – 2004.

no. 2, Spring (2007), 147.
replaced beauty. Insofar as aesthetics is recognized as a branch of philosophy, it is also possible to discern the way in which for many beauty is left behind as a vestige of a primitive past to make room for the aesthetic. This signals a remarkable shift in the development of Western thought, and in many ways parallels the shift of development that occurs in Modernity with respect to ‘being’ as an object of philosophical inquiry.

In early Greek thought, beauty corresponds to being’s capacity to attract interest, stimulate desire and donate form both visible and intelligible. Consequently, what today is referred to as ‘beauty’ the early Greeks named ‘kalos,’ or ‘call.’ Recognizing the way that concrete phenomena draw human thought ever beyond itself, Greek thinkers identify being’s kalos, or beauty, as a phenomenon native to both the sensible and the supra-sensible worlds. From the Pythagoreans, to certain Ionian philosophers, to the Sophists, beauty in various ways is viewed as a phenomenon whose material concretions are endowed with the capacity to carry the intellect to beauty’s loftier dwellings even beyond the limits of the material realm. Within the thought of Plato, beauty is given a transcendental status independent of its many material forms, a status that is never unequivocally denied by Aristotle. In the

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8 Wladislaw Tatarkiewicz, History of Aesthetics, 95 – 111.

Neoplatonic development of both Plato and Aristotle, beauty’s transcendental status begins to accrue a religious dimension influenced primarily by Plotinus who identifies beauty with the Intellectual Principle (Nous). In so doing, Plotinus establishes the foundation for conceiving beauty as the first emanation from the One, and therefore as the plenitude of being that guides the soul’s return to the One.\textsuperscript{10} This identification, however, does not demarcate a clear and determinate separation between the One and beauty but rather complicates their association.\textsuperscript{11}

Inspired by the various passages throughout the Christian Scriptures, the author of a collection of texts attributed to the enigmatic figure Dionysius the Areopagite (465 – 538)\textsuperscript{12} overcomes this complexity by unequivocally appropriating beauty to God as one of the divine names. Beauty in his view is one of the many perfections that proceeds out of the


\textsuperscript{12} Throughout the secondary literature, these texts are referred to both as the \textit{Corpus Dionysi acum} and the \textit{Corpus Areopagiticum}, though we will follow the former. Unless otherwise stated, throughout the dissertation, all translations will be my own. Editions that have been consulted include John Parker, \textit{The Works of Dionysius the Areopagite, 2 vols.} (London: James Parker, 1897 – 1899), which although old remains the most faithful translation with proper attention to the complexity of Dionysius’s terminology; \textit{Pseudo-Dionysius, The Complete Works}, Colm Luibheid (trans.) (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), a highly questionable translation, but beneficial for its ample footnotes and introductory essays; \textit{The Divine Names by Dionysius the Areopagite}, The Editors of the Shrine of Wisdom (trans.) (Surrey, UK: The Shrine of Wisdom and the Garden City Press Limited, 1957 and 1980); and \textit{Dionysius the Areopagite: On the Divine Names and the Mystical Theology}, Clarence Edwin Rolt (trans.) (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 2004). For the Greek, I have consulted \textit{Corpus Diony siacum I: Pseudo–Dionysius Areopagita, De divinis nominibus}, B.R. Suchla (ed.) Patristische Texte und Studien 33 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1990); \textit{Corpus Dionysiacum II: Pseudo–Dionysius Areopagita, De caelestii hierarchia, de eclestieastica hierarchia, de mystica theologia, epistolar}, G. Heil and A.M. Ritter (eds.) Patristische Texte und Studien 36 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1991). Citations will include the text followed by column numbers and letters as found in Migne.
divine plenitude and comes to inhabit every created entity. The author of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* takes for himself the name of an actual biblical eyewitness, which becomes a credential that endures for over a millennium. Consequently, his appropriation of beauty as a divine name, as with the whole of his corpus, carries significant weight throughout the Middle Ages. Several of the schoolmen regardless of allegiances write commentaries on the treatises in the *Corpus Dionysiacum* and adopt aspects of the author’s style of thinking.\(^\text{13}\)

Together with the authority of scripture and the legacy of Augustinian thought on beauty, the Dionysian view of *beauty as a divine name* makes the association between beauty and God a doctrine almost unanimously accepted by the medieval world and guides most inquiries into the phenomenon of beauty. In other words, that God is somehow the supreme beauty beyond all beautiful things is an accepted fact. Consequently, *beauty as a divine name*, as an issue in its own right, never receives isolated treatment; the closest one comes to finding such treatment is in the commentaries on Dionysius’s *Divine Names* by Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, and a few others.

The transition from the world of the high Middle Ages into Modernity has significant impact on the place and understanding of beauty, the complexity of which cannot be addressed in this project. Suffice it to say, by the time Baumgarten pens his *Aesthetica* (1750), and Kant composes his *Critique of Judgment* (1790), the foundations for beauty’s status as a divine name are beginning to corrode. Baumgarten, whose work sets the foundation for the new “science” of aesthetics, identifies beauty with the perfection of sensible cognition:

Aethsetices finis est perfectio cognitionis sensitivae, qua talis. Haec autem est pulcritudo.\textsuperscript{14} 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,\textsuperscript{15} and replaces its once transcendental status with his configuration of the sublime. This 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. Under these conditions, beauty as a divine name struggles to escape one of two outcomes: either, the doctrine is endorsed and God himself becomes nothing more than the theological equivalent of an expression of personal or collective taste, or, refusing to compromise divine transcendence in light of the first option, the doctrine itself is rejected and beauty is given over to the authority of modern aesthetics. In effect, the modern project has come to shape not only the future direction of aesthetic development, but it also influences the way that past treatments of aesthetic themes, especially beauty, are read.

Only relatively recently has the medieval contribution to the development of ‘aesthetics’ received scholarly attention. Well up until the latter half of the twentieth century, a rather austere judgment over the notion of beauty in the middle ages dominates scholarship in the area of ‘aesthetics’. A remark taken from an early 20\textsuperscript{th} century work illustrates this austerity poignantly: “In effect, esthetics had been so completely crushed out, by the pressure of the Christian moral resistance, that its history had need to begin again from the beginning … The Middle Ages must be recognized as an era when formal beauty in

\textsuperscript{14} A.G. Baumgarten, Aesthetica, p.1, c.1, § 14. To my knowledge, there is currently no critical edition or English translation.

\textsuperscript{15} Kant, Critique of Judgment, Bk. II, § 23.
Fine Art (sic), a self-conscious thought or act, did not exist.” An appraisal like this is by no means rare among historians and scholars of aesthetics, and the view it represents may explain the scant attention given to the thousand-year period from Plotinus to the so-called “Renaissance” by historians of aesthetics from the late nineteenth century to today. However, with the renewed interest and optimism in the Middle Ages that has arisen thanks to the work of Modern scholarship since the late 19th and early 20th century, a new avenue for understanding the place of beauty is made available. That scholars have pursued this avenue is evident not only in histories of aesthetics that recognize the contribution of the medieval world, but more visibly from the fact that entire monographs as well as multiple volume works on the aesthetics of the Middle Ages have appeared. This work is pivotal for renewing a genuine interest in beauty as an object of inquiry and as a divine attribute.


17 E.g., Bernard Bosanquet, *History of Aesthetic, From the Greeks to the 20th Century* (New York: The Meridian Library, 1957) which devotes a mere 29 out of 490 pages to the Middle Ages; Katherine Everett Gilbert and Helmut Kuhn, *A History of Esthetics* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1939), which devotes 41 out of 585 pages to medieval esthetics; Ekbert Faas, *The Genealogy of Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), who devotes 9 out of 300 pages to the Middle Ages. These are but a few examples of a multitude of such studies. For a more in depth annotated bibliography of other and earlier studies like these, see Benedetto Croce, *Aesthetic, As Science of Expression and General Linguistic*, Douglas Ainslie (trans.) (London: MacMillan and Co., 1922), 475 – 490. Croce’s own study, it should be noted, in Part II devotes a mere 4 out of 319 pages to the Middle Ages.

18 There are far too many works to list here. Rather, we will list only some of the names of those who have been most instrumental: Grabmann, De Wulf, Chenu, Gilson, Baeumker, Mandonnet. For a more thorough analysis of the work of these and other contributors, see Van Steenberghen, *The Philosophical Movement in the Thirteenth Century*, chpt. 1.


20 Of particular note are studies done by Umberto Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, Hugh Bredin (trans.) (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986, 1959) and *Edgar De Bruyne, L’esthetique du Moyen Age*, (Louvain: Editions de l’Institut Superieur de Philosphic, 1947), though original in its own right, it is a condensed version of his three volume work cited below.

21 By far the most notable is Edgar De Bruyne, *Etudes d’esthetique medievale, en trois tomes* (Bruges: Editions De Tempel, 1946).
Consequently, there is a marked tension between the ‘aesthetic’ and beauty in the current situation of theological aesthetics.

Contemporary practitioners of theological aesthetics exhibit a wide range of responses to this situation. Nevertheless, it is possible to organize the general sense of these responses according to how they treat the issue of beauty as a divine name, that is to say, the association between beauty and God vis-à-vis the aesthetic direction inspired by the modern project. According to this, two groups may be distinguished.

The first group can be characterized by its members’ explicit identification between beauty and God accompanied by a critical response to the project of Modern aesthetics. Part of this critical response includes resisting the inclination that would allow Modern aesthetics to dictate the agenda for theology resulting in an ‘aesthetic theology’ rather than a ‘theological aesthetic.’ Members of this first group also subscribe to the view that beauty cannot be separated from its transcendental partnership with the good and the true. As already noted, Barth and Von Balthasar may be considered the progenitors of this group with their identification between beauty and divine glory (Herrlichkeit) and their shared suspicion of a merely ‘aesthetic theology.’ More recent scholars who follow this theological impulse include, among others, David Bentley Hart, John Saward, Bernhard Häring, Patrick Sherry, John Navone, and Alejandro García-Rivera.

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The second group can be distinguished from the first primarily by the extent to which its members allow Modern aesthetics to influence the theological enterprise. Under this influence, beauty tends to be overshadowed by a broader array of aesthetic concerns like sensuality, feeling, imagination, the fine arts, and the body. Whereas the first group takes a primarily critical posture toward Modern aesthetics, this second group tends to be more accommodating of it, seeing it as a beneficial step away from previous restrictions over important features of human experience. Members of this group include, but are not limited to, Charles Hartshorne, Richard Viladesau, Hans Küng, David Tracy, and Sally McFague.

The general issue pertaining to the doctrine of beauty as a divine name that embraces both groups concerns the degree to which one may speak of continuity between God and his created effect. Or to put it another way, to what extent and in what way can the relationship between God and creation be mediated by beauty? If beauty is indeed a ‘name of God’, then how is one to maintain divine transcendence without reducing the beauty of created things to an exclusively mental phenomenon? But if beauty is indeed something real in things, how can God be beautiful without becoming one among many beautiful things – that is to say, without elevating beauty to a category that embraces both God and creation

(thus falling victim to the problem that Heidegger’s ontotheological critique associated with being)? It is here where the above taxonomy begins to dissolve.

Some of the above figures respond to this matter by appealing in one way or another to the metaphysical tradition in Western philosophy. For example, though their approaches are varied, Von Balthasar, Tracy, Hart and García-Rivera all find in some form of the *analogia entis* a strategy they believe overcomes the difficulties involved in the relation between divine and creaturely beauty. Conceived through a strategy of analogy, beauty identifies a unity-in-plurality and plurality-in-unity that enables a perfect harmony of identity and difference. But analogy is not simply an instrument in the service of theological aesthetics since for many of these thinkers the exploration of beauty from a theological perspective also contributes to the understanding of the *analogia entis*.

Barth, on the other hand, famously rejects any theological configuration of the *analogia entis* going so far as to brand it the “invention of the anti-Christ.”³³ Barth’s “dialectical theology” is concerned above all with stressing the radical alterity of the divine. He therefore believes that in its philosophical application *analogia* wrongly posits a formal unity between God and creation that allows creation to lay claim over God. Consequently, his approach to the mediation of divine and creaturely beauty posits an *analogia fidei* rooted in the person of Christ. This is not to say that the *analogia entis* and Christology are incompatible; Von Balthasar brings the two together by identifying Christ as the concrete, personal form of the *analogia entis*. The concern of Barth’s approach to the mediation, however, is to avoid any implication of the natural order, insisting instead that this mediation derive mostly, if not wholly, from the side of God. In any case, it is not the intention of the

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³³ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburg: T&T Clark, 1961), 1/1.
current project to delve into this spirited and lively debate,\textsuperscript{34} but rather to gesture toward it as representative of the way in which beauty’s relationship to the divine complicates the question of creaturely/divine relativity and mediation.

Still another response issued from some of the figures above involves following the trajectory established by process thought, which denies to the divine traditional attributes like simplicity, immobility, and absoluteness. As in the work of Charles Hartshorne, if beauty is attributed to God it must be a type of beauty bound up with diversity and change, attributes the denial of which result in a denial of divine beauty.\textsuperscript{35} Others, like Sally McFague, who mediate the relationship between God and the world by identifying the world as God’s ‘body,’ arrive at a parity between the beauty experienced in the world and the beauty of God. In these and similar accounts, the aesthetic dimension of theology goes so far as to give a degree of priority, consciously or not, to the anthropomorphic nature of artistic sensibility.

As the above makes clear, the theological milieu in which \textit{beauty as a divine name} is situated involves a unique way of relating to, and mediating the procession of, God. In its historical development, this question of mediation is equally important. The Dionysian-Thomistic development of beauty in this context can be viewed as strategy for its examination. Both Dionysius and Thomas understand beauty to be a divine perfection that both generates the formal constitution of a creature and announces the divine call upon a creature. Beauty is therefore simultaneously immanent and transcendent, evincing a power of

\textsuperscript{34} For perhaps the best collection of essays on the \textit{analogia entis} both in its origination in Pryzwara, and its development by Von Balthasar, Barth and their posterity and as a theme in itself, see \textit{The Analogy of Being: Invention of the Anti-Christ or the Wisdom of God?} Thomas Joseph White, O.P., (ed) (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011).

\textsuperscript{35} Hartshorne, \textit{Man’s Vision of God}, 221 – 229.
human/divine intermediation. This issue of how beauty as a divine name expresses the human/divine intermediation provides the broader context of the current project.

In order to keep this examination focused, however, certain dimensions of the issue are not included. For example, the issue of beauty as a divine name clearly involves an important linguistic dimension that generates several relevant questions: If God exceeds every word, concept or thought, what specific attributes of language allow references to the divine to have any meaning? Is language, and more specifically the words it uses, natural or conventional? How does beauty provide a linguistic ground for approaching this difficulty? In constructing a theology of, and commentary on, divine names, what philosophy of language and what theology of language influence Dionysius’s and Thomas’s thinking? All of these questions shed light on the issue of beauty as a divine name and are necessary to address in any expansion of this project. Given the limited nature of the undertaking at hand, however, the primary focus is on the dimensions of beauty insofar as it is considered a divine name.

II. Dionysius and Thomas: The State of Contemporary Research

When one examines the current state of research with respect to Dionysius and Thomas, one finds a startling lack of literature on beauty, and next to nothing on beauty insofar as it is a divine name. Although this condition is more pronounced for Dionysius than for Thomas, when measured in proportion with the overall literature produced on each thinker the condition appears similar for both figures. A consideration of each figure in turn will serve to contextualize the issue.
**Dionysius.** With the publication of Von Balthasar’s *Herrlichkeit*, interest in the thought of Dionysius the Areopagite experiences a resurgence. Prior to this, the high point of interest in the Areopagite is found among the scholastics of the high Middle Ages. This begins to wane as the identity of the Areopagite comes more and more under suspicion.36 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.37 This can be gleaned especially from the fact that no critical edition of

36 The identity of the Areopagite falls under suspicion ever since its first appearance during the Christological debates of the 6th century. In a report titled “Epistle to Innocent the Maronite concerning a Conference Held with the Severians [*Innocentii Maronitae epistula de collatione cum Severianis habitat*], there is found 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. After a period of relative acquiescence to Dionysius’ apostolic authenticity, the 16th century Reformation begins to rock the boat once more fueled largely 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. Cf. Karlfried Foehlich, “Pseudo-Dionysius and the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century,” in *Pseudo-Dionysius: the Complete Works*, 33–46, and Alexander Golitzin, “‘A Contemplative and A Liturgist: Father Georges Florovsky on the Corpus Dionysiacum,’” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 43: 2 (1999), 132.

the Corpus appears until late in the 20th century. This appearance, however, also demonstrates the fact of a resurgence of interest in Dionysius’s thought.

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. 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.

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

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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.41 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 Wayne Hankey read Dionysius in such a way as to cast his Neoplatonism in the light of his allegiance to the Christian evangel.42

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,’

41 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, et al.), 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. Rosemary A. Arthur, in Pseudo-Dionysius as Polemicist: The Development and Purpose of the Angelic Hierarchy in the Sixth Century Syria (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), argues that Dionysius conscientiously hides his Christian devotion, i.e., his angelology and Christology, behind the veil of Neoplatonism (40 – 41).

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 dissertation is an attempt to make a contribution to Dionysius’ understanding of beauty.

**Thomas Aquinas.** As it does in the community of Dionysian scholars, the increasing popularity of theological aesthetics continues to make its impact felt in the community of Thomistic scholars. One can discern a notable increase in literature on Thomas’s views of beauty in the second half of the twentieth century. It is all the more surprising, then, that to date there remains no English or French translation of Thomas’s *Commentary on the Divine Names*, a treatise that contains the most elaborate presentation of Thomas’s views of beauty. This fact may be one reason why there has been no comprehensive study of the Commentary itself either.

This dissertation makes no claim to offer such a comprehensive study of the whole *Commentary*. Rather, it isolates the theme of *beauty as a divine name* and examines it from a *resourcement* perspective. Any comprehensive study of Aquinas would ideally include examinations of both Thomas’s sources as well as the commentary tradition that arises out of Thomas’s immense body of work. Given the nature of the present work, however, a choice between sources or commentary must be made. Consequently, the focus will be on Thomas’s sources that shape his understanding of beauty, with limited consideration of the commentary tradition.
A resourcement approach to beauty as a divine name in Thomas’s *Commentary on the Divine Names* generates the hyphenated identification Dionysian-Thomistic, with the hyphen itself performing a dual function. First, the hyphen serves to indicate that this approach is in fact a resourcement rather than a commentary approach. Second, the hyphen intends to draw out the unique relation that Thomas has to the Areopagite. This is not to be taken in the sense of any opposition to Thomas’s other dominant influences, the most obvious being that of Aristotle. Rather, it merely intends to emphasize the at times overlooked presence and efficacy of Dionysius’s influence throughout the whole of Thomas’s work including his relationship to Aristotle. This is especially significant in the consideration of beauty as a divine name.

III. Methodology

The present study argues that the issue of beauty as a divine name is a doctrine that, in uniting beauty and the divine, renders beauty a fundamentally theological phenomenon. One primary consequence of this concerns the impact that beauty as a divine name has upon every theological enterprise. As the history and content of theology reveal, theology is a ‘plurivocal’ discourse; a discourse constituted by many voices. These many voices, however, are unified by a general concern to intermediate the encounter between human thought and language, on the one hand, and God’s own speaking on the other. It is an intermediation that involves both the precision and technique of human determination, and the plenitude and surplus of divine mystery. Although beauty’s role in this encounter is prevalent well into the thirteenth century, it undergoes a noticeable decline when the momentum of Modern thought intensifies its focus upon the capacity of human thought to become, in Descartes’
words, the ‘master and possessor of nature.’ Betrayed by the mind’s capacity to determine the world according to its own criteria, beauty is exiled either to the realm of pure sensibility or the realm of pure transcendence. In either case, it is quarantined by a mind that grows more and more impatient with the mystery intrinsic to beauty. The contemporary resurgence of interest in beauty as a theological theme emerges out of a desire to move beyond the monopoly upon the conditions of divine revelation that human thought acquires in Modernity.

The unique attributes that constitute beauty make it a phenomenon that is particularly hospitable to the various dimensions of the human/divine intermediation. Beauty is at once encountered as an extra-mental event and an intra-mental determination. It possesses the unique capacity to spontaneously generate a harmony between the requirements of cognitive judgment and the reality of an actual occurrence. Beauty seems to present to the will that which the will does not initially realize it desires. Upon its encounter, beauty prompts the will out of itself, inspiring the will to realize its own higher capacity for volition. To the extent that the intellect is nourished by the what the will consumes, beauty plays an indispensible role in every cognitive function. Beauty is simultaneously given from a transcendent source even as it is received in a created effect. In order for these attributes of beauty to be recognized, however, it is necessary to return to the historical figures in whose thought beauty is first nurtured.

The first figure to recognize the paramount importance of beauty’s relation to God is Dionysius the Areopagite. In the theological synthesis of this fifth century Syrian monk, two original ideas emerge with respect to the issue of beauty as a divine name. The first concerns his transformation of the two so-called Parmenidean hypotheses into two attributes of the one
God. This establishes the phenomenon of a divine name as a mediating power communicated from the divine essence into the formal constitution of creatures. The second concerns his addition of beauty to the sequence of divine names. Both of these ideas coincide in the Dionysian project, enabling one to speak of a ‘coincidence of originality’ in Dionysius’s theology of beauty.

This originality, however, is not without precedent. In order to most clearly see the extent of Dionysius’s originality it is necessary to examine the historical development that takes place with respect to the relation between beauty and the divine. This relation makes several elliptical and unexplained appearances throughout scripture. It is worked out in more detail, however, in the philosophical thought of the ancient Greeks. As an issue, the relation between beauty and the divine is touched on by a multitude of ancient Greek philosophers. Given Dionysius’s formation at the Athenian Academy three of these thinkers become primary, namely, Plato, Aristotle and Plotinus. The first chapter examines the way each of these three thinkers contributes to the development of beauty’s relation to the divine.

The second chapter examines the issue of beauty as a divine name in Dionysius the Areopagite. In Dionysius, the relation between beauty and God is firmly established in his identification of beauty as one of the primary names for God. Although the relation between beauty and the divine occurs in scripture and ancient Greek thought, Dionysius is the first Christian thinker to make the identification between beauty and God explicit. The second chapter examines the issue as it is exposited in Dionysius’s celebrated On the Divine Names. The issue is most fully elaborated in chapter 4 of this Dionysian treatise, but several other areas of the Corpus Dionysiacum are also relevant. This relevance is determined primarily by
the data that emerges from what is discovered in Plato, Aristotle and Plotinus along with scriptural evidence.

The passage of the Dionysian corpus into the Latin west is a complicated one that involves many important figures. From the moment the *Corpus Dionysiacum* arrives on the scene to the time it arrives in the Latin west, it becomes diversified according to the various interpretations put upon it by figures like John of Scythopolis, Maximus the Confessor, John Scotus Eriugena, Hugh of St. Victor, Thomas Gallus, Robert Grosseteste, Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas. The complexity of its transference into the Latin west derives largely from the interpretive form it assumes. This interpretive form includes the difficulty that its language poses to Latin translators like Hilduin, John Scotus Eriugena, Robert Grosseteste, and John Saracenus. Despite all this, however, the Dionysian corpus that comes to reside at the University of Paris in the thirteenth century exercises a significant influence upon almost every scholar who passes through her hallowed halls. The passage and eventual arrival of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* into the high Middle Ages is the content of the first part of chapter 3.

The remainder of chapter 3 examines the issue of *beauty as a divine name* as it appears in Thomas’s *Commentary on the Divine Names*. To date, there is no English or French translation of this commentary, indicating that its importance remains largely overlooked. Thomas composes this commentary right around the time he begins his monumental *Summa Theologicae*, arguably one of the greatest theological achievements of all time. The foundation of this work concerns the relation between God and humanity, a relation that includes several important contributions from Thomas’s Dionysian commentary. In Dionysius’s theology of the divine names, Thomas discovers a theological ontology that comes to shape his overall portrait of the God of Jesus Christ. Beauty’s role in this cannot be overstated.
Like Dionysius, Thomas contributes original insight to the way in which beauty establishes the divine/human encounter. For Thomas, beauty performs a mediating function that allows the good to orient itself toward the cognitive powers. Illuminating the role that beauty performs in this regard enables a more complete picture of how Thomas understands the divine/human encounter, as well as how he understands God himself.

This study concludes by comparing and contrasting the issue of *beauty as a divine name* in the Dionysian-Thomist legacy with three contemporary practitioners of theological aesthetics: David Bentley Hart, Richard Viladesau and Alejandro Garcia-Rivera. Each of these thinkers also discovers in beauty an event by which the divine/human encounter can be made more intelligible. Each thinker constructs a unique theological methodology through his particular approaches to beauty. The relevance that the Dionysian-Thomistic legacy has with respect to contemporary theological aesthetics may be discerned by relating it to these three distinct approaches. A formidable body of commentary has arisen around the thought of the Angelic Doctor in the 700 years since he put his thoughts into writing. Although an examination of this commentary tradition is not possible within the limits of the present study, this fourth chapter will bring to light areas where this commentary tradition might be mined for further inquiry into the Dionysian-Thomistic configuration of beauty as a divine name. It therefore will gesture toward other possible avenues for bringing this configuration into the discourse of theological aesthetics.
Chapter 1

Sources

Beauty as a divine name most fundamentally concerns the relation between beauty and the divine, or beauty and the supreme principle. The examination of this issue begins with an inquiry into those classical sources upon which this relation develops. Although there are numerous passages throughout the Christian Scriptures that testify to this relation, a certain ambiguity remains regarding the identification between God and beauty. Dionysius’s assertion in his treatise *On the Divine Names* that beauty is in fact a name for God can be read as a response to this Biblical ambiguity. One question that will guide this opening chapter, then, is this: what extra-Biblical influences contributed to this eventual response?

The identity of the author of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* has been debated ever since the Corpus appeared in the mid-sixth century. By the end of the nineteenth century, it is evident that the multitude of parallels between the author of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* and certain Neoplatonists, especially Proclus, make it highly unlikely that the author is the first century

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1 The most significant passages can be found in the following books: *Genesis, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, the Psalms*, and the *Wisdom of Solomon*.

2 Perhaps the clearest parallel is found in chapter 4 of the treatise on *Divine Names*, where Dionysius’s excursus on evil 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: H. Koch, “Der pseudo-epigraphische Character der dionysischen Schriften,” *Theologische Quartalschrift* 77 (1895): 353 – 421; J. Stiglmayr, S.J., *Der Neoplatoniker Proclus als Vorlage des sogenannten Dionysius Areopagita in der Lehre vom Übel in Historisches Jahrbuch* 16 (1895): 253 – 273, 721 – 748; Cf. also Sarah Klitenic Wear and John Dillon, *Dionysius the Areopogit and the Neoplatonist Tradition, Despoiling the Hellenes* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), chpt. 5; Paul Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius, A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to their Influence* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984), 27, was one primary foundation for Stiglmayr’s investigation into the setting and
convert of St. Paul that he claims to be. In the absence of any concrete identity, many have proposed various alter-ego theories. Although these are not without some plausibility, none are credible enough to merit any further serious attention. Following the work of some leading scholars on the matter the examination put forth in this chapter begins from the point of view that the author who calls himself Dionysius the Areopagite is a native of Syria in the late fifth or early sixth century; that he is a monk; that he attends the Academy in Athens and, therefore, frequents the lectures of Proclus who is made scholarch of the Academy in 476.

Plato, Aristotle and Plotinus are the three figures who perhaps more than any others shape the Neoplatonic thought that permeates the Academy at that time. Although their treatment of beauty differs in content and degree, beauty for each is an object of philosophical inquiry. These three sources view beauty in its relation to the transcendent

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3 Perhaps the most notable is Stiglmayr’s theory that Dionysius is actually Severus of Antioch. On this see Jaroslav Pelikan, “The Odyssey of Dionysian Spirituality,” Pseudo-Dionysius, The Complete Works, Colm Luibheid (trans.)(New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 12 – 13; Wear & Dillon, Dionysius the Areopagite and the Neoplatonist Tradition, 1 – 4. Stiglmayr’s proposal appears plausible for a number of reasons: Severus studies in Alexandria during the late fifth century and has the opportunity to become familiar with Proclus; he was baptized into Christianity quite late, after studying the Cappadocian Fathers; he abandons his career as a lawyer to become a monk in Jerusalem; he is appointed Patriarch of Antioch in 512 and became involved in the Monophysite controversy; he was the first one to make reference to the Corpus Dionysiacum. However, despite this, Joseph Lebon, the great authority on Severus of Antioch, has refuted the hypothesis. See Joseph Lebon, “Le Pseudo-Denis l’Aréopagite et Sévère d’Antioche,” Revue d’histoire ecclésiastique 26 (1930); 880 – 915. A list of other hypotheses can be found in Von Balthasar’s Glory of the Lord II: Studies in Theological Style: Clerical Styles (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1984), 146. Balthasar also notes that these theories have all been refuted by Walther Völker, Kontemplation und ekstase bei Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita (Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1958), 5 – 11.

order (Plato), the first principle (Aristotle) and the One (Plotinus). This chapter examines these views without delving into their authors’ aesthetic systems as a whole.

1.1. Plato

The examination of beauty’s relation to the divine in Plato is confronted by a twofold exegetical difficulty. First, Plato does not provide a systematic, or “definitional,” elaboration of beauty in any one dialogue. Second, the dialogue where Plato attempts to provide a definition of beauty – namely, the Hippias Major – fails in its efforts. Similarly, in other dialogues where beauty is given ample attention, most crucially the Symposium and the Phaedrus, no definitive determination of beauty is given. 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, the limitations of the current undertaking do not allow an examination of every text in which beauty appears. Given that the focus of this chapter is on the relation between beauty and the divine, these three aforementioned texts become primary.

The difficulties that derive from these conditions surrounding Plato’s thoughts on beauty may be relieved by situating the issue according to the following literary taxonomy: 1) dialogues that address a theme ‘focally’ with the goal of defining the topic in question, 2) dialogues that address a theme ‘focally’ where the goal is not to arrive at a formal definition, 3) dialogues that treat a given theme non-focally, or only indirectly, and 4) dialogues that are silent on a given theme, in both an absolute sense (no dialogue, for example, treats the

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5 For an illuminating account of beauty in the whole of Plato, we would direct the reader to the third volume of Von Balthasar’s monumental Herrlichkeit, – in English, The Glory of the Lord, A Theological Aesthetics, IV: The Realm of Metaphysics in Antiquity (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 155 – 231 – where he expositions the ways in which the whole of the Platonic corpus bears witness to a theology of glory or revelation.

6 Here, we follow the analysis of Drew A. Hyland, Plato and the Question of Beauty (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008), 1 – 6.
theme of the historical process) and a ‘striking’ sense in which the silence invites one to think about the absence.

Within this taxonomy, the issue of beauty follows a trajectory in its treatment from the *Hippias Major* to the *Symposium* to the *Phaedrus*. The *Hippias Major* contains the most focal treatment of beauty, while in the *Symposium* treats beauty somewhat indirectly in terms of its relationship with love. The *Phaedrus* treats beauty in a more existential context as a way to penetrate its enigmatic content and efficacy. 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, may be best recognized.

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). After Hippias stumbles in his efforts to answer this question, each time providing particular examples of beautiful things, Socrates clarifies, ‘I am asking, sir, what is beauty itself?’ (292d). Particular things that are beautiful announce beauty itself, and it is the latter that Socrates seeks through his inquiry.

The results of the dialogue are well known. Hippias provides a few different responses to determine the nature of beauty *per se*. He first suggests that the ‘appropriate’ (τὸ πρέπον) is what makes all things beautiful, both insofar as they appear beautiful and insofar as they are beautiful. Socrates refutes this by contending that if the same thing, namely the ‘appropriate,’ were 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

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7 *Hippias Major* 294c: ἀλλὰ τὸ πρέπον, ὦ Σώκρατες, καὶ ἕνας καὶ φαίνεσθαι ποιεῖ καλὰ παρόν.
cause could never make things both appear and be either beautiful or anything else.”

With this remark Plato introduces the tension that arises between beauty’s appearance as it is judged by individuals and the common nature that all such judgments affirm. The ‘useful’ (χρήσιμον) is next posited 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.

Because the useful can also pertain to what is evil and ugly, however, this cannot be accepted as a proper definition of beauty. Perhaps, suggests Socrates, the beautiful is defined as that which is ‘profitable’ or ‘beneficial’ (ὠφέλιμα), since all things that are beautiful, whether bodies, rules of life or wisdom, share in common the fact that they benefit the one effected by their beauty. Because the ‘beneficial’ configures beauty as something which produces the good, however, this definition subordinates the good to beauty thus rupturing their unity.

Finally, the two consider to what extent the pleasure that comes through sight and hearing can be validly proffered as a definition for beauty, and conclude that because this would implicate a dependency on the sensible world, it cannot be a valid definition of beauty in itself.

According to the schematic noted above, 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 principle 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 beauty, in Plato’s view, exceeds in its fullness

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8 Hippias Major 294c: φαίνεσθαι δὲ καὶ [ποιεῖν] εἶναι οὐ μόνον καλὰ οὐκ ἂν ποτε δύναιτο τὸ αὐτό, ἀλλὰ οὐδὲ ἄλλα ὠτοῦν.

9 Hippias Major 295c: τοῦτο γὰρ δὴ ἔστω ἡμῖν καλὸν, ὡς ἄλλος καινὸς ὁ ἐκέννει.

10 Hippias Major 296c: οὔτω δὴ καὶ τὰ καλὰ σώματα καὶ τὰ καλὰ νόμιμα καὶ ἡ σοφία καὶ ἡ νυνθή ἐλέγομεν πάντα καλὰ ἔστιν, ὡς ὠφέλιμα.

11 Hippias Major 298a: τὸ καλὸν ἔστι τὸ δι᾽ ἀκοῆς τε καὶ δι᾽ ὀψίως ἢ δύ
the very structure of discursive thought altogether (dianoia), not, however, in such a way as to exclude discursion but rather in such a way as to exceed it while including it. Indeed, as that which inspires the activity of discursive thought, an inspiration so demonstrated by the very content of the Hippias Major, beauty cannot be captured in its boundaries. 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 (Rep. X, 605b). 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 indeed acceptable.

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, even perhaps 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 logos 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

12 Stanely Rosen argues for a similar understanding with respect to logos in, Plato’s Republic: A Study (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 264 – 265: “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.”

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 with the weight of non-discursive\textsuperscript{14} – or perhaps ‘trans-discursive,’ or ‘overly-discursive’ – intelligibility. Plato thus ends his inquiry with Socrates coming to fuller realization of the proverb, “all that is beautiful is difficult.”\textsuperscript{15}

In the \textit{Symposium}, Plato appears to have hearkened to his own discoveries in the \textit{Hippias Major}. Rather than approaching the theme of beauty in search of definition, in the \textit{Symposium} Plato treats beauty as a transcendental, and at times ‘divine,’ phenomenon whose intelligibility is sought through love rather than discursive knowledge. By reading the \textit{Symposium} in its relation to the \textit{Hippias Major} and the \textit{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 \textit{erōs}.\textsuperscript{16} When situated alongside the \textit{Hippias Major} and the \textit{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, whose account comes first, praises love as “a great god, wonderful alike to the gods and to

\textsuperscript{14} The discursive/non-discursive dichotomy is employed throughout Hyland’s inquiry into Platonic beauty as a way to discuss the possibility that Plato’s view of beauty corresponds to something other than, though not opposed to, discursive thinking. In this sense, non-discursive is not to be taken as itself a definition of a category, but merely as that which is ‘other’ to discursive thinking – something more akin to \textit{noesis}.

\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Hippias Major} 304e: ἐγὼ οὖν μοι δοκῶ, ὦ Ἡππία, ὑφελήθαι ἀπὸ τῆς ἀμφοτέρων ὑμῶν ἀμιλίας: τὴν γὰρ παραμίαν ὅτι ποτὲ λέγει, τὸ “χαλεπά τὰ καλά,” δοκῶ μοι εἰδέναι.

mankind,”17 as “ancient source of all our highest goods;”18 as that which alone “will make a man offer his life for another’s;”19 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.”20 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.”21 It is at this point 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.”22

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

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17 Symposium 178a: ὅτι μέγας θεός εἶ ὁ Ἐρως καὶ θαυμαστὸς ἐν ἄνθρωποις τε καὶ θεοῖς,
18 Symposium 178c: πρεσβύτατος δὲ ὅν ἐν πολλοῖς άγαθών ἦμιν αὐτός ἐστιν
19 Symposium 179bc: καὶ μήν ὑπεραισθησίσειν γε μόνοι ἐθέλουσιν οἱ ἔρωντες
20 Symposium 180bc: οὗτος δὲ ἐγώ γε ὠρίσα να ἑπίμετα θεού καὶ πρεσβύτατον καὶ τιμώτατον καὶ κυριώτατον εἶναι εἰς ἀρετῆς καὶ ἐνδυμανίας κτῆσιν ἄνθρωποις καὶ ζώσι καὶ τελευτῆσαιν.
21 Symposium 183e: ὑπὸ εἰς ἀρχής ἐξέχρησιν ὀοῖτε καλὸν εἶναι αὐτὸ καθ᾽ αὐτὸ ὀοῖτε καθόρεν, ἀλλὰ καλὸς μὲν πραττόμενον καλὸν, αἰσχρῶς δὲ αἰσχρὸν.
22 Symposium 183e: ὤδὲ τοῦ ἱθοὺς χρηστοῦ ὄντος ἔραστής διὰ βίου μένει, ἔτει μονίμως συντακείς.
‘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.\textsuperscript{23} 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 (187c). Love, as Eryximachus recognizes, is a single reality with a diversity 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 but remains implied within a discernable trajectory of transcendence; as it is examined in the dialogue’s order of speeches, love is more and more opened to its relationship with beauty.

This movement toward the transcendent 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 raise the mightiest temples and altars, and offered the most splendid sacrifices, in his honor and not – as in fact we do – utterly neglect him.”\textsuperscript{24} 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 (\textit{insula}κεφαλησθαι).\textsuperscript{25} In this way, Aristophanes’s account of love, at least in

\textsuperscript{23} Cf. Tatarkiewicz, \textit{History of Aesthetics}, I, 12 – 89.

\textsuperscript{24} \textit{Symposium} 189c: ἐμοὶ γὰρ δοκοῦσιν ἰνθρωπὸι παντάπασι τὴν τοῦ ἐρωτος δύναμιν ὥσπερ ἰσθήσθαι, ἐπεὶ ἀισθανόμενοι γε μὲν ἄν αὐτὸν ἱερὰ κατασκευάσαι καὶ βωμοῦς, καὶ θυσιὰς ἀν ποιεῖν μεγίστας, ὥσπερ ἀν οὖν τοῦτων οὐδὲν γίνεται περὶ αὐτῶν, δέον πάντων μᾶλλον γίγνεσθαι. Here, we follow the translation of Michael Joyce from \textit{Plato, The Collected Dialogues, including the Letters}, Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (eds.) (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961).

\textsuperscript{25} The word ισθήσθαι in 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.’
this aspect, bears remarkable similarity to the *Hippias Major*’s conclusion about beauty. In both cases, the failure of human thought does not prevent certain aspects of the phenomenon in question from being made intelligible. 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). Rather, 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.  

26 Aristophanes consequently appeals to the concrete drama of religious narrative and myth as he continues his song of praise.

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 redintegrate our former nature, to make two into one, and to bridge the gulf between one human being and another?”  

27 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.

26 Cf. Rosemary Desjardins, *Plato and the Good* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 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 (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).”

27 *Symposium* 191d: ἕστι δὲ δὴ ὅν ἐκ τάσοι ὁ ἔρως ἐμφύτως ἀλλήλων τοῖς ἀνθρώποις καὶ τῆς ἄρχαιας φύσεως συναγωγεὺς καὶ ἐπιχειρῶν ποιῆσαι ἐν ἐκ δυοῦν καὶ ίάσασθαι τὴν φύσιν τὴν ἄνθρωπιν.
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. In his speech, Agathon continues to develop love within this transcendent trajectory. 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. 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 (196c). 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 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 opens him to a mode of thinking or mindfulness that opens discursive reason to what is other to discursive reason.

The fundamental issue in Socrates’ account relevant to the present purpose is the “final revelation” (τὰ δὲ τέλεα καὶ ἐποπτικά) that identifies beauty with the final goal of love, and hence as a divine principle (210a – 212c). Socrates begins his account by explaining Diotima’s teaching that there is a mode of thinking or discourse (logos) that recognizes what is ‘between’ (μεταξῦ) 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 μεταξῦ is reified as merely an object of inquiry.29 Given the fact that this feature appears at the beginning of Diotima’s account, it serves a propaedeutic purpose and so intends to throw light on a mode of thinking rather than merely an object of inquiry. Further analysis may illuminate the contours of this suggestion.

With this revelation, Socrates is able to recognize how love, rather than naming a univocal phenomenon, is in fact a spirit “halfway between mortal and immortal,”30 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.31 Because love’s birth occurs on the same day that

30 Symposium 202e: μεταξῦ ἐστὶ θεοῦ τε καὶ θνητοῦ.
Aphrodite is begotten, “he was born to love the beautiful since Aphrodite herself is beautiful.” 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 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 the designs of resource upon the beautiful and the good (203d).

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 ‘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 μεταξὺ 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 anagogical 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.

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32 Symposium 203c: καὶ ἄμα φύσει ἠρατῆς ὢν περὶ τὸ καλὸν καὶ τῆς Ἀφροδίτης καλῆς οὐσίας.
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 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.33

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. It is suggested that this metaphysical dimension of desire, where beauty stimulates love’s anagogical ascent, marks a novel development in Plato.34 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 μεταξύ, 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 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

33 Symposium 210d – 211b: ἄλλα ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ πέλαγος τετραμήνον τοῦ καλοῦ καὶ θεωρῶν πολλοὺς καὶ καλοὺς λόγους καὶ μεγαλοπρεπεῖς τίτκη καὶ διανοηματα ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ ἄρθρων, ἐώς ᾧ ἐνταῦθα ὑσθεῖς καὶ αὐξηθεῖς κατίδῃ τινὰ ἔπιστήμην μίαν τοιαύτην, ἢ ἐστὶ καλοῦ τοιοῦτο. πειρῶ δὲ μοι, ἔφη, τὸν νοῦν προσέχειν ὡς οἷον τε μάλιστα. ὅ γάρ ἂν μέχρι ἐνταῦθα πρὸς τὰ ἐρωτικὰ παιδαγωγηθῆ, θεώμενος ἔφεξῃ τε καὶ ὀρθῶς τὰ καλά, πρὸς τέλος ἢδὴ ἵνα τῶν ἐρωτικῶν ἔξαιρης κατάγωσαι τῆς θαυμαστῆς τῆς φύσις καλόν, τοῦτο ἐκεῖνο, ὡς ἱκάσκωτες, οὐ δὲ ἐνεκείναι καὶ οἱ ἐμπροσθεν πάντες πάντως ἤσαν, πρῶτον μὲν αὐτὸν καὶ οὕτε γεγονόμενον οὔτε ἀπολλύμενον, οὔτε αὐξανόμενον οὔτε ψβίζον, ἔπειτα οὕτω τῇ μὲν καλοῖ, τῇ δ’ ἀἰσχρόν, οὔδέ τοτε μέν, τοτε δὲ οὐ, οὐδὲ πρὸς μὲν τὸ καλόν, πρὸς δὲ τὸ αἰσχρόν, οὔδ’ ἔνθα μὲν καλόν, ἕνθα δὲ αἰσχρόν, ὡς τισὶ μὲν ἄν καλόν, τισὶ δὲ αἰσχρόν: οὔδ’ αὐτήν ἀναπτάσθησαι αὐτῷ τὸ καλὸν οἷον πρόσωπον τι νῦν χεῖρις οὔδε ἄλλο οὔδεν ἄλλα σῦμα μετέχει, οὔδε τὸ λόγος οὔδε τῆς ἔπιστήμης, οὔδ’ τὸν ἐν ἕτερῳ τινι, οἷον ἐν ἔρωτι ἢ ἐν γῇ ἢ ἐν ὑώραν ἢ ἐν τῷ ἄλλῳ, ἄλλ’ αὐτῷ καθ’ αὐτό μὲθ’ αὐτοῦ μονοείδες ἄει δὲν, τὰ δὲ ἄλλα πάντα καλὰ ἐκεῖνου μετέχοντα πρόπτον τινὰ τοιοῦτον, οἷον γινομένων ταὶ τῶν ἄλλων καὶ ἀπολλυμένων, ἂν ἐκεῖνο μήτε τὰ πλέον μήτε ἐλαττόν γίγνεσθαι μηδὲ πάσχειν μηδὲν.

Translation M. Joyce.

34 Charles H. Kahn, Plato and the Socratic Dialogue: The Philosophical Use of Literary Form (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 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.”
upon which one may affirm in Plato the view that beauty is a transcendental property of being.\footnote{Von Balthasar, \textit{The Glory of the Lord}, IV, 202.} Despite the anachronism such a suggestion contains with respect to any strict doctrine of the \textit{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. When cast in the context of the \textit{Hippias Major}, love provides a way beyond the limits of discursive reason (\textit{dianoia}) and instead taps into a \textit{logos} of the \textit{μεταξὺ}, enabling the vision of beauty to appear unified as it is loved in between its material concretions.

The concrete, existential dimension of this relation is elaborated in the \textit{Phaedrus}. The \textit{Symposium} illustrates how love involves a human seeking and is prompted, energized and mysteriously guided by the otherness of a transcendental offering, which, in the ‘final revelation’ is named beauty. In the \textit{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 \textit{mania} – that ‘heaven sent madness’ that communicates and bestows ‘all blessings.’\footnote{\textit{Phaedrus}, 244b.} This is the madness of an excess or plenitude that touches the lover through beauty.\footnote{Cf. \textit{Phaedrus}, 249de.}

Given the sense of otherness implicated in \textit{mania}, it becomes possible to read the \textit{Phaedrus} as a way to critique certain epistemological theories that assume an autonomous
knower. One such reading, which emphasizes beauty’s relation to knowledge, contends that *mania* is a communication of beauty insofar as it communicates the ‘greatest blessings,’ and as such is ‘heaven-sent.’ When the *Phaedrus* is read in the context of beauty and its relation to the divine in sequence with the *Hippias Major* 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. This mode of mania, Socrates proclaims, “comes from the gods” and “is more beautiful than sanity, which is of human origin.” 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. This relation can be articulated as follows:

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.

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

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39 *Phaedrus*, 244 bc. See note 55 above.

40 *Phaedrus*, 244c.

41 *Phaedrus*, 244c: τόσον κάλλιον μαρτυροῦσιν οἱ παλαιοὶ μανίαν σωφροσύνησι τὴν ἐκ θεοῦ τῆς παρ’ ἀνθρώπων γνωμονής.

42 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.
discursive reason and as such interrupts the normal course of human thought. This does not mean that one ought to settle on 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. This is the ‘cathartic mania’ that, appearing among the sick, inspires prayer and worship, establishing the means of purification. Despite the ambiguity that surrounds 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 being, both in mind and body, from which man is unable to liberate himself by means of rational technique and discursive abstraction. Beauty, as Plato tells us, is that vision of true being that, more than justice, truth or even goodness, shows itself most clearly, but it is also that which is the most manifest to the senses. Mania as cathartic, tapping into both aspects of beauty (the spiritual and corporeal), mediates this substantive truth of eternal being to the physical sense 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

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43 Phaedrus, 244e.
44 Cf. Pieper, “Divine Madness,” 24ff. Pieper arrives at the same interpretation through an application of the findings of modern psychoanalysis.
45 Phaedrus, 250b-e.
the ancients nurtures later generations. Guided by the Muses, this mode of mania results in a poetic inspiration and so could be called poetic mania. However, it is important to distinguish between Plato’s praise of poetry here and his condemnation of it in the Republic (esp. Bk X). 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. 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 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.

The fourth and final mode by which mania communicates itself, which is “the best of

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46 Phaedrus, 245a: τρίτη δὲ ἀπὸ Μουσῶν κατοκωχὴ τε καὶ μανία, λαβοῦσα ἀπαλὴν καὶ ἄβατον ψυχὴν, ἔγειρον καὶ ἐκβακχεύουσα κατὰ τῇ ψυχῇ καὶ κατὰ τὴν ἄλλην ποίησιν, μυρία τῶν παλαιῶν ἐργά κοσμοῦσα τοὺς ἐπιγιγνομένους παιδεύει:

47 Phaedrus, 245a: δὲ δὲν ἄνευ μανίας Μουσῶν ἐπὶ ποιητικὰς θύρας ἀφίκηται, πεισθεὶς ὡς ἄρα ἐκ τέχνης ἴκανος ποιητὴς ἐδομένος, ἀπελῆς αὐτός τε καὶ ἡ ποίησις ὑπὸ τῆς τῶν μανιαμένων ἢ τοῦ συμφρονοῦντος ἢφανίσθη; “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.
all forms of divine possession, both in itself and in its sources, both for him that has it
and for him that shares therein,” 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,” and so includes what is given in the
first three modes. This fourth mode, *erotic mania*, is what could be called an analogical unity
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. Such
an appraisal can be summarized thus: all soul is immortal (245c), subsistent, intrinsically
possessing the source of its own motion (245c), 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). Hearkening back to the
mythical narrative of love’s origins and end presented by Aristophenes in the *Symposium*, this
primordial condition is also the true *telos* of human existence and so the object of both
reminiscence and desire. 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 to ‘coming to earth’ the soul
contemplates these true visions, which, when recalled in existence, are the objects of

48 Phaedrus, 249de: ἄρα αὐτὴ τασῶν τῶν ἐνθουσιάσεων ἀρίστη τε καὶ ἥξ ἄριστων τῷ τῷ Ἥχοντι καὶ τῷ κοινωνοῦντι αὐτῆς γίνεται
49 Phaedrus, 249c: ἔστι δὴ οὖν δεύσο ό πᾶς ἦκων λόγος περὶ τῆς τετάρτης μανίας
51 Phaedrus, 250aff.
52 Pieper, “Divine Madness,” 42.
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.\textsuperscript{53}

The \textit{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 \textit{mania} – as a commingling of the first three modes of \textit{mania} (prophetic, cathartic and poetic) – and the resulting erotic response. As Socrates’ account in the \textit{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, this contradictory collapse is only avoided when \textit{eros}, love, is understood as a logos of the \textit{μεταξὺ}, conceived from a conjugal union of need and resource. Consequently, the \textit{Phaedrus} can be read as an account in which the \textit{mania} of resource is mediated by the power of \textit{eros} to energize or actualize the many desires of need.

These are the texts in which the Platonic account of beauty’s relationship to the transcendental order, or the divine itself, are most clearly elaborated. The subtle correspondence between beauty, resource and \textit{mania} along with the conception of love as a mediating \textit{logos} of the \textit{μεταξὺ} establishes a significant foundation for the way in which beauty and its relation to the divine is 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 \textit{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

\textsuperscript{53} 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.” “Divine Madness,” 42.
logos of the μεταξ ὑ 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.

1.2. 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. There are a few different options for 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.’\(^54\) 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.\(^55\) The handful that have

\(^{54}\) This is the approach taken by Von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, IV, 220 – 230. 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.

\(^{55}\) 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 John J. Cleary, *Aristotle & Mathematics, Aporetic Method in Cosmology and Metaphysics* (Leiden: Brill, 1995) which treats beauty as it arises in concert with the metaphysics of mathematics. Other broader examples include, E. F. Carrit, *The Theory of Beauty* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1914) published almost a century ago, contains 17 pages in which Aristotle’s views of beauty are considered (75 – 92) while Frederick Coppleston, *History of Philosophy, vol. I: Greece and Rome, From the Pres-Socratic to Plotinus* (New York and London: Doubleday, 1993), first published in 1946) contains a 12 page section on Aristotle’s aesthetics (359 – 371) in which one finds a page and a half specifically on beauty. Within the various histories of aesthetics (Bosanquet, Everett and Kuhn, Tatarkiewicz)
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 or measure, and enduring beyond the transience of time. 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.

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 demonstrates 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.

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. Gerald Frank Else, “Aristotle on the Beauty of Tragedy,” Harvard Studies in Classical Philology, Vol. 49, (1938), 179-204; John S. Marshall, “Art and Aesthetic in Aristotle,” The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, Vol. 12, No. 2 (Dec., 1953), 228-231.

56 Metaphysics, 1062b 15 – 1063a 5.
57 Nicomachean Ethics 1123a 9 – 10.
Aristotle’s influence upon the Neoplatonism that permeates the Academy cannot be doubted. From as early as Plotinus and on through his posterity in Neoplatonism, the works of Aristotle are synthesized alongside those of Plato. Porphry writes his *Isagoge*, a well-known introduction to Aristotle’s *Categories*. Iamblichus, who is also highly 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*.\(^58\) 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.”\(^59\) One scholar even refers to Proclus’s writings on Aristotle’s *Physics* and *De Caelo* as “study manuals.”\(^60\) 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 common opinion suggests. 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.

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

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significant attention to the various enigmatic statements about beauty.\textsuperscript{51} 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.

\textbf{1.2.1 Beauty and the Final Cause}

The most well known correspondence between beauty and the final cause in Aristotle occurs early on in book I (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,\textsuperscript{62} 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 \textit{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 XII, chapter 7, where Aristotle considers movement in the context of the eternal mover. After demonstrating how the first

\textsuperscript{51} Owens’ influential study \textit{The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian Metaphysics, A Study in the Greek Background of Medieval Thought}, 3rd Ed. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1951), 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 \textit{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.

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 anagogical 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.”63

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.64 There Aristotle writes: “The Noble (or Morally
Beautiful) is that which is both desirable for its own sake and also worthy of praise.”65 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.66
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

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63 *Metaphysics* 1072a 35: ἀλλὰ μὴν καὶ τὸ καλὸν καὶ τὸ δι’ αὐτὸ αἵρετὸν ἐν τῇ αὐτῇ συστοιχίᾳ. It should be
noted that some translations (e.g., Hugh Tredennick) render καλὸν as “good” rather than “beautiful.” In our
view, this 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 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.

64 Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics* I, 150.

65 *Rhetoric* I, 9 (1366a 33): καλὸν μὲν οὖν ἐστιν ὁ ἄν δι’ αὐτὸ αἵρετον ὃν ἐπαινετόν ἢ

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, chpt. 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.\(^67\) 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.”\(^68\)

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 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*.

\(^{67}\) *Symposium* 210a.

\(^{68}\) *Metaphysics* 1072b 5: κινεῖ δὴ ὡς ἐρώμενον, κινούμενο δὲ τάλλα κινεῖ.
Earlier in book IX, chapter 6, Aristotle distinguishes between a movement and an actuality. Aristotle states that an actuality is “that movement in which the end is present.”\textsuperscript{69} 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.\textsuperscript{70} 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, 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 understood it, is an action that is done

\textsuperscript{69} Metaphysics 1048b 22: ἀλλὰ ἐκείνη ἐνυπάρχει τὸ τέλος καὶ [Ἡ] πρᾶξις
\textsuperscript{70} Metaphysics 1048b 23 – 24.
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 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.\(^\text{71}\) 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 (καλώς), and it is in this sense a first principle.”\(^\text{72}\) The fact that the word καλώς has been translated most often as ‘good’\(^\text{73}\) 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 studies on Aristotle’s use of οὐσία make clear, the linguistic-

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\(^{72}\) *Metaphysics* 1072b 12: ἐπεὶ δὲ ἐστὶ τι κινούν αὐτὸ ἀκίνητον ὄν, ἐνεργεῖά ὑπό τοῦτο οὐκ ἐνδέχεται ἄλλως ἔχειν ὀὕδαιμως, φορά γὰρ ἡ πρώτη τῶν μεταβολῶν, ταύτης δὲ ἡ κύκλως: ταύτην δὲ τούτο κινεῖ. ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἄρα ἐστὶν ὄν: καὶ ἡ ἀνάγκη, καλώς, καὶ ὃ ὑπάρχει ἀρχή.

\(^{73}\) E.g., both Tredennick and Ross translate καλώς 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 καλώς, 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 make sense in the context given. Moreover, Liddel and Scott (*An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1889*) explain that the adverbial use of καλώς is translated as “rightly” most often when used in a moral context, which is not the case with this passage.
interpretive dimensions of Aristotle’s thought are crucial to understanding the various themes that he treats. An equally thorough study on the term *kalos* would provide a helpful fortification for the present purposes. Unfortunately, space here does not allow such a study. Nevertheless, 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 primordiality of the former over the latter: the necessary is “that without which the good is impossible.” This is a reiteration of what appears earlier in chapter V (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

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74 Owens, *The 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 and philosophical direction of the Stagarite’s thought may become irretrievably lost.”

75 *Metaphysics* 1072b 13: τὸ γὰρ ἀναγκαῖον τοσσαυταχώς, τὸ μὲν βία ὑπ’ ἀλλὰ τὴν ὀρμήν, τὸ δὲ οὐκ ἀνευ τὸ εὖ, τὸ δὲ μὴ ἐνδεχόμενον ἄλλως ἀλλ’ ἀπλῶς.
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 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.”⁷⁶ 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

⁷⁶ *Metaphysics* 1072b 17: ἡ δὲ νόησις ἡ καθ’ αὐτήν τοῦ καθ’ αὐτό ἀρίστου, καὶ ἡ μάλιστα τοῦ μάλιστα
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.\textsuperscript{77}

To what extent does this description of God correspond to beauty as Aristotle understood it? God is here identified 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, 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.\textsuperscript{78}

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 \textit{Rhetoric} where his characterization of beauty appears more specifically developed, the elaborations here are the inchoate origins of that later characterization. Elsewhere in the \textit{Metaphysics}, Aristotle acknowledges that a science such as

\textsuperscript{77} \textit{Metaphysics} 1072b 24 – 30: \textit{εἰ} οὖν οὕτως \textit{εὐχεί}, ως \textit{ἡμεῖς} τοιτε, \textit{ὁ} \textit{θεὸς} \textit{ἀεί}, \textit{θαυμαστόν}: \textit{εἰ} \textit{δὲ} \textit{μάλλον}, \textit{ἐτι} \textit{θαυμασιώτερον}. \textit{ἔχει} \textit{δὲ} \textit{ώδε}. καὶ \textit{ζωὴ} \textit{δὲ} \textit{γε} \textit{ὕπαρξει}: \textit{ἡ} \textit{γὰρ} \textit{νοού} \textit{ἐνέργεια} \textit{ζωῆς}, \textit{ἐκένος} \textit{δὲ} \textit{ἡ} \textit{ἐνέργεια}: \textit{ἔνεργεια} \textit{δὲ} \textit{καὶ} \textit{καθ’} \textit{αὐτὴν} \textit{καθαύτου} \textit{ζωῆς} \textit{ἄριστη} καὶ \textit{ἀίδιος}, \textit{φαμὲν} \textit{δὲ} \textit{τὸν} \textit{θεὸν} \textit{εἰσίν} \textit{ζῷον} \textit{ἀίδιον} \textit{ἄριστον}, \textit{ὡστε} \textit{ζωῆς} καὶ \textit{αὐτών} \textit{συνεχῆς} καὶ \textit{ἀίδιος} \textit{ὑπάρχει} \textit{τῇ} \textit{θεῷ}: \textit{τὸῦ} \textit{γάρ} \textit{ὁ} \textit{θεὸς}. Translation by Ross. Aristotle elaborates this notion more fully at 1074b 15 – 1075a 10.

\textsuperscript{78} \textit{Metaphysics} 1074b 25 – 30: \textit{δὴ} \textit{δὴ} \textit{τοῦ} \textit{νοοῦ} \textit{ὁ} \textit{θείοτατον} \textit{kai} \textit{τιμιώτατον} \textit{νοεῖ}, \textit{kai} \textit{οὐ} \textit{μεταβάλλει}: \textit{εἰς} \textit{χεῖρον} \textit{γάρ} \textit{ἡ} \textit{μεταβολή}, \textit{kai} \textit{kίνησις} \textit{tis} \textit{η} \textit{τοῦ} \textit{τουοτον.} \textit{πρῶτον} \textit{μὲν} \textit{οὖν} \textit{εἰ} \textit{μὴ} \textit{νόησις} \textit{ἐστὶ} \textit{ἄλλα} \textit{δύναμις}, \textit{ἐδυσαγωγὸν} \textit{ἐπίστολον} \textit{ἐστὶ} \textit{τὰ} \textit{συνεχές} \textit{αὐτῆς} \textit{τῆς} \textit{νοοσεως}: \textit{ἐπεῖτα} \textit{δὴ} \textit{δὴ} \textit{ὅδε} \textit{ὅτι} \textit{ἄλλο} \textit{τι} \textit{αὐτὶ} \textit{?key} \textit{τὸ} \textit{τιμίωτερον} \textit{ἢ} \textit{ὁ} \textit{νοοῦς}, \textit{τὸ} \textit{νοούμενον}. \textit{καὶ} \textit{γὰρ} \textit{τὸ} \textit{νοεῖν} \textit{kai} \textit{καὶ} \textit{νόησις} \textit{ὑπάρχει} \textit{kai} \textit{τὸ} \textit{χεῖροὸν} \textit{νοοῦντι, ὡς} \textit{ἐὶ} \textit{φειδκτὸν} \textit{τοῦτο} \textit{καὶ} \textit{γὰρ} \textit{μὴ} \textit{ὁρῶν} \textit{ἕως} \textit{κράτιστον} \textit{ἢ} \textit{ὄραν}, \textit{οὐκ} \textit{ἄν} \textit{ἄν} \textit{τὸ} \textit{κράτιστον} \textit{ἡμεῖς} \textit{νοήσις}: \textit{αὐτὸν} \textit{όρα} \textit{νοεῖ}, \textit{ἐπει} \textit{ἔστι} \textit{τὸ} \textit{κράτιστον}, \textit{καὶ} \textit{ἐστῖ} \textit{ἡ} \textit{νόησις} \textit{νόησεως} \textit{νόησις}. Translation Tredennick.
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). In response, Aristotle explains that all effects derive from being that is prior, first and complete in itself: even a seed came 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 passage we 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.

1.2.2. Beauty and the Origin

The second significant passage on beauty from the *Metaphysics* is found in book V, chapter 1, which will be joined to book XIII, chapter 3 for reasons that will become clear. In the first chapter of book V 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.” From these three classifications, he derives two broader groupings: “but of these some are immanent in the thing and others are outside,” 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.”

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 XIII 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 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

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79 *Metaphysics* 1013a 18: πασῶν μὲν οὐν κοινὸν τῶν ἀρχῶν τὸ πρῶτον ἐίναι δὲν ἢ ἐστιν ἢ γίγνεται ἢ γιγνώσκεται.

80 *Metaphysics* 1013a 18: διὸ ἡ τε φύσις ἀρχὴ καὶ τὸ στοιχεῖον καὶ ἡ διάνοια καὶ ἡ προαίρεσις καὶ οὐσία καὶ τὸ οὐ ἑνεκα.

81 *Metaphysics* 1013a 23: πολλῶν γὰρ καὶ τοῦ γνώναι καὶ τῆς κινήσεως ἄρχη τάγαθον καὶ τὸ καλὸν.
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. Given the context of the passage under consideration, 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. 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.

For Aristotle, the objects of mathematics derive from being insofar as it is quantifiable, which is to say insofar as being has order, symmetry, and proportion. Mathematical objects

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possess a unique mode of existence in that they exist neither in sensible entities nor separate from them (1076b 10 – 15). Rather the objects of mathematics are 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 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. Admittedly, his line of reasoning is not without ambiguity. 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.  

Despite the difficulty, however, there are some important implications. One such implication, indicated by the causal use of ἐπεί, is that because the good and the beautiful are different, the latter can be and is treated also by the mathematical sciences. This implication

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85 *Metaphysics* 1078a 32 – 37: ἐπεὶ δὲ τὸ ἀγαθὸν καὶ τὸ καλὸν ἑτέρον τὸ μὲν γὰρ ἀεὶ ἐν πράξει, τὸ δὲ καλὸν καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἀκινήτοις, οἱ φάσκοντες οὐδὲν λέγειν τὰς μαθηματικὰς ἐπιστήμας περὶ καλοῦ ἢ ἀγαθοῦ ἱστοῦσιν. λέγουσι γὰρ καὶ δεικνύουσι μάλιστα: οὐ γὰρ εἰ μὴ ὄνομαξουσί τὰ δ’ ἔργα καὶ τοὺς λόγους δεικνύουσιν, οὐ λέγουσι περὶ αὐτῶν. Translation Ross.
is underscored by the passage in the *Nichomachean Ethics* where Aristotle explains how human action, in the ethical context of the good, cannot be determined with mathematical exactitude.\(^{86}\) 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 (ὡρισμένον). 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 is corroborated by many contemporary mathematicians and physicists).\(^{87}\) 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 causative 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.”\(^{88}\) 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.’\(^{89}\) Such a statement

\(^{86}\) *Nichomachean Ethics* 1094b 11 – 27.


\(^{88}\) *Metaphysics* 1078b 5: μᾶλλον δὲ γνωρίμως ἐν ἄλλοις περὶ αὐτῶν ἐρούμεν.

\(^{89}\) E.g., Tredennick’s translation.
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.

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 *Nichomachean Ethics*, *Poetics* and *Rhetoric*. In the *Nichomachean 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.”

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 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.” 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.

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,

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90 *Rhetoric* 1123b 6: ὡσπερ καὶ τὸ κάλλος ἐν μεγάλῳ σώματι, οἱ μικροὶ δ’ ἀστεῖοι καὶ σύμμετροι, καλοὶ δ’ οὖ.

91 *Poetics* 1450b 35: ἐτὶ δ’ ἐπεὶ τὸ καλὸν καὶ ζῷον καὶ ἢπατου δ’ συνεστηκέν ἐκ τινῶν οὐ μόνον ταῦτα τεταγμένα δεῖ ξεῖν ἄλλα καὶ μέγεθος ὑπάρχειν μὴ τὸ τυχόν:

92 *Poetics* 1451a: τὸ γὰρ καλὸν ἐν μεγέθει καὶ τάξει ἐστὶν, διὸ οὔτε πάμμικρον ἢ τυχόν τὸ καλὸν ζῷον ἰσοψηφεῖται γὰρ ἢ θεωρία εὐγὸς τούτου ἀναισθήτου χρόνου γινομένη οὕτω παραγέγεθες οὐ γὰρ ἢ ἡ θεωρία γίνεται ἀλλ’ οἴχεται τοῖς θεωροῦσι τὸ ἐν καὶ τὸ οὖν ἐκ τῆς θεωρίας ὑπερζύμενωσιν εἰ τις θεωρεῖ.
noted earlier, that man is the measure of all things.\textsuperscript{93} One also find this idea that beauty depends upon human perception in the \textit{Rhetoric} where it is explained in the context of writing and comprehension.\textsuperscript{94} 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. Without conforming itself to the limitations of the intellect, the end could never be desired for itself.

Nevertheless, there remains in Aristotle an 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 said, “is a blind man’s question.”\textsuperscript{95} As Aristotle seems to indicate, 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.”\textsuperscript{96} This Aristotelian conjunction is signified by a few different names; the prime mover, the unmoved mover,

\textsuperscript{93} \textit{Metaphysics}, 1062b 15 – 1063a 5.
\textsuperscript{94} \textit{Rhetoric} III, chpt. 9 1409a.
\textsuperscript{96} Etienne Gilson, \textit{God and Philosophy} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1941), 32.
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, demonstrating how 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.

1.3. Plotinus

Unlike Plato and Aristotle, Plotinus devotes specific areas of his thought to the theme of beauty. Consequently, the secondary literature devoted to this theme is abundant, ranging from collections of essays,97 to chapters in monographs,98 to entire monographs themselves.99 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,100 while others insist that beauty is derived from the

97 E.g., *Neoplatonism and Western Aesthetics*, Aphrodite Alexandrakis and Nicholas J. Moutafakis (eds.) (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002) essays by Narbonne, Sen, Quinn, Schroeder, Hubler, and Vassilopoulou are specifically devoted to Plotinus, while many others include his thought as a primary foundation.


One which, though equated with the Good, is clearly distinguished from Beauty. Before addressing this, it will be helpful to explicate some of the more fundamental elements of Plotinian 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 dimension. *Enneads* 3.8 is also relevant as a section that discusses contemplation and the One, exploring the method of encounter with the beautiful. Since Plotinus identifies beauty most properly with the Intellectual-principle (*nous*), other relevant sections include those areas where he discusses this principle.

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 et al.). To his credit, Plotinus’ methodology does not begin here, but follows from 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 against this view he argues that if it were difficulty in Plotinus’ references to beauty (καλλονή) 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 Suzanne Stern-Gillet, “Le Principle Du Beau Chez Plotin: Réflexions sur “Enneads” VI.7.32 et 33,” *Phronesis* 45 (1) (Feb. 2000): 38 – 63, and John H. Gay, “Four Medieval Views of Creation,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 56/4 (Oct., 1963): 243 – 273 both of whom argue that Plotinus does indeed identify beauty and the One.

101 R. W. Rist, *Plotinus: The Road to Reality*, 53 – 65. Rist contends that Inge’s examination “oversimplifies” the matter (56) and merely ‘states the problem rather than solves it’ (53).

102 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. Editions that have been consulted include the Armstrong translation in the Loeb edition, along with translation composed by MacKenna and Page.

accurate ‘nothing single or simple’ could be beautiful, nor could the parts of a whole but only the whole itself. For Plotinus, 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.”\(^{104}\) Beauty penetrates beyond the whole \textit{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 it and less than it.”\(^{105}\) 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.”\(^{106}\) Symmetry and good proportion cannot be identified as beauty itself since they bespeak a more primordial ‘something else’. Rather, for Plotinus the principle that

\(^{104}\) 1.6.1: καίτοι δει, εἴπερ ἄλοιν, καὶ τὸ μέρη καλὰ ἐναι· οὕ γὰρ δῆ ἐξ αἰσχρῶν, ἀλλὰ πάντα κατειληφέναι τὸ κάλλος.

\(^{105}\) 5.8.1: Ἡν ἀρα ἐν τῇ τέχνῃ τὸ κάλλος τοῦτο ἁμαυνὸν πολλῶν· οὐ γὰρ ἐκεῖνο ἠλθεν εἰς τὸν λίθον τὸ ἐν τῇ τέχνῃ, ἀλλ’ ἐκεῖνο μὲν μένει, ἄλλο δὲ ἀπ’ ἐκείνης ἐλαττον ἐκείνου.

\(^{106}\) 1.6.1: Ὅταν δὲ δῆ καὶ τῆς αὐτῆς συμμετρίας μενοῦσης ὅτε μὲν καλὸν τὸ αὐτὸ πρόσωπον, ὅτε δὲ μὴ φαίνεται, τῶς οὐκ ἄλλο δὲ ἐπὶ τῷ συμμέτρῳ λέγειν τὸ καλὸν ἐναι, καὶ τὸ σύμμετρον καλὸν ἐναι δὲ ἄλλο;
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). 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 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?” 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

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107 6.6.7: *αὕτη γάρ νοῦ φύσις· ἐπεὶ καὶ ψυχή οὕτω μιμεῖται καὶ ἢ λεγομένη φύσις, καθ' ἢν καὶ ὑπ' ἢς ἐκαστὰ γεννᾶται ἀλλο ἀλλοθι, οὕτης ὁμοί ἦαυτή οὐσής. 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” (*ἐκαστὰ γεννᾶται*), can be read in terms of a contrast between an intelligibility that exceeds the productions and processes of discursive thought even while entering into discursive thought.

108 1.6.2: Τίς οὖν ὁμοίότης τοῖς τῇς πρός τὰ ἓκεί καλά; καὶ γάρ, εἰ ὁμοίότης, οὕτω μὲν ἔστω· πῶς δὲ καλὰ κάκελνα καὶ ταύτα;
Whether or not Aristotle’s criticism is an accurate appraisal of Plato is debatable.\(^{109}\) 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.”\(^{111}\) 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.”\(^{112}\) All of this points to the way in which \(nous\), as the proper locus of beauty, is a plenitude of formative power and intelligibility. Plotinus is “directly” in the Aristotelian tradition in presenting the union of the soul with the divine intellect “as an experience that transcends the normal activity of reason.”\(^{113}\)

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

\(^{109}\) Aristotle, \textit{Metaphysics} 1079b.


\(^{111}\) 1.6.2: \(Προσιὸ ν \τὸ \ ἑιδὸς \τὸ \μὲν \ \ἐκ \ πολλῶν \ ἐσόμενον \ μερῶν \ ἐν \ συνθέσει \ συνετάξε \ τε \ καὶ \ εἰς \ μίαν \ συντέλειαν \ ἤγαγε \ καὶ \ ἐν \ τῇ \ ὁμολογίᾳ \ πεποίηκεν, \ ἐπειτερ \ ἐν \ ἦν \ αὐτό \ ἐν \ τε \ ἐδει \ τὸ \ μορφοῦμενον \ εἶναι \ ὡς \ δυνατὸν \ αὐτῷ \ ἐκ \ πολλῶν \ ὄντι.

\(^{112}\) 1.6.2: Οὕτω \μὲν \ δὴ \ τὸ \καλὸν \ σῶμα \ γίγνεται \ λόγου \ ἀπὸ \θείων \ ἐλθόντος \ κοινωνίας.

meant to serve as ‘doorways’ toward this higher realm (4.8.6). A few different principles emerge from this component of Plotinian beauty.

First, \( \text{nous} \) is a unity-in-plurality, a ‘many and one’ whose unity is multiplicity (4.8.3; 6.2.21; 6.5.6, et al.) and as such is identified with the all and with being (5.1.4). The unity of \( \text{nous} \) is secured insofar as, in its act of intellection, it is turned to the One whose overflow was the cause of its emanation:

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.\(^{114}\)

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 (5.2.1). \( \text{nous} \) is a plurality not only because now it has being and intellection as a ‘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 – \( \text{nous} \) – 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, \( \text{nous} \) is therefore identified with beauty: “And first we must posit beauty which is also the good; from this immediately comes \( \text{nous} \), which is beauty, and soul is given beauty by \( \text{nous} \).”\(^{115}\) This statement contains an ambiguity that accounts for the various interpretation of the relation between beauty and the One, which will be addressed below.

\(^{114}\) 5.2.1: \( \kappaαι \ ηπωτη \ οιον \ γεννησις \ αουτη; \ \οιον \ \gammaαπος \ \tauω \ \muηδεν \ \ζητειν \ \muηδε \ \εχειν \ \muηδε \ \δεισβαι \ \οιον \ \υπερερρυη \ \και \ \το \ \υπερπληρες \ \αντου \ \πεποιηκεν \ \αλλο; \ \οιον \ \γενομαιν \ \εις \ \αυτον \ \επεστραφη \ \και \ \επληρωθη \ \και \ \εγεντο \ \προς \ \αυτον \ \βλεπον \ \και \ \νοος \ \ουτος. \)

\(^{115}\) 1.6.6: \( \και \ το \ \πρωτον \ \θητουν \ \την \ \καλλονην, \ \οπερ \ \και \ \ταγαθον; \ \αργ \ \οου \ \νοος \ \ευθυς \ \το \ \καλον; \ \ψυχη \ \δε \ \νοος \ \καλον. \) It is worth noting the use of \( \alphaπο \) in the aspirated form \( \alphaφυ \) \( \sigmaυ \) 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.
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 under the heading ‘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 translations, each represent differing rapports and responses to the beauty that draws them upward. In this way beauty can be viewed also as a mode of ‘spiritual discipline.’

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.” Consequently, this figure must be taught to arrive at the principles that give rise to these many beautiful things by recognizing in these 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.’

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116 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, “[t]he 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).

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

118 1.3.1: θετέον δὴ αὐτὸν εὐκίνητον καὶ ἐπτομένον μὲν πρὸς τὸ καλὸν, ἀδυνατώτερον δὲ παρ’ αὐτοῦ κινεῖσθαι …

119 The phrase is καὶ λόγους τοὺς φιλοσοφίας ἐνθετέον, which means literally ‘one must insert the teachings/doctrines of philosophy’.
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.” 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

120 1.3.2: Ἀπὸ δὲ τῶν ἀρετῶν ἤδη ἀναβαίνειν ἐπὶ νοῦν, ἐπὶ τὸ ὄν· κάκει βαδιστέον τὴν ἀνω πορείαν. Translation Armstrong.
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 firm confidence in the existence of the immaterial.” 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.

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 associated with 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?” 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.” 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.” Beauty is the power that allows this harmony to flourish since beauty is identical with being (5.8.9) and wisdom is itself a conduit for beauty (5.9.2).

121 1.3.3: Τὰ μὲν δὴ μαθήματα δοτέον πρὸς συνεθισμὸν κατανοήσεως καὶ πίστεως ἀσωμάτου.
122 1.6.5: Ταῦτα οὖν ἀγάμενοι καὶ φιλοῦντες πῶς αὕτα λέγομεν καλά;
123 1.6.5: Ἐστι μὲν γὰρ καὶ φαίνεται καὶ οὐ μὴ ποτε ὁ ἰδὼν ἄλλο τι ἰδεῖ ἢ τὰ ὄντως ὄντα ταῦτα εἶναι. Τί ὄντα ὄντως; Ἡ καλά.
124 5.8.5: Ἡ ἄρα ἀληθινὴ σοφία οὐσία, καὶ ἡ ἀληθινὴ οὐσία σοφία, καὶ ἡ ἀξία καὶ τῇ οὐσίᾳ παρὰ τῆς σοφίας, καὶ, ὅτι παρὰ τῆς σοφίας, οὐσία ἀληθῆς.
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, provides 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 conceive creation in terms of hierarchical pedagogy.

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. Scholars associate this element in Plotinus with Diotima’s account in the Symposium.125 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, what might be called transcendental and predicamental for lack of better terms.

The first involves the act of the soul in its encounter with nature, i.e., knowledge on the 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, 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. 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).\(^{126}\) In the case of the soul, knowledge must elevate 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 this act of love 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 intellec
tively 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:

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 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.  

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.

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 be 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.*

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127 3.8.8: Ταύτα μὲν οὕτων. Τής δὲ θεωρίας ἀναβαίνοντος ἐκ τῆς φύσεως ἐπὶ ψυχήν καὶ ἀπὸ ταύτης εἰς νοοῦ καὶ ἄει οἰκειοτέρων τῶν θεωριῶν γνωριμένων καὶ ἐνοικεῖσθαι τοῖς θεωροῦσι καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς σπουδαίας ψυχῆς πρὸς τὸ αὐτὸ τῷ ὑποκειμένῳ ἵπτων τῶν ἐγνωσμένων ἐτε εἰς νοον σπευδόντων, ἐπὶ τοῦτο δηλοῦσι ἢ ὡς ἐν ἄμφω ὡς οἰκεῖος, ὡσπερ ἐπὶ τῆς ψυχῆς τῆς ἀρίστης, ἀλλ’ οὐσία καὶ τῷ ταύτῳ τὸ εἶναι καὶ τὸ νοεῖν εἶναι. Translation Armstrong.

128 6.7.36: Ἐστὶ μὲν γὰρ ὡς τοῦ ἄγαθον εἰτε γνῶσις εἰτε ἐπαφὴ μέγιστον, καὶ μέγιστὸν φησι τοῦτ’ εἶναι μάθημα, οὐ τὸ πρός αὐτὸ ἕδειν μάθημα λέγων, ἀλλὰ περὶ αὐτοῦ μαθεῖν τι πρότερον. Διάδοκοιι μὲν οὖν ἀναλογίας ηὐ καὶ ἀραιέσεις καὶ γνώσεις τῶν ἐς αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀναρασμοὶ τε, ἢ ἐνδικαὶ ἐν διάδοκοιις τις τῶν μάθημα, καὶ μέχρι τοῦ παίδασιγγηθῆς καὶ ἐν καλῷ ἱδρυθῆς, ἐν ψ ψ τοῦτο νοεί, ἐξενεχθέος δὲ τῷ αὐτῶ τοῦ νοού ὁπλικά καὶ ψηφίῳ ὀπτ’ αὐτοῦ οἱν ὁδῆσαντος ἀρσεῖς εἰςεδείχνει ἐξαίρεσις ὀυκ ἰδὼν ὅπως, ἀλλ’ ἡ θέα πλήσασα φωτός τὰ ὑματα οὐ δι’ αὐτοῦ πεποῖκεν ἄλλο ὅραν, ἀλλ’ αὐτὸ τὸ φῶς τὸ δράμα ἤν.
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 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.

With the thought of Plotinus, beauty as a divine name encounters both Platonic and Aristotelian dimensions. 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.¹²⁹ There are a number of places throughout his *Enneads* where Plotinus expresses this point, the most significant of which merits noting. At 5.5.12, 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 prior to beauty.”

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 to affirm the identification. 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*.”

As noted above, this and other passages led Inge to conclude that the linguistic distinction between καλλονή (beauty) and καλόν (beautiful) correspond to different kinds of beauty, the former of which he identified as appropriate to the One. Even Rist’s analysis, which in the end refutes Inge and which concludes that Plotinus denies beauty to

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130 5.5.12: Δεύτερος ὁν οὗτος ὁ ἔρως καὶ ἡ ἡ τινί υπεριέγραμμον μᾶλλον δεύτερον μηνύει τὸ καλόν εἶναι· ἡ δὲ ἀρχαιότερα τοῦτον καὶ ἀναίσθητος ἐφέσις ἀρχαιότερον φησι καὶ τάγαθον εἶναι καὶ πρότερον τοῦτοι. Translation Armstrong.

131 Perhaps the best discussion of this issue is found in Rist, *Plotinus: The Road to Reality*, chpt. 5.

132 1.6.6: Καὶ τὸ πρῶτον θετόν τὴν καλλονήν, διὰ περὶ καὶ τάγαθον - ἄρθ' οὖ νοῦς εὐθὺς τὸ καλόν· ψυχή δὲ νῦν καλόν.

133 In particular 1.6.7; 6.2.18; 6.7.32. Rist (*Plotinus: The Road to Reality*, 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.
the One, cannot avoid acknowledging some kind of identification between the One and beauty: “[t]he Beauty of the One,” he writes, “is that unique Beauty which is the power to create beautiful Beings…” Therefore, Plotinus’s distinction between the One and beauty is not unequivocally absolute but harbors a degree of porosity.

With this, it becomes opportune to introduce Dionysius into the contours of this development. For while he was highly influenced by all three thinkers considered in this chapter, his allegiance to the authority of Christian Scriptures and the Church compelled him to secure the identity between beauty and God through the strategy of the divine names.

Chapter 2

Beauty as a Divine Name in Dionysius the Areopagite

This chapter examines the various dimensions of development that were contributed by Dionysius the Areopagite to the issue of beauty as a divine name. The issue itself is found most clearly elaborated in the fourth chapter of his treatise On the Divine Names, but it will be necessary to examine a few preliminary issues before adjusting the focus on this section of his text. The first concerns the degree to which one may speak of a tradition of divine names that precedes the Dionysian corpus and consequently provides a foundation for its developments. The second involves the way in which a divine name is conceived by Dionysius and how it differs from other modes of divine attribution. Without delving too deeply into the linguistic aspects of these issues, this examination will construct a foundation for examining the way in which beauty is conceived by Dionysius as one of the possible, as well as primary, names for God. Once this is in place, the examination will focus upon beauty throughout the Corpus Dionysiacum but with special attention to Divine Names 4, 7.

2.1. The Tradition of the Divine Names

The term ‘divine name’ applies to three 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. As this reflection develops, certain designations, or ‘names’ become more widespread as references to divinity or divinities. More specific to Dionysius, the term ‘divine name’ may also refer to a phenomenon that identifies the communication of a divine perfection into the created order. Or it may refer to the specific text written by Dionysius, On the Divine Names. Since the Dionysian text encompasses the
first two significations, it is important to clarify the interrelation and particular dimensions they express.

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.¹ In the remainder of the corpus, however, nothing further is said of this ‘tradition.’ Any attempt to relate this tradition to the Dionysian text, then, for the most part is an exercise in speculation and historical construction.²

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 others³, that of the Bible maintains that names attempt to determine the essence of the named thing.⁴ 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.

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¹ DN1, 1 (585A): Τῷ ΣΥΜΠΡΕΣΒΥΤΕΡΟΙ ΤΙΜΟΘΕΟΙ ΔΙΟΝΥΣΙΟΣ Ο ΠΡΕΣΒΥΤΕΡΟΣ ΠΕΡΙ ΘΕΙΩΝ ΟΝΟΜΑΤΩΝ. τίς ὁ τοῦ λόγου σκοπός, καὶ τίς ἡ περὶ θεῖων ὄνομάτων 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.

³ The most significant ancient Greek sources on naming include, among others, Plato’s *Cratylus* along with Proclus’s much later *Commentary on the Cratylus*, Aristotle’s *Topics*, *On Interpretation*, and *Posterior Analytics*.

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 discursive content, inspiring and motivating the cognitive process through the attraction of personal intimacy and affection. God’s name is, to borrow an image from the Eastern Christian mystical tradition, the grace that alone can unite the head to the heart.

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 God, it is the Tetragrammaton, the Hashem, often represented as YHWH, which occurs most frequently throughout Scripture. Many names are used throughout the Old Testament to identify God, but only YHWH identifies the personal name of God.

God gives this personal name to Moses through a three-part introduction. First, without using a proper name at all God introduces himself with a reference to Moses’ ancestry, “I am the God [Elohe] of your father, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” (Ex. 3:6). Second, when Moses beseeches a more specified name to present to the people, God

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7 Charles A. Gieschen, “The Divine Name in Ante-Nicene Christology,” Vigiliae Christianae 57, 2 (2003), 121: “Unlike Elohim and the many other titles or names used to identify God in the OT (see), YHWH was understood to the personal name of God;” cf. Adler, “What’s In a Name,” 266.
replies, “‘Ehyeh asher Ehyeh.’ … ‘Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘Ehyeh has sent me to you.’’” (Ex. 3:14).\(^8\) 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” (Ex. 3:15).

There are a few notable dynamics involved in this triadic introduction. 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. Then, the triad itself embodies the three elements of time – past (reference to ancestry), present (Ehyeh asher Ehyeh as the name to be for presentation), and future (“this will be my title for all generations”). This triadic introduction is “book-ended” by Exodus 6:2 – 9, where God again says to Moses:

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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 does he consummate it with a name. The intention of the name, then, is not to provide the Israelites a source of

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\(^8\) Given the controversy surrounding the translation of this phrase, we employ here the English transliteration following Adler, “What’s In a Name?,” 265.
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 between \( \text{Ehyeh asher Ehyeh} \) and the \( \text{HaShem} \), a distinction that involves issues regarding the translation of these names.

In the \textit{Exodus} account of the divine introduction, although the \( \text{HaShem} \) is God’s “official” name, it is not the first name spoken to Moses. The first name given is \( \text{Ehyeh asher Ehyeh} \), 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.\(^9\) A better translation, according to these scholars, is “I will be what I will be,” since this conveys the implication of divine un-boundedness – 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.’\(^10\) Reading a modern idiom into the matter, other scholars emphasize an element of

\(^9\) Cf. Harvey J. Fields, \textit{A Torah commentary for Our Times: Exodus and Leviticus} (New York: URJ Books and Music, 1990) 19; Adler, “What’s In a Name,” 267 – 268. 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., \( \text{Ehyeh asher Ehyeh} \)] is, in other words, the ultimate declaration of transcendent self-determination … The name \( \text{Ehyeh asher Ehyeh} \) informs us that God alone of all things can be said to embody the quintessence of self-determination.” Rather, corresponding to various features of beauty, God as communicated in his Divine Name is better understood from the perspective of a \textit{plenitude of determinate promise} rather than self-determination since the latter implies not only incompletion, 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.

\(^10\) Cf. Adler, “What’s In a Name,” 267.
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.”

Taken at face value, this observation strips the Ehyeh of real name-quality and reduces it to an utterance of functionality. If it is taken as drawing out a functional feature of the meaning of the divine name, however, 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.” 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.” … Perhaps the best word on this momentous occasion is: “What I please,” since we 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.

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 temporality. This is exemplified in

11 Jordan Howard Sobel, Logic and Theism: arguments For and Against belief in God (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 539.
12 Patrick Navas, Divine Truth or Human Tradition?: A Reconsideration of the Roman Catholic and Protestant Doctrines of the Trinity (Bloomington, ID: AuthorHouse, 2007), 540 ff.
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’.”

In such cases, following a trend within modern and postmodern 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.

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. 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 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.” The HaShem, then, is a name that unites past, present and future in a singular utterance. The union given by this utterance is intimately connected to the Ehyeh as God’s excess or plenitude of being, which

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14 J. B. Metz 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.” (Metz, *Theology of the World* (London: Burns & Oates, 1969), 88. 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.

15 Adler, “What’s In a Name,” 266.

16 Adler, “What’s In a Name,” 266.
as such is constituted as infinite promise to become, or 'be determined to,' whatever is
necessary for those in a personal relationship with him.

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 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 Divine Names scholars tend to downplay the importance of
this Biblical origin to the overemphasis of Dionysius’s Neoplatonic pedigree.¹⁷ 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 “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.”¹⁸ 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

¹⁷ See, e.g., Sarah Klitenic Wear and John M. Dillon, Dionysius the Areopagite and the Neoplatonist Tradition:
Despoiling the Hellenes (Burlington: Ashgate, 2007), 15ff.; Paul Rorem, Pseudo-Dionysius, A Commentary on the Texts
and an Introduction to Their Influence (NY and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), chpt. 6. Christian Schäfer,
The Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite, An Introduction to the Structure and Content of the Treatise On The Divine Names
(Leiden: Brill, 2006) makes absolutely no reference to this Biblical tradition of the Divine Name.

¹⁸ Frederick M. Schroeder, “The Self in Ancient Religious Experience,” Classical Mediterranean Spirituality,
Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, Der Glaube der Hellenen (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1931), 17.
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 that trumps 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.

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,’ or that the names exposited in his treatise are gathered entirely
from various texts of Plato, appears not only to overlook Dionysius’s own claim to
exclusive Scriptural authority, but also to neglect the significant difference between biblical
and Greek thought. As chapter seven 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. The biblical influence is very
much present. The utter transcendence of the divine wisdom (Ps 147:5 et al.) 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

19 Rorem, Pseudo-Dionysius, 164.
20 Wear and Dillon, Dionysius the Areopagite and the Neoplatonist Tradition, 15 – 16.
21 DN 1, 1 (372A): Καθόλου τοιγαροῦν οὐ τολμήτεον εἰπεῖν οὐτε μὴν ἔννοησάτι τι περὶ τῆς ὑπερουσιός καὶ
κρυφίας θεότητος παρά τὰ τειωδῶς ἥμιν 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.”
22 DN 7, 2 (868B).
διάνοια πλάνη τίς ἐστι)\textsuperscript{23} in comparison. His intention in emphasizing this, as with the whole of his treatise, is primarily analogical, concerned with the faith practices of the worshipping community.\textsuperscript{24} Such evidence indicates that Dionyius's doctrine of divine names must be treated beyond attention to Neoplatonic schematics and structures by also considering 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.\textsuperscript{25} It is long held that the relationship between Jesus and the divine name in explanations of the Κύριος title reflects an early Jewish identification of Jesus with YHWH.\textsuperscript{26} 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

\textsuperscript{23} DN 7, 1 (865B).

\textsuperscript{24} DN 7, 1 (865CD), which is an instructional exhortation: Ἀλλ’ ὅπερ ἐν ἄλλως ἐφη, οἰκείως ἡμῖν τὰ ὑπὲρ ἡμᾶς παραλαμβάνοντες καὶ τῷ συντρόφῳ τῶν αἰσθήσεων ἐνιλλόμενοι καὶ τοῖς καθ’ ἡμᾶς τὰ θεία παραβάλλοντες ἀπατώμεθα κατὰ τὸ φαινόμενον τὸν θείον καὶ ἀπάρρητον λόγον μεταδιώκοντες. Δέσιν εἰδέναι τὸν καθ’ ἡμᾶς νου ὑπὸ τὴν μὲν ἔχειν δύναμιν εἰς τὸ νοεῖν, δι’ ἣς τὰ νοητὰ βλέπει, τὴν δὲ ἐνσωσίν ὑπεραίρουσαν τὴν νοῦ φύσιν, δι’ ἣς συνάπτεται πρὸς τὰ ἐπέκεινα ἑαυτοῦ. Κατὰ ταύτην οὖν τὰ θεία νοητέον οὖ καθ’ ἡμᾶς, ἀλλ’ ἄλλους ἑαυτοὺς ὅλων ἑαυτῶν ἐξισταμένους καὶ ἄλλος θεοῦ γιγνομένους, κρεῖττον γὰρ εἶναι θεοῦ καὶ μὴ ἑαυτῶν. Οὕτω γὰρ ἐστιν τὰ θεία δοτὰ τοῖς μετὰ θεοῦ γιγνομένοις. “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.”

\textsuperscript{25} Gieschen, “The Divine Name in Ante-Nicene Christology.”

This doubt does not endure as it is soon established that worship of Jesus as Κύριος already occurs among his Aramaic-speaking Palestinian followers. Eventually the theory of the Κύριος dependence on Hellenism is largely discredited by further study of the title Κύριος, and by later studies into Paul’s use of Hebrew Scripture YHWH texts.

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.

A significant consequence of these studies is the awareness that “[o]nce 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.” 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 and Chalcedon, 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, the biblical event of personal, intimate naming and the Greek categorical approach to names begins to coalesce.

As a result, attributes that are not as clearly identified with God in Scripture, although

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31 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, “The Divine Name in Ante-Nicene Christology,” 119 – 120.

expressed in Scripture as related to and constitutive of the divine nature, can be appropriated to God as a divine name. Athens can be enlisted to offer conceptual clarity to the excess of intelligibility given to Jerusalem.

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 (nous); at other times with God (One/Good). 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. 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 YWHW and imparts not only understanding, but also life and salvation. It is identified with the good (Is 45:7), an identification that derives from the fact that it is YHWH’s dwelling place and thus his attribute. There is then a subtle identification between this light and YHWH’s very self (Ps 43:3; Is 2:5), one that continues in the New Testament (James 1:17, I Tim. 6:15 – 16). In

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34 Cf. inter alia, Gen 1:14 – 19; Ps 74:16; Ps 121:6; Ps 136:7 – 9; Jer 31:35; Job 9:7; Is 38:7 – 8; Is 49:10; Josh 10:12 – 13.
35 Mic 7:8; Is 9:2; Is 42:16; Is 51:4; Is 58:8; Is 60:1; Ezra 9:8; Ps 18:21; Ps 36:9; Ps 56:13; Job 33:28 – 30.
36 Ps 104:2; Hab 3:4; Dan 2:22; Is 10:17; Ex 13:21 – 22; Neh 9:12; Ps 78:14.
appropriating the divine name to Jesus, the Christological tradition also identifies him with light.\(^{37}\)

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,\(^{38}\) but more so as a biblical mode of praise. In neither tradition 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 II, chapter 35, the name of God is invoked as an example of a single identity predicated plurally in order to refute Basilides’s claim that prophetic predication of God occurs under the influence of

\(^{37}\) There are a multitude of references among which are the following: Jn 1:9; Jn 8:12; Jn 9:4 – 5; Jn 11: 9 – 10; Jn 12: 35 – 36, 46; Acts 26:23; II Tim 1:10; II Cor 4: 6; Rom 13:12.

\(^{38}\) Porphyry is said to have written a treatise entitled *On the Divine Names*, noted in, e.g., René Arnou, S. J., “Platonisme des pères,” *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, 12 (Part 2, Paris, 1934): cols. 2285 – 2287; 2314 – 2316; 2363 – 2367 and Robert Maarten Van Den Berg, *Proclus’ Commentary on the Cratylus in Context: Ancient Theories of Language and Naming* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 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 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 is that divine names are like divine statues, that is, 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 power it is used to express.
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.39

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 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;”40 they also share an interest in the so-called ‘theology of the divine names.’41 The precise nature of this ‘theology of the divine names’ is

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39 Andrew Louth, *Dionysius the Areopagite* (Wilton, CT: Morehouse-Barlow, 1989), 78.
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, although the parallel is widely believed to be coincidental. Consequently, although it is possible that Ephrem influences Dionysius, and that the philological similarities suggest some correspondence, 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 may be Dionysius’ original contribution. This may explain why he positions the name beauty at the very beginning of the treatise since such a position signifies a high degree of priority. 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 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.


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

2.2. Divine Names as the Procession of Divine Perfections

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, 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 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…

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’ so that, advancing through the various hierarchies that

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46 DN 1, 8 (597BC): Νῦν δέ, ὡς τής παρούσῃ ἐστὶ πραγματείας, ἐκ τῶν λογίων συναγαγόντες καὶ ἱστατε ἐπὶ τοῖς εἰρημένοις χρώμενοι καὶ πρὸς αὐτὰ ακοσμοῦντες ἔπι τῆν ἀνάπτυξιν τῶν νοητῶν θεωνυμιῶν προσώμενος καὶ ὃπερ ἄκατα πάνταν ἡμῖν θεολογόν τῷ ἱεραρχίκῳ θεομετάτητα, θεοτικὴ διανοιὰς τῶν θεοφανείας ἐπιπετέσθαι, κυρίως εἰπτέν, θεωρίας καὶ ὅτα ἵερα ταῖς τῶν ἱερῶν θεωνυμιῶν ἀναπαραθήκης παραδόθουσα τάς ἄγιος τάς ἄγια κατὰ τήν θείαν παράδοσιν ἐνδιδούντες καὶ τῶν ἀμύστων αὐτὰ γελώτων καὶ ἐμπαιγμῶν ἔξαιρομενοι…

47 DN 2, 7 (645A); Louth, Dionysius the Areopagite, 83.
constitute the created order, a greater union with God even to the point of deification might follow. 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. Throughout the first chapter, the objective and content of On the 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 ‘celebrates the principle affirmative expressions respecting God’ insofar as it is both one and

49 CH 3, 1 (164D); EH 1, 1 (372B); et al.
50 The order of presentation of the Dionysian corpus has been considered in a few different ways. Jan Vanneste, Le Mystère de Dieu. Essai sur la structure rationelle de la doctrine mystique du pseudo-Denys L’Ariopagite (Brussels: Desclée de Brouwer, 1959) argued that the DN and the MT exposited 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, Rene Roques, “Denys l’Areopagite,” Dictionnaire de Spiritualité 3 (1957): 243 – 286, Structures théologiques de la Gnost à Richard de Saint Victor. Essais et analyses critiques (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1962) suggested a more unified sequence that follows the order DN, MT, CH, and EH. Most recently, Paul Rorem, Biblical and Liturgical Symbols Within the Pseudo-Dionysian Synthesis (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1984) 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).
51 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 “The Earliest Syriac Reception of Dionysius,” Rethinking Dionysius the Areopagite, Sarah Coakley and Charles M. Stang (eds.)(Oxford: Blackwell, 2009), 31 – 32.
three. It considers the unions and distinctions as they are in the divine itself, “which is neither possible to say or to conceive” (οὔτε ἐξετάσει οὔτε ἐννοήσας 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.\(^5^2\) 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.\(^5^3\) In this way, something of God is communicated in the form of various creatures, even one as lowly as a worm,\(^5^4\) and various material entities like a throne or a wheel. As Dionysius explains, however, these images are ‘dissimilar similitudes’ (ἀνομοίοις ὁμοίωσις) 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.\(^5^5\)

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 requires the divine speaking communicated in scripture. In contrast, the latter two, in expressing


\(^5^3\) This lost treatise is explained most fully in Ep. 9, 1 (1104BC, 1105A).


\(^5^5\) CH 2, 2 – 4 (137 D – 140A – C, 141C, 144A, 145A).
divine distinctions, involve a communicative act that takes some kind of intelligible shape through existential phenomena. 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.

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. 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.

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56 DN 2, 4 (640D – 641A).
57 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.
58 DN 2, 1 (636C – 637A): Τούτο μὲν οὖν καὶ ἐν ἄλλοις ἔκτασθην ἡμῖν ἀποδέδεικται τὸ πάσας ἡμῖν θεοπρεπεῖς ὕπερ ἡμῶν μερικῶς, ἀλλ’ ἐπὶ τῆς ἴδιος καὶ παντελοῦς καὶ ὀλοκλήρου καὶ πλήρους θεότητος ὑπὸ τῶν λοιπῶν ἑμεῖς θεότητος ὑπὸ τῶν λοιπῶν ἑμεῖς θεοπρεπεῖς ἡμῖν ἑμεῖς θεότητος ὑπὸ τῶν λοιπῶν ἑμεῖς διακρίνεσθαι καὶ πάσας αὐτὰς ἁμέρῳ ἀπολύσει ἀπολύσει ἀπολύσει ἀπολύσει ἀπολύσει.
59 DN 2, 11 (649B): Τούτων μὲν οὖν ἄλλως. Ἐπὶ δὲ τοῦ τούτων λόγου σκοπὸν προϊόμενον τὰ κοινὰ καὶ ἱνωμένα τῆς διακρίσεως τῆς θείας ὑδάματα κατὰ τὸ ἡμῖν ἑρμητῶν ἀναλίπτοντες. Καὶ ἵνα σαφῶς περὶ πάντων ἐξ ἐπιστορίων, διακρίτων θείων ἐφαινεν ως ἑβρήτια, τὰς ἀνακριτικὰς τῆς θείας προδοσίας. Διαφορεῖσθαι γὰρ πάσα τοῖς σοῦ καὶ ἑπερχοῦσα τὰς τῶν ἡλίου ἀγαθῶν μετουσίων ἡμεῖς μὲν διακρίνεσθαι, πληθύνεται δὲ ἐνικώς καὶ πολλαπλασιάζεται ἐκ τού ἔνωδ οὐκέποινται.
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.\textsuperscript{60} 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.\textsuperscript{61} 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 occurred with respect to the Neoplatonic interpretation of Plato’s \textit{Parmenides}\.\textsuperscript{62} 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

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\footnote{62} E.g., Louth, \textit{Dionysius the Areopagite}, chpt. 5; Wear & Dillon, \textit{Dionysius the Areopagite and the Neoplatonist Tradition}, chpt. 2; Rorem, \textit{Pseudo-Dionysius}, 164ff.
\end{footnotes}
distinction between the One in itself, derived from the first hypothesis, and the first emanated principle, the Intellect \(\textit{nous}\), 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 Proclus, who follows Syrianus,\(^63\) 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. 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.\(^64\)

In Dionysius, rather than identifying two discrete realities – the One and \(\textit{nous}\) – the two Parmenidean hypotheses are instead transferred into the divine to identify distinct aspects of the one God.\(^65\) 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


\(^{65}\) Eugenio Corsini, \textit{Il Trattato De Divinis Nominibus Dell Pseudo-Dionigi e I commenti neoplatonici al parmenide} (Torino: G. Giappichelli, 1962), 144ff. Stephen Gersh maintains that Corsini was the first to recognize this as an original step in Dionysius. See his \textit{From Iamblichus to Eriugena: An Investigation of the Prehistory and Evolution of the Pseudo-Dionysian Tradition} (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 155.
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…”66 This superlative configuration denotes the porosity that a divine name harbors in its relation to God; the content that is communicated through a divine 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.”67 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-’

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66 *DN* 2, 3 (640B): Τά μὲν οὖν ἠνωμένα τῆς ὁλης θεότητος ἐστιν, ὡς ἐν ταῖς Θεολογικαῖς ὑποτυπώσεσι διὰ πλειόνων ἐκ τῶν λογίων ἀπεδείξαμεν, τὸ ὑπέργαθον, τὸ ὑπέρδεξαμεν, τὸ ὑπερούσιον, τὸ ὑπέρξιον, τὸ ὑπέρσοφον καὶ δόσα τῆς ὑπεροχικῆς ἐστίν ἀφαιρέσεως,…

67 *DN* 2, 3 (640BC): μεθ’ ὦν καὶ τὰ αἰτιολογικά πάντα, τὸ ἄγαθον, τὸ καλὸν, τὸ ὁν, τὸ ἐξωγόνον, τὸ σοφὸν καὶ δόσα ἐκ τῶν ἄγαθοπρεπῶν αὐτῆς διωρεῖν ἢ πάντων ἄγαθῶν αἰτία κατονομάζεται.
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 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.

### 2.3. Beauty as a Divine Name: *On the Divine Names*, Chapter 4.

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,*68 a work that examines beauty as 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, the most significant aspect of beauty in Dionysius – namely, its *anagogical power* – is largely overlooked. A more recent article on Dionysian beauty, which does in fact pay attention to this anagogical dimension,

treats beauty from within the idiom of modern aesthetics. Consequently, it locates the anagogical power primarily in Dionysius’s iconology rather than his doctrine of beauty as such. A recent monograph on Dionysian thought devotes a chapter to the consideration of beauty alongside goodness and love. 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, the author admits the limitations of such an approach and leaves out the aspect of divine pedagogy within beauty’s anagogical power.

*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 the two aspects of divine hiddenness and divine self-communication. At the same time, he introduces beauty into the tradition of the divine names. It is within this coincidence of originality that the issue of beauty as a divine name is to be examined. In other words, beauty in Dionysius, as with all the “Divine properties, even those revealed to us, are known by the participations alone.” Abstractive of 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 a

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71 DN 2, 7 (645Λ): Πάντα γὰρ τὰ δεῖ, καὶ ὧν ἡμῖν ἐκπέφανται, ταῖς μετοχαῖς μόναις γινώσκεται. Αὕτâ δὲ, ὅποια ποτε ἔστι κατὰ τὴν οἰκείαν ἀρχὴν καὶ ἱδρυσιν, ὑπὲρ νοῦν ἔστε καὶ πᾶσαν οὐσίαν καὶ γνώσιν.
Neoplatonic plagiarist. Dionysian originality can only be adequately established with a more complete picture of his theological concerns.

The following examination of beauty as a divine name draws from Dionysius’s biblical foundations and his Greek influence. The examination emphasizes beauty as an anagogical power by which God calls creatures back to himself. As this call of beauty’s anagogical power orients itself toward the rational creature, it establishes a dialectic of intelligibility reminiscent of what appears in Plato, Aristotle and Plotinus. The various themes to be examined will be cast into relation with these dimensions.

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. 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 and love, and serves as a principle of unity. Reflecting a more Aristotelian dimension, it appears with the Good as a principle of knowledge. Following Plotinus, beauty is linked to an ordering

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

74 DN 4, 13 (712A) – 4, 17 (713D).

75 DN 4, 12 (709D).

76 DN 7, 3 (872BC)

77 DN 4, 9 (105A); 5, 8 (824A); 10, 1 (937AB).
wisdom that enables the anagogical ascent of the mind through the various orders of created things.\textsuperscript{78} beauty is also instrumental in other treatises of the \textit{Corpus Dionysiacum}. It is a fundamental feature of hierarchical activity in both the Ecclesial and the Celestial orders.\textsuperscript{79} It enters into Dionysius’s Christological teachings,\textsuperscript{80} plays a role in the mystical way of unknowing,\textsuperscript{81} and is associated with the hiddenness of God.\textsuperscript{82}

The preceding summary of beauty throughout the \textit{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. Although this reflects aspects of Plato’s and Aristotle’s considerations of beauty, Dionysius no doubt follows primarily the Plotinian view of beauty. Plotinus identifies beauty with \textit{nous}, configuring it as a one and many at the very same time. But Dionysius goes beyond Plotinus when he transfers beauty from the first emanation to God himself. The result of this transfer produces two fundamental ways of understanding beauty as a divine

\textsuperscript{78} DN 7, 1 (865B); DN 8, 3 (892B), 8, 5 (892CD).

\textsuperscript{79} 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).

\textsuperscript{80} Though not expressed in any discrete treatise, this teaching is found throughout the \textit{Corpus Dionysiacum} at times alongside beauty, e.g., EH III, 3, 11 (441B); CH 1, 2 (121A).

\textsuperscript{81} MT 2 (1025B).

\textsuperscript{82} Ep. 9, 1 (1105C).
name. The first concerns beauty insofar as it is bound up with the divine identity in itself; the second concerns the way in which beauty 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 consideration generates three relevant sub-categories: beauty as the good, beauty as light, and beauty as intelligibility. With respect to the way that God causes beauty in things, beauty may be considered as a principle of determination. This consideration also generates three relevant sub-categories: beauty as emanation, beauty as a unity in plurality, and beauty as hierarchy. The chapter concludes with an examination that brings both of these aspects into a teleological context, namely, beauty and the One.

2.3.1. 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 “[n]either before nor since has there been an aesthetics more transcendent, more a priori, and more divorced from the real world and from normal aesthetic experience.”83 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.”84 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.\footnote{Cf. Schäfer, *The Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite*, 67ff., 125ff.; Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 139; Von Balthasar*The Glory of the Lord II*, 158.}

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.\footnote{\textit{DN} 4, 7 (701C): Τὸ δὲ καλὸν καὶ κάλλος οὐ διαιρετῶν ἐπὶ τῆς ἐν ἐν τὰ ὅλα συνειληφυίας αἰτίας. Ταῦτα γὰρ ἐπὶ μὲν τῶν ὄντων ἀπάντων εἰς μετοχὰς καὶ μετέχοντο διαιροῦντες καλὸν μὲν εἶναι λέγομεν τὸ κάλλους μετέχον, κάλλος δὲ τὴν μετοχὴν τῆς καλλοποιοῦ τῶν ὅλων 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,\footnote{R.J. Henley, *Saint Thomas and Platonism: A Study of “Plato” and “Platonici” Texts in the Writings of Saint Thomas* (The Hague: Springer, 1970), 374 ff.} 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, for Dionysius a thing’s formality derives from the divine plenitude. 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 (καλλόν) all things to Itself (whence also it is called Beauty) (κάλλος), and as collecting all in all to Itself.89

Not only does beauty communicate itself but it does so in such a way that allows its “sublimely objective”90 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 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

88 O’Rourke, Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas, 117 – 129.
89 DN 4, 7 (701D): Τὸ δὲ ύπερούσιον καλὸν κάλλος μὲν λέγεται διὰ τὴν ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ πάσι τοῖς οὐσι μεταδομένης οἰκείως ἐκάστῳ καλλονήν καὶ ως τῆς πάντων εὐσφροστίας καὶ ἀγλαίας αὐτῶν δικήν φωτός ἐναστράπτον ἄπασι τὰς καλλοποιούσας τῆς πηγαίας ἀκτίνος αὐτοῦ μεταδόσεις καὶ ως πάντα πρὸς ἑαυτὸ καλοῦν, ὅπεν καὶ κάλλος λέγεται, καὶ ως ὅλα ἐν ὅλοις εἰς ταῦτα συνάγον.
90 Putnam, beauty in the Pseudo-Denis, 1. In our view, the categories of ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ have very limited explanatory power. We use them here only to show such limitations.
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.\textsuperscript{91} The idea of plenitude is indicated by the use of ἐκβλυζομένης, the ‘bubbling forth,’ a word whose root, βλυ, is defined as ‘to be full.’\textsuperscript{92} It is a word used in other places, most notably 

\textit{Divine Names} 4, 2 and 4, 6 where it describes the fullness of Good that overflows as Light.\textsuperscript{93} The Good possesses in itself the Light that

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\item \textsuperscript{91} \textit{CH} 4, 1 (177CD): ‘Εστι γάρ τούτο τῆς πάντων αιτίας καὶ ύπέρ πάντα ἀγαθότητος ἱδον τὸ πρὸς κροινών ἑαυτῆς τὰ ὄντα καλέν, ὡς ἐκάστῳ τῶν ὄντων ὄριστα πρὸς τῆς οἰκείας ἀναλογίας. Πάντα μὲν οὖν τὰ ὄντα μετέχει προνοίας ἐκ τῆς ὑπερουσίου καὶ πανανεάζουσα ἐκβλυζομένης.

\item \textsuperscript{92} This word and its variants occur a total of 13 times: ὑπερβλυζόω (8x), ἀναβλυζόω (2x), ἐκβλυζόω (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, \textit{Pseudo-Dionysius and the Neoplatonic Tradition}, chpt. 4. The significance of Dionysius’s use of this word, as well as the other ways in which Dionysius expresses fullness through the prefixed ‘ὑπέρ’, is underscored when compared to his infrequent use of πληρώμα, which occurs four times in the whole Dionysian corpus: in \textit{DN} 4, 6 where it occurs in conjunction with ὑπερβλυζόουσα; in \textit{EH} 2, 2, 4, where it is used merely to describe the ‘whole body of the Church’; in \textit{EH} 3, 2, again describing the fullness of the \textit{synaxis} or communion of the Church; and in \textit{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 (\textit{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.

\item \textsuperscript{93} \textit{DN} 4, 2 (696C): Ἀλλὰ καὶ μετ’ ἐκείνους τοὺς ἱερός καὶ ἄγιος νός αἱ ψυχαὶ καὶ Ἰάσσα ψυχὸν ἀγαθὰ διὰ τὴν ὑπεράγαζον ἐστὶν ἀγαθότητα τὸ νοερᾶς αὐτᾶς εἶναι, τὸ ἔχειν τὴν ὑστιμίδη ζωῆς ἀνώλεθρον αὐτὸ τά ἐστι καὶ δύνασθαι πρὸς τὰς ἀγαλλικὰς ἀνατεινομένας ζωὰς δι’ αὐτῶν ὡς ἄγαθων καθήμερων ἐπί τὴν πάντων ἄγαθων ἀγαθορράχων ἀνάγεσθαι καὶ τῶν ἐκείθεν ἐκβλυζομένων ἐλλάμψεων ἐν μετουσία γίνεσθαι κατὰ τὴν σφρᾶν ἀναλόγιαν καὶ τῆς τοῦ ἀγαθειδοῦς ὑπερήφανος, ὡς δύναμις, μετέχειν καὶ διὰ 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 godlike fashion, as they are able, and whatever else we have enumerated in our Treatise concerning the soul.” And \textit{DN} 4, 6 (701B): Φῶς οὖν νοητὸν λέγεται τὸ ὑπέρ πᾶν φῶς ἄγαθον ὡς ἀκτίς πηγαία καὶ ὑπερβλυζόσκυον φωτοχώσια πάντα τὴν ὑπερκόσμιον καὶ περικόσμιον καὶ ἐγκόσμιον νοῦν ἐκ τοῦ πληρώματος αὐτῆς καταλαμπτοῦσα καὶ τὰς νοερὰς αὐτῶν ἄλας ἀνανεάζουσα δυνάμεις. “The Good then above every light is called spiritual Light, as fountal 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.”
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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.” Beauty is a causal source that preholds 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.

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. It was noted above how the biblical divine name tradition conceives the name of God as a promise of determinate plenitude. Dionysius’s self-proclaimed allegiance to scriptural authority and his configuration of the name ‘being’ testify to this influence. In Divine Names 5, 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 with a reminder that the Divine Names as a treatise is not concerned with the divine superessence as such. Divine superessence is instead treated in the Theological Outlines. With this reminder, Dionysius emphasizes both 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. In the created order the various ‘divine names’ identify distinct phenomena. As they exist in God, however, they are not distinct but

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94 DN 4, 7 (704A): ἀλλ' ὡς αὐτὸ καθ' ἑαυτῷ μεθ' ἑαυτοῦ μονοειδὲς ἀεὶ ὃν καλὸν καὶ ὃς παντὸς καλοῦ τὴν πηγαίναν καλλονὴν ὑπεροχικός ἐν ἑαυτῷ προέχον.

95 DN 5, 1 (816B).
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.” 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. 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:

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96 DN 5, 2 (816D): ἀλλ’ ἐνὸς θεοῦ τὰς ὅλας ἁγιὰς προόδους καὶ τὰς παρ’ ἡμῶν ἐξυμνουμένας θεωριμάς
97 DN 5, 3 (817BC).
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 more abundantly, and having received larger and greater gifts from it.  

As Dionysius explains, 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. In this sense, God is beauty “[f]or God is not in any way (οὐ πώς) a being, but absolutely and unboundedly, becoming pregnant with and anticipating the whole of being in himself.”

This configuration of being closely resembles that found in the biblical divine name tradition where God’s name Ehyeh identifies unbounded ontological promise.

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

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98 DN 5, 3 (817B): Εἰ δὲ καὶ εἰσίν οἱ θείοι νόες ὑπὲρ τὰ λοιπὰ ὅντα καὶ ζῶσιν ὑπὲρ τὰ ἄλλα ζῶντα καὶ νοοῦσι καὶ γινώσκουσιν ὑπὲρ ἀισθήσιν καὶ λόγου καὶ παρὰ πάντα τὰ ὅντα τοῦ καλοῦ καὶ ἀγαθοῦ ἐρείναι καὶ μετέχουσιν, αὐτοὶ μᾶλλον εἰσὶν περὶ τὰ γάρ αὐτοῖς περὶ περισσώς αὐτοῦ μετέχοντες καὶ πλείους καὶ μείζους ἐξ αὐτοῦ δωρεάς εἰληφότες ὄντες καὶ τὰ λοιπὰ τῶν αἰσθητικῶν υπέρεχει πλεονεκτοῦντα τῇ περισσείᾳ τοῦ λόγου, καὶ ταύτα τῇ ἀισθήσει καὶ ἄλλα τῇ ἔξω.

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

100 DN 5, 4 (817D): Καὶ γὰρ ὁ θεὸς οὐ πώς ἔστιν ὅν, ὅλη ἀπλῶς καὶ ἀπειρορίστως ὃλον ἐν ἑαυτῷ τὸ ἒναι συνεληφώς καὶ προεληφώς. My translation.

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.”\textsuperscript{102} The word ‘primitively’ (\textit{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.\textsuperscript{103} 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’ (\textit{οὐπω δὲ εἰς μετάδοσιν ἔτωμον}). Rather, “that which fulfills others and extends to others its free bestowals must itself be more than full.”\textsuperscript{104} 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 \textit{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.

\textit{2.3.1.1. BEAUTY AS THE GOOD}

The divine transcendent plenitude possesses the character of the good as that which all things desire. Dionysius is clearly Neoplatonic in his identification of God as the good whose self-diffusion elicits universal attraction. Attraction and desire constitute the substantitive similarity between the good and beauty. Insofar as beauty is bound up with the

\textsuperscript{102} Proclus, \textit{Elements of Theology}, prop. 18: τοῦ δοθέντος ἄρα τὸ ἐν αὐτῷ τῷ δεδικτόχῳ προυπάρχον κρειττόνως ἔστι· καὶ ὁπερ εἰκὼν μὲν ἐστιν, ἀλλ’ οὐ ταῦτον ἐκείνῳ πρώτως γὰρ ἐστιν, τὸ δὲ δευτέρως.

\textsuperscript{103} Proclus, \textit{Elements of Theology}, prop. 26

\textsuperscript{104} Proclus, \textit{Elements of Theology}, prop. 131: ὑπέρπληκτος ἄρα εἶναι δὲ τὸ πληρωτικὸν ἄλλων καὶ εἰς ἄλλα διατείνον τὰς ἐαυτοῦ χορηγίας. Cf. also prop. 152.
divine itself, it identifies the divine as the transcendent plenitude that calls (kalos) to all other beings. Everything that was, that is and that will be is swathed in the divine being. The divine attracts all things to itself by attracting all things to each other.\textsuperscript{105} Beauty and the good are both names that identify God as a source and goal of desire.

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.\textsuperscript{106} 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 four 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.\textsuperscript{107} 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.\textsuperscript{108} At the same time, Dionysius invokes the principle of plenitude and declares that the good in itself transcends all things insofar as it

\textsuperscript{105} DN 5, 7 (821B), DN 13, 3 (980BC).

\textsuperscript{106} See, e.g., Rorem’s comments in Pseudo-Dionysius, The Complete Works, 71, n. 133, 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, The Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite, 80 – 84 simply identifies beauty with the good and offers nothing further.

\textsuperscript{107} DN 4, 1 (693B).

\textsuperscript{108} DN 4, 2 (696BCD).
negates all things by its superlative excess.\textsuperscript{109} 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.\textsuperscript{110}

The opening three relatively short sections of chapter four are the only passages where the good is treated in itself. The remainder of the chapter treats the good indirectly by treating light, beauty and love. This suggests that these other divine names bring a greater degree of concreteness to the good. 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.\textsuperscript{111} Admitting that something is missing in his consideration of the good (“But what slipped from our view in the midst of this discourse…”\textsuperscript{112}), 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 ‘contemplate,’ the good. Dioysius’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:

\begin{quote}
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,
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{109} This is a point he echoes in MT 1, 2 (1000B).
\textsuperscript{110} DN 4, 3 (697A).
\textsuperscript{111} DN 4, 4 (697B – 700C); 4, 5 (700D – 701A); 4,6 (701B).
\textsuperscript{112} DN 4, 4 (697B): Ἀλλ’ ὅπερ ἡμᾶς ἐν μέσω παραδραμὸν διαστέφευγε…
as aspiring either to see or to be moved and enlightened and heated and to be wholly held together by the light.\textsuperscript{113}

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 Dioysius 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, 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.”\textsuperscript{114} These statements indicate Dioysius’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.

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

\textsuperscript{113} DN 4, 4 (700C): Κατὰ τὸν αὐτὸν τῆς ἐμφανοῦς εἰκόνος λόγον καὶ τὸ φῶς συνάγει καὶ ἐπιστρέφει πρὸς ἑαυτὸ πάντα τὰ ὄρματα, τὰ κινούμενα, τὰ φωτιζόμενα, τὰ θερμαινόμενα, τὰ ὅλως ὑπὸ τῶν αὐτοῦ μαρμαρογυνῶν συνεχόμενα. Διὸ καὶ ἤλιος, ὅτι πάντα ἀδιάληπτα καὶ συνάγει τὰ διεκδικοῦμένα. Καὶ πάντα αὐτοῦ τὰ αἰσθήματα ἔρειεται ἢ ὡς τοῦ ὄρους ἢ ὡς τοῦ κυνείσθαι καὶ φωτίζεσθαι καὶ θερμαίνεσθαι καὶ ὅλως συνέχεσθαι πρὸς τὸ φωτός ἐρείμενα.

\textsuperscript{114} DN 4, 4 (700C): Καὶ οὐ δῆτον φημὶ κατὰ τὸν τῆς παλαιότητος λόγον, ὅτι θεός ὃν ὁ ἤλιος καὶ δημιουργὸς τούτος τοῦ παντὸς ἰδίως ἐπιτρεπεῖ τὸν ἐμφανῆ κόσμον, ἀλλ’ ὅτι «τὰ ἀόρατα» τοῦ θεοῦ «ἀπὸ κτίσεως κόσμου ταῖς ποίησισι νοούμενα καθοράται, ἢ τὰ ἀόρατα αὐτοῦ δύναμις καὶ θειότης».
are well suited to the beautifying and highly favored comeliness.” This 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 ὡραιότητος 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 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. The good is surely what all things desire, but this remains a rather abstract idea without the more concrete content provided by the phenomenon of beauty.

The echoes of the Symposium and the Phaedrus can be detected here. Beauty as ὡραιότητος corresponds to the attraction that all beautiful material objects elicit while beauty as καλόν 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 is universally recognized for its similarity to the Symposium 210E – 211A:

115 DN 4, 7 (701C): Τούτο τάγαθ᾽ ὃμνεῖται πρὸς τῶν ἱερῶν θεολόγων καὶ ώς καλόν καὶ ώς κάλλος καὶ ώς «ἄγαπη» καὶ ώς ἁγαπητόν καὶ ὅσα ἄλλα εὐπρεπεῖς εἰσὶ τῆς καλλιτοιχίας καὶ κεχαριτωμένης ὡραιότητος θεωμείσθαν. My translation.
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 ὑπαίσχυντος. Beauty as καλὸν is like the mania that descends upon the soul alerting it to beauty’s more youthful presence as ὑπαίσχυντος in particular things in order to begin drawing the soul back to itself through beautiful things. 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 ἐν ἁγαθὸν καὶ καλὸν).

In Divine Names 4, there is a detectable sequence of names that reflects a momentum toward the concrete. The good, as noted, is spoken of in rather abstract and general terms that become more and more concrete 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, but also serves as an anagogical conduit that carries attraction more and more intensely into the good that is desired.

116 DN 4, 7 (701D – 704A): καλὸν δὲ ὡς πάγκαλον ἄμα καὶ ὑπέρκαλον καὶ ἄει ὡς κατὰ τὰ αὐτὰ καὶ ὑπαίσχυντος καλὸν καὶ ὡς τίμη τιμώμενον ὡς ἀπολλύμενον ὡς αὐξανόμενον ὡς φθίνον, ὡς ἡ μὲν καλὸν, τῇ δὲ αἰσχρῇ ὡς τοῦτο μὲν, τοῖς δὲ οὐ, οὐδὲ πρὸς μὲν τὸ καλὸν, πρὸς δὲ τῷ αἰσχρῷ ὡς ἐνθα μέν, ἐνθα δὲ οὐ ὡς ταῖς μὲν ὡς τοῖς καλὸν, τοῖς δὲ οὐ καλὸν, ὅλα ὡς αὐτὸ καθ’ ἑαυτὸ μεθ’ ἑαυτοῦ μονοείδες ἄει ὡς καλὸν καὶ ὡς παντὸς καλοῦ τὴν πηγαίαν καλλονὴν ὑπεροχικής ἐν ἑαυτῷ προεέχον.
2.3.1.2. BEAUTY AS SIMPLICITY AND 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. Plotinus questions the classical identification between beauty and symmetria, insisting that symmetria itself owes its beauty to an even more remote principle. Otherwise, only composite things could be called beautiful while simple things, like light, could not.117 Light is also a prevalent biblical image used to convey divinity both as it dwells in itself and as it communicates itself. 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.118

117 See especially Enneads I, 6, 1; Tatarkiewicz, History of Aesthetics, I, 313 – 331; Von Balthasar, GOTL, IV 292 – 301.
118 DN 2, 4 (641B): Καὶ γονὴν ὀρῶμεν ἐν οἴκῳ πολλῶν ἐνόντων λαμπτήρων πρὸς ἐν τῷ φῶς ἔνοιμεν τὰ πάντων φῶτα καὶ μίαν αἰγήν αἰδιάκριτον ἀναλάμποντα, καὶ οὐκ ἀν τις, ὡς ὑμεῖς, δύνατο τοῦτο τοῦ λαμπτήρος τῷ φῶς ἀπὸ τῶν ἄλλων ἐκ τοῦ πάντα τὰ φῶτα περιέχοντος ἀέρος διακρίναι καὶ ἴδειν ἰδίω ἀνευ θατέρου θάτερον διῶν ἐν δόλως ἀμιγώς συγκεκραμένων.
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.\(^{119}\)

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 makes them one altogether.”\(^{120}\) Dionysius uses this luminary dynamic in his explanation of the divine name beauty:

> 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 all things to Itself (whence also it is called Beauty), and as collecting all in all to Itself.\(^{121}\)

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\(^{119}\) CH I, 2 (121B): Καὶ γὰρ οὐδὲ αὐτὴ πώποτε τῆς οἰκείας ἕνικής ἑνότητος ἀπολείπεται, πρὸς ἀναγωγικὴν δὲ καὶ ἑνοποιόν τῶν προνουμένων σύγκρασιν ἀναγοροπρεπῶς πληθυνομένη καὶ προϊόντος μένει τε ἑνὸν ἑαυτῆς ἀραβρότου ἐν ἀκινήτῳ ταύτητι μονίμως πεπηγαία καὶ τούτου ἐπ’ αὐτῆν ὡς θεμίτων ἀνανεώσας ἀναλόγως αὐτοὺς ἀνατείνει καὶ ἐνοποιεῖ κατὰ τὴν ἀπλωτικὴν αὐτῆς ἑνωσίν.

\(^{120}\) Cf. DN 4, 6 (701B) as it is more fully expressed: Φῶς οὖν νοητόν λέγεται τὸ ὑπέρ πάντα φῶς ἀγαθὸν ὡς ἀκτίς πηγαία καὶ υπερβλύζουσα φωτοχυσία πάντα τὸν ὑπερκόσμιον καὶ περικόσμιον καὶ ἐγκόσμιον νουν ἐκ τοῦ πληρωματος αὐτῆς καταλάμπουσα καὶ τὰς νοερὰς αὐτῶν ὅλας ἀνανέαζουσα δυνάμεις καὶ πάντας περίχουσα τῷ ὑπερτετάσθαι καὶ πάντων ὑπερέχουσα τῷ ὑπερκοσμίῳ καὶ ἀπλῶς πάσαι τῆς ὕπερεχούσας δυνάμεως τὴν κυρείαν ὡς ἀρχήμως καὶ ὑπέρφωτος ἐν ἑαυτῇ συλλαβόσα καὶ ὑπερέχουσα καὶ προέχουσα καὶ τὰ νοερὰ καὶ λογικὰ πάντα συνάγουσα καὶ ἀσθένεια 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 exalting; and in one word, by embracing and having previously and pre-eminent 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 making all things rational, and making them one altogether.”

\(^{121}\) DN 4, 7 (701D): Τὸ δὲ ὑπερούσιον καλὸν κάλλος μὲν λέγεται διὰ τὴν ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ πᾶσα τοῖς οὕσι μεταδιδομένην οἰκείας ἐκάστοτε καλλονήν καὶ ὡς τῆς πάντων εὐφωμησίας καὶ ἀγιασίας αὐτοῦ δίκην φωτὸς ἑαυτοῦ ἐναστρέφον ἄτται τὰς καλλοποιίας τῆς πηγαίας ἀκτίνος αὐτοῦ μεταδόσεις καὶ ὡς πάντα πρὸς ἑαυτὸ καλοῦν, ὡς καὶ κάλλος λέγεται, καὶ ὡς ὅλα ἐν ὅλοις εἰς ταύτῳ συνάγον... This passage is cited above for different reasons. Here the stress is on the luminary dynamic.
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.” The simplicity of beauty remains in every beautiful thing even though it is diversified in beauty’s distributive act, and it is this simplicity 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 Dionysius associates 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; 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.

122 DN 4, 7 (704A): Τῇ γὰρ ἀπλῇ καὶ ύπερφυεῖ τῶν ὄλων καλῶν φύσει πάσα καλλονή καὶ πάν καλῶν ἔνοειδῶς κατ’ αὐτίαν προϊσφέτηκεν.
123 DN 4, 5 (701A): ὅτι φῶς νοητόν ὁ ἀγαθὸς λέγεται διὰ τὸ πάντα μὲν υπερουράνιον νοῦν ἐμπυπλάναι νοητοῦ φωτός, πάσον δὲ ἄγνοιαν καὶ πλάνην ἔλαυνεν ἐκ πασῶν, αἰς ἀν ἐγγένηται ψυχαῖς, καὶ πάσας αὐταῖς φωτός λεπτόν μεταδίδοναι καὶ τοὺς νοεροὺς αὐτῶν ὀφθαλμοὺς ἀποκαθαίρειν τῆς περικειμένης αὐταῖς ἐκ τῆς ἀγνοίας ἀχλύος καὶ ἀνακινεῖν καὶ ἀναπτύσσειν τῷ πολλῷ βάρει τοῦ σκότους συμμεσωσασθά τι καὶ μεταδίδοναι πρῶτα μὲν αὐλῆς μετρίας.
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, 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.” 124 By virtue of this relativity of reception, the anagogical dynamic that marks the Dionysian divine names is most fundamentally analo[125]gical 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.

Dionysius uses this analogical anagogy to explain the affect 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.” 125 When it is cast in the context of beauty, this analogical anagogy takes the form of an act of gathering elicited by the inherent ‘call’ upon 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-

124 DN 4, 7 (704AB): Ἐκ τοῦ καλοῦ τοῦτο πάσι τοῖς οὖσι τὸ ἐίναι κατὰ τὸν οἶκειόν λόγον ἔκειστα καλά
125 DN 4, 5 (701A): ἐπὶ τὸ ἐκείνων ὡσπερ ἀπογευμένων φωτός καὶ μᾶλλον ἐφισμένων μᾶλλον ἔαυτήν ἐνδιδόναι καὶ περισσῶς ἐπηλάμβανεν, ἐντὶ ἠγάπησαν πολὺ, καὶ δεὶ ἀνατείνειν αὐτὰς ἐπὶ τὰ πρόσω κατὰ τὴν σφάνων εἰς ἀνάνευσιν ἀναλογίαν
existing by reason of the beautiful and good, and imparted from the beautiful and good, by reason of the Beautiful and 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 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.

For Dionysius, the concrete personhood of Jesus reveals how divine Goodness distills its plenitude as an anagogical 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. The theme of light in Dionysius’s cultural milieu, found in both works of art and popular pagan religiosity, provides a preliminary

126 DN 4, 12 (709D): Ἐπὶ τοῖς ὀρθῶς τῶν θείων ἄκρωμένοις ἐπὶ τῆς αὐτῆς δυνάμεως τάττεται πρὸς τῶν ἱερῶν θεολόγων τὸ τῆς ἁγάτης καὶ τοῦ ἐρωτος ὄνομα κατὰ τὰς θείας ἐκφαντορίας. Καὶ ἐστὶ τούτο δυνάμεως ἐνοποίου καὶ συνδετικῆς καὶ διαφερόντως συγκρατικῆς ἐν τῷ καλῷ καὶ ἀγαθῷ διὰ τὸ καλὸν καὶ ἀγαθὸν προφετεύσως και ἐκ τοῦ καλοῦ καὶ ἀγαθοῦ διὰ τὸ καλὸν καὶ ἀγαθὸν ἐκδιδομένης...


128 Cf. Epistle 3 (1069B).

129 Kevin F. Doherty, “St. Thomas and the Pseudo-Dionysian Symbol of Light,” The New Scholasticism 34 (1960): 170 – 89. Doherty maintains that, since he was a 5th century Syrian, Dionysius’s “historical matrix” is one of a “Christian Neoplatonist’s … religious reaction to the cult of Mithras, the Persian sun-god …”
referent to his encounter with the Christ that he finds in Scripture.\footnote{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 Golitzen has explained in “Suddenly, Christ: The Place of Negative Theology in the Mystagogy of Dionysius the Areopagite,” Mystics: Presence and Aporia (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 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: Act 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. Golitzen’s observation indicates the way in which Dionysius’s Biblical heritage is often eclipsed by his Neoplatonism.} From the very beginning of \textit{Genesis}\footnote{E.g., Gen 1: 1 – 6.} to the “I am” motif in the Gospels,\footnote{E.g., John 9: 5.} the theme of light permeates the divine self-disclosure throughout the scriptures.\footnote{For a brief summary of the most relevant Biblical passages with respect to light, see Riordan, \textit{Divine Light}, 152.} A particularly significant expression of this theme occurs in Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians,\footnote{2Cor 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.”} 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 intended to place his vision alongside Paul’s, underscores the significance of this passage. Such passages in scripture reinforce Dionysius would have encountered a powerful cult of Mithriac mysteries established by Julian the Apostate (c. A.D. 360), whose \textit{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 \textit{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 homoeopathic medicine against the disease of Mithraic heliolatry”(177).
Dionysius’s encounter with the Platonic image of the sun as an analogy for intelligibility.\(^\text{135}\) It also reinforces his encounter with Plotinus’s ideas concerning the way that light ‘invades’ the darkness of matter granting it a share in beauty.\(^\text{136}\) The scriptural depiction of Christ as the light 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 analogical 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.”\(^\text{137}\) In identifying the light with Jesus, Dionysius more 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.\(^\text{138}\)


\(^{136}\) 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 Ex 24:17, “To the Israelites the glory of the Lord was seen as a consuming fire on the mountaintop.”

\(^{137}\) CH I, 1 (120B): Ἀλλὰ καὶ πᾶσα πατροκινητό τοῦ οὐρανοῦ φωτοφανείας πρόδοσος εἰς ἡμᾶς ἀγαθοδότως φιλίτισα πάλιν ὡς ἐνοπιοὺς δύναμις ἀναστατικός ἡμᾶς ἀναπληροῦσα καὶ ἐπιστρέφεται πρὸς τὴν τοῦ συναγωγοῦ πατρὸς ἐνότητα καὶ θεοποιοῦν ἀπλότητα.

\(^{138}\) CH I, 2 (121A): Οὐκοῦν ἤτοι ἔπικαι θάλαμον, τὸ πατρικὸν φῶς, τὸ δὲ ἐντὸ Ὀλυμπίως, ὕποτίζει πάντα ἄνθρωπον ἔρχομενον εἰς τὸν κόσμον», δι’ οὗ τὴν πρὸς τὸν ἀρχήφωτον πατέρα προσαγωγὴν ἐρχόμενον, ἐπὶ τὰς τῶν ἑρωτάτων λόγιν πατροπαραδότους ἐλλήμερες ὡς ἑφικτὸν ἀνανεώσις καὶ τὰς
This passage is packed full of a multitude of Dionysian themes, though the dominant theme is light and its anagogical 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 anagogical power of cognition, beauty reveals itself as a plenitude of intelligibility.

2.3.1.3. 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 serves 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.’

In *Divine Names* 4, 8, Dionysius describes the effect that the Beautiful (and Good)\textsuperscript{139} 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.\textsuperscript{140}

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.\textsuperscript{141} The very next section in *Divine Names* 4, 9, Dionysius describes the movement of the soul in terms of a cognitive anagogy 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 goal is always to arrive at a more complete union with the beautiful. In this regard, beauty as a divine name signifies

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\textsuperscript{139} As noted, after DN 4, 7, Dionysius combines the Beautiful and the Good as a single perfection. For the sake of the context of this dissertation and ease of reading, the Beautiful alone will be noted though this should be taken as the unity of the Beautiful and the Good.

\textsuperscript{140} DN 4, 8 (704D).

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:  

Further, there is a movement of soul, circular indeed – the entrance into itself from (ἀπό) 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, 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.  

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142 It is important to note the controversial nature of this interpretation. The phrase ἡ εἰς έαυτὴν εὐσοδὸς ἀπὸ τῶν ἔξω is unclear as to how one should understand the sense of ἀπό. 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…” [Γνωσις δὲ ὁ νοὸς διὰ τῶν αἰσθητῶν ἀνακινεῖται] 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 ἀπό 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, ἀπό 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. Otherwise, from where does the eventual union arise and with what is the soul united?

143 DN 4, 9 (705A): ἡ ἐις έαυτὴν εὐσοδὸς ἀπό τῶν ἔξω καὶ τῶν νοερῶν αὐτῆς δυνάμεων ἢ ἐνοεὶδῆς συνελέξεις ὠστερ ἐν τινὶ κύκλῳ τὸ ἀπλανές αὐτὴ δυσρομένη καὶ ἀπό τῶν πολλῶν τῶν ἔξωθεν αὐτὴν ἑπιστρέφουσα καὶ συνάγουσα πρώτον εἰς εαυτὴν, εἶτα ὡς ἐνοεὶδῆ γενομένην ἐνοῦσα ταῖς ἐνεαίως ἰσωμέναις δυνάμεσι εἰς οὕτως ἐπὶ τὸ καλὸν καὶ ἀγαθὸν χειραγωγήσα τὸ ὑπὲρ πάντα τὰ ὑντα καὶ ἐν καὶ ταῦταν καὶ ἀναρχαὶ καὶ ἀτελεύτητον
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.” 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.

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.” 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.

Dionysius conceives the divine plenitude, from which proceed the divine perfections, as a plenitude of intelligibility that attracts the desire of creatures endowed with

144 DN 4, 9 (705AB): Ἑλικοειδῶς δὲ ψυχή κινεῖται, καθ’ ὅσον οὐκείως ἑαυτῇ τὰς θείας ἐλλάμπεται γνώσεις, οὐ νοερῶς καὶ ἐνιαίως, ἀλλὰ λογικῶς καὶ διεξοδικῶς καὶ οἰόν συμμίκτοις καὶ μεταβατικαῖς ἐνεργείαις.


146 DN 4, 10 (705BC): Τούτων οὖν καὶ τῶν αἰσθητῶν ἐν τῷ δὲ τῷ παντὶ τριών κινήσεων καὶ πολλῷ πρότερον τῶν ἐκάστου μονῶν καὶ στάσεων καὶ ἱδρύσεων αἰτίῶν ἔστι καὶ συνοχικόν καὶ πέρας τὸ καλὸν καὶ ἀγαθόν τὸ ὑπὲρ πάσαν στάσιν καὶ κίνησιν.
intellect through a process of cognitive analogogy. 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 analogogy, but contemplation remains the final and ultimate goal of this ascent.\(^\text{147}\) Dionysius’s approach to knowledge, rooted as it is in beauty, includes both discursive logic and symbolism.

There is a discernable Aristotelian dimension to Dionysius’s epistemology. This dimension is most visible in certain parts of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* that emphasize a more discursive approach to knowledge. 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 causes.\(^\text{148}\) 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.

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\(^{148}\) EH 3, III, 2: εἰσέλθωμεν ἀπὸ τῶν αἰτιῶν εἰς τὰ αἴτια κατὰ τὴν ἱερὰν ἡμῶν σύναξιν, καὶ τὴν εὐπρεπὴ τῶν νοητῶν ἱσοῦ φωταγωγοῦντος οὐμόθεν θεωρίαν τὸ μακάριον ἀποστύλβουσαν ἐμφανῶς τῶν ἀρχετύπων κάλλος. Ἀλλ’ ὦ θειοτάτη καὶ ιερά τελετή, τὰ περικείμενα σοὶ συμβολικῶς ἀμφιέσματα τῶν αἰνιγμάτων ἀποκαλυφθημένη τηλαυγάς ἢμιν ἀναδείχθητι καὶ τὰς νοερὰς ἡμῶν ὑφὲς ἐνιαίου καὶ ἀπερικλάστου 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).
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 ἀφαίτητος 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 (ἀναλυτικὸς) manner. As indicated by the word ἀναλυτικὸς, this advance is conceived in terms of a ‘return’ from what is a variety to what is simpler.

Both of these examples are grounded in Dionsysius’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.

The symbolic sense of Dionysian epistemology 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:

149 CH 15, 1 (328A): Φέρε δή λοιπὸν ἀναπαύοντες ἡμῶν εἰ δοκεῖ τὸ νοερὸν ὄμμα τῆς περί τᾶς ἐνικᾶς καὶ ὑψηλᾶς θεωρίας ἀγγελοπρεπούς συντονίας ἐπὶ τὸ διαιρετόν καὶ πολυμερὲς πλάτος τῆς πολυειδοῦς τῶν ἁγγελικῶν μορφωτικῶν ποικιλίας καταβάντας πάλιν ἀπ’ αὐτῶν ὡς ἀπ’ εἰκόνων ἐπὶ τὴν ἀπλότητα τῶν οὐρανίων νομῶν ἀναλυτικῶς ἀνακάμπτωμεν. “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.”

150 The word ἀναλυτικός 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.”

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...\(^{152}\)

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.\(^{153}\) The first neglects to keep in mind that although the 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 “distraction” (κλινὼς). 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” (ἄκλινως) at the archetypal form, at the divine promise of determinate plenitude. Consequently, this second type of art, like an *icon*, remains ontologically open even as it gives

\(^{152}\) EH 4, III, 1 (473C): "Καὶ καθάπερ ἐπὶ τῶν αἰσθητῶν εἰκόνων εἰ πρὸς τὸ ἀρχέτυπον εἶδος ὁ γραφεύς ἄκλινως εἰσορᾷ πρὸς μηδὲν ἄλλο τῶν ὅρατων ἀνυπελεκμένου ἢ κατὰ τί μεριζόμενος αὐτὸν ἔκειν οὕτως ἐστὶ τὸν γραφόμενον εἰ θείως εἰπεῖ διαπλασιάζει καὶ δείξει τὸν ἐκάτερον ἐν ἑκάτερῳ παρά τὸ τῆς ὑσίας διάφορον, οὕτω τοῖς φιλοκάλοις ἐν νῷ γραφεύσειν ἢ πρὸς τὸ εὐώδες καὶ κρύφθην κάλλος ἀτενής καὶ ἀπαρέγκλιτος θεωρία τὸ ἀπλανὲς διωρίσεται καὶ θεωιδεύσατον ἴνα ἄλημα. Εἰκότως οὖν πρὸς τὴν ὑπερουσίους εὐώδη καὶ νοητὴν ἐντρέπεται οἱ θείοι γραφεῖς τὸ νοερὸν ἐαυτῶν ἀμεταστρέπτως, εἰδοτούσιν ὀδυσσωμένας ὁδώρας τῶν ἐν αὐτοῖς θεομυθίαν ἀρτέρων "Εἰς τὸ θεαθήναι κατὰ τὸ λόγιον τοῖς ἀνθρώποις" ἀλλ’ ἱερῶς ἐποπτεύουσιν ὡς ἐν εἰκόνι τῷ θείῳ μόρῳ τὰ τῆς ἐκκλησίας ἱεροτάτα περιεκκαλυμμένα."  

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, “the persistent and unflinching contemplation of the sweet-savored and hidden 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 through the artistic act.

This contention can be further verified by a passage in the Divine Names where, making reference to a certain Clement ¹⁵⁴ and also to Scripture,¹⁵⁵ 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 knowledge of these things, we might be led, as far as possible, to the Universal Cause of all things.¹⁵⁶

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

¹⁵⁴ Rorem maintains that this Clement could be either Clement the Apostolic Father (c.100) or Clement of Alexandria (c. 150 – 215), Pseudo-Dionysius the Complete Works, 102, n. 186. Rolt, on the other hand, suggests only that it is the Bishop of Rome (c. 95) who is also the author of a well-known Epistle to the Corinthians (Dionysius the Areopogite, 142, n. 386).

¹⁵⁵ Hos 13:4 (LXX).

¹⁵⁶ DN 5, 9 (824D): Εἰ δὲ ὁ φιλόσοφος ἄξιοὶ Ἐλληνες καὶ πρὸς τι παραδείγματα λέγεσθαι τά ἐν τοῖς οὕτων ἄρχηγωτέρα, πρόεισι μὲν οὐ διὰ κυρίων καὶ παντελῶν καὶ άπλῶν ὄνομάτων ο λόγος αὐτών. Συγχωροῦντας δὲ καὶ τούτο ὁρθῶς λέγεσθαι τῆς θεολογίας μνημονευτέον φασκούσης ὅτι «Οὗ παραδείγματος αὐτότως, ἀλλ’ ἰνα διὰ τῆς τούτων ἀναλογίας γνώσεως ἐπὶ τὴν πάντων αἰτίαν, ὦς οἰοί τέ ἐσμεν, ἄναχθωμεν.»
manner above all things.” 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. 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 only the exemplar itself of which it is an image or symbol, but also exemplarity as such, that is to say, ‘subsistent exemplarity.’ It is this ‘subsistent exemplarity,’ surrounding every

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157 DN 5, 5 (820B): Πάντων οὖν εἰκότως τῶν ἄλλων ἀρχηγικῶτερον ὡς ὄν θεὸς ἐκ τῆς πρεσβυτέρας τῶν ἄλλων αὐτοῦ δωρεῶν ὑμεῖται.

158 Consider in particular DN 1, 7 (597A): Πάντα δὲ ἀπλώς καὶ ἀπειροίστως ἐν ἑαυτῇ τὰ ὄντα προέληφε ταῖς παντελεῖς τῆς μιᾶς αὐτῆς καὶ παναιτίου προνοίας ἀγαθότητα καὶ ἐκ τῶν ὄντων ἀπάντων ἐναρμονίως ὑμεῖται καὶ ὑμνεῖται; “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.

159 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).
image and exemplar, or every symbol and plentitude of intelligibility, that accounts for
the divine presence.\textsuperscript{160} 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.\textsuperscript{161} 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 to
things sensible differently.\textsuperscript{162}

\textit{Dissimilar similitudes} name an artistic \textit{topos} in Dionysius expressing the way that forms and
concepts derived from artistic activity signify ‘not what is, but what is not’.\textsuperscript{163} It is a mode of
signification that acknowledges 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 \textit{dissimilar similitudes},

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{160} DN 5, 5 (820A).
\item \textsuperscript{161} DN 5, 7 (821B); 7, 3 (869D, 872A).
\item \textsuperscript{162} CH 2, 4 (141D): Ἔστιν οὖν ἐκ πάντων αὐτῶν ἑπινοηθής καὶ πάντων ἑπινοηθής. Καὶ τοῖς νομοῖς ταῦτα ἐκ τῶν ὑλῶν ἀναπλάθασι ταῖς λεγομέναις ἀνομοίους ὁμοιότητας, ἐτέρῳ τρόπῳ τῶν νοηρῶν ἐχόντων ἐκ τοῖς αἰσθητοῖς ἐπονοεῖται.
\item \textsuperscript{163} CH 2, 3 (140C).
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
differences conveying unity. These *dissimilar similitudes*, therefore, express an analogical principle present in every form of art, where ‘art’ refers broadly to all human acts of determination. Every act of determination by which human cognition mediates with the natural world is an act that illuminates the plenitude of being. 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.”

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. 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 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.

164 CH 2, 3 (141AB): Τιμῶσι τοιγαρόν, οὐκ αἷσχους ἀποταληροῦσι τὰς οὐρανίας διακοσμήσεις αἰ τῶν λογίων ἱερογραφίαι ταῖς ἀνομοίοις αὐτάς μορφοποιιάς ἐκφαίνουσαι καὶ διά τούτων ἀποδεικνύσαι τῶν ὁλικῶν ἀπάντων ὑπερκοσμίως ἐκβεβηκυίας.
Inasmuch as Dionysius orients the \textit{dissimilar similitude} schematic to the event of scriptural representation, it applies \textit{a fortiori} to the conceptual level. It reveals how the determination of divine plentitude in and through discursive, abstract concepts remains an ‘open phenomenon’ through the artistic act. The plentitude 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 recalcitrant to discursive, abstract, conceptually 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 Dioysius identifies the divine perfection as a plenitude of intelligibility. In its excess it evokes a way of knowing that 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 \textit{dissimilar similitudes}, symbolism mediates the communication of beauty – that is to say, mediates the communication of the divine plenitude of intelligibility. This point in the present analysis, however, marks a shift from beauty as it identifies the divine in itself as transcendent plenitude to beauty as it identifies the divine in its act of communication.

\textit{2.3.2. Beauty as a Principle of Determination}
Beauty as a divine name identifies the divine in itself as a transcendent plenitude.

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 emanation. The rudimentary passage where this identification is articulated is 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.165

This passage echoes significant features of both Platonic and Aristotelian thoughts on 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.166 Aristotle also recognizes beauty in this respect.167 Where Aristotle limits beauty’s originating power to ‘many’ things rather than to ‘all,’ however, Dionysius does not concede such limitations. Dionysius also introduces into beauty’s causality 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 simultaneously present in some manner. Thus, beauty is also considered

165 DN 4, 7 (704BC): Ἐκ τοῦ καλοῦ τοῦτού πάσι τοῖς ὑπὸ τὸ τέλειον κατὰ τὸν ὁμοιότατον λόγον ἐκάστα καλά, καὶ διὰ τὸ καλὸν αἱ πάντων ἑραμογαὶ καὶ φιλίαι καὶ κοινωνίαι, καὶ τῷ καλῷ τὰ πάντα ἤγιναι, καὶ ἠρχῇ πάντων τὸ καλὸν ύπὸ ποιητικὸν αἴτιον καὶ κινοῦν τὰ ὀλίγα καὶ συνέχον τῷ τῆς ὁμοιότητος καλλονῆς ἐρωτι καὶ πέρας πάντων καὶ ἀναπτυγμένον ὡς τελικὸν αἴτιον, τοῦ καλοῦ γὰρ ἔνεκα πάντα γίγνεται, καὶ παραδειγματικῶν, ὅτι κατ’ αὐτὸ πάντα ἀφορίζεται.

166 Symposium 210a 4ff.

167 Metaphysics 1013a 23.
Having established 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, 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 God.”

It is important to note here that Dionysius’s assertion is metaphysical rather than aesthetic; 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 abodings 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.

As a principle of determination, beauty generates the origin of substance. 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

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168 DN 4, 7 (704C): Καὶ ταῦτάν ἐστιν τἀγαθοὶ τὸ καλὸν, ὅτι τὸ καλὸν καὶ ἀγαθὸν κατὰ πᾶσαν αἰτίαν πάντα ἔφιεται, καὶ ὥστε τί τῶν ὄντων, ὥμως μὴ μετέχει τοῦ καλοῦ καὶ ἀγαθοῦ

169 DN 4, 7 (704CD): Τούτῳ τὸ ἐν ἀγαθῷ καὶ καλῷ ἐνικώς ἐστὶ πάντων τῶν πολλῶν καλῶν καὶ ἀγαθῶν αἴτιον. Ἐκ ταύτων πᾶσι τῶν ὄντων αἱ συνάδειαι ὑπάρξεις, αἱ ἐνώσεις, αἱ διακρίσεις, αἱ ταυτότηται, αἱ ἐτερότηται, αἱ ὀμοιότηται, αἱ κοινωνίαι τῶν ἐναντίων, αἱ συμμετοχαὶ τῶν ἴσων, αἱ πρόνοιαι τῶν ὑποτεθέρου, αἱ ἀλληλουξίαι τῶν ὁμοστοίχων, αἱ ἑπιστοροφαὶ τῶν καταδεικτερῶν, αἱ πάντων ἔως τῶν φρουρικῶν καὶ ἀμετακίνητων μονῶν καὶ ἰδρύσεως, καὶ αὕτης αἱ πάντων ἐν πᾶσιν οἰκείως ἐκάστην κοινωνίαν καὶ ἑρμηνευκαὶ καὶ ἀναγνώστης φύλακα καὶ σοφίας τοῦ παντός, αἱ ἐν τῷ πάντῃ συγκράσεις, αἱ διάδειται συνοιχία τῶν ὄντων, αἱ ἀνάληπται διαδοχαὶ τῶν γινομένων, αἱ στάσεις πᾶσαι καὶ αἱ κινήσεις αἱ τῶν νοσῶν, αἱ τῶν ψυχῶν, αἱ τῶν συμμάτων.
idea he no doubt discovers in Plotinus. In transferring 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. 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. Second, beauty’s causal power is examined from the way in which its emanative act gives rise to a unity in plurality. Third, beauty is examined insofar as this unity in plurality generates an ontological hierarchy that, in Dionysius, becomes the very image of divine beauty.

2.3.2.1. Beauty as Emanation

Dionysius adopts the Neoplatonic triad of monos, prodos and epistrophē 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

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170 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.

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 plentitude of the productive source, the *monos*. 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. This is due to the fact that ‘the producer’ remains steadfast in its own ontological constitution (*monos*) while emanating derivative entities. A second feature concerns the way in which “all procession is accomplished through a likeness of the secondary to the primary.” Part of this likeness includes a share in the plentitude of the source, which in turn bequeaths the productive

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172 Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, props. 25, 27.

173 Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, prop. 27: οὐ γὰρ ἀπομερισμός ἐστὶ τοῦ παράγοντος τὸ παραγόμενον· οὐδὲ γὰρ γενέσει τοῦτο προσήκειν, οὐδὲ τοῖς γεννητικοῖς αἰτίοις. οὐδὲ μετάβασις· οὐ γάρ ὑλη γίνεται τοῦ προϊόντος.

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. 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. 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 as the emanated entity, in its becoming determinate, remains (monos) in the cause, proceeds from it (prodos) and reverts upon it (epistrophe).

178 Cf. Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, prop. 35. The influence of a Hegelian interpretation has led some to misconstrue Proclines 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 proposition 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,” The *Elements of Theology, A Revised Text*, E.R. Dodds (trans.) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933), 220 – 221. 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 overture — 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
Although there are only two passages in the *Elements of Theology* that 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.\(^{179}\) Beauty is named along with similitude, permanence and sameness as an imparticipable that grants 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, 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 the Bible, 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. Coupled with the Platonic notion that the good of its nature

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necessarily diffuses itself, divine volition is associated with the illumination of natural forms and, therefore, called beauty. 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.

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 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 entireties, the parts, every one thing, and multitude, the connections of parts, the unions of every multitude, the perfections of the entireties, the quality, the weight, the size, the infinitude, the compounds, the distinctions, every infinitude, every term, all the bounds, the orders, the pre-eminentences, 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.¹⁸⁰

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 what is somehow simultaneously present and absent.

The influence of Christian thought upon Dionysius’s approach to Neoplatonic emanation, especially as regards the Trinity and the Incarnation, also has significant impact on the way it is reconfigured.¹⁸¹ 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

¹⁸⁰ DN 4, 10 (705CD): Διό πᾶσα στάσεις καὶ κίνησις καὶ ἕξ ὑπὸ καὶ ἐν ὑπὶ καὶ ἑις ὑ καὶ ὑν ἐνεκα. Καὶ γὰρ ἐξ αὐτοῦ καὶ δ’ αὐτοῦ καὶ ὑστα καὶ ὑω ἐπᾶ καὶ νῦ καὶ φυχ ὑ καὶ πάσῃς φύσεως ἀι σμεροετής, ἀι ἵστης, ἀι μεγαλειότητας, τὰ μέτρα πάντα καὶ ἀι τῶν ὄντων ἐναλλογίας καὶ ἀρμονίας καὶ κράσιος, ἀι ἀληθησες καὶ μῆρα, πᾶν ἐν καὶ πλῆθος, ἀι συνδέσεις τῶν μερῶν, ἀι παντὸς πλῆθους ἐνωτει, ἀι τελεοτιτης τῶν ὀλτήτων τὸ ποιόν, τὸ ποσόν, τὸ πτήλον, τὸ ἀπευρον, ἀι συγκρίσεις, ἀι διακρίσεις, πᾶσα ἀπερίᾳ, πᾶν πέρας, ὅ προῖ πάντες, ἀι τάξεις, ἀι ὑπεροχαῖς, τὰ στουχεία, τὰ εἴδη, πᾶσα ὑστα, πᾶσα δύναμις, πᾶσα ἐνέργεια, πᾶσα ἔξω, πᾶσα ἀθόρυβης, πᾶς λόγος, πᾶσα νόημα, πᾶσα ἐπιστήμη, πᾶσα ἐνωσις. Καὶ ἀπλως πᾶν ἐν τοῦ καλοῦ καὶ ἀγαθοῦ καὶ ἐν τῷ καλῷ καὶ ἀγαθῷ ἔστι καὶ ἑς τό καλὸν καὶ ἀγαθὸν ἐπιστρέφεται.

¹⁸¹ 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 – 190. 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.
relation among emanated entities themselves.\textsuperscript{182} The relation is conceived mostly in terms of love. This 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.\textsuperscript{183}

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. 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 (\textit{monos}) as it creates the otherness of entities. Procession (\textit{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

\textsuperscript{182} Cf. Gersh, \textit{From Iamblichus to Eriugena}, 205.

\textsuperscript{183} \textit{Ep.}, 8, 1 (1085D-1088A): ἄλλα τοῦ δόντως ἀγαθὸν καὶ ὑπεραγάθῳ Χριστῷ τὰς ἀγαθοτητοὺς ἀκτίνας ἐν ἄρσει παραδεχόμενοι πρὸς αὐτῶν ἐπὶ τὰς θείας ἀγαθουργίας αὐτοῦ φωταγωγῆσαι. Ἄρα γάρ οὐκ ἔστιν ἀφάτου καὶ ὑπὲρ νόησιν ἀγαθότητος, ὅτι τὰ δόντα εἰναι ποιεῖ καὶ ὅτι πάντα αὐτὰ πρὸς τὸ εἶναι παρήγαγε καὶ πᾶντα βούλεται δει γενέσθαι παρατηλήσα ταύτῃ καὶ κοινωνικὰ τῶν αὐτῶν κατὰ τὴν ἕκαστον ἐπιτρέπεται: Τί δὲ, ὅτι καὶ τῶν ἀποφοιτῶν ἐκτιμῶν ἔχεται καὶ φιλονεικεῖ καὶ δεῖται μὴ ἀπακομίζει τῶν ἐρωμένων καὶ βρυομομένων αὐτῶν καὶ εἰκὴ κατεγκαλούντων ἀνέχεται, καὶ αὐτὸς ἀπολογεῖται: Καὶ μᾶλλον ἐπαγγέλλεται θεραπεύσαντι καὶ ἐπὶ αὐτοῖς ἀπέχουσα, ὅμως προσιοῦσα, προστρέχει καὶ ὑπαντή καὶ ὅλος ὅλους περιφύσει, ὅμως προσιούσα, προστρέχει καὶ ὑπαντή καὶ ὅλος ὅλους περιφυσῶς ἀποστέκται καὶ οὐκ ἔγκαλε περὶ τῶν προτέρων, ἀλλ’ ἄγαπη τα παρόντα καὶ ἔρημη ἄγει καὶ συγκαλεῖ τοὺς φιλοὺς—δηλαδὴ τοὺς ἀγαθούς—, ἵνα ἡ πάντων εὐφροσυνών ἡ 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.
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 *epistrophē*), 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, 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 his *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”. 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 centered within itself in its unmoved sameness.”

It proceeds as a fullness that exceeds the capacity of the finite intellect and is therefore 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

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184 *CH* I, 1, 2 (121B): Καὶ γὰρ οὕτω αὐτῇ πώποτε τῆς ὀικείας ἕνικης ἔνότητος ἀπολείπεται, πρὸς ἀναγωγικὴν δὲ καὶ ἐνσωπιόν τῶν προορισμένων σύγκρασιν ἀγαθοπρεπῶς πληθυνομένη καὶ προϊοῦσα μένει τε ἐνδον ἐαυτῆς ἀραρότως ἐν ἀκινήτῳ ταυτότητι μονίμως πεπηγυμένη καὶ τούς ἐπ’ αὐτὴν ὡς θεμιτὸν ἀνανεύοντας ἀναλόγως αὐτὰς ἀνατείνει καὶ ἐνσωποίει κατὰ τὴν ἀπλωτικὴν αὐτῆς ἔνωσιν.

185 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.
our nature, by paternal forethought.” 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. It 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, the 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 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.” Every proceeding entity bears 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

186 CH I, 1, 2: (121B): Καὶ γὰρ οὐδὲ δυνατὸν ἔτέρως ἢμὲν ἐπιλάμψαι τὴν θεαρχικὴν ἀκτίνα μὴ τῇ ποικιλίᾳ τῶν ἱερῶν παραπτεσμάτων ἀναγωγικῶς περικεκαλυμμένην καὶ τοὺς καθ’ ἡμᾶς προνοίας πατρικὴ συμφυς καὶ οἰκείως διεσκευασμένην.

187 CH I, 2 (121C): Καὶ γὰρ οὐδὲ δυνατὸν ἔτέρως ἢμὲν ἐπιλάμψαι τὴν θεαρχικὴν ἀκτίνα μὴ τῇ ποικιλίᾳ τῶν ἱερῶν παραπτεσμάτων ἀναγωγικῶς περικεκαλυμμένην καὶ τοὺς καθ’ ἡμᾶς προνοίας πατρικὴ συμφυς καὶ οἰκείως διεσκευασμένην.
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).  

2.3.2.2. 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. For this reason, ‘all things are determined according to’ beauty, indicating the way in which it is a principle of determination. 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 the plurality of its emanation 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.

In identifying God with the name beauty, Dionysius also 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.

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188 One recent interpretation of Dionysian emanation (Schäfer, The Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite, 88 – 94) alters the sequence of the Neoplatonic triad such that nous 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 describe it, however, it still appears to be a creaturely recapitulations 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.

189 DN 4, 7 (704A).

190 DN 4, 7 (704A).
into how the problem of the one and many in God, as the unity in plurality of beauty, is overcome.

Part of Dionysius’s approach involves assimilating Neoplatonic difference as a positive approach to otherness. In his 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.191 This notion of constitutive difference is interpreted in various ways between pagan and Christian Neoplatonists. As one recent scholar 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.192

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.”193 Through participation in the divine peace, the divided multiplicity is transformed (ἐπιστρεφούσης) into a full unity (εἰς τὴν ὀλὴν ἑνότητα). 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.


193 DN 11, 1 (948D): Αὕτη γὰρ ἦστιν ἡ πάντων ἑνωτικὴ καὶ τῆς ἄπαντων ὁμοοίας τε καὶ συμφυΐας γεννητικὴ καὶ ἀπεργαστικὴ.
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 becometh which, united indivisibly, and at the same time they severally
continuously unmingled stand, as regards their own proper kind, not muddied through their
mingling with the opposite, nor blunting any of their unifying distinctness and purity.194

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 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. 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 the one. 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.195

194 DN 11, 2 (949C): Καὶ πρῶτον γε τοῦτο ῥητέον, ὅτι τῆς αὐτοειρήνης καὶ τῆς ὅλης καὶ τῆς καθ’ ἐκαστὸν ἔστιν ὑποστάτης καὶ ὅτι πάντα πρὸς ἄλλα ἁγκαράσαν μία τὴν ἀντικείμενον αὐτῶν ἐνυβίων, καθ’ ἐν ἀδιακριτῶν ἰσομεσάν καὶ ἀπαράμετρος ἰσόμετρος κατὰ τὸ ὅτι ἐκαστὸ εἴδος ἐστίν καρπερέος οὐκ ἐπιθελοῦμεν διὰ τῆς πρὸς τὰ ἀντικείμενα κράσεως ὁδὲ ἀπαμβλύνοντα τι τῆς ἑνωτικῆς ἀκριβείας καὶ καθαρότητος.

195 DN 11, 3 (952BC): Πῶς δέ, φαίνει τις, εὑρίσκει πάντα εἰρήνην. Πολλὰ γὰρ ἐτέρψει καὶ διακρίσει χαίρει καὶ οὐκ ἂν ποτὲ ἐκόναν ἠρέμησεν ἐθελήσῃ. Καὶ εἰ μὲν ἐτέρψη καὶ διακρίσει ὁ τοῦτο λέγων φησὶ τὴν ἐκάστο τῶν ὄντων ἰδιότητα καὶ ὁτι τούτη ὁδὲ ἐν τῶν ὄντων ὅν, ὅτε ἐστίν, ἐθέλει ποτὲ ἀπολλύειν, οὐκ ἂν ὁδὲ ἡμεῖς πρὸς τοῦτο ἀντικρίζωμεν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ταύτῃ εἰρήνῃ ἑρέσσωμεν ἀποφανούμεθα. Πάντα γὰρ ἄνατὰ πρὸς ἐαυτὰ εἰρηνεύειν τε καὶ ἠνωθεῖ καὶ ἔστινυ καὶ τῶν ἐαυτῶν ἀκίνητα καὶ ἄπτωτα εἶναι. Καὶ ἔστι καὶ τῆς καθ’ ἐκαστὸν ἁμαρτήμοις ἰδιότητος η διατελεῖ τῆς εἰρήνης φυλακτικῇ ταῖς εἰρηνοδώρῳς αὐτῆς
As a principle of determination, beauty’s unity in plurality is the source of the unifying foundation of peace because the aforementioned ‘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. In this sense, beauty’s anagogical power is personalized in Christ by the fact that he 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.196

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.

2.3.2.3. 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

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196 DN 11, 5 (953AB): Τί δὲν τις εἴποι περὶ τῆς κατὰ Χριστὸν εἰρηνογοῦτος φιλανθρωπίας; Καθ’ ἣν οὐ μὴ μᾶθωμεν ἐν πολεμεῖν, οὔτε ἑαυτοῖς οὔτε ἄλληλοις οὔτε ἄγγελοις, ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτοῖς τὰ θέα κατὰ δύναμιν συνεργήσωμεν κατὰ πρόνοιαν Ἰησοῦ τοῦ «τὰ πάντα ἐν πάσιν» ἐνεργοῦντος καὶ ποιοῦντος εἰρήνην ἀφήνουν καὶ ξό οἰόνος προωρισμένην καὶ ἀποκαταλλάσσοντος ἡμᾶς ἑαυτῷ ἐν πνεύματί καὶ τοι’ ἑαυτοῦ καὶ ἐν αὐτῷ τῷ πατρὶ.
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.197

The principle of love that is described here bears an ordering power that reflects Dionysian heirarchy. 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, holly 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.198

In this passage, beauty continues to serve as a final, and so efficient, cause of a hieararchical momentum. What Dionysius includes, however, is a more explicit account of beauty’s anagological 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 concieved in ways similar to beauty; as an anagological power whose origin and goal is beautification, that is, an increase in beauty itself.

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197 DN 4, 10 (705BC); Πάνων οὖν ἐστί τὸ καλὸν καὶ ἀγαθὸν ἐφετὸν καὶ ἔραστὸν καὶ ἀγαπητόν, καὶ δι’ αὑτὸ καὶ αὐτοῦ ἔνεκα καὶ τὰ ἄριστα τῶν κρείττων ἐπιστρεπτικῶς ἔρωσι καὶ κοινωνικῶς τὰ ὀμόστοιχα τῶν ὁμοσταγών καὶ τὰ κρεῖττα τῶν ἡττών προνοητικῶς καὶ αὐτὰ ἔσκιοτα ἐκάστα συνεκτικῶς, καὶ πάντα τοῦ καλοῦ καὶ ἀγαθοῦ ἐφεμένα ποιεῖ καὶ βουλεῖται πάντα, δόσα ποιεῖ καὶ βουλεῖται

198 EH 1, 1 (372B); ἡμῶν τε τὰ πρὸς αὐτὸν ἀνατεινομένῳ καὶ ἡμᾶς ἀνατείνοντι τῶν καλῶν ἢμως συμπιτίσται τὰς πολλὰς ἐπέρτωτοι καὶ εἰς ἐνοείδθη καὶ θεῖον ἀποτελείονς ζυμῇ ἔξιν τε καὶ ἐνέργειαν ἐπιστρεπτῆ διωρεῖται τῆς θείας ἔρωσιν τῆς δύναμιν, εὖ ἄρα εἰς τὴν ἄγαν ἐρχόμενοι τῆς ἱερατείας ἐνέργειαι ἐγώυτερον μὲν αὐτῶν γινόμεθα τῶν ὑπὲρ ἡμᾶς ύπότων τῇ κατὰ δύναμιν ἀφορμοῦσθαι τοῦ μονήμου τε καὶ ἀνεξάλλακτου τῆς αὐτῶν ἱερᾶς ἀδράσεως καὶ ταύτη πρὸς τὴν μακαρίαν ἡμῶς καὶ θεορηκῆ ἄγην ἀναβλέψιμας δόσα τε ιδεῖν ἐφικτὸν ἐπιπτούσαντες ἱερὰς καὶ τῆς τῶν θεομάτων γνώσεως ἐλλαμπρότεντες τὴν μυστικήν ἐπιστήμην ἀφρείρωμενοι καὶ ἀφερεματὶ φωτοειδεῖς καὶ θεουργικοὶ τετελεσμένοι καὶ τελεσιουργοὶ γενέσθαι δυνησόμεθα. Emphasis added.
Dionysius is widely credited with the origination of the neologism ἱεραρχία, though 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,”199 or a “mediated pyramid of revelation and authority,”200 or a “staircase principle.”201 Interpretations like these distort the explanation of hierarchy provided in the Dionysian text, which conceives it primarily in terms of act.

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: “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.”202 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 is identified as ‘symbolism.’ As explained previously, implementing principles of beauty, symbolism identifies a mode of beauty’s power to distill

199 E.g., Wear and Dillon, Pseudo-Dionysius and the Neoplatonic Tradition, 57. Emphasis added.
200 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.
201 Florovsky, The Byzantine Ascetic and Spiritual Fathers, 221. Emphasis added.
202 CH I, 3 (121CD): ἐπεὶ μὴ δυνατόν ἐστι τῷ καθ’ ἡμᾶς νοῦ πρὸς τὴν ἀκοὴν ἀναταθῆναι τῶν οὐρανίων οἰεραρχῶν μίμησιν τε καὶ θεωρίαν, εἰ μὴ τῇ καθ’ αὐτὸν ὑλᾶς χειραγωγία χρήσατο τὰ μὲν φαίνομενα κἀλλη τῆς ἁρανοῦς εὐπρεπείας ἀπεικονίσματα λογιζόμενος...
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 three in the *Celestial Hierarchy*, Dionysius sets out his explanation of hierarchy by distinguishing it as a triad: a sacred ordering (τάξις\(^{203}\)), 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,\(^{204}\) 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.”\(^{205}\) Hierarchy is an activity 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 (ἁπλοῦν), good (ἀγαθόν), has the power to initiate (τελεταρχικόν), and, from every dissimilarity relative to the whole (ἀμιγές μὲν ἄστι καθόλου πάσης ἀνομοιότητος), is universally attractive.

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\(^{203}\) 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.”

\(^{204}\) 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…”

\(^{205}\) *CH* 3, 1 (164D): πρὸς τὸ θεοειδὲς ὡς ἐρωτόν ἀφομοιουμένη καὶ πρὸς τὸς ἐνδιδομένας αὐτῇ θεόθεν ἐλλάμψεις ἀναλόγως ἐπὶ τὸ θεομίμητον ἀναγομένη,
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.” 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. 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…” Here again Dionysius uses the word ὡραιότητος 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 (signified 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 comeliness, 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.

206 CH 3, 2 (165AB): Οὐ γάρ θεμετὸν ἐστι τοῖς τῶν ἱερῶν τελεταῖς ἢ τοῖς ἱερῶς τελουμένοις ἐνεργήσαι τι
καθόλου παρὰ τὰς τῆς οἰκείας τελεταρχίας ἱερὰς διατάξεις ἀλλ’ οὔδε ὑπάρχειν ἑρῶς

207 CH 3, 2 (165B): Οὐκοῦν ἱεραρχίαν ὁ λέγων ἱεράν τινα καθόλου δηλοὶ διακόσμησιν, εἰκόνα τῆς θεαρχικῆς
جريدةτης ὡραιότητος.

208 CH 3, 2 (165A): Σκοπὸς οὖν ἱεραρχίας ἔστιν ἡ πρὸς θεόν ὡς ἄριστον ἀρχομοίσις τε καὶ ἐνωσις αὐτῶν
ἐξουσία πάσης ἱερᾶς ἐπιστήμης τε καὶ ἐνεργείας καθηγομένα καὶ πρὸς τὴν αὐτοῦ θειοτάτην εὐπρέπειαν
ἀκλίνως μὲν ὄρον ὡς δυνατὸν δὲ ἀποτυπωμένος καὶ τοὺς ἑαυτοῦ διασώτας ἀγάλματα θεία τελῶν
ἐστοπτρα διειδέστατα καὶ ἀκηλίδωτα, δεκτικά τῆς ἀρχιφώτου καὶ θεαρχικῆς ἀκτάνος καὶ τῆς μὲν
Beauty’s anagogical power is prevalent in this passage insofar as divine beauty takes the form of “religious science and operation” (ἱερὰς ἐπιστήμης τε καὶ ἐνεργείας). This can be reconfigured as ‘knowing’ (science) and ‘being’ (operation/act). In being received, divine beauty in this form is passed through members of the hierarchy to other members. This ‘receiving’ and ‘passing on’ occurs when each member looks “unflinchingly” at the divine beauty (ἐυπρέπειαν) 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 the vision of divine beauty transmits it to other members by showing forth her own beauty. 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.209

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.210 Dionysius views both beauty and light as ontological constituents of every created entity.211 The communal sharing of beauty and light involves an ontological giving

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209 CH 3, 2 (165B): ἐστι γὰρ ἕκαστῳ τῶν ἱεραρχίας καταληφθέντων ὁ τελειώσως τὸ κατ’ οἰκείαν ἀναλογίαν ἐπὶ τὸ θεομίμητον ἀνασχίναι καὶ τὸ δὴ πάντων θεοτέρων ως τὰ λόγια φησι «Θεοῦ συνεργόν» γενέσθαι καὶ διεξαίτην τὴν θείαν ἐνέργειαν ἐν οἰκωτῷ κατὰ τὸ δυνατὸν ἀναφαινομένην.

210 Cf. DN 4, 1 (693BC, 696AB).

211 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…”
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.

2.3.3. Beauty and the One

The final aspect of beauty as a divine name that remains to be examined concerns its relation to the Plotinian One. The ambiguity in Plotinus between beauty and the One is resolved 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. 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.’

Beauty’s relation to the One is positioned at the close of this chapter because it embodies 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.

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.’ 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 prior to beauty.”

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 definitive assertions throughout the *Enneads* that sharply distinguish the One from beauty, there are enough passages to suggest that Plotinus does

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212 5.5.12: Δεύτερος ὃν ὁ λόγος ἐκ ἔρως καὶ ἡ ἐς συνιέντων μᾶλλον δεύτερον μηνύει τὸ καλὸν εἶναι· ἢ δὲ ἀρχαιότερα τούτου καὶ ἀναισθητος ἔφεσις ἀρχαιότερον ψης καὶ τάγαθον εἶναι καὶ πρότερον τούτου. Translation Armstrong.
leave open the possibility for some sort of identification between them.213 For example, Plotinus writes “[a]nd 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.”214 It has been suggested that here and in other passages215 the linguistic distinction between καλλονή (beauty) and καλόν (beautiful) correspond to different kinds of beauty, the former being identified as appropriate to the One.216 Even those who conclude that Plotinus denies beauty to the One cannot avoid acknowledging some kind of identification between the One and beauty: “[t]he beauty of the One,” as one such analysis asserts, “is that unique beauty which is the power to create beautiful Beings…”217 Plotinus’s distinction, therefore, between the One and beauty is not unequivocally absolute but harbors a degree of ambiguity.

In his analysis of the issue, Dionysius unequivocally identifies the Supreme Godhead with the name beauty right alongside the names ‘good,’ and ‘one’. This means that Dionysius rejects Plotinus’s assertions that renders beauty a 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 some speculate that it reflects the way that the treatise itself follows Neoplatonic

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213 Perhaps the best discussion of this issue is found in Rist, *Plotinus: The Road to Reality*, chpt. 5.
214 1.6.6: Καὶ τὸ πρῶτον θετέον τὴν καλλονήν, ὥπερ καὶ τά γαθόν· ἀφ’ οὗ νοῦς εὐθὺς τὸ καλὸν· ψυχῇ δὲ νῦν καλὸν·
215 In particular 1.6.7; 6.2.18; 6.7.32. Rist (*Plotinus: The Road to Reality*, 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.
emanation. From this perspective, the name ‘one’ occurs at the end of the treatise as a symbolic ‘return’ to divine transcendence.

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. 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. Of the eight times it appears in Plato, seven maintain this military/polemic use while one carries the pejorative sense of obstinacy. The fact that this term is most often used either pejoratively or to signify strength and might in the context of contrariety and opposition 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.

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219 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.” The impact that this term has had on the reception of Dionysius should not be underestimated. One finds it influencing, for example, Coppleston’s analysis of Dionysius (*History of Philosophy II, 94*). Citing the opening of DN 13, Coppleston 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.

220 *Cf., inter alia* Homer II. 1.172; 1.245; 5.363; 5.576 et al.; Od. 4.219; 4.265; 8.121; 10.345; et al.; Plut. *Akr. 31; Plut. *Arist. 9; Thuc. 4.43 [2], 4.131 [1]; Hdt. 1.76 [4]; Soph. *Ajax*, 646.

221 *Laws* 5.727c; *Statesman* 295d; *Theaetetus* 157d, 169b; *Republic* 3.388d; *Symposium* 217c, 220c.

222 *Phaedo* 77a: “he is the most obstinately incredulous of mortals” (καίτοι καρτερώτατος ἄνθρωπων ἐστίν) translation by Burnet in *Plato: Platonis Opera*, ed. John Burnet (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1903).
The above considerations can be expressed as two related hypotheses. *Hypothesis 1*: although Plotinus rejects the identification between beauty and the One, 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 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.”\(^{223}\) 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

\(^{223}\) DN 13, 1 (977B): Καὶ γὰρ ἡ θεολογία τοῦ πάντων αὐτίου καὶ πάντα καὶ ἀμα πάντα κατηγορεῖ καὶ ώς τέλειον αὐτό καὶ ώς ἐν ἀνυμνεῖ.
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.

In order to draw out an important distinction, the excerpt has been divided into two
components. The first refers to God as he is in himself, explaining the way that perfection
refers to immanent divine completion. The second part, which includes an almost anti-
Plontinian maneuver, not only describes divine perfection in terms of relation to the all, but
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 first steps in
transferring 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 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 beseems one,

\[224\] DN 13, 1 (977B): Τέλειον μέν ὄν ἐστιν οὐ μόνον ὡς αὐτοτελὲς καὶ καθ’ ἐαυτὸ υφ’ ἐαυτοῦ μονοειδῶς ἀφοριζόμενον καὶ ὅλων δι’ ὅλου τελειώτατον, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὡς ὑπερτελὲς κατὰ τὸ πάντων ὑπερέχον καὶ πάσαν μὲν ἀπευρίραν ὄριζον, παντὸς δὲ πέρατος ὑπερηπλωμένων καὶ ὑπὸ μηδενὸς χωρούμενον ἢ καταλαμβανόμενον, ἀλλὰ διατέινον ἐπὶ πάντα ἀμά καὶ ὑπέρ πάντα ταῖς ἀνεκλείπτοις ἐπιδόσεσι καὶ ἀτελευτῆτοις ἐνέργειαις.
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.\(^{225}\)

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 source of all things. Relationship through the mode of transcendence stands as the very opposite of the Plotinian complete removal from all things and instead 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, 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.\(^{226}\)

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\(^{225}\) DN 13, 1 (977B): Τέλειον δ’ αὖ λέγεται καὶ ώς ἀναξίζες καὶ ἄει τέλειον καὶ ώς ἀμείωτον, ώς πάντα ἐν ἑαυτῷ προέχον καὶ ὑπερβλύζον κατὰ μίαν τὴν ἀποσυνθετικὴν καὶ ταύτην καὶ ὑπερπλήρῃ καὶ ἀνελάττωτον ὕπερπλήρην, καθ’ ἦν τὰ τέλεια πάντα τελεούσωργει καὶ τῆς οἰκεῖας ἀποπληροφερετικότητος.

\(^{226}\) DN 13, 3 (980BC): Πάντα γὰρ ἐν ἑαυτῷ τὸ ἐν ἑνεδύσας προεληφθείσα τε καὶ περιεληφθείσα. Ταύτῃ γοῦν ἡ θεολογία τὴν ὅλην θεοχώριαν ώς πάντων αὐτίκαν ὤμει τῇ τοῦ ἐνός ἐπωνυμίᾳ, καὶ ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ό πατήρ καὶ ἐκ τοῦ κύριος ήσουδός χριστός καὶ ἐν καὶ τὸ αὐτὸ πνεῦμα διὰ τὴν ὑπέρβαλον τῆς ὅλης θεικῆς ἐνότητος ἀμέρειαν, ἐν ἓν πάντα ἐνικοὺς συνῆκται καὶ ὑπερήνωται καὶ πρόσεστιν ὑπερουσίως.
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.\textsuperscript{227} 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, \textit{by the power of the Divine Oneness}, should celebrate as one the whole and the One Deity.”\textsuperscript{228} The one for Dionysius is never a univocal, separated identity but rather an attribute only conceived in concert with divine perfection.

\textbf{Conclusion}

Dionysius is a pivotal figure with respect to the issue of beauty as a divine name. His originality in the matter provides the singular contribution that results in the first explicit identification of God as beauty itself. His originality consists first of his configuration of the

\textsuperscript{227} E.g., Coppleston, \textit{History of Philosophy II}, 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.”

\textsuperscript{228} DN 13, 3 (980BC): \text{Καὶ χρῆ καὶ ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ τῶν πολλῶν ἐπὶ τό ἐν τῇ δυνάμει τῆς θεικῆς ἐνότητος ἑπιστρεφομένους ἐνιαίως όμενέν τήν ὄλην καὶ μίαν θεότητα, τό πάντων αὐτίων ἐν}
divine names as a comingling of biblical and Greek thought. The biblical tradition furnishes him with the context wherein a divine name identifies an attribute of God that, while remaining steadfast in the divine itself, communicates itself through the intelligibility of real phenomena. The Greek tradition furnishes him with various principles through which the divine names can be made more intelligible. This comingling provides a foundation upon which beauty is expressed as one of the most important names for God. Beauty’s significance involves granting a greater degree of concretion to the good as the good diffuses itself in its act of creative emanation. It also expresses an anagogical power that, for entities endowed with intellect, stimulates cognitive desire for beauty’s transcendent plenitude of intelligibility. As will be examined in the following chapter, Aquinas’s contribution to the issue involves a fuller development of beauty’s cognitive anagogy.
Chapter 3

Beauty as a Divine Name in Thomas Aquinas

Beauty as a divine name reaches a high point of formal expression in scholastic thought. The passage of this issue into the scholastic thought of the high Middle Ages occurs most fundamentally, though not exclusively, through the passage of the Corpus Dionysiacum. This chapter examines the contours of both the passage of beauty and of Dionysius in order to establish the foundation upon which the issue is treated in the thought of Thomas Aquinas. Although the theme of beauty in its own right appears scattered throughout Thomas’s earlier work (1250s, early 1260s), his Commentary on the Divine Names marks a unique period of development on the issue. This chapter examines Thomas’s primary account of the issue of beauty as a divine name as it is found in this often-overlooked treatise. What Thomas encounters in this treatise has lasting impact on his overall understanding of God, creation, and the relation between the two. Consequently, this chapter also examines beauty as a divine name insofar as it appears in Thomas’s thought after the writing of his commentary on the Dionysian text, with special emphasis being given to the Summa Theologiae.

3.1. From Dionysius to Aquinas

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 made 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, theological and spiritual inquiry.

### 3.1.1. The Passage of Dionysius into the Latin West

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 Dionysiacum* 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.¹ What comes to light amidst this literature is that the passage of Dionysius into the Latin West follows three distinguishable, though interrelated, 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

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Dionysiacum that scholars agree is the source for all later Greek manuscripts – but also by providing a scholia, or set of commentaries and glosses, on the texts. This editio variorum derives from a textual tradition that was itself already fragmented and corrupt. John’s glosses on the text, although often accused of consciously neutralizing its monophysite and Neoplatonic tendencies, 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 some have suggested the Corpus Dionysiacum itself refers neither to a historical figure, nor even to a text per se, but rather to its reception. This observation is supported by the fact that “all later access to the Areopagite was mediated through John of Scythopolis.” 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. In either case, the fact remains that the Corpus Dionysiacum acquires increasing acceptance by a world whose

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4 These accusations have been refuted in Paul Rorem and John C. Lamoreaux, John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus. Annotating the Areopagie (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), chpt. 1.

5 Perczel, “The 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, “The 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, “The Reception of Dionysius up to Maximus the Confessor,” 48.
technical language of the sixth-century Christological debates begins to open itself to the
more imagery-laden language of Dionysius. 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.” 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 the “heretical East,” to the “orthodox East,” to the “Catholic West.” The
interpretive tradition initiated by John of Scythopolis and pursued in, and eventually
conflated with, 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. Maximus redeployed the Dionysian categories of apophatic and cataphatic in his

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8 Cf. Andrew Louth, “From the Doctrine of Christ to the Icon of Christ: St. Maximus the Confessor on the
Transfiguration of Christ,” In the Shadow of the Incarnation: Essays on Jesus Christ in the Early Church in Honor of Brian
9 Louth, “The Reception of Dionysius up to Maximus the Confessor,” 51.
11 The conflation between the glosses of both figures that occurs in the manuscript tradition was first
discovered by Hans Urs Von Balthasar. See Hans Urs Von Balthasar, “Das Scholienwerk des Johannes von
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,
Christological articulation, providing a “creative theological development.” 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. 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 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 *apocrisarius*. 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 *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

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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.\footnote{Rorem, “The Early Latin Dionysius: Eriugena and Hugh of St. Victor,” 71 – 72.} 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.\footnote{Louth, *Dionysius the Areopagite*, 122 – 123.}

### 3.1.2. 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 Areopagite,\footnote{The lack of any evidence of interest in Dionysius between Eriugena and Hugh of St. Victor is detailed in David Luscombe, “The Commentary of Hugh of St. Victor on the Celestial Hierarchy,” *Die Dionysius-Rezeption im Mittelalter*, Tzotcho Boiadjiev, Georgi Kapriv and Andreas Speer (eds.)(Turnholt: Brepols, 2000), 160 – 164, and Dominique Poirel, “Le ‘chant dionysien’ du IXe au XIIe siècle,” *Les historiens et le latin médiéval: Colloque tenu à la Sorbonne les 9, 10 et 11 septembre 1999*, Monique Goulet, Michel Parisse (eds.)(Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2001), 151 – 176.} 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 *Extracito* 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, 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. The first component consists of two supplementary sections. Section one includes Eriugena’s translation of the *Celestial Hierarchy*, along with the *scholia* of Maximus the Confessor and Anastasius the papal librarian, 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. Section two of the first component consists of Eriugena’s translation of the remainder of the corpus (*Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*,

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19 For the schematic here, we will be following primarily Dondaine, *Le corpus dionysien de l’université de Paris*, 69 – 121.

20 For more detail on the contribution of Anastasius, see Dondaine, *Le corpus dionysien de l’université de Paris*, 35 – 68.

21 Dondaine, *Le corpus dionysien de l’université de Paris*, 72, and see also 16 – 17.
**Mystical Theology, 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,”\(^22\) 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. 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*.\(^23\) 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:

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\(^{22}\) Dondaine, *Le corpus dionysien de l’university de Paris*, 84 – 89.

\(^{23}\) Dondaine, *Le corpus dionysien de l’university de Paris*, 85 – 87. There are apparently 102 glosses from the *Periphyseon*, 73 of which are in the *Divine Names*. 
divine nescience; the eternal search for God toward the beatitude of the spirit; and the return of all things to their cause.\textsuperscript{24}

In the \textit{Periphyseon}, the tradition of the divine names is transformed into a kind of natural theology of the Word. In Dionysius the various perfections proceeding from God 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 Dioysius’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.\textsuperscript{25} 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.\textsuperscript{26} 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.\textsuperscript{27} 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,’\textsuperscript{28} prevents his ideas from collapsing into explicit pantheism.

\textsuperscript{24} Dondaine, \textit{Le corpus dionysien de l’university de Paris}, 86.

\textsuperscript{25} Eriugena, \textit{Periphyseon}, I.P. Sheldon-Williams (trans.) (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1987) 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 Dermot Moran, \textit{The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena, A Study of Idealism in the Middle Ages} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 118.

\textsuperscript{26} \textit{Periphyseon}, III, 9 (645CD); [PL 122, 645D].

\textsuperscript{27} \textit{Periphyseon}, III, 20 (683CD, 684A); [PL 122, 683D, 684A].

\textsuperscript{28} \textit{Periphyseon}, II, 1 (525AB); [PL 122, 525B].
God remains ever beyond the world even as he creates himself in and as the world. To better illustrate this difficult relation, Eriugena includes in his discussion of God’s procession into and as the world a hexaemeral sequence where each day of creation corresponds to various phases of the divine manifestation. 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.

What emerges from this 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. 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

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29 Periphyseon, III, 24 (690D) – 40 (742B); [PL 122, 690D – 742B].
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 achievement marks the point at which the divine names tradition becomes transformed into a metaphysics of beauty.

3.1.3. The Journey of Beauty as a Divine Name from the Sixth to the Thirteenth Century

Beauty as a divine name, as the previous chapters established, 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 divine beauty. Beauty is consequently distinguished according to its presence in created things and its transcendent modality. Because of this apparent duality, however, beauty for neither group of 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

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33 This is examined in detail below in section 3.2.
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\(^\text{34}\) contributing to the development of beauty’s relationship to God. 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.\(^\text{35}\)

*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 as a divine name 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

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ambiguous account of the relationship. In his *Confessions*, one of his earlier works (c. 400), Augustine calls God by the name ‘Beauty,’ but in so doing, renders it unclear whether the beauty of created things is real or merely nominal. As his thought develops, and the Plotinian influence becomes more pronounced (and perhaps the specter of his Manichean past begins to haunt him), a greater degree of ambiguity arises around Augustine’s views on beauty and its relationship to God and creation. 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. 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. This visualization, encapsulated in Augustine’s remark that ‘unity is the form of all beauty,’ expresses the way in which beauty maintains a close association with the divine. However, Augustine also continues to endorse the ancient view that identifies beauty with symmetry locating beauty’s existential condition in number. Number, in turn, takes the form of the proportions and shapes that appear beautiful as they deliver pleasure to reason’s perceptive

36 Augustine, *Confessions*, bk. X, chpt. 27, 38: “Late have I loved you, Beauty so old and so new; late have I loved you.”

37 Earlier in the same book (*Confessions* bk. X, chpt. 6, 9) beauty is designated as the “response” that created things register to the one whose inquiry about their nature is prompted by love. In the following section (*Confessions* bk. X, chpt. 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, chpt. 8, 12).

38 Augustine, *De vera religione*, chpt. 32, 59 [PL 34, col. 149].

39 Augustine, *De vera religione*, chpt. 30, 55 [PL 34, col. 146]; chpt. 40, 76 [PL 34, col. 156]; chpt. 41, 77 [PL 34, col. 157]; *De musica*, bk. VI, chpt. 11, 30 [PL 32, col. 1180].

40 Augustine, *Epist.* 18 [PL 33, col. 85].

41 Augustine, *De libero arbitrio*, bk. II, chpt. 16, 42 [PL 32, col. 1263]; *De musica*, bk. VI, chpt. 12, 35 [PL 32, col. 1182].
faculties.\textsuperscript{42} From this perspective beauty is identified with numerical equality,\textsuperscript{43} which in some cases derives from a contrast of opposites or antitheses.\textsuperscript{44} This 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. Beauty is understood to be both internal and external, generating an ascending momentum wherein the soul moves ever inward toward God in rhythm with its movement ever outward to God in its encounter with creation.\textsuperscript{45}

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.\textsuperscript{46} Beauty for Boethius is primarily understood in the classical sense as a commensuration of, or proportion between, members.\textsuperscript{47} He recognizes how created entities are endowed with a beauty given by the Creator but holds this to be quite low on the

\textsuperscript{42} Augustine, \textit{De ordine}, bk. II, chpt. 15, 42 [PL 32, col. 1014].
\textsuperscript{43} Augustine, \textit{De musica} bk. VI, chpt. 12, 38 [PL 32, col. 1184].
\textsuperscript{44} Augustine repeats this aspect of beauty twice almost verbatim: \textit{De civitate Dei}, chpt. 11, 18, and \textit{De ordine}, bk. I, chpt. 7, 18 [PL 32, col. 986].
\textsuperscript{47} Boethius, \textit{Topicorum Aristotelis interpretatio}, III, 1 [PL 64, col. 935]; de Bruyne, \textit{Études d’esthétique médiévale}, 9.
scale of values. 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. As a result of these judgments, in 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. 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.

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 transport the heritage of the Greco-Roman world to posterity. Consequently, the work of figures like Cassiodorus (480 – 575), Isidore of Seville (570 – 636), and the Venerable Bede (672 – 735), 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

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48 See, e.g., Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, bk. II; *Topicorum Aristotelis interpretatio*, III, 1 [PL 64, col. 935].


51 Cf. de Bruyne, *Études d'esthétique médiévale*, vol. 1, 35 – 73.


directs the soul to God by providing a foretaste of eternal bliss. \(^{54}\) At times these ‘encyclopediasts’ emphasize the association between beauty and light, a theme that although originating in Plotinus becomes common to late antiquity. \(^{55}\) 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 natural world is a special sign of divine grace. \(^{56}\) 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.

\textit{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 \textit{Periphyseon}, is the way in which beauty is viewed as a locus of a mutual interpenetration between God and the created order. Beauty is conceived as an ineffable unity constituted by a harmonious coalescence of all diverse components. \(^{57}\) 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 gives itself over to the limits of finite shape, form, visibility and comprehension. \(^{58}\) Beauty in this regard is thoroughly anagogical since these visible shapes and comprehensible forms, according to Eriugena, are given by God in order

\(^{54}\) E.g., Cassiodorus, \textit{De artibus ac disciplinis}, V [PL 70, col. 1212B].

\(^{55}\) Tatarkiewicz, \textit{History of Aesthetics}, vol. 2, 84.

\(^{56}\) E.g., Bede, \textit{Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum} 1, 7.


\(^{58}\) Eriugena, \textit{De divisione natura (Periphyseon)}, bk. III, 17 [PL 122, col. 678C]; (Sheldon-Williams, III, 17, 678C, p. 305).
to recall human minds into the pure and invisible beauty of truth itself.\textsuperscript{59} 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.\textsuperscript{60} Similar to Augustine, Eriugena associates the knowability of created entities with the divine voice calling the knowing intellect back into the causal divine unity-in-diversity.\textsuperscript{61} 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. The identity between created beauty and divine beauty is, for Eriugena, so close that at times he is accused of being a pantheist.\textsuperscript{62} 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.\textsuperscript{63} 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.

\textit{Early Scholasticism: The Cistercians, the Victorines, and the School of Chartres.} 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

\textsuperscript{59} Eriugena, \textit{Expositiones super ierarchiam caelestem S. Dionysii}, chpt. I, §3 [PL 122, col. 138 – 139A].

\textsuperscript{60} Eriugena, \textit{De divisione natura (Periphyseon)}, bk. 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 an really beautiful and really lovable.”

\textsuperscript{61} Eriugena, \textit{De divisione natura (Periphyseon)}, bk. III, 18 [PL 122, col. 680 A – C]; (Sheldon-Williams, III, 18, 680A, p. 306.)

\textsuperscript{62} Eriugena, \textit{De divisione natura (Periphyseon)}, bk. 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.

\textsuperscript{63} See Dermot Moran, \textit{The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena: A Study of Idealism in the Middle Ages} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 85 – 91. Moran suggests that Eriugena is only implicated by association.
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. Reflecting an Augustinian 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. 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, it is considered the opposite of, and at times even opposed to, spiritual beauty. On the other hand, it is a manifestation of spiritual beauty. This duality creates a problem for the relation between physical and spiritual beauty.

Following a Pltteinian 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. This does not mean that every physical form is a revelation of beauty; the Cistercian attitude toward sensuous beauty is marked by conflict, at times regarding it as

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64 Cf. de Bruyne, *Études d’esthétique médiévale*, vol. 3 (bk. IV), 38 – 57. De Bruyne speaks of the Cistercian approach as seeing beauty with a “spiritual” eye.

65 Bernard of Clairveuax, *Sermones in Cantica Canticorum*, Serm. XXV, 6 [PL 183, col. 901D].


an occasion for vanity while at other times seeing in it the reflection of a perfection.\textsuperscript{68} 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.\textsuperscript{69} 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 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 ‘\textit{claritas}’; the second, which corresponds to the soul’s external relationship with the world, is beauty as ‘\textit{cari}tas.’\textsuperscript{70} Both kinds of beauty are oriented to the Good – the first to the Good absolutely and the second to the Good relatively. As a consequence, beauty for the Cistercians becomes largely an issue of moral thought.

By considering beauty within the moral domain, however, 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: \textit{beauty that is without blemish} arises when the soul purifies itself from sin; \textit{beauty that bears a certain elegance of taste and decoration} arises in the soul through the monastic life; and \textit{beauty that attracts through the charm of its members and color} arises in the soul through the ‘hidden inspiration of grace.’\textsuperscript{71} 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

\textsuperscript{68} Bernard of Clairvaux, \textit{Sermones in Cantica Canticorum}, Serm. XXVII, 5 – 6 [PL 183, col. 915A – 916B].
\textsuperscript{70} Thomas of Citeaux, \textit{Commentarii in Cantica Canticorum}, bk. VI, chpt. 4 [PL 206, col. 380C].
sought after. 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 their posterity.

There is among the Victorines a much stronger alignment with the views expressed by Eriugena than found in the Cistercians, and an almost reduplication of the Dionysian account of beauty as a divine name. 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.

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 the Deity.

The beauty of every object, in Victorine symbolism, provides to the searching intellect a moment of contemplative encounter with the divine. 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.

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

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75 Hugh of St. Victor, *Didascalicon*, bk. VII, chpt. 4 [PL 176, 815A – B].

76 Hugh of St. Victor, *Didascalicon*, bk. VII, chpt. 4 [PL 176, 814B].
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. 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 world. 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. 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. Their primary source in this regard is Plato’s *Timeaus*, around which they develop the view that the world is a mathematical work

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whose principle is that of proportion. God is the ‘artist’ who creates the ‘royal palace of
the world in wondrous beauty.’ 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. 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,” described as “the universal
teaching of Chartres” holds that, because God informs everything through a donation of
being, God is said to be every being with respect to the given form. Because God is in
himself removed from all forms as being pure form without any admixture of matter,
however, this Chartrian axiom cannot be validly charged with pantheism. One finds in the
school of Chartres an identification between 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.

81 Alan of Lille, Liber de planctu naturae, q. 4 [PL 210, col. 453B].
82 Guibert of Nogent, De vita sua, bk I, chpt. 2 [PL 156, col. 840B].
84 Thierry of Chartres, De sex dierum operibus, in Thierry of Chartres, Commentaries on Boethius by Thierry of Chartres and
His School, Nikolaus M. Häring (ed.) (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1971), 553 – 576; see also
B. Hauréau, Notices et extraits de quelques manuscrits latins de la Bibliothèque Nationale (Paris: Librairie Klincksieck,
1890 – 1893), vol. 2., 61.
85 Gilbert of Poitiers, Liber de sex principiis [PL 188, col. 1257C ff.].
86 Thierry of Chartres proposed a theory that refers to God as the forma essendi. 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., Ralph McInerny, A History of Western Philosophy, Vol. 2,
(South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1963), part III, chpt. 4.
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.  

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. 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; as the good insofar as it is approved by the internal gaze of sight; as the disposition of form turned outward; as congruence, harmony and ordering; as that which obeys measure, order and form; as a property of the good that pleases perception; as the teleological harmony of thing with itself; as the identity, or unity, of proportions containing everything and combining them into one; as God insofar as God is the most beautiful beauty. In these formulations, the earlier characterization of


91 Summa Alexandri I, (Quaracchi: Collegii S.Bonaventurae, 1948), 163.

92 Summa Alexandri II, (Quaracchi: Collegii S.Bonaventurae, 1948), 103.

93 Summa Alexandri, I, (Quaracchi: Collegii S.Bonaventurae, 1948), 162.


beauty as a mediating agency becomes beauty’s “relationalism,” a characteristic feature of the view of beauty espoused by these early thirteenth century scholastics.97

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.98 By emphasizing 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 μεταξὐ. That these early thirteenth century schoolmen recognize the various problems associated with beauty is clear.99 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.100 In this relation to God’s creative causality, itself identified with the self-diffusive good of Neoplatonism, beauty is that aspect of the good

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98 This awareness is also at times related verbally as when, e.g., Robert Grosseteste, in his *De unica forma omnium*, (L. Bauer, *Die Philosophischen Werke des Robert Grosseteste, Bischof von Lincoln* [Münster: Aschendorff, 1912], 108 – 109), declares, “Ask not what beauty is, for at once the darkness of 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.


that distills itself for the cognitive desire of the intellect. By virtue of God’s creative
eンドメント, the beauty of creation is a ‘vestige’ through which one may arrive at knowledge
of God’s uncreated beauty. 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. 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. 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 corporeity itself. Through light, beauty penetrates
intellectual perception with an immediacy that is not present in number, measure or
weight. 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

101 Cf. de Bruyne, Études d’esthétique médiévale, vol. 2 (bk. IV), 93 – 95.
102 Summa Alexandri, II, n. 81 (Quaracchi: Collegii S.Bonaventurae, 1948), 103.
104 Summa Alexandri, II, n. 40 (Quaracchi: Collegii S.Bonaventurae, 1948), 49.
105 Robert Grosseteste, De Luce (De Inchoacione Formarum), Clare C. Riedl (trans.) (Milwaukee WI: Marquette
University Press, 1942, 1978), 10; see also L. Bauer, Die Philosophischen Werke des Robert Grosseteste, Bischofs von
Lincoln (Münster: Aschendorff, 1912.), 51. It is Grosseteste who produces the most significant work on light.
106 Grosseteste, Comm. in Hexaemeron. Cited in Eco, Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages, 49; cf. De Bruyne, Études
d’esthétique médiévale, Tome II, 127, 128. See also James McEvoy, Robert Grosseteste (Oxford: Oxford University
identify a difference between originating source and emanated outflow, a doctrine that becomes common for the thirteenth century. 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. 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,’ God is form itself and thus light itself.

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 divine-world relation, a theme that is taken up by Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas.

3.2. Beauty as a Divine Name in Albert the Great

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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, Alexander of Hales, and Dionysius.\footnote{For the most detailed account of Albert’s views of beauty, see De Bruyne, \textit{Etudes d’esthétique médiévale}, vol. 2 (bk. IV), 153 – 188.} The two most important sources where this treatment can be found are his \textit{Summa de Bono},\footnote{Albert the Great, \textit{Summa De Bono}, in Albert the Great, \textit{Opera Omnia}, tom. 28, H. Kühle, C. Feckes, B. Geyer, W. Kübel (Bonn: Editio Coloniensis, 1951.) This work is believed to have been written early in his career, between 1240 – 1244.} and his \textit{De Pulcro et Bono}.\footnote{This text had long been attributed to Thomas Aquinas. One of the first to call this into question was Désiré Joseph Mercier “Du beau dans la nature et dans l’art” \textit{Revue Neoschlastique}, vol. 1, 3 (July) 1894: 285, n.1. Shortly thereafter, Pierre Mandonnet, in \textit{Des Écrits Authentiques de Saint Thomas d’Aquin} (Fribourg: Herder, 1910) attributed the work to Albert. This view was later endorsed by Maurice de Wulf, \textit{Histoire de la Philosophie Médiévale}, I. (Louvain: Bibliothèque de l'Institut Supérieur de Philosophie, 1924), and De Bruyne \textit{Etudes d’esthétique médiévale}, vol. 2 (bk. IV), 153 – 188. The text contains lectures V and VI of chapter 4 of Albert’s \textit{Commentary on the Divine Names}. The text can be found in \textit{Albertus Magnus, Super Dionysium De Divinis Nominibus (Opera omnia, tom. 37)}; nn. 71 – 92, P. Simon, (ed.) (Bonn: Editio Coloniensis, 1972), 180-195, and also in Thomas Aquinas, \textit{Opera omnia}. Curante R. Busa. (ed.) (P. A. Uccelli, Napoli, 1869 [et] ed. Parmensis, t. XVI, 1864). References to the \textit{De Pulcro et Bono} will cite the question, article and arguments from the Uccelli edition, while all other references to his commentary on the \textit{Divine Names} will come from the Simon edition and cite the chapter, page number and line numbers.} 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 Chartierian 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.’ 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 a dialectic of beauty. 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 outside or beyond it. It must therefore be approached dialectically.

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); *unum*, *verum*, *bonum* (Cistercians); *illuminans*, *pulcrificans*, *bonum faciens* (Dionysius). 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.

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

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115 *Summa de Bono* 12, 3, sol.; 12, 4, 9; 12, 5, 4 – 9.

116 Here we follow De Bruyne’s analysis. For a table in which this schematic is given clarity, see De Bruyne, *Etudes d’esthétique médiévale*, vol. 2 (bk. IV), 156. It should be noted that while De Bruyne sees in Albert a prototype of the Hegelian dialectic, in our view this analysis fails to do 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. 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.
beauty’s causality provides an anagogical ordering for the rational soul (*in ordinacione 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.’ Insofar as God’s beauty causes things, the phases include ‘the caused thing in its disposition,’ ‘the caused thing in its activity,’ and ‘the caused thing in relation to its end.’ 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 chapter 2 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. Drawing from the *Book of Wisdom*, Albert maintains that the Good diversifies itself in number, perfects itself in measure, and completes itself in weight. This has been called “the good under the most humble form” since as number it “gives to the unformed matter its first distinction.”

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

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118 *Summa de Bono* 11,7,9.

resulting particularity (weight).\textsuperscript{120} Because number and measure give rise to a resulting particularity, Albert synthesizes them into weight and identifies this as the \textit{modus} in the Augustinian triad \textit{modus, species, ordo}.\textsuperscript{121} Mode is the indivisibility of a thing that establishes its proper harmony, particular equilibrium and original rhythm. When measure, number and weight come together in the \textit{modus}, that particular entity begins to ascend toward functional determination.

Albert uses the example of a foot in order to illustrate his point.\textsuperscript{122} 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 \textit{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 \textit{species}, which Albert identifies as form, pertains to the ‘\textit{mobilitas a virtute gressiva}’ and so identifies the active power that constitutes the \textit{modus} of the foot. Both of these are unified in the \textit{ordo} that establishes its aptitude to walk.\textsuperscript{123} The form of the foot is determined toward ultimate perfection, that is, toward its function as an entity that steps. This means that the \textit{modus} and \textit{species} are harmonized in the \textit{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 (\textit{ordo}), the foot’s \textit{modus} and \textit{species} appear as a unity and so constitute the \textit{unum}, in the (Cistercian) triad \textit{unum, verum, bonum}.\textsuperscript{124} The foot’s \textit{unum} allows it to be distinguished

\textsuperscript{120} Cf. De Bruyne, \textit{Etudes d’esthétique médiévale}, vol. 2 (bk. IV), 161.

\textsuperscript{121} \textit{Summa de Bono} 11, 10: Haec autem commensuratio ad formam totius secundum continentiam ab Augustino dicitur \textit{modus}.

\textsuperscript{122} \textit{Summa de Bono} 11, 12: Secundum quod pes est substantia, principia constituentia sunt materialia quorum \textit{modus} est mensura ad formam totius. \textit{Species} autem est forma pedis, \textit{ordo} autem ad actum.

\textsuperscript{123} \textit{Summa de Bono}, 11, 12: secundum quod pes est organum, sic \textit{modus} eius est dispositio ad bene ferendum, et \textit{species} facilis \textit{mobilitas a virtute gressiva}; \textit{ordo} autem ad id, scilicet propter finem quod est inessus.

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*. Here, the *unum* and *verum* are synthesized in the *bonum* of the foot, which is indissolubly oriented to its end. *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 corresponds to its *substantia*. *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. He synthesizes *substantia* and *species* within this power, or *virtus*, and identifies it as *essentia*. Albert, following in the traditional reading of *virtus*, explains that it can signify either a power that is latent or a power that is in act. *Essentia* is the name that designates a substance, or nature, in act. Through its activity the *essentia* enriches its 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

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125 *Summa de Bono* 12, 5: *Cum vero bonum dicat indivationem 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.*

126 *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 inquantum) egraditur actus et operatio.*

127 De Bruyne, *Etudes d’esthétique médiévale*, vol. 2 (bk. IV), 158.

128 *Summa de Bono* 12, 7: *Virtus vero quae ponebatur in praehabitibus tribus supponebat potentiam inclinatam ad actum, sed non in actu ipso: sicut alia est virtus scribendi in puero et in scriptore perfecto.*
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. “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 in space.”\(^{129}\) 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.\(^{130}\) 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 operatio* (power) 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,

\(^{129}\) De Bruyne, *Etudes d’esthétique médiévale*, vol. 2 (bk. IV), 159.

\(^{130}\) *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 praeedentia.*)
that is to say, insofar as it is in a degree of perfection in nature and power. 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 power is established in the second three triads – ‘substantia, species, virtus;’ ‘essentia, virtus, operatio;’ and ‘substantia agens, species, ratio finis.’ 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. 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.

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 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. 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

131 Summa de Bono 12, 8: Nihil enim perfectum constat, hoc est simul stat, nisi quod stat in perfectione potestatis et naturae.

132 Summa de Bono 12, 8: Perfectio autem naturae consistit in primus tribus ternariis, perfectio vero potestatis in secundis tribus: perfectio enim potestatis est in opere attingente finem.

133 Summa de Bono 12, 8: Quod congruit autem ponit ordinem ad alium et praecipue ad hominem.

134 Summa de Bono 12, 8: Quod ver discernit ponit relationem rei ad intellectum.

135 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.
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 to put it more
concisely, “[b]eauty is the good as it is known and loved in all its truth.”136 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_.137

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 himself under this or that _ratio_.”138 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

136 De Bruyne, _Etudes d’esthétique médiévale_, vol. 2 (bk. IV), 161.

137 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 ‘⇒’ indicate one term becoming the first term in the next, higher triad:
number + measure = weight ⇒ modus + species = ordo ⇒ unum + verum = bonum ⇒ substantia + species
⇒ virtus ⇒ essentia + virtus = operatio ⇒ substantia agens + species = ratio finis ⇒ quod constat + quod
congruit ⇒ quod discernit ⇒ verum + bonum ⇒ pulcrum ⇒ illuminans + pulcrificans = bonum faciens.

138 Simon Tugwell, “Albert and the Dionysian Tradition,” _Albert and Thomas, Selected Writings_, Simon Tugwell
therefore intelligible. 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).

This dialectic of beauty is the foundation for the analysis one finds in Albert’s commentary on the Divine Names, especially chapter four, lectures five and six. 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. A few pages appear here and there, 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. 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

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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 foundational metaphysics of beauty of the *Summa de Bono* upon which the commentary is structured, this criticism appears to be misguided, 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, 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, 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.” 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.


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.147 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 extrinsically given nor wholly intrinsically emergent.148 Rather, mingling both Dionysius and Aristotle,149 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 καλὸν. 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.150

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 four, lectures five and six (De pulcro et bono). The fundamental triad that runs throughout Albert’s commentary derives from chapter four 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. This is established in the opening question, which concerns the relation between verum, bonum and pulcrum insofar

148 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).
149 DN 1, 15, l. 61; DN II, 73, l. 41 – 42.
150 DN I, 15, l. 48 – 49; DN I, 15, l. 59. DPB q. 11, a.1.
as they are processions from God that are given to the formal constitution of creatures.\textsuperscript{151} 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 \textit{ratio} of truth, but insofar as it is the \textit{good} thus apprehended, it enflames the mind as it opens the mind toward more of the good.\textsuperscript{152} Albert is no doubt writing under the influence of Aristotle's dictum in the \textit{Metaphysics} that ‘all human beings desire to know.’ And if, as has been observed recently, Aristotelians tend to stress the “know” more than the “desire,”\textsuperscript{153} Albert’s treatment here sets him apart 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 \textit{ratio} of truth, Albert says, it is necessary that desire’s momentum “enflame” a two-fold apprehension: the first is the \textit{ratio} of truth ordered toward the speculative intellect, and the second is the \textit{ratio} of the good ordered toward the practical intellect.\textsuperscript{154} For this reason, desire will first exist as a fuller momentum toward the good before it is determined as the \textit{ratio} of truth in the same way that the fuller power of nature is prior to the more determined power of medicine.\textsuperscript{155} Based upon this relation, Albert gives his interpretation as to why Dionysius structures his

\textsuperscript{151} \textit{De Pulcro et Bono} (hereafter DPB) q. 1, a. 1, sol: Dicendum quod ea, de quibus intendit determinare in opposito Dionysius, sunt quaedam processiones divinae, idest quaedam bona procedentia a Deo in creaturis, quibus proficiuntur in divinam assimilacionem, cum procedunt formali processione, sicut calido primo calida alia; et ideo secundum ordinem processionis debet attendi ordo istorum de quibus hic agitur.

\textsuperscript{152} DPB q. 1, a. 1, sol: Prima autem processio, quae est in mente, est secundum apprehensionem veri, deinde illud verum excendescit et accipitur in ratione boni, et sic deinde movetur desiderium ad ipsum;

\textsuperscript{153} Burrell and Moulin, “Albert, Aquinas and Dionysius,” 108.

\textsuperscript{154} 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.

\textsuperscript{155} 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.
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.\(^{156}\) 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.\(^{157}\) The most important for Albert is that beauty is the splendor of substantial, or actual, form beyond 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.*\(^{158}\) 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.\(^{159}\) Thirdly, beauty is a gathering power that makes things resplendent. Fourthly, beauty

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\(^{156}\) 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.*

\(^{157}\) 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 resplen dentia coloris supra membra proportionata, hoc est quasi differentia specifica complens rationem pulcri.*

\(^{158}\) 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 beyond the limitations of matter identifies beauty’s plenitude, here characterized as the specific difference of beauty’s *ratio*.

\(^{159}\) DPB q. 1, a. 2, sol: *Secundum est quod trahit ad se desiderium, et hoc habet in quantum est bonum et finis.*
harbors in itself the power to provide beauty to all things, thus diversifying without diminishing itself (like light). 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 beyond 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. Albert explains here that as they are in the subject, beauty and the good agree in form and therefore are the same *quantum ad suibectum*. They differ, however, in ratio by virtue of two distinct modes of form: resplendence and destination. Insofar as form is resplendent beyond 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. As he does in the *Summa de Bono*, Albert here views beauty as the event by which the good is given visibility and intelligibility. 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, it must have some mode of

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160 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.

161 DBP q. 1, a. 2, sol: Quantum igitur ad primum, separat ratio pulcri a ratione honesti et boni: quantum vero ad secundum, non separant 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 accidit secundum quod est forma utriusque. Omnis enim cognitio pertinet ad formam, quae est determinans materiae potentiarum multiplicitatem; differt autem ratione, quia secundum quod forma est finis materiae, sic bonum accipit rationem congregandi. Secundum autem quod resplendet super partes materiae, sic est pulcrum habens rationem congregandi. Sic igitur dicimus quod pulcrum 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.
presence that does not collapse the distance necessary to preserve desire \textit{qua} desire. This Albert identifies with the resplendence of form beyond the material parts, and so identifies it as beauty.

Beauty corresponds to the perception of being as a desirable and moveable good. It is the moment where pure perception is driven by desire, corresponding to the discovery of the value in the form.\footnote{Cf. De Bruyne, \textit{Etudes d'esthétique médiévale}, vol. 2 (bk. IV), 163.} This discovery of formal value corresponds to the true and is a recurring event since beauty is the plenitude of desired good that shines beyond 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 \textit{truth of the good}, it is not valid to say that beauty is the \textit{goodness of truth}; the \textit{truth of the good} refers to the recurring event of all cognition where the good is perpetually being determined as true, while the \textit{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 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 \textit{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 with bonestum, which marks a lower, or more derivative, degree of illumination that provokes a cognitive response.  

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 the most beautiful thing carries beauty to the world by the intellect, and Augustine who, echoing Hillary, says that the highest beauty is the son of God.

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

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163 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.

164 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, pulcherrimus. 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 pulrorum: sicut dictum est de natura cognitionis supra. Est enim sua pulcritudo, et haece est conditio primi agentis, quod agat per suam essentiam, sed exemplariter in omnibus alius.
simplicity (act) the highest beauty reverberates (resultat).\textsuperscript{165} In a subtle way, this assertion identifies 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 \textit{modus significandi}. Albert’s explanation draws from the final chapter of Dionysius’s \textit{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.\textsuperscript{166}

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 ‘\textit{appelatio}’ with respect to ‘beauty’ even though it does not directly signify or supposit beauty itself. Beauty, in turn, has the property of ‘\textit{ampliatio}’ in that its supposits, being beautiful, amplify beauty to past instances and to all possible future instances of beauty. The

\begin{footnotes}
\item[165] DPB q. 2, a. 1, ad. 1: Deus quamvis sit simplex in substantia, est tamen multiplex in attributis; et ideo ex proportione motus ad actum resultat summa pulcritudo, quod sapientia non discordat a potentia, et sic de alis. 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.

\item[166] 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 differerit 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 significandum perfectionem causae primae, quae vere est in ipsa, oportet dicere de ipsa pulcritudo, et ad significandum eius simplicitatem oportet dicere quod est pulcritudo.
\end{footnotes}
term beautiful, then, both signifies the beautiful *suppositum* and calls for the form of beauty. 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 (*terminat*) the mode of cognition enabling positive determinations of the good (i.e., truth). The beautiful brings cognition into the determination of form. The countermovement that drives cognition out (*exigit*) of this determination (*eius*) is beauty as simplicity. Identifying the surplus beyond the multiple determinations, beauty as simplicity negates 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.

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

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168 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 ipsa: participationem causae facientes pulera, tota pulera, idest omnia pulera. Hoc intelligitur de natura pulcritudinis, quae est forma puleriorum, quae participatur ad esse omnium puliorum, et facit ea pulera, sicut albedo alba. Si vero intelligatur de prima causa effectiva, sicut particuli, intelligitur per effectum ipsius: *super substantiale vero puliorum.*
movement.169 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.170 Only the beauty of the first agent can said to properly create beauty as an efficient cause acting through its essence.171 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) pulcer communis, which illuminates the ratio of (3) divine beauty – describes the first metaphysical condition of beauty, namely, claritas. Claritas signifies the ratio of beauty that shines beyond 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.172

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),

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169 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.

170 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.

171 DPB q. 3, a. 1, ad. 1: Ad primum ergo dicendum, quod pulcritudo quae est forma pulcrorum facit pulcritudinem vel pulcrum autem dicet pulcritudinem vel pulcrum formalem, 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.

172 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 resplendeat super partes materiae, et ideo habet per se processionem pulcritudo.
which becomes diversified without ever relinquishing its unity with the source, beauty is
the principle effect of all things beautiful. 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.
Beauty, for Grosseteste, 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. 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. The relationship is analogous to that of a subject and its essence, where
consonantia is the subject and claritas the essence. 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

173 DPB q. 9, exp.: Ipsum enim, scilicet pulcrum, est principium effectivum omnium pulcrorum, et est movens
tota, idest omnia pulcra …


175 DPB q. 4, a. 1, sol: Decendum quod sicut ad pulcritudinem corporis requiritur quod sit proportio debita
membrorum, et quod color supersplendeat eis, quorum si altera deesset, non esset pulcrum corpus: ita ad
rationem universalis pulcritudinis exigitur proportio aliquidum ad invicem, vel partium, vel principiorum, vel
quorumunque quibus supersplendeat claritas formae.

176 DPB q. 4, a. 1, ad. 1: Decendum quod sicut ad esse similitatis concurrerit nasus sicut subiectum, et concavitas
sicut essentia simi, et similiter ad rationem pulcritudinis concurrerit consonantia sicut subiectum, et claritas sicut
essentia eius: et similiter dicendum ad secundum.
nature.” 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. 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. 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


179 DPB q. 5, a. 1, sol: Dicendum quod hoc non convenit pulcro secundum propriam differentiam, qua completur sua ratio, sed ratione subjecti sui, in quo communicat 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;
end is reachable through desire, it spans the ontological distance inherent within 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.\footnote{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 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.}
The end desired is both absent and present simultaneously. For Albert, the good spans this
dialectical distance as a sequence of modalities. The substance of these modalities remains
the same while each modality names a different ratio in the sequence. The good is that which
all things desire; bonitas 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.\footnote{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.} 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.\footnote{DPB q. 6, a. 1, ad. 1: At videtur, quod haec non debet esse conditionem 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.} The second concerns the way that a ‘coming together’ (congregata) appears to fall
short of the pure unity of beauty.\textsuperscript{183} 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.’\textsuperscript{184} Form alone bears the capacity to 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.\textsuperscript{185} 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.\textsuperscript{186}

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

\textsuperscript{183} 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.

\textsuperscript{184} 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 multiplicates positiones materiae concludit in uno, secundum quod terminat ad ipsam.

\textsuperscript{185} 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.

\textsuperscript{186} 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.
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.

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.187 In the same way that a circle is 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.188 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.189 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.190 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.191 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 anagogical power insofar as

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187 DPB q. 8, a. 1, sol.
188 DPB q. 8, a. 1, ad. 1.
189 DPB q. 9, exp.: Ipsum enim, scilicet pulcrum, est principium effectivum omnium pulcrorum, et est movens tota, idest omnia pulera, aut sicut efficiens, aut sicut finis; et continens omnia amore proprie pulertiludinis. 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:
190 DPB q. 9, exp.: et est causa exemplaris, quoniam secundum ipsum, scilicet pulcrum, cuncta determinantur sicut exemplar: quantum enim unumquodque habet de puleritudine, tantum habet de esse.
191 DPB q. 9, exp.: ex isto pulero immateriali, quod Deus est, omnibus existentibus singulatorem esse pulera secundum propriam rationem: idest sicut ex efficiente primo.
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.

### 3.3. Beauty as a Divine Name in Thomas Aquinas’s Reading of Dionysius

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, *Dei Ästhetik des Thomas von Aquin: Eine genetische und systematische Analyse*, though several other monographs have appeared since its publication. Thomas’s

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192 Francis J. Kovach, *Dei Ästhetik des Thomas von Aquin: Eine genetische und systematische Analyse* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1961). Prior to Kovach’s study, the most significant works on Thomas’s aesthetics included the
views of beauty can also be found in monographs and articles that pertain to various
dimensions of aesthetics and beauty. 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

A not exhaustive list includes the following: P. Vallet, L’Idée du Beau dans la Philosophie de S. Thomas d’Aquin (Paris: Maison Jouby et Roger, 1887), 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; Maurice De Wulf, L’Oeuvre d’art et la beauté: Conférences faites à la Faculté des Poitiens (Leuven: Institut de Philosophie, 1920). One notable study published shortly after Kovach is Winfried Czapiewski, Das Schöne bei Thomas von Aquin (Fribourg: Herder, 1964).


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 scholastic thought. A critical awareness of this provides greater perspicacity to understanding how beauty relates to the divine throughout Aquinas’s work.

The ensuing examination of beauty as a divine name in Aquinas follows two interrelated trajectories. The first examines the issue as it appears in his early *Commentary on the Divine Names*. Although there is no exact dating of this treatise, scholarly opinion sets it somewhere between 1265 and 1268. 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

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195 One of the more recent discussions of the various attempts to date this can be found in Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P., *Saint Thomas Aquinas, volume 1: The Person and His Work*, Robert Royal (trans.) (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1993), 127 – 129. 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 James A. Weisheipl, O.P., *Friar Thomas D’Aquino, His Life, Thought and Works* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1974), 383, and H.D. Saffrey, *Sancti Thomae de Aquino Super Librum de Causis Expositio* (Fribourg: Société Philosophique, 1954), xxxii – xxxvi.
Dionysius to be a thinker in the tradition of Aristotle.\textsuperscript{196} 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 (§ 3.4. below) 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 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.

### 3.3.1. 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

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\textsuperscript{196} *Super Sent.* Lib. 2, d. 14, q. 1, a.2, resp: Dionysius autem fere ubique sequitur Aristotelem, ut patet diligentier inspicienti librum eius.
historical nuances and inaccuracies, the recent attention to Thomas’s Neoplatonic dimensions serves to provide a more accurate portrait of his intellectual inheritance.

The more accurate portrait of Thomas presented by these authors serves to illuminate Thomas’s Neoplatonismin terms of his metaphysics, his methodology and his historical context. Much of the data that emerges from this work is significant for any approach to Thomas’s Commentary on the Divine Names.

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200 Most notable with respect to this particular theme is Robert John Henle, S. J., whose work has opened many doorways into dimensions of Aquinas that were formerly obscure. See, *inter alia*, Saint Thomas and Platonism: a study of the Plato and platonic texts in the writing of Saint Thomas (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1956) 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 in the Treatment of ‘Positiones’ with Particular Reference to ‘Positiones Platonicae’” *Gregorianum* 36 (1955): 391 – 409.

201 Many authors can be included in this category, but in recent years few have been as comprehensive as Wayne Henyke. See, *inter alia*, God in Himself: Aquinas’ Doctrine of God as Expounded in his *ST* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987); “Aquinas and the Platonists,” *The Platonic Tradition in the Middle Ages*, Stephen Gersh and Maarten J.F.M. Hoenen (eds.) (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2002), 279 – 324; “Denys et Aquinas: Antimodern cold and postmodern hot,” *Christian Origins, Theology, Rhetoric and Community*, Lewis Ayres and Gareth Jones
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 \textit{esse}. For example, drawing attention to Thomas’s view of being as \textit{esse intensivum}, attention to Thomas’s Neoplatonic inheritance demonstrates how Thomistic \textit{esse} aligns with the Dionysian view of being as an intensive depth of perfections.\textsuperscript{202}

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.\textsuperscript{203} 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 \textit{Denkform}.

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.\textsuperscript{204} Thomas is an heir to its exegetical and commentary tradition, which shapes his hermeneutical horizon. It is a tradition 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.\textsuperscript{205} This

\textsuperscript{202} As noted, \textit{esse intensivum} is a metaphysical principle first posited by Fabro, and textually supported by O’Rourke. See note 196 above.

\textsuperscript{203} Henle’s work demonstrates this in detail, and has been endorsed by Hankey in “Denys and Aquinas: Antimodern Cold and Postmodern Hot,” 154; see also Torrel, \textit{St. Thomas Aquinas, vol. 1}, 67.

\textsuperscript{204} This is Hankey’s thesis in “Aquinas and the Platonists.”

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 Aristotle. Part of the reason that Aquinas reveres Aristotle, then, may perhaps be due to the quasi-apostolic authority of Dionysius.206 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.207 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.208 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 Dionsyius possible.

Finally, it may be worth while to ask ‘why The Divine Names?’ Among the five treatises in the Dionysian corpus, 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. After all, Thomas does not hesitate to distance himself from his teacher on certain issues. Nor does Thomas hesitate to engage texts ignored by all other commentators, as his Commentary on the De Trinitate attests. 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 in their responses. In this way the treatise presents itself to Thomas as a cosmic Christology of creation, that is to say, Christology in the form of cosmic theology. 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. The whole treatise, then, harbors many parallels to the nature of Sacra Doctrina that occupies the primary subject matter of Thomas’s Summa

\[209\] Most famously, perhaps, is the difference in views of the beatific vision. On this see Tugwell, *Albert & Thomas*, 94 – 95.
It is no coincidence that the writing of the commentary occurs around the same time Thomas writes the *Prima Pars* of the *Summa Theologiae*.

3.3.2. A Note on the Translation of John the Saracen

A final 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. It is no surprise then that Aquinas also uses this translation. Several 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. A first factor concerns 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. 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. It is suggested that the Latinization of many of the Greek terms used

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211 This issue is found most fully explored in the work of Gabriel Théry. See, inter alia, “Jean Sarrazin, Traducteur de Scot Erigene” *Studia Mediavalia in Honor of R.J. Martin* (Bruges: Edition de Tempel, 1948), 359 – 381. On pages 372 – 373, 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, reviseur de la traduction érigénienne du Corpus Dionysiacum,” *Archives d’histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge* 18 (1951): 45 – 87.
by Eriugena obscures, if not altogether eliminates, the Eastern character of the Areopagite.\textsuperscript{212} Secondly, this 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. For example, where Eriugena translates \textit{nous} as ‘animus’ or ‘intellectus,’ the Saracen translates as ‘mens;’ where Eriugena translates \textit{ousia} as ‘essentia,’ the Saracen translates as ‘substantia;’ where Eriugena translates \textit{hypostasis} as ‘substantia,’ the Saracen translates as ‘persona;’ and where Eriugena translates \textit{hyparxis} as ‘subsistentia,’ the Saracen translates as ‘essentia.’\textsuperscript{213} 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 \textit{eis} as ‘in,’ the Saracen translates as ‘ad,’ clearly 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?\textsuperscript{214} Or is it the case that any allusion to the ‘authentic Dionysius’ is misleading since, as noted earlier, the \textit{Corpus Dionysiacum} refers neither to a concrete historical figure, nor even a collection of texts, but rather a reception of a tradition? Both questions elicit important considerations for any approach to Aquinas’s commentary. Even though the \textit{Corpus Dionysiacum} refers to the reception of a tradition, it is important for subsequent receptions to build upon preceding

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{212}] Théry, “Jean Sarrazin, Traducteur de Scot Erigene,” 377.
\item[\textsuperscript{213}] Théry, “Jean Sarrazin, Traducteur de Scot Erigene,” 377.
\item[\textsuperscript{214}] As Théry suggests in “Documents concernant Jean Sarrazin, reviseur de la traduction érigénienne du Corpus Dionysiacum,” 79.
\end{itemize}
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 Eastern tradition: the mystical beyond understanding, theology as praise and worship, 
names as opposed to concepts, etc. And while the alteration of terminology produced by the 
Saracen’s translation may obscure those dimensions, they do not eliminate them altogether. 
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 answered 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 
they are dressed in the interests and terminology of his Western context.

3.3.3. Beauty as a Divine Name: IN DE DIVINIS NOMINIBUS EXPOSITIO

The most complete treatment of the issue of beauty as a divine name is found in 
Book IV, 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 I.

3.3.3.1. ON DIVINE NAMING: Proemium and Book I.

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 exposits 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 similitude. The first division includes that which is said of God for which there is no similitude 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 Hypotiposibus (On Divine Distinctions). The second division includes things said of God for which there is some similitude 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. 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 remotinis, concerns what might be considered similitude as dialectic insofar as it involves the recognition that, since

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215 In De divinis nominibus [hereafter = DN], pr.: nam in libro quodam, qui apud nos non habetur, qui intitulatur de divinis hypotyposibus idest characteribus, ea de Deo tradidit quae ad unitatem divinae essentiae et distinctionem personarum pertinent.

216 DN, pr.: Quae vero dicitur 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 alius 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.
they necessarily require some created mediation, all similitudes are deficient as divine communications. They must therefore be removed or negated by the processes of remotion and unknowing, which Dionysius speaks of in his *De mystica theologica.*

The nature and application of a similitude in Thomas is as complex as his conception of *esse*. Like *esse*, it is an analogous reality and so must be thought analogously. 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 two modes.

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217 *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 remanet occultum et ignotum.

218 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" (*alialem analogiam*). The intentional ambiguity in Thomas’s phrasing (*alialem*) 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. *Summa Theologiae* (hereafter *STh*) I, q. 4, a. 3: Cum enim omne agens agat sibi simile inquantum est agens, agit autem unumquodque secundum suam formam, nescesse 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 continetur, effectus eius adhuc magis accedent remote ad similitudinem formae agentis, non tamen ita quod participent 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 inquantum sunt entia, ut primo et universalis principio totius esse. Cf. also *STh* I, q. 44, a. 3.
The symbols of the second mode are translated from creatures to God (a ‘way up’ as it were) while the perfections of the former are derived from God to creatures (a ‘way down’ as it were).\textsuperscript{219} It is important to stress that the two are not the same.\textsuperscript{220} 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.”\textsuperscript{221} 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.

\textsuperscript{219} 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 verbs) 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.

\textsuperscript{220} A difference between a procession and a similitude is suggested in DN 1, 2: et, similiter, res simpliciter supernaturalis et infigurabilis multiplicantur componitur per varietatem divisibilium signorum, inquantum sicilicet ipse Deus, qui est supernaturalis et simplex per diversa nobis manifestatur in Scripturis sive sint diversae processiones sive diversae similitudines. Emphasis added.

\textsuperscript{221} DN 3, 2: sed in processione creaturam, ipsa divina essentia non communicatur creaturis procedentibus, sed remanet incommunicata seu imparticpata;
Thomas’s rejection of the position of Moses Maimonides provides further evidence for his refusal to read the divine names in an equivocal way.\(^{222}\) 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 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 \textit{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 \textit{Book I}.

The second point Thomas highlights in the \textit{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” (\textit{obscuro utitur stilo}) but credits this as a diligent or industrious (\textit{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.”\(^{223}\) His final thoughts in the \textit{Proemium} concern the personal style of Dionysius. Thomas recognizes the difficult nature of Dionysius’s “efficacious reasoning to demonstrate a proposition,”

\(^{222}\) De Pot. q. 7, a. 5; STh I, q. 13, a. 2. Cf. also John F. Wippel, \textit{The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas, From Finite Being to Uncreated Being} (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 523 – 525. The scholarly consensus is that the \textit{De Potentia} was written between 1265 and 1266, a dating that would put it in the same literary period as the \textit{Commentary on the Divine Names} and the \textit{Prima Pars} of the \textit{Summa}.

\(^{223}\) DN pr: Haece igitur Platonicorum 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.
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.” 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. 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.

Book I. 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."226

224 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 cas implicat. Tertia, quia multoties utitur quadam multiplicatione verborum quae, licet superflua videantur, tamen diligenter considerantibus magnum sententiae profunditatem continere inveniuntur.

225 Most significantly the criticism put forth by Jones, “(Mis?)-Reading the Divine Names as a Science.”

226 Dionysius the Areopagite, On the Divine Names, 1, 1 (585B): "Εστώ δὲ καὶ νῦν ἡμῖν ὁ τῶν λογίων θεοῦς προδιωρισμένος τὸ τῆς ἀλθείας ημῶς καταδείκτασθαι τῶν περί θεοῦ λεγομένων "οὐκ ἐν πειθοῖς σοφίας ἀνθρωπινῆς λόγοις, ἀλλ’ ἐν ἀποδεικτῇ τῆς πνευματοκινήτου τῶν θεολόγων "δυνάμεως", καθ’ ἴνα τοῖς ἀφθέγκτος καὶ ἀγνώστοις ἀφθέγκτως καὶ ἀγνώστως συναπτόμεθα κατὰ τὴν κρείττονα τῆς καθ’ ἡμῶς λογικῆς καὶ νοερᾶς δυνάμεως καὶ ἐνεργείας ἐννοίαν."
This passage provides the justification for the approach Aquinas takes to the entire text, as his explication of Book I 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. Thomas is in full agreement with Dionysius when he asserts that this clinging is a better union that mere human knowledge. “For we are conjoined through faith to things higher than those are to which the natural reason pertains and we inhere in them more certainly, to the extent that divine revelation is more certain than human cognition.” 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 De Nenkform. 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.

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227 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.

228 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.
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.  

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.

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.’ Situated on one end of the spectrum of cognition, scientia stands opposite 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. 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. As Book I 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*. 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 determined by human reason.

He therefore takes up the *ratio* of a divine name in the second lecture of Book I, 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.” And while this illumination 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

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232 STh II-II, q. 2, a. 1.


234 STh II-II, q. 1, a. 2 Here Thomas follows Hugh of St. Victor who, in *De Sacramentis* I, 10, 2 [PL176, col. 330] states that “faith is a form of mental certitude about distant realities that is greater than opinio and less than science.”

235 *DN* 1, 2: *Dicit ergo primo quod nos sequentes hab, scilicet praedictas thearchicas, idest divinas leges, ut scilicet commensurate secundum nostram mensuram mensuram et firmiter et cum amore, divinis illuminationibus nos immittamus; quae quidem leges non solum homines sanctos, sed etiam gubernant supercoelestium ordinum et substantiarum sanctos ornatus, idest, ornant pulchras et ordinatas dispositiones Angelorum; venerantur 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.
through reason. 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.” What exactly constitutes these boundaries is not clear. Most likely, though, they refer to one’s individual and relative 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 thearchical hymns, that is, to knowing the divine names, by which God is praised.

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 divine names, the purpose is to provide the capacity to see, that is to say, to provide in-forming knowledge:

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236 *DN* 1, 2: et hoc quidem ex sanctitate et castitate animi provenit, non se extra suas metas extendentis;

237 *DN* 1, 2: sic, inquam, venerantes divina, secundum sequelam divinarum legum, *extendimur ad splendores nobis illuc tentes in sanctis eloquis*, 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.
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...  

These passages clearly reveal that for Aquinas, a more hymnic approach holds priority over any mode of human reasoning. This is not 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,” 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. 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. The divine name tradition, then, 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 primarily the knowledge of faith. The content of the divine names

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238 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 eloqui*

239 DN 1, 2: *Est igitur sensus praemissorum, quod desistamus a perscrutatione divinorum secundum rationem nostram*

240 DN 1, 2: *Est igitur sensus praemissorum, quod desistamus a perscrutatione divinorum secundum rationem nostram, sed inhaeramus sacrae Scripturae, in qua traduntur nobis nomina divina, per quae manifestatur 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.*
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.\(^{241}\) 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.\(^{242}\) 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*. No doubt 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

\(^{241}\) 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 principiorum ad causam agentem, a qua incipit operatio et motus.*

\(^{242}\) DN 1, 2: *Consequenter autem ponit quae pertinent ad rationem principii respectu determinatorum effectuum.*
express the relation of the affect to the intellect. The process is an anagogical 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 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.

When Thomas ponders the possible ways in which the divine name 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.” 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

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243 Gallus’s *Extractio* can be found in *Dionysii Cartusiani Opera Omnia*, vols. 15 – 16 (Tournai: Typis Carusiae Sanctae Mariae de Pratis, 1902), c. 5.


unity of knowledge and activity. In Aquinas’s reading, the ratio of a divine name is constituted by significant elements of beauty.

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.”

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 form God in the manner of participation, there comes to pass a ‘handing down’ that renders manifest what was hidden.

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 nothing to reduce the efficacy of the original

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246 DN 1, 2: Non solum autem a Deo communicatur rebus quod in se subsistant et meliorentur, sed etiam quod alis 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.

247 DN 1, 2: Manifestum est enim quod quaecumque in creaturis sunt, in Deo praecessitunt eminentius. Sed creaturarum quidem manifesta 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.
The fact is that Dionysius does indeed open section five of chapter one by expressing a doubt and he does indeed proceed to solve the doubt. That

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It is from this passage where Jones focuses the primary thrust of his critique ("(Mis?)-Reading the Divine Names as a Science," 151 ff.) 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 Name that grounds its hymnological character”(154, 155). Jones provides a lengthy citation from Dionysius’s DN treatise, chapter 1, lecture 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 – 154). 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 issues could be raised against Jones’s understanding of Aquinas, who Jones regards as an equivocal thinker of the highest order. Oddly, Jones’s reading of Aquinas actually betrays Jones’s own tendencies toward equivocation. 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 point out are some of Jones’s (mis?)-readings of Aquinas. His first mistake arises when he contends that “[a]ccording to Aquinas, Dionysius proceeds in terms of revelation and not human reason”(147). This is surely misguided since Thomas does not equivocate in this way. 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 “[t]his view, of course, assumes that because of divine simplicity, whatever is not identical to the divine essence is created” (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.
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.\(^{249}\)

Even hymnology assumes some theory of sign/referent mediation, which Dionysius clearly indicates is a primary interest. As Dionsyius 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 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 ineffable and

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\(^{249}\) 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.*
unspeakable, but even they do not comprehend it. 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 immissions, 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.

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 through remotion. A second mode of nomination

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250 DN 1, 3: Et licet Angeli videant essentiam, tamen etiam sunt nobis ineffabiles et ignotae sanctarum virtutum uniones quae convenient Angelis, quibus scilicet uniuntur per cognitionem ad divinam essentiam, ipsam aliqualiter attingendo, sed non comprehendendo;

251 DN 1, 3: etenim illi qui sic laudant Deum per remotionem, per illuminationem Dei vero et supernaturaliter sunt hoc edocti ex beatissima conjunctione ad Deum; qui Deus, cum sit omnium existentium causa, ipse nihil est existentium, non quasi deficiens ab essendo, sed supereminenter segregatus ab omnibus.

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. 253 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. 254 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. 255 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.” 256

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.

253 Dionysius the Areopagite, On the Divine Names 1, 5 (593B): Ἐπειδὴ δὲ ὡς ἄναρθτος ὑπαρχεῖς αὐτῷ τῷ εἶναι πάντων ἐστὶ τῶν ἑντων αἰτία, τῇ ἀγαθορρηξίᾳ τῆς θεορρηξίας πρόνοιαν ἐκ πάντων τῶν αἰτιῶν ὑμητέον. “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.”

254 DN 1, 3: Si vero sit causa alterius secundum aliquam dispositionem superadditam, 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.

255 Cf. Super Lib. de causis, p. 11.

256 DN 1, 3: Sic igitur in ipso sua causa prachabet similitudinem omnium suorum effectuum.
But when the effect bears a similitude that is contained in the cause supereminently, the name is said *supereminently*. Aquinas later on in the *Summa Theologiae* refines this mode of naming into the distinctions of equivocal and analogical naming, since supereminence can be interpreted in both senses. 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 II*, Thomas explains how the divine name tradition elucidates the unions and distinctions in God. Apart from *Book IV*, *Book II* 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 (Lk 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. The divine essence cannot be thought as only a unity if by this all distinction is

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257 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 et generato. Si vero non sit similitudo secundum eamdem rationem, sed sit supereminentius in causa, non dictetur 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 eamdem rationem, sed eminentius, sequitur quod providentiam deitatis, sicut principem totius boni, idest, principaliter in se totum bonum habentem et aliis diffundentem, convent laudare ex omnibus causatis, non tamen univoce sed supereminenter, quod contingit propter convenientiam creaturarum cum ipsa;*

258 STh I, q. 13.

259 DN 2, 1: *Dicit ergo, primo, quod per se bonitas laudatur ab eloquii, idest sacris Scripturis, sicut determinans, idest distinguens ab aliis et manifestans totam divinam essentiam, quodemque est, quia cuiuscumque convenit divina essentia, convenit ei per se bonitatem esse et e converso. Et hoc probat per hoc quod in sancta Scriptura inducitur ipsa*
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 names *perfect* and *integral*: perfect to signify the superful excess of divine perfections, and integral to signify the removal of any diminution that the name perfect might imply. 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

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260 DN 2, 1: Et hoc modo divinitas dicitur perfecta, inquantum 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 attigisset 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.’ *Integrum* overcomes any deficiency in the word *perfectum.*
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 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 II. 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 ingressible divine supercollocations which are of the divine singularity, superineffable and superunknown.”

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 incomunicable.
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; pouring itself out in its act of self-communication, the surplus source is continually ‘pushed further back’ as it continually pours itself out. 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 inisistence 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.

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 distinction that proceeds from the divine essence itself and enters into the formal constitution of creaturely existence. 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 cognition est in cognoscende secundum modum cognoscentis. 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. This is precisely the foundation that must be born in mind in the following exposition of beauty as a divine name.

264 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, et al.

265 DN 2, 4: Dicit ergo, primo, quod omnia divina etiam quae nobis manifestata sunt, cognoscuntur a nobis solum participationibus. Cuius ratio est, quia nihil cognoscutur nisi secundum quod est in cognoscente. Sunt autem quaedam cognoscibilia, quae sunt infra intellectum nostrum, quae quidem habent simplicitus esse in intellectu nostro, quam in seipsis, sicut sunt omnes res corporales, unde huiusmodi res dicuntur cognosci a nobis per
3.3.3.2. THE GOOD AND LIGHT AS PROPAEDEUTIC: Book IV, Lectures 1 – 4.

Thomas opens Book IV by explaining the priority of the good. 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. 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.

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 five. Following this are the names dealing with the perfection of a being. These are...

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266 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.

267 DN 4, 1: Si autem singulae processiones considerentur, quas divina nomina manifestant, tria videmus ex divina bonitate esse rebus attributa: primo quidem, ut in se sint et perficientur; secundo, ut ad invicem comparentur; tertio, ut ordinentur in finem.
treated in *Divine Names*, chapters six, seven and eight, namely, “to live,” “to know” (i.e., Wisdom), and “to be just or virtuous” respectively.\(^{268}\)

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 nine. 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 ten.\(^ {269}\)

Finally, the good communicates to a created entity its ordination toward an end.

Since peace and tranquility of order follow this ordination, chapter eleven of the *Divine Names* treats the name Peace. Insofar as this ordination requires a governor, *Divine Names* chapter twelve treats the names King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Finally, *Divine Names* chapter thirteen considers the end itself by treating the names Perfect and One.\(^ {270}\)

In taking up the more specific themes of Book IV, Thomas continues to determine the names treated as they relate to the good. Since the good is what all things desire,

\(^ {268}\) *DN* 4, 1: Si autem ipsae res in se considerentur: primum et communius, quod in eis inventur, 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.

\(^ {269}\) *DN* 4, 1: Comparatio autem rerum ad invicem attenditur secundum duo: primo, secundum aliquid intrinsecum, propt qua una res dictur alteri similis vel aequalis, cadem vel diversa, propter convenientiam in substantia, quantitate aut qualitate et de his agit in 9 capitulo; secundo vero, secundum aliquid extrinsecum, sive secundum quod continentur sub una parte sive secundum quod continentur sub una mensura et de his agit in 10, ubi agitur de omnipotentente et antiquo dieorum;

\(^ {270}\) *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.
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 IV 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., Lk 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 ebdomadibus, Thomas examines the issues that Boethius’s text raises with respect to the relation of divine goodness to creaturely goodness. 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.

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 four of his Commentary on the De Hebdomadibus shows, Thomas’s ultimate solution derives from employing an analogical

271 See St. Thomas Aquinas, An Exposition of the “On the Hebdomads” of Boethius, Introduction and Translation by Janice L. Schultz and Edward A. Synan (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2001). 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 Rudi Te Velde, Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas, 1 – 83.
strategy in place of Boethius’s univocal/equivocal strategy.\textsuperscript{272} As Thomas maintains, like health, and like being itself, ‘good’ can be said in many ways.\textsuperscript{273} 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 \textit{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.\textsuperscript{274} 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 \textit{per se} and, reflecting what appeared in the \textit{De HebdomADIUS}, an end that is present \textit{in esse et in operari}.

\textsuperscript{272} I.e., Goodness is spoken in one sense only (univocity). Therefore creatures can only be good \textit{either} by substance \textit{or} by participation (equivocity).

\textsuperscript{273} \textit{Exp. lib. De Hebd.} c. 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 premissa, 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, inquantum 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 dicitum 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.

\textsuperscript{274} STh I, q. 13, a. 2.
In his examination of the name light (Book IV, 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. Thomas reads Dionysius’s treatment of 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. 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. Just as the sun causes heat in even those things furthest from it while remaining in itself beyond all things and entirely unmixed with

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275 DN 4, 5: Postquam Dionysius tractavit de lumine, nunc agit de pulchro, ad cuius intellectum praeexigitur lumen;

276 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, sic et archetypum, idest principalis figura vel principale exemplar in impressa imagine.

277 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 suprenis et perfectissimis substantiis auge 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
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. 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.\textsuperscript{278} Thirdly, in the same way that the sun generates the energy that stabilizes and preserves a creature, the divine good provides \textit{habitude} to entities. It is at this point where Thomas makes a clear appeal to the aesthetic tradition by describing this habit in terms of measure, number and place. Why Aquinas says ‘place’ (\textit{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.\textsuperscript{279} In any case by providing habit to creatures in these three ways, God is described as a \textit{principle of determination}: “But God not only has the habit of measure toward things produced, but

\begin{itemize}
  \item omnia transeat tradendo similitudinem suam rebus, adhuc tamen \textit{super omnes est}, per suae substantiae singularitatem. Posset etiam aliquis credere quod, quamvis excedat omnes substantias, tamen supremae substantiae usque ad eam attingant per modum quo corpus inferius attingit suum superius; et ad hoc excludendum, subdit quod superiores substantiae non pertingunt \textit{ad excessum} divinae bonitatis. Posset iterum aliquis credere quod quae adhuc non sunt infima in rebus, non sunt a Deo creata propter eorum imperfectionem, sicut Manichaci posuerunt corpora corruptibilia non esse creati a Deo et ad hoc excludendum, subdit quod inferiora non transeunt ambitum causali tatis eius.
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{278} DN 4, 3: Secundo; ibi: \textit{sed et illuminat et cetera}, postquam posuerat quod causalitas eius se extendit ad omnes substantias, ostendit quid substantiae ex divina bonitate sequentur; et dicit quod divina bonitas illuminat omnia quae illuminari possunt, salicet rationales substantias; universaliter autem omnes substantias creat, dans eis esse; et vivificat omnia quasi vivunt et continet, idest conservat; et perficit, dans eis suas perfectiones

\textsuperscript{279} Professor Boehner, in his \textit{Medieval Logic, An Outline of Its Development from 1250 to c. 1400} (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1952), 2, observes that it is thanks to the \textit{Liber sec proprinorum}, commonly attributed to Gilbert de la Porée (†1154) (aka Gilbert of Poitiers) that a realistic interpretation of such categories of “time” and “place” was adopted by certain scholastics. The \textit{Liber sec princiupium} 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 (\textit{The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas}, 225, n.98). 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.
also the habitude of acting cause and end.\textsuperscript{280} The formal properties of a created entity, in their active appearing, conform to their respective momentum toward the good. The resulting determination, appearing by means of measure, number and place, announces the desired good as a present \textit{res} available to the appetitive faculties. Drawing from Albert, it can be said that 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 \textit{De theologica symbolica}. This treatise, as noted already, examines metaphorical names of God translated from creatures. Because the \textit{Divine Names} treats the intelligible names of 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.\textsuperscript{281} 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

\textsuperscript{280} DN 4, 3: Tertio; ibi: \textit{et mensura} et cetera, ostendidit quam habitudinem habeat divina bonitas ad res iam productas; et dicit, primo, quod habet habitudinem mensurae. \textit{Est enim mensura existentium}, quia ex hoc potest scrii 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 immobiliunm rerum non mensurat tempore nisi per accidentem, ratione motus adiuncti sed propria mensura essendi est aevum; duratio autem uniuscuiusque esse praeigitur et mensurat a Deo et secundum hoc Deus dicitur omnium existentium aevum. Inventur 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. Racionem autem tam temporis quam numeri sequitur ordo, quia una species numeri naturaliter est alia prior et tempus est etiam numeros motuum secundum prius et posterius. Unde consequenter dicit, quod Deus est ordo omnium, inquantum 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: \textit{et causa et finis}.

\textsuperscript{281} 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 \textit{in libro de symbolica theologia}, sed \textit{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: \textit{et divendum 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: \textit{igitur} et cetera; tertio, ostendit quis est finis diffusionis huius luminis; ibi: \textit{et intellectualia} et cetera.
visibility through formal determination, opens the channel 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.282 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 cognition 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

282 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 supercelestem 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.
eslewhere Aquinas judges discursive reason as ‘most imperfect.’\textsuperscript{283} 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.\textsuperscript{284}

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.”\textsuperscript{285} Thomas calls this a ‘certain circulation’ \textit{(quaedam

\textsuperscript{283} 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. 1; Gilby, \textit{Poetic Experience}, 46 – 51.

\textsuperscript{284} DN 4, 4: Duorum autem quae facit divinum lumen in animabus, primum est: quod \textit{ab omnibus animabus} quibus innascitur, \textit{expellit omnes} ignorantiam \textit{et errorem}. Ignorantia pertinet ad remotionem veritatis, sed error ad inhaesionem falsitatis; dicit autem: \textit{ingignitur}, ut alludit ei quod dicitur II Petri, 1: \textit{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 dicit potest, sed solum nescientia eorum ad quae quis natus est et debet scire. Secundum est: quod \textit{tradit sanctum lumen}; et nota quod dicit: \textit{sanctum lumen}, tum quia a Deo inmittitur, 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 possidet.

\textsuperscript{285} DN 4, 4: \textit{ffectus enim divinae gratiae multiplicantur}, secundum multiplicationem desiderii et dilectionis, secundum illud Luc. 7: \textit{dimissa sunt et peccata multa, quoniam dilesit multum};
circulatio) that is perpetual according to its own nature.\textsuperscript{286} Light, therefore, 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 virute 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.\textsuperscript{287}

\textsuperscript{286} DN 4, 4: sic enim quaedam circulatio attenditur, dum ex lumine crescit desiderium luminis et ex desiderio aueto crescit lumen. Circulatio autem secundum suam naturam perpetua est et sic \textit{semp}er \textit{di}vinum lumen \textit{e}x\textit{c}endit animas \textit{ad anteriora} per profectum, non tamen in omnibus aequaliter, sed \textit{secundum proportionem ipsarum ad respectum luminis: quaedam enim diligentius respiciunt ad lumen immissum, quae magis desiderant et magis proficiunt.}

\textsuperscript{287} DN 4, 4: Quantum ad primum ergo dicit quod supersubstantiale \textit{bonum}, licet sit \textit{super omne lumen} et sensibile et intelligibile, tamen \textit{nominatur lumen intelligibile}, inquantum est quidam \textit{radius} et \textit{fons omnis intellectualis luminis: et ne intelligatur fons in se solo consistens, subdit quod est \textit{e}ffusio \textit{luminis} desuper manans; et ut \textit{sciatur} ad quos manat, subdit quod ex sua plenitudine \textit{illum}inat \textit{omnem mentem} \textit{supermundanam}, quantum ad Angelos assistentes et \textit{circumundanam} quantum ad ministra\textit{tes}, quorum ministerio mundus iste \textit{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 \textit{pertinet ad excessum} et dicit quod \textit{lumen divinum} \textit{excedit omnes mentes}, licet in eas diffundatur, quia \textit{semper superexcessus} est per suam substantiam. Tertio, ponit id quod \textit{pertinet ad comprehensio}nem, et dicit quod Deus omnia \textit{comprehendit quae sunt} in praedictis \textit{mentibus, inquantum superiaret} eis, sicut causa superior praebet in se quod in effectibus inferioribus \textit{invenitur}; unde, ad hoc exponendum, subdit quod ipse Deus, \textit{universaliter, omnem dominationem}, seu \textit{potestatem \textit{illuminative} virtutis, idest quidquid pertinet ad cuiuscumque cognitionem vel ad quamcumque virtutem docendi, Deus in se \textit{coasse}mus}, idest simul assumens, non per diversas virtutes diversa cognoscens, sicut nos colores \textit{visu} et \textit{sonos auditu cognoscimus}, sed \textit{secundum unam virtutem cognoscit omnia}; et superhabet, quia \textit{excellenti}us \textit{unumquodque cognoscit quam ab aliquo cognoscatur}; et praebet, quia non \textit{acquirit cognitionem virtutis} vel \textit{virtutem docendi} ab aliquo, sed \textit{omnes ab ipso}; et hoc \textit{competit ei, inquantum est principalis lucens, ut principium luminis et inquantum est super omnia lucens.}
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 aesthetic thought. Through illumination, the divine light ‘gathers together’ all intellectual and rational beings. In so doing, the divine light also unifies these beings 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 fulness, converting those whose individual determinations (opiniones) are not founded upon truth.\textsuperscript{288}

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 anagogical power. Both of these are developed further in Thomas’s exposition on beauty as such.

3.3.3.3. **Beauty as a Divine Name: Book IV, Lectures 5 and 6.**

As many scholars maintain, Lectures 5 and 6 of Book IV of Thomas’s *Commentary on the Divine Names* marks the turning point of his considerations of beauty.\textsuperscript{289} Several new insights into beauty present themselves to Thomas in this section of Dionysius’s treatise:

\textsuperscript{288} DN 4, 4: Deinde, cum dicit: \textit{et intellectualia} et cetera, ostendit finem et fructum causalitatis luminis; et dicit quod, per illuminationem congregat \textit{omnia intellectualia}, idest Angelos \textit{et rationalia}, idest homines \textit{et facit ea indestructibilia}, quia dum uniantur in veritate, in ea conservantur. Et hoc, consequenter, exponit ex opposito: sicut enim \textit{ignorantia} est divisiva eorum qui in errorem inducuntur, \textit{ita praesentia intellectualis luminis}, per quod cognoscitur veritas, congregat eos \textit{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 erre in veritate contingit. Et ideo illi qui cognoscunt veritatem, conveniunt in una sententia, sed illi qui ignorant, dividunt per diversos errores. Est etiam \textit{praesentia luminis perfectiva}, inquantum constituit in fine rei cognitae, quae est veritas et est etiam \textit{convertiva}, idest revocativa ad veritatem, \textit{convertens homines a multis opinionibus} quae non habent firmitatem veritatis; et non solum ab opinione ad certam scientiam transibat, sed etiam a veritate ad uniformitatem; et hoc est quod subdit, quod \textit{congregat varias visiones} vel \textit{ut magis proprii dictur phantasias ad unam veram cognitionem}, per oppositum falsitatis. Et non solum \textit{convertit} ad lumen veritatis sed \textit{etiam repleit ipso lumine veritatis}, quod in se est unum et aliorum unitivum.

\textsuperscript{289} This is most emphasized in Kovach, *Dei Ästhetik des Thomas von Aquin*, 49 – 51.
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.\footnote{Kovach, \textit{Dei Ästhetik des Thomas von Aquin}, 51. As Kovach helpfully illustrates, within the period from 1260 – 1268, Thomas produces 9 written works, which contain 25 variations on his doctrine of beauty up to that time. 20 of those 25 appear in the \textit{Commentary on the Divine Names}.} These are the fundamental themes by which Thomas structures the Dionysian text in Lectures 5 and 6 of his commentary.

\textit{Lecture 5.} Thomas immediately opens his account of beauty by establishing scriptural evidence \textit{that} the beautiful is attributed to God. This attribution, by which the good is praised as beauty, takes two primary forms. The first is through the \textit{causality} of beauty, from which derives the beautiful and beauty as found in \textit{Canticles} 1, and \textit{Psalm} 95 respectively. The second is through the \textit{possession} of beauty, from which derive love and loveable as found in 1\textit{Jn} 4 and the \textit{Canticles} respectively.\footnote{DN 4, 5: \textit{Dicit ergo, primo, quod hoc supersubstantiale bonum quod est Deus lundatur a sanctit theologis in sacra Scriptura, sicut pulchrum, Cant. 1: ece tu pulcher es, dilecte mi; et sicut pulchritudo, Psalm. 95: confessio et pulchritudo in prospectu eius; et sicut dilectio I Ioan. 4: Deus caritas est, et sicut diligibile, ut in auctoritate canticorum inducta; et quaequecumque aliae sunt convenientes Dei nominationes, ad pulchritudinem pertinentes: sive per causalitatem pulchritudinis, quod dicit propter pulchrum et pulchritudinem; sive secundum quod pulchritudo gratio habetur, quod dicit propter dilectionem et diligibile.}

The remainder of the lecture consists of an examination of how \textit{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.* 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. That Thomas does 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. 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 partcipating 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.” It seems that by avoiding reference to beauty as an abstract signifier, Thomas implies the kind of participation he has in mind. Scholars recognize three

292 Albertus Magnus, *De pulchro et bono,* q. 2, a.1, ad. 2.

293 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, idest omnia in uno, unde etsi in creaturis differant pulchrum et pulchritudo, Deus tamen utrumque comprehendit in se, secundum unum et idem.


295 DN 4, 5: *Deinde, cum dicit: hoc enim creaturae nihil est aliud quam similitudo divinae pulchritudinis in rebus participata.* Emphasis added.
fundamental modes of participation in Aquinas. 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 undetermined 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 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:

He 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

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296 See John F. Wippel, The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas, 94 – 131; Fabro, La nozione metafisica, 145 – 150; Te Velde, Participation and Substantiality, 76 – 83.
consists he shows, adding that thus God hands down beauty insofar as God is the cause of consonance and brightness in all things.\footnote{DN 4, 5: Dicit ergo primo quod Deus qui est supersubstantiale pulchrum, dicitur pulchritudo propter hoc quod omnibus entibus creatis dat pulchritudinem, secundum proprietatem uniuscuiusque: alia enim est pulchritudo spiritus et alia corporis, atque alia huic et illius corporis. Et in quo consistat pulchritudinis ratio, ostendit subdens quod sic Deus tradit pulchritudinem, inquantum est causa consonantiae et claritatis in omnibus:}

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 \textit{beautiful} is not predicated upon a relation to the corporeal as 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, Thomas’s account reads the Dionysian text as attributing beauty to God both as \textit{beauty} and as \textit{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 \textit{ratio} that Thomas stresses in his explanation at this point are \textit{consonantia} and \textit{claritas}. God causes \textit{claritas} by giving the “testimony (\textit{traditiones}) of God’s luminous ray, which is the fountain of all light.”\footnote{DN 4, 5: Quomodo autem Deus sit causa claritatis, ostendit subdens, quod Deus immittit omnibus creaturis, cum quodam fulgere, \textit{traditionem sui radii luminosi, qui est fons omnis luminis}; quae quidem traditiones fulgidae divini radii, secundum participationem similitudinis sunt intelligendae et istae traditiones sunt \textit{pulchritudinum}, idest facientes pulchritudinem in rebus. Emphasis added to distinguish quoted text. The word \textit{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.} When this passage is read in concert with the account of the name light, \textit{claritas} can be understood to identify the plenitude of intelligibility that God ‘surrenders’ from his divine excess. As Aquinas further explains, these \textit{traditiones} are given to be understood by the brightness that emanates from a participating similitude. The \textit{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 invokes 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 invokes 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.  

The end that Thomas has in mind is the divine plenitude or excess. It is an end, therefore, that exceeds any 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.

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299 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, inquantum 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 ultimum ordinentur.
themselves.\textsuperscript{300} 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 \textit{claritas} and \textit{consonantia} constitutive of the formal properties of each created entity.

If the attribution of beauty to God identifies beauty’s causality, the attribution of \textit{the beautiful} (\textit{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 \textit{Book IV}, 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 \textit{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 \textit{super}. The sun is therefore called ‘superhot’

\textsuperscript{300} The term ‘predicamental’ as used to signify the order of creaturely relation is first introduced by Fabro, \textit{Participation et causalité selon s. Thomas d’Aquin}, 510 – 523.
because it explodes the comparative and superlative categories of heat derived from
generic specifications.\textsuperscript{301}

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 or
remotion involved in a negative way of thinking. 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.\textsuperscript{302}

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

\textsuperscript{301} DN 4, 5: Excessus autem est duplex: unus in genere, qui significatur per comparativum vel superlativum;
alis 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 excellentsi.

\textsuperscript{302} 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.
Aquinas’s explanation does not explicitly mention concern for the distinction between abstract and concrete, however some correspondence is suggested. God 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.

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 through which it distills itself. Rather, beauty is itself an excess of concretion.
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 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 expositing 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*.”

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. This is significant since in the *nova translatio* of John the Saracen, the greek word ‘óv’ became latinized as *esse*. But here Thomas links his conception of *esse* with “the beauty of a thing’s proper *ratio*” rather than ‘óv.’ 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

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306 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.

307 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.*
and it is the bond of friendship for all common affection; and it is the condition that grounds the possibility of external activity and communication.  

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. It is out of a proper love for beauty that the beautiful, which is God, is an effective, moving and containing cause. 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. 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. Thomas identifies divine causality as an efficient cause insofar as it

308 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 eamdem sententiam conveniunt; et amicitiae, quantum ad affectum; et communiones, quantum ad actum vel ad quodcumque extrinsecum; et universaliter omnes creaturarum, quantamcumque unionem habent, habent ex virtute pulchri.

309 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*, c. 4; *De Veritate*, q. 5, a.2; *SCG* I, c. 13, c. 15; and in his famous ‘five ways’ argument in *STh* I, q. 2, a. 3. For an insightful and helpful analysis of Thomas on all modes of causality, see John F. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, chpts. 10 – 12.

310 DN 4, 5: propter hoc subdit quod pulchrum, quod est Deus, est causa effectiva et motiva et continens, amore propriae pulchritudinis.

311 DN 4, 5: haec enim tria videntur ad rationem causae efficientis pertinent: ut det esse, moveat et conservet.

312 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.
designates the act by which God communicates his own similitude out of a love for its beauty.

The beautiful which 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.\(^{313}\) 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 effect the anagogical process increasing the intensity of illumination. For, an end cannot be a cause unless it moves that which is caused.\(^{314}\)

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 principle is established inductively, but more frequently Thomas attempts to establish it deductively.\(^{315}\) In any case, he does little to develop the issue here. He merely asserts that since all imitation

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\(^{313}\) 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.

\(^{314}\) Cf. *De Veritate*, q. 5, a. 2; STh I, q. 2, a. 3.

is necessarily an imitation of the beautiful, the beautiful is a principle of distinction and
determination for all things.316

The exposition of the causality of ‘the beautiful,’ as Thomas reads Dioysius, 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.317 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.”318 The phrasing is not without a degree of
ambiguity. To what exactly does illud refer? Some translations take it as a reference to the
particular thing that is known.319 But the word’s case, gender and number allign 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

316 DN 4, 5: Tertio, est causa examplaris, quia omnia distinguuntur secundum pulchrum divinum et huius signum
est quod nullus curat effigiare vel repraesentare, nisi ad pulchrum.

317 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 caniam omnibus modis; et quia nihil est quod non participet
pulchro et bono, cum unumquodque sit pulchrum et bonum secundum propriam formam; et ulterior, etiam,
audacter hoc dixerat 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.

318 DN 4, 5: Quamvis autem pulchrum et bonum sint idem subiecto, quia tam claritas quam consonantia sub
ratione boni continentur, tamen ratione different: nam pulchrum addit supra bonum, ordinem ad vim
cognosciivam illud esse huiusmodi.

319 E.g., Eco, The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas, 31; Jan Aertsen, Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals, 343.
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.\textsuperscript{320} 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 \textit{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 \textit{illud} therefore makes more sense when taken as a reference to the good.\textsuperscript{321} Some scholars view this observation as Thomas’s most original contribution to aesthetic thought.\textsuperscript{322} 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.

\textsuperscript{320} This difficulty is, appropriately, pointed out by Eco, \textit{Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas}, 36. Although Eco proposes an explanation, it appears only to confuse the issue rather than clarifying it.

\textsuperscript{321} 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, \textit{Art and Scholasticism and the Frontiers of Poetry}, Joseph W. Evans (trans.) (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1962), 167 – 170; Tatarkiewicz, \textit{History of Aesthetics}, Vol. 2, 259; De Bruyne, \textit{Etudes d'esthetique medievale}, vol. 2, (Bk IV), 281 – 286.

\textsuperscript{322} E.g., De Bruyne, \textit{Etudes d'esthetique medievale}, vol. 2, (Bk IV), 281; Tatarkiewicz, \textit{History of Aesthetics}, vol. 2, 246.
Lecture 6. Although the beautiful and the good are one, Thomas explains, Dionysius says that they are the cause of all good and beautiful things which are many. 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. 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.’ 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

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323 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.

324 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.
understanding of another term, distinction or discretion immediately follow the ratio of ‘one’. So the beautiful causes the unions 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 nine. Nevertheless because they are reducible to beauty’s consonantia, Thomas includes them here.

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

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325 De Trinitate, q. 4, a. 1: unde in primis terminis propositiones negativae sunt immediatae, quasi negatio unius sit in intellectu alterius.

326 DN 4, 6: Deinde, cum subdit: unitiones et cetera, ponit ea quae pertinent ad considerationem unius. Ubi considerandum est quod unum addit supra rationem entis, indisionem: est enim unum, ens indivisum; unde unitati distinctio sive discretio opponitur; et ideo, primo, ponit unitiones 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 discrezione 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 ager. 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 contrarium, quantum ad primum; et incommixiones 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.327

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.328 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.329

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 Dionysius’s view of the causality of the beautiful, which emphasizes the order that derives from the beautiful, reflects the

327 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 superiore quidem in inferioribus participatone, 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.

328 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, inquantum 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 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 praedictio distinctionis rerum.

329 DN 4, 6: Quarto, requiritur debita proportio in partibus, ut scilicet tale sit fundamentum quod congruat alius partibus; et hoc est quod dicit: et harmoniae cunctae rei, idest omnium partium universi. Harmonia enim causatur in sonis ex debita proportione numerorum. Partibus ergo sic dispositis, sequitur earum composito in toto, secundum quod ex omnibus partibus universi constituitur una rerum universitas; et hoc est quod subdit: in omni, idest in universo, concretiones.
heirarchical activity that corresponds to Dionysian beauty. When Aquinas takes up the matter, this heirarchical activity gives rise to a relational, or analogical, ontology. 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.”

Finally, the beautiful causes all rest and motions in things insofar as they include some habitute 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.

330 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 inferiort, 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 sunt. 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, qua est de ratione pulchritudinis. Emphasis of last line added to denote quotation in the main body.

331 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
3.3.3.4. Beauty as a Divine Name: Book IV, 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.\(^{332}\) 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.\(^{333}\)

Lecture 7. 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 \textit{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

\begin{quote}
ergo primo quod ex pulchro divino causantur omnes stationes, idest quietes, \textit{et motus sive sint mentium sive animarum sive corporum. Et hoc ideo dicit, quia illud plerumque quod est super omnem quietem \textit{et motum} est causa omnibus et quietis et motus, inquantum collocax \textit{unumquodque in propria sua ratione} in qua res habet suam stationem et inquantum movet omnia \textit{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 quietes reducantur in causaliatem pulchri.
\end{quote}

\(^{332}\) Aquinas’s reference is from \textit{De Anima}, probably 406a – 407b 25; 408a 30ff. and 412a 23. It also appears in \textit{Metaphysics} bk. IX, c. 6 (1048b 22 – 25).

\(^{333}\) 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, inquantum exunct 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.
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 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.\(^{334}\)

In his explanation of the movement of the rational soul, Aquinas provides the grounds for his ‘intellectual’ and ‘angological’ 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:

\[
\text{...it is connatural to the soul that it understand by receiving from exterior things which are multiform and divided. Whence in this reception its circular motion can not be perceived, but more in the fact}\]

\(^{334}\) DN 4, 7: Sic igitur accipiens motum, distinguat 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, *dianunt movent* circulariter intelligendo Deum, inquantum moventur *unit", 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 principio et finis et quod sit in eo ordo et differentias 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 propinquius perfecta pries 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 linea. De proprietate autem motus obliqui est quod sit medius inter circularem et rectum, habens aliquid de utoque; et hic motus convenit Angelis, inquantum 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 *indestinenter* 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.
that it is recalled from exterior things: first converted to itself, second elevated to consideration of angelic powers, but third even to God himself.  

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.” 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). 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.

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335 DN 4, 7: Animae autem connaturale est quod intelligat accipiendo a rebus exterioribus quae sunt multiformes et divise, 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.

336 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;

337 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.

338 DN 4, 7: quae quidem convolutio dirigit virtem animae, ut non erret: manifestum est enim quod anima, discurrendo de uno ad aliud sicut de effectu in causam vel de uno simili ad alium 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 cognoscentur et ideo eorum consideratio, propter sui uniformitatem, circularis convolutio
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.\(^{339}\) For the rational soul, in contrast, the multiformity is natural to its mode of knowing insofar as it knows by discursion through diverse things.\(^{340}\) But this knowledge is also uniform in that it is the one divine beautiful and good that is known through the discursio 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.”\(^{339,341}\) Therefore the soul is moved obliquely by being illuminated with divine cognitions according to its own diverse mode of knowledge.

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\(^{339}\) 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: Respondendo 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 autem 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 alter dicendum est quod, sicut homo cognoscit diversis viribus cognitivis omnia rerum genera, intellectu quidem universali et immateriali, sensu autem singulari et corporeali; 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 intelligibilium 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.

\(^{340}\) Cf. STh I, q. 58, a. 3 and a. 4.

\(^{341}\) DN 4, 7: Sic igitur 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 effected 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.” This is the grounding of the anagogical 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 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

342 DN 4, 7: *sed quando progreditur ad res exteriores, quae sunt circa ipsam, a quibus sint a quibusdam signis variis et multiplicibus elevatur ad contemplandum res simplices et unitas.*
end. In all sensible things, then, the motions that the beautiful and good elicit in angelic minds and rational souls are also elicited among non-rational entities. 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 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.  

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. 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.

343 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 inventur 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 uniuisque, 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 movetur et eius gratia operatur; 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.

344 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
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.”\(^{345}\) 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 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.\(^{346}\)

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

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\(^{345}\) Dn 4, 7: Deinde, cum dicit: et in ipso et cetera, ostendit quod omnis causalitas aliarum causarum, in ipso praexsistit; et dicit quod in ipso est onne principium tam exemplare, quam finale, efficiens, formale et elementale, idest materiale, sicut effectus sunt in virtute suae causae.

\(^{346}\) 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 inquantum omnes substantiae et actiones ordinantur in ipsum, sicut in finem; et hoc est quod subdit: et omnia quaeramique sunt et fiant, propter pulchrum et bonum sunt et fiant et ad ipsum omnia inspiciant, 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.
judgment excludes \textit{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, such a charge must be softened. 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 rationalism of \textit{scientia}.

3.3.3.5. \textbf{SUMMARY OF BEAUTY AS A DIVINE NAME IN THE Commentary on the Divine Names}

How much of Thomas’s views of beauty, and its relation to God, can be determined from his \textit{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.\footnote{For brief accounts of this debate, see Torrel, \textit{St. Thomas Aquinas}, Vol. 1, 236 – 239 and Wippel, \textit{The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas}, introduction. 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 (M. Grabmann, \textit{Mittelalterliche Geistesleben} I (Munich: Heuber, 1926): “Die Aristoteleskommentare des heiligen Thomas von Aquin,” 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., Charles Jourdain, \textit{La philosophie de saint Thomas d’Aquin}, Volume 1 (Paris: L. Hachette et cie, 1858), and, according to Msgr. Wippel, \textit{The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas}, xix, Ettienne Gilson as well, who in, e.g., \textit{The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas} (New York: Random House, 1956) 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., Eugen Rolfes, \textit{Die Philosophie von Thomas von Aquin: in Auszügen aus seinen Schriften} (Leipzig: F. Meiner, 1920). 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.}
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 was not only aware of the broad selection of texts available to him to comment upon, but also that he was not reluctant to venture out on his own. His choice to comment on the *Divine 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 remains obscure. 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.” 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 limited 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 allowed.

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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. 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 orients 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 to quies et motus marks the point at which Thomas’s analysis returns to the claritas and consonantia of beauty.

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

350 Cf. Super Lib. de causis, p. 10. In this proposition, Aquinas expounds how the inelligences are plenitudes of forms.
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 section 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.
3.4. Beauty as a Divine Name In Thomas Aquinas: Beyond Dionysius

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.351 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.352 A brief survey of his findings will provide important features of the foundation for what follows.

3.4.1. General Development of Beauty in Aquinas

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.353 Using the chronology proposed by Grabmann,354 Kovach distinguishes five


353 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
periods of Thomas’s literary activity. Before these five periods, one may speak of a preliminary period (1244 or 1245) in which Thomas writes *De propositionibus modalibus* and *De fallicis 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). His *De Ente et Essentia* (1252 – 1256) contains nothing new about beauty. It is only in his *Commentary on the 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 24 different times. This treatment focuses primarily on following: the beauty of the church; a reference to Dionysius that draws *bonum* and *pulchrum* together; several passages that indicate a preliminary definition of beauty; a first statement asserting that God is beautiful; an important passage about the essence of beauty as ‘*decor speciei*’; references to creaturely

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% 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.

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.

In I Sent. Prol.: 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).

E.g., In I Sent. d. 3, a. 2, exp.; In I Sent. d. 31, q. 2, a. 1, ad. 4.

In I Sent. d. 46, q. 1, a. 4, 1a and ad. 1

In I Sent. d. 46, q. 1, a. 4, ad. 1.
beauty as following the order of its creator; the beauty of angels; the beauty of good works; the beauty of virtue; the beauty of art especially sculpture; and the beauty of different historical ages. He also mentions how physical beauty is a condition for marriage; that beauty for the soul means an absence of sin; that there is beauty in the person, more specifically a spiritual beauty derived from mercy; and the beauty of the heavenly spheres as a pulchritudo visibilis perfective of the act of seeing.

In the following 8 year period (1256 – 1264), there are many repetitions of the themes just mentioned, and only about 6 new additional considerations. These include: a division of beauty into the spiritual and the exterior; that beauty is pleasurable and desireable; that there is beauty of particular things in nature; the desirability of bonum, pulcrum and pax; a first mention of immaterial and invisible beauty; the only reference where Thomas interprets the Platonic-Augustinian concept of numeros as beauty (from Wis. 11:21); and the assertion

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360 In II Sent. prol.
361 In II Sent. d. 6, q. 1, a. 1, sc.
362 In II Sent. d. 27, q. 1, a. 4, sol.; In II Sent. d. 38, q. 1, a. 2, sol.
363 In II Sent. d. 42, q. 1, a. 5, sol.
364 In III Sent. d. 1, q. 1, a. 1, ad. 3.
365 In III Sent. d. 1, q. 1, a. 4, sol.
366 In III Sent. d. 2, q. 2, a. 1, sol.
367 In III Sent. d. 3, q. 1, a. 2, sc.
368 In III Sent. d. 13, q. 3, a. 1, sol.
369 In IV Sent. d. 1, q. 1, a. 2.
370 In IV Sent. d. 48, q. 2, a. 3, sol; and In IV Sent. d. 50, q. 2, a. 4, sol.
371 Included in this period are Contra impugantes de cultum 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 – 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 Isaian (1259 – 1261); and toward the end of this period (1261 – 1264) Expos. in lob., Catena aurea in Matt.
that pleasure beautifies an action.\textsuperscript{372} 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 \textit{Commentary on the Sentences}.\textsuperscript{373}

The third literary period identified by Kovach, marks the period in which Thomas writes his \textit{Commentary on the Divine Names}, along with 8 other texts.\textsuperscript{374}Within these 8 other texts, there are only a few new ideas expressed beyond what is found in the Dionysian commentary: a relativity derived from the comparative foundation of beauty; the beauty of truth; the beautiful ability; the beauty of happiness; the beauty of the name of Christ; and the beauty of movement.\textsuperscript{375}

Thomas’s fourth literary period follows his writing of the \textit{Summa Contra Gentiles} and the \textit{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 \textit{Prima Pars} and the \textit{Prima Secunda} of the \textit{Summa Theologiae}, along with the completion of 8 other texts.\textsuperscript{376} In the many passages where he mentions beauty in \textit{Expositio in Ieremiae}, \textit{In Physicam}, and \textit{Responsorio ad Ioannem Vercellenum}, not one new thought on beauty is presented. It is primarily in his \textit{Prima Pars} and \textit{Prima Secundae} where one finds the greatest number of new ideas on beauty. In sum, these include: the affiliation of beauty with the good, as well as the difference between beauty and good;

\textsuperscript{372} These references are, respectively: Contra Imp. II, c. 6 (7), n. 339; In Evang. Matt. III: 1; De Ver. q. 22, a. 1, ad. 12; SCG III, 80; SCG III, 97; Quodlib. VIII, q. 9, a. 1.

\textsuperscript{373} \textit{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.

\textsuperscript{374} \textit{Expositio in Iob} (1261 – 1264); \textit{Officium de festo corporis Christi} (1264); \textit{Catena aurea in Matt., Marc., Luc., Ion.}, (1261 – 1267); \textit{De regno} (1265 – 1266); \textit{De pot.} (1265 – 1267).

\textsuperscript{375} These references are, respectively: \textit{In Iob.}, c. 25, l. 1; \textit{Catena aurea in Matt.} 13, 10; \textit{Catena aurea in Luc.}, 6, 3 (\textit{decora potentia}); \textit{Catena aurea in Luc.}, 6, 11 (\textit{decora felicitatis}); \textit{Catena aurea in Luc.}, 10,7; \textit{Catena aurea in Luc.}, 10,7; 23, 6.

\textsuperscript{376} \textit{In Lamentationes Ieremiae} (1264 – 1269); \textit{Responsorio ad Ioannem Vercellenum de art.} 108 (1265 – 1266); \textit{In Politicam}, bk. 3, l. 6 (1266 – 1268); \textit{In Ethicam} (1266 – 1269); \textit{In Physicam} (1268); \textit{In Post Anal.} (1268); \textit{De Malo} (1268 – 1269).
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; the idea that the beauty of an image is dependent upon the degree of perfection in its representation; that only human beings out of all living things can enjoy beauty per se; and that the ordination of people is beautiful.\textsuperscript{377} The new ideas of beauty presented in the other works include: that the beauty of the soul is more difficult to recognize than that of the body; that there is beauty in utility; that there is a contrariety between the beautiful and the ugly; that beauty cannot be loved without being seen; and two remarks about geometrical beauty and the degree of ugliness.\textsuperscript{378}

The final period of Thomas’s literary work is focused mainly on the final components of his \textit{Summa Theologiae}, though several other writings emerge alongside this.\textsuperscript{379} There are only three fundamentally new ideas of beauty expressed during this time: that all manifestation derives from beauty (and the good); that physical beauty can be opposed to virtue; and that the contemplative life is spiritually beautiful.\textsuperscript{380}

As Kovach makes clear in his analysis of this data, and what is important for the purpose at hand, is that the \textit{Commentary on the Divine Names} is pivotal for the development of Thomas’s thought thereafter. It is 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

\textsuperscript{377} These references are, respectively: STh I, q. 5, a. 4; STh I, q. 5, a. 4; STh I, q. 19, a. 9, ad 2; STh I q. 39, a. 8, sol.; STh I, q. 91, a. 3, ad. 3; STh I-II, q. 105, a. 1, sc.

\textsuperscript{378} These references are, respectively: In I Pol., l. 3, n. 73; In II Pol., l. 4, n. 200; In VIII Eth. L. 8, n. 1654; In IX. Eth., l. 5, n. 1824; In I Post. Anal. L. 15; De Malo q., 2, a. 9, sol.

\textsuperscript{379} \textit{De perfectione vitae spiritualis} (1269); \textit{In Perihermeneias} (1269 – 1272); \textit{In evangelium Ioannis} (1269 – 1272); \textit{De virtutibus in communi} and \textit{De virtutibus cardinalibus} (1269 – 1272); \textit{In Liber de causis} (1269 – 1273); \textit{De unitate intellectus contra Averroistas} (1270); In Psalmos David and \textit{In Aristotelem De Anima} (1270 – 1272); \textit{Compendium theologiae} (1271 – 1273); \textit{In Arist. De caelo et mundo} (1272); \textit{Quaestiones quoddam lib. XII} (1272); \textit{In epis. Pauli ad Rom.} and \textit{De substantiis separatis} (1272 – 1273); \textit{Expositio in Symbolum Apostolorum} (1273); \textit{In Salutationem Angelicam} (1273); \textit{De decem praeceptis} (1273).

\textsuperscript{380} These references are, respectively: STh II-II, q. 103, a. 1, ad. 2; STh II-II, q. 145, a. 2, ad. 3; STh II-II q. 180, a. 2.
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.\textsuperscript{381} Dionysius fortifies for Thomas what had been for him, prior to his \textit{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 derives from the theonym beauty, can be considered a prototype for Thomas’s metaphysical doctrine of \textit{analogia}.\textsuperscript{382} Insofar as Thomas’s metaphysics, expressed through his original views on \textit{esse}, penetrate the other primary areas of his thinking, beauty is also present. The \textit{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.

\subsection{3.4.2. The Two Formulae of the \textit{Summa Theologiae}}

Thomas makes many elliptical references to beauty throughout his \textit{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

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{381} Kovach, \textit{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 gelegentlich zu behandeln” (56).
\item \textsuperscript{382} This has recently been noted by Te Velde, \textit{Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas}, 169.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
derives from the way that other statements on beauty throughout the *Summa* in some way correspond to the fundamental ideas these formulae express. 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*.

### 3.4.2.1. 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*. 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.

The particular details of the exact wording ought not be overlooked. Thomas is speaking about the beautiful rather than beauty, a distinction that he elaborated in his *Commentary on the Divine Names*. The particular details of the exact wording ought not be overlooked.

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384 *STh I, q. 5, a. 4, ad. 1*: Ad primum ergo dicendum quod pulchrum et bonum in subjecto quidem sunt idem, quia super eandem rem fundantur, sicut super formam, et propter hoc, bonum laudatur ut pulchrum. Sed ratione differunt. Nam bonum proprae 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 proprae pertinet ad rationem causae formalis.

385 Cf. Phelan, “The Concept of Beauty in St. Thomas Aquinas,” 162: “*Pulchra dicuntur quae visa placent* is not a haphazard description of the beautiful, but a statement that has been carefully weighed and carefully worded.”
Those things that please when seen do so because, as participants in beauty, they are full 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). 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. 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 debunked by his doctrine of analogia, so too would the charge against any ‘kalotheology.’ 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, as the beautiful, communicates itself as an event happening in between the real order and the order of thought. Beauty is ‘seen’ as the

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386 See section 3.3.3.3. above. Jacques Maritain, in Art and Scholasticism, 23, 161 n. 47, 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.

387 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, Thomas A. Carlson (trans.) (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), xxii – xv; 199 – 200, notes 5 and 6.

388 E.g., De Munnynck, “L’esthétique de St. Thomas d’Aquain,” 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.
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, beauty “is the actuality of being and form” and so is a principle of determination. For this reason it is also called ‘the beautiful’ “as having a necessary reference to a subject.” 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. But where modern aesthetics tends to associate intuition with a “confused” conception, 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. 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.

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389 Maurer, About Beauty, 16.
391 Cf. Maritain, Art and Scholasticism, 163, n. 56.
393 STh I, q. 1, a. 5, ad. 1: “Ad primum ergo dicendum quod nihil prohibet id quod est certius secundum naturam, esse quod 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, 1a, 1 (993b 9).
The pleasure that Thom 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, and angological, interpretation of beauty. The first line of encounter between the cognitive 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 of aesthetic experience. Of course, sensation is involved given the Aristotelian dimension in Thomas’s theory of knowledge. But more instructive for understanding Thomas’s use of *placere* is the content of chapter one, Book II of his *Summa Contra Gentiles*. Not only does the subject matter of this second book correspond to Thomas’s account of ‘the beautiful’ in his *Commentary on the Divine Names*, but the Psalm that opens the chapter indicates the fact that all the works of divine creation are a delight. Thomas takes it for granted that the encounter between the intellect and its object is *per se* a pleasure and that, as Dionysius himself asserts, all things can become a help to contemplation.

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 by 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 habituæ.397

As chapter two above 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 V, 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 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.398 As Aquinas reads the matter, every higher level of


398 Some of the earlier twentieth century scholars who discovered this Dionysian influence upon Thomas’s notion of esse include Aimé Solignac, “La doctrine de l’esse chez saint Thomas est-elle d’origine néoplatonicienne?” Archives de Philosophie 30 (1967): 339 – 352; 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
being signifies a greater share or participation in the intensive depth of being’s perfections. This is why, as noted above, Thomas comes to conclude that only human beings, that is to say only rational souls, can fully enjoy beauty. 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. 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

399 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 praemerinert vitae et vita sapientiae, ita existentia praeminerent viventibus et viventia sapientibus. Sed divinæ mentes Angelorum non carent esse, quinimmo habent excellentius super alia existentia creatæ et habent vitam super alia viventia et intelligent et cognoscent 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, perfectior in bonum habentes. His enim duobus modis, bonum in creaturis inventur: aut secundum participationem actuale 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 participantes, 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 possidetur.

This point also resonates in his Super Lib. de causis, p. 12 : Sed quia auctor huius libri non videtur poner formas separatas, quod hic dictur esse et vitam et intelligentiam in se invicem esse, est intelligentium secundum quod inventur in habitentibus esse, vivere et intelligere; quia in ipso esse secundum propriam rationem inventur causale vitam 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 intelligentiam sicut verba sonant, quod intelligentiae et vita sint in ipso esse duo esset, sed quia haec duae, prout sunt in ipso 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 intelligentium est in aliis comparationibus secundum quas unum istorum dictur esse in alio.

400 STh I, q. 91, a. 3, ad. 3.
401 De Veritate q. 22, a. 1, ad. 13.
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.402

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

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402 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 rationem deservientes, dicimus enim pulchra visibilia et pulchros sonos. In sensibilibus autem aliorum sensuum, non utimur nomine pulchritudinis, non enim dicimus pulchros sapore aut odores. Et sic patet quod pulchrum addit supra bonum, quendam ordinem ad vim cognoscitivam, ita quod bonum dicatur id quod simpliciter complacet appetitu; pulchrum autem dicatur id cujus ipsa apprehensio placet.*
as the essence of truth. Truth is the ratio of being whereby a more complete
determination of being’s plenitude is given over the structures of discursive, conceptual
reason.\textsuperscript{403}

When situated within the context of the \textit{Divine Names} commentary, Thomas’s \textit{placental}
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 power of being to give 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 \textit{Summa
Theologia} corresponds to this moment.

3.4.2.2. \textbf{THE Tria Requiruntur FORMULA}

Perhaps Thomas’s most well known passage on beauty is found in his treatise on the
Trinity, \textit{Prima Pars}, question 39, article 8. In a part of the \textit{respondeo}, Thomas provides the
necessary conditions for beauty, which is to say the conditions necessary for beauty both to
manifest itself and to become perceivable. \textit{Tria requiruntur} is a phrase commonly used by the
schoolmen to designate the conditions that, rather than being merely sufficient, are the \textit{sine
qua non} for the particular phenomenon in question.

\textsuperscript{403} Cf. De Veritate q. 15, a., 1; STh I, q. 16, a. 1; q. 39, a. 8.
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.

Question 39 of Thomas’s *Prima Pars* concerns the persons of the Trinity in reference to the essence. One of the general themes that runs 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, Augustine and the authors of Scripture (Jn 14:6; Ps 39:9, Is 65:1), fittingly appropriate the essential attributes to the persons of the

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405 Hillary of Poitiers, *De Trinitate*, bk II [PL 10, col. 51A].

406 Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, Bk. I, 5 [PL 34, col. 21]; *De Trinitate*, Bk. VI, c. 10 [PL 42, col. 932].
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 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.”

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.

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 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.

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407 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.

408 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 quodam. Secunda autem consideratio rei est, inquantum est una. Tertia consideratio rei est, secundum quod inept 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.
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, it indicates the prevailing influence in this passage 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. 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 *translare* or *derivare* that were used in his *Commentary on the Divine Names*. The only data available for a sufficient conjecture

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409 See section 3.3.3.1 above.
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.

Second, if the way to God derived from creatures in the *Summa* passage under consideration is not an exclusive, unilateral movement from creatures to God, then the use of the fourfold causality of the beautiful indicates the role of God 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 of the aspiring mind, but also the receptivity of the heart. Both knowledge and love become necessary in this way to God through creatures.410

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 Father, *species* in the Son, and *usus* in the Holy

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410 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 IV, 19; De Ver. q. 22, a. 3, ad. 4; q. 22, a. 11, ad. 5 & 7.
Spirit — applies to the first consideration, God considered absolutely in his being. The

 propriété 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.411

 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: intergritas 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.

 Intergritas, 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.412 This is the only place where

 Aquinas uses the term intergritas to refer to beauty or the beautiful, though there are areas of

 his corpus where similar ideas appear.413 Some claim that these other passages have misled

 scholars into erroneous interpretations of what Aquinas means by intergritas, wrongly

 believing that beauty somehow involves quite literally having a great size, or possessing the


411 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.

412 STh I, q. 39, a. 8: Quantum igitur ad primum, similitudinem habet cum proprio filii, inquantum est filius
habens in se vere et perfecte naturam patris.

413 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 exposits 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.”
capacity to impress the faculties.\textsuperscript{414} Others claim that \textit{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.\textsuperscript{415} Each of these appears to bring something important to understanding \textit{integritas} in this regard. It is also possible to examine, as Kovach does, other areas where Aquinas discusses \textit{perfectio} to discover clues as to what is meant by \textit{integritas} in this \textit{Summa} passage.\textsuperscript{416}

When the Trinitarian context is taken into consideration, however, the Son’s manifestation of the nature of the Father becomes normative for interpreting \textit{integritas} as a necessary condition of beauty. 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.\textsuperscript{417} 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). This dynamic is repeated on a creaturely context when 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 \textit{qua} beautiful has truly and perfectly the nature of beauty though in a way that neither merely reduplicates beauty nor is

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item E.g. Eco, \textit{The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas}, 248, n.85, asserts that De Bruyne wrongly interprets \textit{integritas} as a superabundance of being based upon the \textit{Sentences} commentary passage, and that Cardinal Mercier “crudely” claims that \textit{integritas} means a beautiful object must be “spacious and potent and able to stimulate the faculties vigorously.”
\item This is the view advanced by James Joyce as evident in his \textit{Stephen Hero} and his \textit{Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man}, both cited in Eco, \textit{The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas}, 249, n. 85.
\item STh I, q. 34, a. 2, ad. 3.
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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 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.\(^{418}\) 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.\(^{419}\) 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, it always discloses the excess

\(^{418}\) 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. Convenienser
enim ea quae sunt similia, unitur. Ipsius autem personae filii, qui est verbum Dei, attenditur, uno quidem
modo, communis convenientia ad totam creaturam. Quia verbum artificis, ideo conceptus eius, est similitudo
exemplaris eorum quae ab artifice sunt. Unde verbum Dei, quod est aeternus conceptus eius, est similitudo
exemplaris totius creaturarum. Emphasis added.

\(^{419}\) STh I, q. 4, a. 1; STh I, q. 91, a. 3, ad. 2.
of its being wherein lies its greater perfection. Thomas’s identification between a thing’s
derfection and its goodness, then, also makes sense within such an interpretation.\textsuperscript{420}

In examining the second necessary condition, Thomas explains that \textit{proportio} or
\textit{consonantia} “agrees with the Son’s property, inasmuch as he is the express image of the
Father.”\textsuperscript{421} 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.”\textsuperscript{422} Once again, in order to
discern the depths of meaning behind this necessary condition, some have searched every
passage where Thomas discusses \textit{proportio} and \textit{consonantia}.\textsuperscript{423} However, it might be more
revealing to look to his explanation regarding the relation between the image and the Son.

Thomas explains that the \textit{ratio} of an image includes a similitude of species, or at least
some sign of the species;\textsuperscript{424} which is to say, a manifestation of the difference that the image
bears from its examplar 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.\textsuperscript{425} 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

\textsuperscript{420} SCG I, c. 38; STh I, q. 5, a. 1; STh I, q. 4, preamb.

\textsuperscript{421} STh q. 39, a. 8: Quantum vero ad secundum, convenit cum proprio filii, inquantum est imago expressa
patris.

\textsuperscript{422} STh q. 39, a. 8: Unde videmus quod aliqua imago dicitur esse pulchra, si perfecte repraesentat rem, quamvis
turpem.


\textsuperscript{424} STh q. 35, a. 1: de ratione imaginis est similitudo. Non tamen quaecumque similitudo sufficit ad rationem
imagineis; sed similitudo quae est in specie rei, vel saltum in aliquo signo speciei.

\textsuperscript{425} STh q. 35, a. 1: Sed neque ipsa similitudo speciei sufficit vel figureae; 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.
specific sign.” 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. 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 an abstract norm, with 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 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 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

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426 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.  
427 STh q. 35, a. 2, ad. 1.
proportion to its superabundant origin \((\text{integritas})\). Its ugliness, in other words, is not part of the thing’s nature, but itself derives from a failure of \(\text{proportio} \text{ or } \text{consonantia}\).

Finally, \textit{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.”\(^{428}\) 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.”\(^{429}\) 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.”\(^{430}\) 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.

If, then, \textit{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 \textit{claritas} has an analogous referent. 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

\(^{428}\) \textsc{STh} q. 39, a. 8: Quantum vero ad tertium, convenit cum proprio filii, inquantum est verbum, quod quidem lux est, et splendor intellectus, ut Damascenus dicit. Et hoc tangent Augustinus cum dicit, \textit{tanquam verbum perfectum cui non desit aliquid, et ars quaedam omnipotentis Dei, et cetera.}\n
\(^{429}\) \textsc{STh} q. 34, a. 3: Verbum autem in mente conceptum, est repraesentativum omnis eius quod actu intelligitur.

\(^{430}\) \textsc{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.
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 precession 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 intellect’s desire to be creatively causal, to the extent it can, by generating images from the excess of its 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 an instrument for writing (pencil). 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 requisitum* 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.

Alber 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
anagogical 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, the good insofar as it has acquired 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 high middle ages, Aquinas brings to his reading concerns and issues that occupy his thoughts. 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.
Chapter 4
Conclusion

Beauty as a Divine Name and Contemporary Theological Aesthetics

4.1. Introduction

So what has this dissertation accomplished? The primary argument throughout has been that for both Dionysius and Thomas, beauty has an inherent and indispensable association with the divine. In order to understand beauty as it is presented in the Dionysian-Thomistic configuration, it is necessary to locate it within the context of a divine name. To put it another way, beauty cannot be grasped properly, either in Dionysius or Aquinas, if it is detached from the synthesis between theology and philosophy, or faith and reason, that is expressed in the phenomenon of a divine name. In Dionysius, this synthesis is a primary attribute of the entire corpus, so much so that it is almost impossible to discern where philosophy ends and where theology begins. In Thomas, the distinction between philosophy and theology is in general clearer; an attribute that in part derives from the milieu of scholastic thought. However, his *Commentary on the Divine Names* marks a point in his writing where this distinction yields to a synthesis reminiscent of the very Dionysian spirit of the text being commented upon.

In the eight hundred years since Thomas wrote, a rich tradition of commentary on his thought has arisen. This tradition could very easily be mined for further riches of interpretation and information on this issue. It is hoped that the present dissertation stimulates new interest in the way that this tradition has dealt with beauty insofar as it is a divine name. Examining the commentary tradition on Thomas Aquinas in this respect would make several contributions to the contemporary project of theological aesthetics. Since such an examination exceeds the scope of the present work, this final chapter proposes only to
gesture toward the contribution that the Dionysian-Thomistic configuration of beauty as a divine name makes to theological aesthetics by bringing it into critical comparison with certain contemporary practitioners of theological aesthetics. Three projects in particular are examined; namely, the projects of David Bentley Hart, Richard Viladesau, and Alejandro García-Rivera. While these figures appear arbitrary, each represents a distinct methodology for doing theological aesthetics. Consequently, they serve to bring out various dimensions of the Dionysian-Thomistic configuration of beauty as a divine name. This in turn serves to reveal the currency for contemporary theology embodied in the Dionysian-Thomistic configuration of beauty as a divine name.

The issue at the heart of this concluding chapter, then, concerns the way in which the Dionysian-Thomistic configuration of beauty as a divine name contributes to the development of a methodology for contemporary theological aesthetics. As the introduction explained, theological aesthetics is a mode of theological discourse that is receiving increased attention among contemporary theologians. As with many young enterprises, a diversity of modalities has arisen within theological aesthetics that is both beneficial and problematic: beneficial because the diversity of theological aesthetic bespeaks the breadth of subject matter that it is capable of addressing; problematic, because it risks splintering theological aesthetics to the neglect of any underlying unity. It is precisely here in the intersection of these two features of diversity where the question of methodology becomes most significant.

4.2. Infinite Beauty and Rhetoric Without Reserve: David Bentley Hart

David Bentley Hart’s The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth demonstrates the importance and efficacy that a proper understanding of Christian beauty
has for any theological enterprise. Whether one’s theological aspirations are oriented
toward contemplation and reflection of the Christian form itself, or whether one’s
theological aspirations are directed toward Christianity’s relation to culture and society,
beauty provides an indispensable dimension of Christian truth. Hart’s own efforts, which
embody a theological defense of Christian beauty, demonstrate the efficacy of beauty with
respect to both theological aspirations.

His text consists of three fundamental parts that synoptically comprise a
contemplation of Christianity’s internal form book-ended on either side by an engagement
with the cultural context. Part one consists primarily of what might be considered a
‘diagnosis of the socio-cultural milieu’ insofar as that milieu is influenced by postmodern
thought. Hart illuminates Christian beauty by contrasting it, or even opposing it, to the
various postmodern narratives of Lyotard, Derrida, Levinas, Deleuze, Heidegger, and Nancy,
all of which Hart reads as different appropriations of the Kantian sublime. Part two, which is
the most voluminous of the three parts, Hart calls a ‘dogmatic minora.’ This second part
consists of four subsections – Trinity, Creation, Salvation, and Eschaton – that are
elaborated from the position of beauty’s intrinsic relevance to Christianity’s self-
understanding. Part three then closes with what might be considered a ‘cultural prescription’
intended to establish that the application of Christian beauty to the cultural context generates

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2 Hart is well aware of the complexity, or perhaps vacuity, of the term ‘postmodern.’ He therefore expends a few pages in the introduction explaining his own use of the term (5–8): “‘Postmodernity,’ for the purpose of this text, marks out a certain territory in current intellectual culture, a general convergence of various ideologies and methods, each of whose pronouncements might justifiably object to so tidy and comprehensive an abstraction, because all other terms that could be used – ‘poststructuralism,’ ‘late modernity,’ ‘deconstruction,’ etc. – suffer from too confined a range of associations. In the … sense given the word above – the ascendency of rhetoric over dialectic – the postmodern indicates an auroral astonishment following upon a nocturnal oblivion: the West at long last awakes from the nightmare of philosophy … to rejoice in the irreducibly aesthetic character and ultimate foundationlessness of ‘truth” (5).
a rhetoric with the power to persuade every created entity to the fullness of its vision. With this rhetoric, which is nothing other than Christ himself, as its primary ‘argument’ the Christian evangel alone offers the only true way to peace.

Both as it appears in *The Beauty of the Infinite* and elsewhere, Hart’s work continues to exercise significant influence upon contemporary theological discourse, especially insofar as theology concerns itself with beauty and the aesthetic. His project is to a large extent related to the issue of *beauty as a divine name*. For the most part, the relation is not explicit, although Hart often praises the Dionysian synthesis of theology and beauty as an achievement of the highest importance to the Christian faith. Thomas’s contribution to the issue, however, rarely receives any thorough treatment. Aside from the few pages where Hart endorses Thomas’s doctrines of analogy and participation, there are only occasional references or ornamental remarks. Nevertheless, given the subject matter, a critical comparison between Hart’s project and the Dionysian-Thomistic understanding of *beauty as a divine name* could potentially occupy several pages of text. For the sake of brevity, and to keep the matter focused and ordered, the following comparison draws out a few of the more salient themes, which enable an intermediation between Hart’s project and the Dionysian-Thomistic understanding of beauty.

**4.2.1. Being as Divine Plenitude: Beauty and the Sublime**

One of the most insightful elements of Hart’s work is his unmasking of the dominant narratives of the so-called postmodern project as the many faces of the Kantian sublime. As Hart’s analysis reveals, by appropriating the Kantian sublime in the various

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3 Other major works by Hart include: *Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and Its Fashionable Enemies* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2009); *The Doors of the Sea* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005); *In the Aftermath: Provocations and Laments* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008); and several articles.
modes of postmodern philosophical discourse – the ‘differential sublime’ of Derrida and Lyotard, the ‘cosmological sublime’ of Deleuze and Foucault, the ‘ethical sublime’ of Levinas, and the ‘ontological sublime’ of Heidegger and Nancy – the ‘postmodern’ project displaces beauty by elevating the sublime as the ‘name’ of thought’s elusive other. No longer is the being of reality, the mind’s ‘other,’ a faithful, trustworthy gift of a share in the excess plenitude of the divine life itself. Instead, in the postmodern eidos it has become the legionary clamor of the indeterminate dark forces of the sublime. Where modern thinkers read these forces as a challenge to human reason to realize the zenith of its own greatness as ‘master and possessor of nature’ (in Descartes’ words), the postmodern appropriation mediates them with far greater chastity and humility of purpose. According to Hart, however, postmodernity’s is a superficial chastity and a false humility that hides a more primordial, pagan-like worship of the sublime’s fundamental nihil. If the modern project is read as the human attempt to master, on its own terms and within the (purity) of human reason, the darkness of the unknown, postmodernity is the final, parodically religious, acquiescence to these forces.

According to Hart, postmodernity can be defined precisely as the many narratives of the sublime (44). Hart juxtaposes his analysis of the eventual rise of the sublime to the preceding event of modernity, which, at least within philosophical thought, he characterizes as the ‘dissolution of being.’ As Hart describes it, modernity is:

the disintegration of that radiant unity wherein the good, the true and the beautiful coincided as infinite simplicity and fecundity, communicating themselves to a world whose only reality was its variable participation in their gratuity; and the divorce between this thought of being, as the supereminent fullness of all perfection, and the thought of God (who could no longer be conceived as being and the well-spring of all being, revealing his glory in the depth of splendor in which created things are shaped and sustained) (44).

The loss of this view of being occurred with such rapidity, according to Hart, that being could only be reconfigured in opposite terms: “as veil or absence, thought or unthought, but in either case impenetrable – the veil that veils even itself, the empty name that adds nothing
to the essence of beings, sheer uniform existence.” (44). When being is thus reconfigured, God’s transcendence can only be preserved and ‘thought’ as God’s absolute absence, “his exile beyond or hiddenness within the veil of being, occasionally breaking through perhaps, but only as an alienum or an explanatory cause” (44). Modernity’s disintegration of being’s capacity to serve as a communication of divine perfection bequeaths to postmodernity an empty vestige. Rather than filling this vestige with content, postmodernity identifies it as the sublime that resides beyond any communication, any representation or any knowability.

In Hart’s analysis, it is the Kantian configuration that is taken up by postmodern thinkers as the most compelling account of the sublime. The predominant feature that the various appropriations of the Kantian sublime emphasize is unrepresentability. This feature introduces a crucial difference from the configuration of the infinite as beauty, both in the historical conception of beauty and in Kant’s own treatment of beauty. Beauty for Kant identifies an object of a disinterested liking,⁴ which elicits a pleasure derived from a universal judgment without a concept⁵ and perceived in the object’s form of purposiveness without knowledge of any specific purpose.⁶ It is something that, without any concept at all, is cognized as necessarily desirable.⁷ While beauty eludes the determination of concepts, it identifies the realm of nature insofar as nature somehow conforms to the human faculties of presentation and representation. The most significant feature of beauty, according to Kant, is

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that in its non-conceptual conformity to the faculty of human judgment it carries in its form some sense of a given object’s purpose.

In contrast, the sublime entirely ruptures and renders impotent any sense of purpose in human judgment. Consequently, the sublime reveals the weakness and inability of the human power of representation. It is ‘incommensurate’ with the human powers of exhibition and ‘violent’ to human imagination.\(^8\) Evaluating this, Kant writes:

> Hence the feeling of the sublime is a feeling of displeasure that arises from the imagination’s inadequacy, in an aesthetic estimation of magnitude, for an estimation of reason, but is at the same time also a pleasure aroused by the fact that this very judgment, namely, that even the greatest power of sensibility is inadequate, is itself in harmony with rational ideas, insofar as striving toward them is still a law for us.\(^9\)

When the imagination fails to represent magnitude or greatness in a thing, it encounters the sublime. The feeling of displeasure that accompanies this failure is immediately transformed into pleasure the moment that the mind realizes in this failure its primordial connection with that which cannot be measured. The sublime, therefore, identifies the conflict between reason and imagination. This conflict, however, gives rise to a purposiveness that establishes the reality of the sublime. As Kant explains it, the conflict gives rise “to a feeling that we have a pure and independent reason, or a power for estimating magnitude, whose superiority cannot be made intuitable by anything other than the inadequacy of that power which in exhibiting magnitudes of sensible objects is itself unbounded.”\(^10\) The sublime is Kant’s name for the totality that is nowhere found existing in nature but that is discovered only through a failure of human reason. Nature itself can never contain the sublime, though it may hint at its presence. Only the human mind, through its power of reason, is capable of interpreting

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these hints as the unrepresentable shimmers of the sublime, and in so doing come to realize its own true calling.

It is in the sublime where thought discovers its own infinitude, but it does so over and against the natural world of objects. The natural world of objects is diminished in value by the mind’s encounter with its own infinitude in the sublime. Reminiscent of Plato’s cave, finite objects obscure or even conceal the full vocation of the mind’s relationship to the sublime. The mind must will itself past the impediment of the world in order to discover its true destiny. And the impact that all this has on God as creator is severe. As later Kantians explain, Kant’s account of the sublime ‘transmutes’ his predecessors’ theological account of the sublime’s moral significance, which regards the sublime as an occasion for reflection upon our own infinitude before the grandeur of God. Kant, in contrast, sees in the sublime the elevation of humanity rather than God: “God’s creation is humbled before our free reason, and even the sublimity of God himself can be appreciated only through the image of our own autonomy.”

In light of all this, Hart’s appraisal appears insightful: “The impression a sober reading of Kant’s treatment of the sublime should, in fact, leave is one of extraordinary rationalist triumphalism, a Promethean sense of the self’s ultimate transcendence over all of nature, even its most awful and monstrous effects” (46). Hart points out that postmodern appropriators of the Kantian sublime tend to focus on the ‘irrational’ or ‘unthinkable’ aspects of Kant’s project as they scurry to the regions of the postmetaphysical that are nowhere to be found in Kant himself. Nevertheless, they remain faithful to the fundamental

\[11\] Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Experience of Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 259. Hart’s own citation of this passage is somewhat misleading, as it gives the impression that Guyer is unequivocally endorsing the explanation of Kant that he puts forth. In fact, Guyer is writing in a far less evaluative mode at this point in his text.
equivocation in Kant that the distinction between the sublime and the beautiful establishes. It is precisely here where Hart’s project demonstrates its continuity with the Dionysian-Thomistic configuration of beauty as a divine name.

Hart’s confrontation between beauty and the Kantian sublime brings to light a long overlooked dimension of the dominant forces within both the modern and postmodern philosophical project(s). This dimension concerns above all the question of determinacy, not of particular things (though this is involved) but of the way in which the mind’s other can be configured in relation to the question of determinacy. The Kantian sublime, both in Kant’s own account and in the account of his postmodern commentators, identifies the mind’s other as a cognitive ‘realm’ characterized by its utter indeterminacy, by which is meant an emptiness, or absence, of all determinate content. The sublime interrupts the mind’s efforts to represent, and hence, determine the various objects that appear before it. Since the sublime can only be discovered in the realm of nature by the mind itself, the intelligibility that nature generates, that is to say its beauty, is uprooted and replanted in the mind’s power of judgment. As Hart observes regarding Kant’s view of beauty and the sublime, “[t]he beautiful adumbrates nothing beyond the self, and thought must traverse it, even transgress it, to escape either triviality or illusion: the beautiful leaves off where the sublime begins, and the sublime itself falls away when it has sufficiently suggested to reason the formless power of the infinite” (46 – 47). For postmodernity generally speaking, then, the infinite is conceived as a totality of indeterminate power that serves only to cease human efforts of representation and communication.

Hart demonstrates his alignment with the Dionysian-Thomistic configuration of beauty as a divine name not only by opposing this modern/postmodern view of the infinite, but
in directly identifying the infinite, God, as beauty itself. Where the sublime empties the infinite of all determinations, Hart’s configuration, which can be read as a rehabilitation of many of the Dionysian-Thomistic principles, establishes the infinite as divine beauty itself. In God, Hart writes,

beauty and the infinite entirely coincide, for the very life of God is one of – to phrase it strangely – infinite form; and when such a God creates, the difference between created beauty and the divine beauty it reflects subsists … in the analogy between the determinate particularities of the world and that always greater, supereminent determinacy in whose splendor they participate (131).

The identification of beauty with the divine, for Hart as much as for Dionysius and Thomas, reveals beauty, and thus being, as a plenitude of determinate promise. As beauty itself, God is the overfull source of all that is, was and will be determined through formal particularity. The infinite as divine beauty is not a cognitive space of indeterminacy, but a plenitude of ontological fullness, capable of infinite determinations.

Hart also shares the impact that this Dionysian-Thomistic configuration of beauty has upon the nature of intelligibility. For both Dionysius and Thomas, beauty identifies the divine self-communication (i.e., the good) as this communication donates the conditions of visibility and intelligibility. In the commentaries of both Albert and Thomas, Dionysian beauty is located between the good and the true; beauty is the intelligibility of the good prior to its entering the modality of truth where it becomes determinate intelligibility. Dionysius emphasizes this dimension of beauty in his symbolism and his liturgical/hymnological approach to the divine names. Beauty in this regard is an intelligibility that exceeds the limits of conceptual, discursive reason even as it gives itself over to the movement and process of discursive reasoning. Hart too constructs his theological account of beauty in similar fashion. Christian knowledge of the world, Hart insists, does not derive from some positive reconstruction of sufficient reason, “but through an openness before glory, a willingness to
reorient one’s will toward the light of being, and to receive the world as gift, in response to which the most fully adequate discourse of truth is worship, prayer and rejoicing” (132).

Or as he further explains it:

…the truth of being is “poetic” before it is “rational” – indeed is rational precisely as a result of its supreme poetic coherence and richness of detail – and cannot be truly known if this order is reversed. Beauty is the beginning and end of all true knowledge: really to know anything, one must first love, and having known one must finally delight; only this “corresponds” to the Trinitarian love and delight that creates. The truth of being is the whole of being, in its event, groundless, and so in its every detail revelatory of the light that grants it (132).

The plenitude that characterizes beauty is not, for Hart, a material plenitude, but a plenitude of intelligible content. In this, he aligns himself clearly with Dionysius and Thomas, for whom beauty establishes being as an intensive depth of perfection that communicates the divine itself. This means, for Hart, that the Christian understanding of beauty is analogical in two senses:

in the simple analytic sense, that whatever “beauty” means is grasped only by analogy, by constant exposure to countless instances of its advent, and through constant and continuous revision (this is because, in theological terms, God is the “primary analogate” to whom beauty is ascribed); and in the more radically ontological sense, that beauty is not some property discretely inherent in particular objects, but indwells the analogical relationship of all things, each to the other, as a measure of the dynamism of their involvement with one another (18).

Both senses are clearly in line with the Dionysian-Thomistic configuration of beauty. And it is the coincidence of these two senses in which beauty can be conceived as the fuller, more poetic sense of truth. With respect to Dionysius, the view that truth is poetic before it is rational is scarcely controversial. The extent to which Thomas can be said to advance this view, however, is more complicated and controversial in light of the massive commentary tradition that follows Aquinas. Much of how Thomas can be aligned with this poetic priority of truth depends upon what exactly the ‘poetic’ means. As noted in chapter three above, Thomas makes many remarks that assert the superiority of love over cognition in the intellect’s momentum toward its desired object. Furthermore, his entire Commentary on the Divine Names demonstrates how faith illuminates truth before reason does, though reason
always provides a necessary contribution. Love and faith are more closely aligned with “the poetic” if, following Plato, “the poetic” is considered as a mode of intellection beyond, though not opposed to, the limits of (discursive) rationality. The poetic in this sense is the excess fullness of intelligibility that is contracted by rational thought into a more determined mode of truth. In any case, Thomas would most likely assert that the ‘truth of being’ is a convenientia between the poetic and the rational.

4.2.2. For or Against Metaphysics? Rhetoric and Dialectic

One of the central themes that occupies Hart’s essay is the so-called death of metaphysics upon which so much of the postmodern project erects its own edifices. As the present dissertation establishes, the issue of beauty as a divine name is deeply bound up with metaphysics in some way. Hart maintains a similar position with respect to his own theological configuration of beauty, but the contours of his position are not easy to discern in the dense, thicket of his anti-postmodern apologetic. The comparison between Hart’s project and the Dionysian-Thomistic configuration of beauty as a divine name becomes most relevant with respect to this issue.

Although Hart establishes his opposition to the postmodern proclamation of the death of metaphysics early and often, his own approach to metaphysics as such is not always concise or clear. It could be said that he is advancing something rather novel in the history of metaphysical thought, and its novelty tends to generate ambiguity. Before evaluating this ambiguity, a closer examination of Hart’s critique of postmodern thought as it concerns metaphysics will serve to contextualize the matter.

Hart argues that the ‘suspicion of metanarratives,’ which is the fundamental impulse behind every declaration of the ‘death of metaphysics,’ as itself another will-to-power
narrative disguised as the great liberation of otherness. As he puts it, “[s]urely the power to narrate the end of Western metaphysics is … a power to approach all narratives from a postmetaphysical vantage and to pronounce upon them – even in advance of their appearance – a final verdict” (420). As postmetaphysical thought takes the form of a ‘radical hermeneutic,’ in the sense provided by Heidegger and his heirs, it succumbs to the same self-proclaimed mastery over all narratives that it abjures so vehemently in ‘metaphysics.’ If the violence of metaphysics consists in both its “abstract campaign to master the principles of the real” and in the actual events of historical violence that such a campaign has at times engendered, then the renunciation of this power may in fact embody a “subtler kind of power, a final violence (or a violence of finality), the tyranny of twilight” (421). Because a postmetaphysical hermeneutic of suspicion assumes for itself a position of final arbiter with an almost omniscient awareness of the end of all narratives, its very renunciation of control over all difference becomes the metanarrative condition for all differences, its resistance to every totalizing motion becomes the metanarrative condition of any motion. This means that ‘radical hermeneutics’ cannot avoid the violent suppression of certain differences and motions that transgress the limits of intelligibility – limits (nb!) that radical hermeneutics alone claims to establish.

To be more to the point, there is a violence that is itself intrinsic to the project of radical hermeneutics. Hart sees this violence as the “inevitable concommittance – a shadow – of a benign passivity” (424). The advantage that is won by this benign passivity, an advantage acquired by a condition of resignation derived from a faithful reception of the truth of the ‘end of metaphysics,’ becomes little more than a simulacrum of the Enlightenment’s mythos of neutral rationality. Similar to the neutral rationality that it
opposes, radical hermeneutics also places itself beyond the mud and grime of the particular through its privileged and universal knowledge of what can or cannot appear even before the event of appearance at all (424). “It declares an end to the war of truths,” Hart explains, “by resolving (or dissolving) every disagreement into its own truth; the hermeneutical space is an unassailable site, an Archimedean point that shifts every tradition that arrives away from the center” (424). In essence, postmodernity’s attempts to do justice to particularity and difference, by elevating particularity and difference to an absolute status, end up eliminating precisely what makes a thing particular and different. When particularity and difference are transformed into ‘triumphant’ universal categories, they are in effect emptied all their constitutive content as they undergo the “common”-izing procedure of categorical thought. This is not to say that thinking particularity and difference with a certain emphasis is always an ignis fatuus. Hart acknowledges that within any encounter of differing particularities, whether of individuals or communities, violence is always a real possibility. Some measure of prudence, then, can be recognized in the aspirations of postmetanarrative hermeneutics. But for Hart, this should not hide the fact that this hermeneutical project is itself violent even if it is enacted against violence. “[I]t is a practice that necessarily ignores the sheer irreducible complexity of the relationship between community and identity,” explains Hart, “and between the particularity of the other and the particularity of a tradition; it overlooks the degree to which communities and distinct names are often the only form of resistance against “totality,” and the degree to which metanarratives are the only way of liberation from metanarratives” (426).

To be sure, Hart’s is not a defense of metaphysics over and against its postmodern coroners. This is a difficult point to recognize since Hart spends so much effort attacking
those who attack metaphysics. Rather, Hart’s critique is aimed at exposing the intrinsic and inescapable hypocrisy of any attempt to overcome rhetorical violence outside the Christian evangel. Without the penetration of the Christian form into its deepest concerns, thought is incapable of avoiding violence. In other words, for Hart, it is not so much that there is no end of metaphysics; on this he remains somewhat circumlocutional. Rather, any so-called end to metaphysics, predicated upon a final decision to relinquish all rhetorical violence, cannot be inaugurated by the various postmodern projects because these only introduce another, subtler kind of violence.

When it comes to his own approach to metaphysics, Hart’s is not an easy position to pin down. In part this is because Hart himself rightly recognizes that the name ‘metaphysics’ itself signifies a diversity of modes, which ultimately means that “… it is a word to which neither any stable nor any very useful, meaning can be assigned” (8). Throughout history, metaphysics has been expressed through a multitude of idioms and, as a result, has come to signify a multitude of enterprises. As Ricouer notes, “The unity of “the” metaphysical is an after-the-fact construction of Heideggarian thought, intended to vindicate his own labor of thinking and to justify the renunciation of any kind of thinking that is not a genuine overcoming of metaphysics.”\(^{12}\) Hart sketches out a number of possible meanings that the name ‘metaphysical’ could be used to identify, though it is a mostly rhetorical list that plays upon the various caricatures of metaphysics constructed by its postmodern detractors. His point in doing so is to isolate the sort of metaphysics that has in fact been laid to rest:

Undoubtedly, though, in a general sense the situation of Western thought is now one in which a certain critique of a certain “metaphysics” has been quite successfully prosecuted, but one of very limited scope: within the narrative of Western philosophy, with its myth of independent reason and the power of the mind to transcend the limits of language and determine the limits of possible

knowledge by the agency of unaided reason, metaphysical speculation (as a purely deductive enterprise of rational reflection) proves finally to be a contradiction of the terms of that narrative. This is the “nihilistic vocation” of the metaphysical, which Heidegger, in Nietzsche’s wake, identified with such acuity (9).

With this sort of metaphysics isolated, Hart is able to distance it from the kind of metaphysics that in his view one finds in the tradition of Christian thought, a tradition in which beauty had, until the modern period, performed an indelible and formative role. Hart’s project aspires to renew a metaphysics founded upon a “theological reappropriation of … the “covenant of light” – a trust in the evidence of the given, an understanding of knowledge as an effect of the eros stirred by the gift of the world’s truth …”(145). This is the foundation for the kind of metaphysics Hart maintains is intrinsic to Christianity (146).

What exactly is involved in this kind of metaphysics and how does it compare to the metaphysical foundation upon which the Dionysian-Thomistic configuration of beauty stands? There are two interrelated features of Hart’s metaphysics that provide the substance of a response to this question.

The first concerns the relation between Hart’s metaphysics and the kind of classical metaphysics that shapes the scholastic tradition, represented most famously by Aquinas. This sort of metaphysics is largely Aristotelian, though there are undeniable Platonic and Neoplatonic dimensions mediated largely through the Areopagite. Metaphysics in this regard is the investigation of being as being through a consideration of objects of existence that are free from both matter and motion. It is ‘meta’ in both the temporal sense as the scientia that comes after physics and in the ‘spatial’ sense as the scientia that investigates objects “beyond” the natural world (physis). As Thomas and many other schoolmen knew well, by virtue of its objects metaphysics, in the second sense just noted, is a cognitive activity that holds a unique relationship to theology. There is an indispensible ‘poetic’ or ‘contemplative’ dimension to
this sense of metaphysics. When this dimension is either ignored or relinquished, as occurs with Kant and his heirs who seek to restructure metaphysics according to mathematics, metaphysics struggles and eventually collapses under the weight of its own purpose. For the metaphysics that inspires the scholastic thought of Aquinas and many of his fellow schoolmen, however, the poetic dimension is very much preserved. A tremendous amount of literature has been produced on this mode of metaphysics especially in its Thomistic idiom, making it far too involved to consider in detail here.13

What is important to note is the fact that for all the ink that Hart spills with respect to metaphysics, very little of that ink is directed to metaphysics in this scholastics, or Thomistic, sense of the term. Hart does enlist Aquinas as an ally in combating the Heideggarian polemic against classical metaphysics, emphasizing the singular achievement of Thomistic esse as the infinite fullness of being, along with a laudatory appraisal of Thomistic analogy and participation (222 – 225). But in this case, Hart’s analysis is intended merely to discredit Heidegger and his role in the so-called ‘death of metaphysics.’ For the most part, the kind of metaphysics that is arguably latent in Dionysius and explicit in Aquinas, that is in many respects fostered from a theological account of beauty and which serves to nourish a proper account of beauty, is absent from Hart’s project.14

The second feature of Hart’s metaphysics, from which flows the lifeblood of the entire work, serves to indicate exactly why he is scarcely concerned with his lack of attention to any scholastic mode of metaphysics. As the title of the final part of his book suggests,

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13 Helpful studies on this matter among the literature already noted in this dissertation include: O’Rourke, Pseudo Dionysius on the Metaphysics of Aquinas; Wippel, The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas; Te Velde, Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas.

14 Hart’s project has been criticized for its lack of a more robust metaphysics to ground his appeals to analogy. See Peter Casarella’s review of Hart’s book in Cultural Encounters, A Journal for the Theology of Culture, Winter (2005), 99 – 100.
Hart’s metaphysics is most fittingly described as ‘rhetoric without reserve.’ Describing this mode of metaphysics, Hart differentiates it from both a modern mode and a postmodern mode:

Christian thought stands outside the opposition that is presumed within either a metaphysics of ontological hypotaxis (such as any idealism describes) or a metaphysics of ontological rupture (such as postmodernism professes); it knows only the beauty of being’s parataxis, its open, free, serial, and irreducible declaration of glory; it grasps being neither as an immobile synthesis that stands over against and sublates every utterance, nor as the sheer cacophony of aleatory violence, but as rhetoric, the outward address and proclamation of the God who has eternally spoken, who speaks, and who will speak, the God who “others” himself in himself and contains and surrenders otherness as infinite music, infinite discourse. As a “metaphysics” of creation, it rejects every claim regarding the identist “substance” that “underlies” plurality… (181 – 182).

Configured in this way, metaphysics relinquishes its bond with any necessary grounds and becomes a rhetorical force whose object is a peaceful persuasion. In contrast to the scholastic-Thomist model of metaphysics, which has as its object ens inquantum est ens, the object of Hart’s metaphysics is the divine itself given through the form of Christ.

Metaphysics in this sense is a mode of thinking grounded on the fact that “God … is not a hierarchy of prior essence and posterior manifestation, indeterminate being and then paradoxical expression, but is always already expression, already Word and Likeness” (182). With references to Word and Likeness, Hart unknowingly appears to echo aspects of Thomas’s Trinitarian configuration of beauty. However, whether or not Hart believes that metaphysics, in either its classical Greek or scholastic mode, can be effective as a science is not at issue here. Rather, if it is to furnish the proper grammar of theology, Hart contends,

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15 Hart’s idiom is well known for employing obscure words, or for using words in abstruse ways. By metaphysics of ontological hypotaxis, I take Hart to mean a kind of imitation of a Neoplatonism found in many forms of idealism whereby one hierarchical level of being is directly dependent on the prior, and that this is the condition of every level throughout the hierarchy. The emphasis in such a metaphysics is identity and unity over against difference and otherness. Or to put it another way, difference is always mediated and adjudicated by a “superior” level of being. By metaphysics of ontological rupture I take him to mean a metaphysics that emphasizes the other or the different so much so that the consequence can only be communicated with the language of ‘rupture’ or an interruption of unity. In contrast with both of these, the beauty of being’s parataxis identifies the way in which a properly Christian metaphysics holds unity and difference together by emphasizing beauty’s conjunctive role. Beauty, in other words, is the conjunction that hold difference and unity, otherness and identity, in a peaceful and meaningful bond.
metaphysics must in effect cast off its fetters of dialectic and instead turn wholly to rhetoric (142, 183, 442).

For Hart, beauty is being itself (146). And since beauty is the endless surplus of form given by the divine life itself, every attempt to acquire a dialectical foothold over the necessity of being is ultimately incapable of avoiding violence. “Violence thus arises only as a result of a desire not ordered toward the other as love because not directed ultimately toward God’s infinity; for only in his light do we truly see” (145). God’s light is infinite, while any principle derived from a metaphysics that relies on dialectic is ultimately finite. Reading the other in light of a finite principle of dialectic, then, is to not read that other in God’s infinite light. Because the other qua other is already a moment of the divine rhetoric, “an icon in which the infinite is pleased uniquely to disclose itself,” the most “original” and accurate apprehension of that other “lies in the beauty of rhetoric” (144).

All of this, as theological, refers back to the form of Christ himself. “Christian rhetoric, therefore, offers Christ as rhetoric, as beauty, but also as presence, mediated aesthetically by an endless parataxis of further “statements” for just that reason all the more present … the church’s only task is to enact and offer this form” (148). With beauty as its front line, Hart argues, the Christian evangel can confidently march into the thick of postmodernity’s battle for allegiances without selling its soul to any rhetoric of violence. The most powerful and convincing argument that the church has at its disposal is the form of Christ, which, in every moment of testimony, must precede the marshalling of any form of reason. Of course, this means that Christianity cannot concede postmodernity’s reduction of every discourse to a strategy of power or its belief that any rhetorical transaction cannot
avoid some appeal to an inescapable, original violence. Thus, while rhetoric can avoid violence, it is questionable at best whether the same can be said for dialectic.

Clearly, in this aspect of his project Hart differs from the Dionysian-Thomistic approach to beauty as a divine name. This does not mean that the Dionysian-Thomistic approach does not express anything similar to the ideas expressed in Hart’s ‘rhetoric without reserve.’ The idea that every entity is an icon through which the divine infinity discloses its own beauty is certainly comparable to many Dionysian ideas, and in a much less obvious way some of Thomas’s ideas. Like Hart, Dionysius constructs his entire corpus on the fact of the Incarnation, which is to say from the perspective that the event of Christ radically transforms the Greek metaphysics he uses to express it. At the same time, however, the very use of Greek metaphysics by Dionysius and then Aquinas, transformed though it becomes, is grounds upon which to assert that they would not share Hart’s overly negative appraisal and dismissal of that Greek sense of metaphysics:

For their parts, classical “metaphysics” and postmodernism belong to the same story; each, implying or repeating the other, conceives being as a plain upon which forces of meaning and meaninglessness converge in endless war; according to either, being is known in its oppositions, and oppositions must be overcome or affirmed, but in either case as violence … there is a specular infinity in mutually defining opposites: Parmenides and Heraclitus (sic) gaze into one another’s eyes, and the story of being springs up between them; just as two mirrors set before one another prolate their depths indefinitely; repeating an opposition that recedes forever along an illusory corridor without end, seeming to span all horizons and contain all things, the dialectic of Apollo and Dionysius oscillates without resolution between endless repetitions of the same emptiness, the same play of reflection and inversion (151).

In this passage, Hart’s objections to dialectic become clear. Dialectic, in whatever idiom it may be found, is always a violence since it grounds its most fundamental impulse, that is to say, exists as a mode of cognition, on a seemingly necessary opposition. Any appeal to a ‘necessary opposition’ is an appeal to violence as the fundamental ground of thought. A generous reading could perhaps take Hart to be attacking a very particular mode of dialectic. But the lack of any specification of this in his project makes such generosity difficult to
justify. Rather, dialectic in Hart’s analysis is read equivocally as an always unmediated difference, which only the Christ-form can bring to a peaceful mediation.

For the Dionysius-Thomistic approach, and Albert could certainly be included here, dialectic is not *ipso facto* and inherently associated with a necessary opposition. Where Hart reads dialectic always in terms of an equivocal difference, these thinkers read it as a relation that provides a moment of mediation. For these thinkers, the very situation in which the human person lives and moves and has her being is dialectical. The contingent nature of being means that thought is always encountering an other in the pursuit of its desire. Thought is dialectical not because Dionysius, Thomas and Albert believe that human nature is inherently constituted by endless conflict but because the beauty of being, given as a gift from God, exceeds any apparatus available to somehow capture, or contain, the fullness. So long as God is the glorious other, human being cannot escape its dialectical conditions. To be sure, Hart also recognizes this. But his response, in rejecting a particular extreme mode of dialectic, ends up on the very opposite extreme: there is no totality to be captured, but only the infinite beauty of being that renders every being equally detached from any ground or foundation. Only the form of Christ, then, can secure the knowledge and love that is sought in every act undertaken.

In Hart, then, one finds a renewal in many ways of the kind of approach to beauty that originates in Dionysius and develops in Aquinas. Most significant is the direct identification of beauty with God. This identification is the most important dimension of Hart’s project as it secures the possibility of overcoming the indeterminate emptiness of the totality honored by postmodernism by reestablishing the excessive plenitude of the infinite worshiped in Christianity. Equally significant is the way that beauty identifies the plenitude
of being’s intelligibility, as the mediation whereby the good gives itself over the
determination of truth. For Hart, beauty is the infinite goodness of truth, but a truth that is
nowhere exhausted because it is everywhere present. Only through beauty can the good’s
kenotic surrender to truth be perceived as the glory of a God who never ceases to pour
himself out for others. Consequently Christianity, in worshiping and proclaiming this truth
as the presence of the God in the crucified one, has a unique investment in beauty.

The question lingers, however: does Hart perhaps neglect relevant aspects of the
traditional thought on beauty found in the Diysian-Thomistic approach? Does Hart, in
other words, too easily dismiss the place and necessity, not to mention the various forms, of
dialectic within this tradition? Or more directly still, can Hart’s reading of dialectic as
equivocal opposition, that is, as an unmediated difference without reserve, be characterized
as faulty if not altogether wrong? Although Hart rightly recognizes how dialectical
approaches often conceal their underlying rhetoric (149), does he neglect to recognize how
all rhetoric in some way cannot avoid appealing to an underlying dialectic? How can he so
often and firmly advocate the benefits of analogia without a properly developed dialectical
foundation? Can his ‘rhetoric without reserve’ brand of metaphysics sustain a truly
theological aesthetics?

4.3. Beauty and the Transcendental Turn: Richard Viladesau

The primary characteristic that marks Viladesau’s project, and what distinguishes it
from Hart’s approach, is its accommodation to the modern project in general. Where
Hart’s project is polemical and apologetic, Viladesau takes a much more comprehensive and

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University Press, 1999). References to this text will appear parenthetically in the main body.
constructive approach. Where Hart focuses his project on beauty, Viladesau locates his considerations of beauty in a broader attempt to construct a methodology for theological aesthetics; that is to say, beauty is subordinated to the aesthetic. This is not to say that Viladesau’s project bears little relation to the Dionysian-Thomistic configuration of beauty as a divine name. Periodically throughout his study Viladesau refers to Aquinas and Dionysius, including a section that examines, however briefly, Thomas’s consideration of beauty found in his Commentary on the Divine Names (114 – 117). The extent to which the Dionysian-Thomistic approach to beauty informs Viladesau’s own project and the ramifications this has for his theological aesthetics, however, remains to be considered.

4.3.1. The Transcendental Conditions of the Aesthetic

Viladesau’s study is impressive not only for the breadth of its scholarship but also for the diversity and insight of its literary analysis. The strong theological appeal to literature along with a variety of other art forms illustrates the fact that Viladesau’s primary goal is to “approach the aesthetic from the point of view of a “fundamental” theology” (ix).

Consequently, following the modern impulse, beauty becomes subordinated to what is taken to be a broader and more extensive phenomenon, namely, the ‘aesthetic’. He therefore opens his work by explaining that the nature of theological aesthetics, which he believes includes an “aesthetic theology,” is in the most general terms “the use by theology of the language, methods and contents of the aesthetic realm” (38). That is to say, a “theopoiesis” – the “art of making theological discourse affecting and beautiful” (38) – is relevant, if not essential, to every mode of theology.

Viladesau stresses this fact to distinguish aspects of his project from Von Balthasar, for whom any ‘aesthetic theology’ is a “deterioration” of a theological aesthetics, “by betraying and selling out theological substance to current viewpoints of an inner-worldly theory of beauty” (Von Balthasar, The Glory of the Lord I, 38). Viladesau is far more willing to allow ‘current viewpoints of an inner-worldly beauty’ contribute to the content of his project.
The first part of his work sets out to uncover the foundational elements of such a theological aesthetics by applying a kind of transcendental methodology to his theological project. He first examines how God is historically depicted in thought and in image, concluding that one of the tasks of a theological aesthetic is to discover “theological criteria for a critical hermeneutic of images” (68). If divine revelation holds a central place in theology – which it surely must – then theology’s task is not only to address and respond to the difficulty of imaging revelation but also the historical dimensions in which revelation is communicated. This means that the problem of various forms of thought, from metaphysics to transcendental thought to aesthetics, is a supreme concern for the theological task.

Validesau proposes three possible theological responses: 1) a response that concedes the total “deconstruction” of the metaphysics that underlie many depictions of the divine in favor of an exclusive appeal to revelation; 2) a response that follows Whitehead in aesthetically redirecting the metaphysical task, rendering theology fundamentally ‘aesthetic’ in order to eliminate the problem of divine inconceivability; or 3) convinced of the necessity of an ontological approach to theological knowledge, one may formulate a transcendental theory of cognition in order to explain the knowability of God “in terms of the created and engraced capacity of the human mind to participate in God’s mystery” (70). Viladesau aligns his own approach with the third possible response.

Viladesau proceeds to examine the dialectic between revelation and human perception, focusing on sensibility and imagination as the conditions of “transcendent” knowledge (75). This focus draws attention to the “unthematic” presence of the “field” in which an object may appear as this particular thing. His intent is to construct a ‘natural theology of the imagination’ that emphasizes the importance of the imagination in the
cognitive process.\textsuperscript{18} From this perspective, the so-called religious \textit{a priori} is mediated in a primary sense through images and perception, making the imagination an “implicit revelation of the divine and a precondition for supernatural faith” (76). This “epistemology of the imagination” uncovers the fact that “it is possible for us to experience “more” in a particular circumstance than our words are adequate to: we may experience something as being (thus far) without a name, as a question, as a feeling of wonderment” (79). In other words, intellection exceeds linguistic and conceptually cognitive mediation. The dialectic between revelation and perception means that language must be understood in a wide sense as a “horizon of a nonobjective pre-apprehension of being” (82).

This “horizon of a nonobjective pre-apprehension of being” in many ways reflects the cognitive dimensions of beauty expressed in Dionysian symbolism and in Thomas’s original developments of beauty’s role in cognition. Although Viladesau’s transcendental approach furnishes him with a grammar that results in a different expression, his point is similar to the idea that beauty is the trans-discursive intelligibility of the good prior to its determination as truth. This ought not be taken in an equivocal sense, however. Beauty’s capacity to donate intelligibility in excess of the concepts and connections associated with discursive thought in no way renders these concepts and connections irrelevant or invalid. To the contrary, it elevates their importance, uplifting discursive thinking toward realms where it becomes indispensable. Viladesau’s linguistic concern, emerging from his

\textsuperscript{18} In this, he follows what is sketched out in, and then rejected by, Garrett Green, \textit{Imagining God. Theology and Religious Imagination} (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), 42. Green rejects this project on the grounds that the positivity of Christian revelation precludes the possibility of a ‘natural theology of revelation’ (84). Where Garrett rejects historicity as such, Viladesau contends that the positivity of Christian revelation only requires that we reject certain particular historical content: “I would say rather that Christianity’s “positivity” excludes the deduction of its particular historical content from any a priori structures of the existential human subject. Nevertheless, from such structures one can heuristically “anticipate” certain characteristics that any revelation to the human subject must possess (e.g., historicity itself, although not the content of history) (\textit{Theological Aesthetics}, 76).
transcendental approach, allows him to illustrate the unique quality of this plenitude of intelligibility as it relates to verbal expression. This becomes most significant with respect to the way in which language expresses negation:

The word can generally represent absent realities, abstract ideas, analogies, and judgments in a more clear and direct way than spatial images. While its symbolic quality extends its range to poetry, the capacity of the word to express judgments of being and of doing make it the normal (although not exclusive) medium of ontological and ethical thought. Above all, word’s unique ability to express negation directly makes it capable of expressing inverse insight and transcendence. It is possible for physical images to evoke these dimensions of thought – one might think, for example, of Zen paintings or Christian icons, which use conventionalized styles to tell the viewer that the meaning of the image is not to be found simply in the act of seeing. But there is a directness and economy in the word “not” that images cannot approach (89).

This linguistic appropriation of the apophatic is an important step for any contemporary renewal of this dimension of the Dionysian-Thomistic approach to beauty as a divine name. It reflects the dissimilar similitude often invoked in Dionysian symbolism, as well as the via negativa that comes to inform much of Thomas’s theology and metaphysics. Most importantly, as Viladesau recognizes, it chastens thought as thought enters into the realm of the beautiful where it is easily tempted to a kind of idolatry derived from an overemphasis on the positive aspect of beauty. From this perspective, “[t]he preapprehension of God, in conjunction with concrete religious experience, serves as a basis for formulating a basic notion of “divinity” and for justifying the analogous use of words and concepts” (100). The plenitude of intelligibility is not here directly identified with beauty as such. Nevertheless, there is a crucial recognition that this dimension of the issue is important for the exposition on beauty that is to follow. Although beauty per se has not yet become the focus of his examination, in accordance with his method Viladesau establishes the conditions in which beauty can most fittingly be explored. Such a modern approach takes very seriously the problem associated with subject-consciousness and the conditions for cognitive reflection.

In this context, Viladesau sketches out his view of beauty as an approach to God.
4.3.2. Beauty as a Way to God

Where the first part of Viladesau’s project considers theological aesthetics insofar as it identifies an epistemology of transcendental perception, the second part considers theological aesthetics insofar as it examines the relation of beauty and art to the divine. More specifically in this second part, Viladesau follows an approach similar to the ‘transcendental’ method of Rahner and Longergan: God as the “condition of possibility” for every apprehension of beauty in beautiful things (103). The question that guides his analysis is do those aesthetic experiences that raise the mind and spirit to God already presuppose a conviction of God’s existence and add to that established conviction an affective component; or, on the other hand, can Einstein’s statement (that the violinist Yehudi Menuhin once again proved that there is a God in heaven) be taken in a more literal sense – namely, that such experiences in themselves provide a sort of “evidence” that can serve in the rational grounding of our conviction (104)?

The starting point of Viladesau’s response to this question involves examining the anagogical power of beauty. This is another dimension where his project intersects with the Dionysian-Thomistic approach. True to form, his analysis is informed by Plato, Dionysius, Augustine, and the great scholastic tradition that follows this anagogical impulse (105 – 117). Given the limited scope of his analysis, there is little reason to take issue with his reading of any of these thinkers.

After expositing and conceding the critique of the ‘gradation principle’ – that differing degrees of a given phenomenon demonstrate the existence of a maximum of that phenomenon\(^\text{19}\) – that lies behind the Dionysian-Thomistic view of beauty’s anagogical dimension, Viladesau concludes that “the approach to God from the beautiful … when formulated as it is by Augustine, Bonaventure, or Aquinas, becomes intellectually alien to the contemporary mind” (117). He therefore takes up the issue of beauty as a way to God by

\(^\text{19}\) For a recent analysis of the various dimensions of this principle in Thomas along with the relevant literature, see Wippel, The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas, 469 – 479.
applying to aesthetic experience the transcendental method as developed by thinkers like Coreth, Lotz, Rahner and Lonergan. Viladesau’s first step is to emphasize that aesthetic experience is more than mere sensation or pleasure. Rather, it identifies the experience of the whole person as a spiritual as well as a material being. Because all “proofs” for God’s existence are explications of our fundamental transcendental experience, then a “transcendental” approach to God “that takes the fact of aesthetic experience as its starting point and finds God as the absolute and necessary condition of possibility of such experience” becomes possible (125). The second step, according to Viladesau, is to discover how beauty implies a relation to God of necessity; that is to say, to discover what it is “that connects beauty with the essence and/or perfection of being” (125).

It is here where Viladesau turns his examination to the question of beauty as a transcendental property of being. After a brief but thorough analysis of the issue within twentieth century scholarship, he arrives at several interrelated configurations of beauty, which bear similarity to the various dimensions of the Dionysian-Thomistic configuration of beauty. He affirms the position that beauty does in fact have a transcendental status, but his arrival at this position derives from an interpretation of the issue informed by Lonergan’s category “patterns of experience” (130).20 Human minds, according to this paradigm, act in ways that are reasonable and responsible according to a diversity of centers of attention, purpose and interest. There are several such patterns of experience: biological, dramatic, aesthetic, intellectual, practical, worshipful. The aesthetic pattern of experience, in particular, is primarily associated with the delight and joy that accompanies existence. Although this particular pattern of experience is “post-biological” it is nevertheless “pre-scientific and pre-

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philosophical” (131). One might say it identifies an encounter with the good before the
good is determined as truth. Viladesau expands this pattern of experience into a broader
“way of functioning intellectually and responsibly that centers on contemplation,
appropriation, and appreciation of objects of the notions of intelligibility, truth and value,
rather than on the process of attaining them” (131). From this perspective, beauty has a
transcendental status insofar as the name ‘beautiful’ identifies the transcendental value that is
experienced in the aesthetic pattern. “We judge something to be beautiful,” he explains,
“when we find it in accord with (the fulfillment of) some dynamism of our being: physical,
cultural, spiritual” (131).

Approaching beauty from this perspective uncovers several important dimensions of
its constitution. First, reflecting in some sense the Thomistic association between beauty and
cognition, Viladesau asserts that “beauty is the order of reason in things, their truth and
goodness, their “rightness” – that is, their intelligibility, their accord with the dynamism of
the human person toward being and being-well” (131). Recognizing the important relation
and intimacy that beauty has with the good, Viladesau also explains that “[t]o speak of the
beautiful is to bring out a certain aspect of the good – namely the joy of existence that is
intrinsic to it. Beauty is value considered, not under the aspect of what is to be done, but
simply regarded “in itself”’(132). The traditional association between beauty and love is also
central to Viladesau’s approach. “Beauty is the quality of an object or person that calls us
and permits us to be responsibly in love,” he writes, “… beauty is what we call goodness or
value (of various kinds) when its lovability becomes evident” (132). In synthesizing these
various configurations of beauty, Viladesau recognizes the intimate relation beauty has to
being:
Beauty is value, truth, and intelligibility insofar as they produce joy in their perception and/or contemplation. They do so because the perception of form, or intelligibility (which is also the condition for truth and value), fulfills the basic orientation of finite spirit, a condition of its well-being. In this sense, beauty is intrinsic to being: everything that exists has “form,” in the sense of intelligibility and entelechy; and the perception of that form can produce satisfaction to the spirit at some level (133).

Such a remark appears indebted in some sense to what is found in the Dionysian-Thomistic approach to beauty. Nevertheless, its indebtedness appears to find payoff in the more modern paradigm that Viladesau adopts for his methodology. This is not to say that such a paradigm is de facto incapable of accommodating the Dionysian-Thomistic configuration of beauty as a divine name. Although according to many (neo)Thomists the so-called transcendental turn in Thomism can only be judged as a violation of Thomas’s thought, as such a turn is applied by Viladesau it appears quite capable of illuminating several aspects of beauty insofar as it relates to the divine. However, where the negative judgment over the transcendental project may apply to Viladesau concerns the direct identification of beauty with God. Thomas clearly follows Dionysius in unequivocally naming God ‘Beauty.’ For Viladesau, the matter is far more uncertain. Clearly, beauty is a ‘way to God’ and “God is the “horizon” of every experience of beauty” (149). But one must search vigorously to find in Viladesau’s project any direct identification between beauty and God. One statement made to that effect calls God “the ultimate Beauty” (191), but little is said to explain the more specific dimensions of what this means. In this regard, there is an ambiguity reminiscent of Plato and Plotinus with respect to how Viladesau understands the precise relation between beauty and the divine.

Viladesau’s project offers a number of valuable elements with respect to developing a methodology for a theological aesthetics. Primary among these is the way in which his project pays careful attention to the subject-centered conditions under which beauty may be conceived as relating to God. This allows him to emphasize important aspects of the human
person in his efforts to establish these conditions; aspects like the imagination, sensibility, the affective and the artistic impulse. Recognizing the theological value that these features of the human condition hold not only broadens the scope of theological discourse, it invests these elements of the human condition themselves with inherent value. Viladesau’s methodology also serves to renew the cognitive dimension of beauty found in the Dionysian-Thomistic approach. It is rather commonplace today to associate beauty with only the affective, non-cognitive, sense of feeling. The transcendental approach taken by Viladesau renews the important cognitive dimension of beauty without overly-rationalizing it. Beauty is established as the intelligibility of a thing, that is to say, a thing’s form. Form as such is beautiful and so invites the searching intellect into reflection and contemplation of itself as it is given in particular objects. Cognition and contemplation are unified in the form, which is to say, unified in beauty.

These positive dimensions of beauty and its relation to God are central for Viladesau, but they are not final. Viladesau takes very seriously the warning, issued by both Barth and Von Balthasar, that beauty can easily lead one into an unconscious idolatry and engender a facile humanism (190). He thus concludes by establishing the important role that a theology of the cross would have for theological aesthetics. The cross, which signifies the death of self, bespeaks the existential human condition rather than an abstract component of human nature. They cross and the death of self “reveal and condemn the reality of sin, especially as the idolatry of the self. They remind us that the attainment of the good concretely involves not merely a “progression” but also a dialectic of conversion: not a straightforward growth of the spontaneous or “natural” self, but a death to self” (191). The cross is the reminder of “a permanent dialectic and an “ascent” in human existence” (191).
This dialectic is not to be understood as “ontic opposition” between spirit and matter, as so often happens within overly Platonic readings of Christianity. Rather, the dialectic is “ontological” insofar as it “involves the direction of personal self-determination” (191). This allows the classical cautions about beauty and pleasure to be understood in the context of original sin, in which the Christian may affirm both the goodness and “godliness” of beauty but also the existential danger that beauty poses.

One of the most beneficial aspects of Viladesau’s project is the emphasis given to the cross. Following both Barth and Von Balthasar, he affirms that any account of divine beauty must be able to include even the cross, “and everything else which a worldly aesthetics … discards as no longer bearable” (192). The cross per se is clearly not a feature of the Dionysian-Thomistic approach, at least not specifically. Nevertheless, Viladesau’s emphasis here serves to highlight the important role that Christology performs in the overall development of beauty’s relation to God throughout the Western tradition in general and in Aquinas more specifically. Although the cross of Christ, which is to say his suffering, does not hold a primary station in the Christological aspect of the Dionysian-Thomistic configuration of beauty as a divine name, Viladesau’s emphasis invites those cross-centered aspects of Thomas’s Christology into the contemporary conversation of theological aesthetics.

Perhaps the most problematic feature of Viladesau’s project as it concerns a methodology for theological aesthetics is the extent to which he is willing to accommodate the transcendental turn. Although this turn receives its greatest influence from Kant, it begins from the Cartesian turn to self that arguably inaugurates the primary direction of

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modern thought. It is a turn that prescribes the starting point of thought in the mind rather than in the world. And while such a turn has allowed for a greater understanding of thought itself, it is not without shortcoming when it comes to the relationship between thought and the world itself. As Gilson observes, when someone begins philosophizing inside the mind, he can never get out.22 The impact this has on beauty is significant. One may question, then, whether the transcendental method that Viladesau applies to theological aesthetics is capable of illuminating beauty qua beauty or whether such an approach merely serves the subjective dimensions of beauty. Under such conditions, can beauty ever be recognized as something authentically other? By beginning with such a Kantian method, can beauty ever escape its Kantian configuration? Does beauty not become merely one of the many extensions of the mind in its act to determine the world? How, then, has beauty overcome the divide between thought and thing, mind and being? Is the God to whom beauty leads the infinite excess of all good, or is it the indeterminate sublime?

4.4. Beauty as Community: Alejandro García-Rivera

If Hart’s project can be characterized as a proposal for the God who is infinite beauty over and against a world allured by the Kantian sublime, and so as ‘cultural critique;’ and if Viladesau’s project can be characterized as a proposal for demonstrating how beauty is a way to God within a world shaped by the developments of modernity, and so as ‘cultural accommodation;’ then García-Rivera’s project can be located in many ways between these. This is not to say that his methodology borrows both from the rejection of postmetaphysical philosophies found in Hart and from the transcendental method found in Viladesau. The

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between sense of García-Rivera’s project applies at a much broader level. Rather, what one finds in García-Rivera’s project is the very embodiment of what is prescribed by both Hart and Viladesau.

As it relates to Hart’s proposal, García-Rivera’s project develops an account of beauty through the particularities and differences of the Hispanic culture. The whole impetus of his project, then, exemplifies Hart’s concern for the way that beauty elevates the particular and the different without relinquishing that which constitutes them as particular and different. It also represents an authentic engagement with the particular and different in ways that stand against the postmodern prescription; rather than proclaiming the theoretical triumph of the ‘other,’ García-Rivera’s project demonstrates how a devotion to one’s cultural particularity is the true beginning of recognizing the beauty in every other cultural particularity.

With respect to Viladesau, García-Rivera’s project is an embodiment in concreto of the aesthetic conditions under which beauty can be perceived as the presence of the divine. Where Viladesau launches his analysis of the aesthetic upon the structure of transcendental thought, locating beauty therein, García-Rivera’s analysis is far more symbiotic with respect to beauty and the various ‘aesthetic’ dimensions that inform his project. This symbiosis is enabled from the beginning by his implementation of both beauty and the beautiful as his governing principles. Beauty identifies the divine, transcendent dimension that gives itself to the beautiful things that appear in the Hispanic cultural experience. Consequently, the cultural analysis that occupies much of his project is more in line with metaphysical thought.
than it is in line with the kind of transcendental thought that guides Viladesau.  

Nevertheless, García-Rivera shares Viladesau’s appreciation of the role that the imagination has in the theological aesthetic enterprise. And like Viladesau, he also implements a strategy that utilizes artistic achievements of many sorts to illustrate meaning and to develop ideas.

García-Rivera’s project is embodied most completely in his *The Community of the Beautiful*, a work that, like Hart’s and Viladesau’s projects, sketches out the foundation for advancing a theological aesthetic. It is a book that is rich in ideas and content, written in a lively and engaging style that combines technical precision and insight with ease of communication. There are a number of ideas that find parallel with and a number that contrast the Dionysian-Thomistic approach to *beauty as a divine name*. For the sake of brevity and order, however, the following examination draws these ideas under García-Rivera’s two most fundamental principles: sign and difference.

### 4.4.1. The Incarnation: From Form to Sign

A variety of thinkers informs García-Rivera’s project with a range that extends throughout literary genres and epochs. From a poet like G. M. Hopkins, to philosophers like Charles Sanders Pierce, Josiah Royce and Jan Mukarovsky, to contemporary theologians like Hans Urs Von Balthasar and Gustavo Gutiérrez, to scholastic thinkers like Aquinas, Scotus and Ockham. This collection of figures creates the context in which García-Rivera proposes the first primary principle of his project, which is expressed as a development from form to sign. It is a development that follows many steps along a poetic trajectory.

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23 The word ‘metaphysical’ here is akin to its use by certain contemporary practitioners of metaphysics, who view it not as a universal system of necessary principles only, but also, and more importantly, as the emergence of cultural perspectives and expression. For an example, see the essays in *Being and Dialectic, Metaphysics as a Cultural Presence*, William Desmond and Joseph Grange (eds.) (Albany: SUNY Press, 2000).

The most fundamental characteristic that marks García-Rivera’s project is its poetic sense. Describing this, he writes,

I am referring to that process of thinking which Charles Sanders Pierce, the great American philosopher, called interpretive musement – thinking at a “treetop” level. It is not purely conceptual thinking having its home in the heavens. It is neither purely perceptual having its home on the ground. It is a “third” type of knowing that finds its home in the “in-between” of heaven and earth, “treetop” level thinking, which allows one a vision of the whole (8).

Throughout the opening chapter it is a poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins, who provides the various images upon which García-Rivera builds the structure of his procedure. The poetic dimension reveals the fact that a theological aesthetic for García-Rivera is closely akin to St. Augustine’s approach in the *Confessions*, which asks questions not only for the sake of arriving at determinate answers, but more importantly in order to move the human heart to contemplation and worship. It is also by virtue of his poetic approach that García-Rivera advances a proper theological aesthetics rather than a theology of beauty. For, as he asks, “What is Beauty if it is not received? A theology of Beauty alone leaves open the question of the inner dynamism of the human spirit” (10). This reception of beauty is what characterizes aesthetic experience and it is fundamental to theological aesthetics.

This is a feature of theological aesthetics that García-Rivera draws out of the Dionysian approach, arguing that for the Areopagite beauty never concerns the question as to *whether* the creature can experience the divine, but rather *how* the creature experiences the divine. For Dionysius, García-Rivera contends, beauty accounts for both the divine origins of this experience as well as its receptivity by the human heart. From the very beginning, then, García-Rivera’s project is guided by the Dionysian insight into beauty’s identification of the divine itself as well as beauty’s presence as a constitutive feature of creation. In this double capacity, García-Rivera finds a way for theology to address many of the bifurcated
dualisms that have erupted in the modern period (mind/being; knowledge/love; human/divine). Explaining the importance of beauty in this, he writes:

Theological aesthetics attempts to make clear once again the connection between Beauty and the beautiful, between Beauty’s divine origins and its appropriation by the human heart. In doing so, theological aesthetics discloses the importance of restoring the connection between Beauty and the beautiful which, in our day, has been severed. Human life has a worth and a dignity which only Beauty can reveal through the beautiful. Without the language and experience of Beauty and the beautiful, the Church will find difficult the expression of her faith, much less her conviction of the dignity of the human person, and, even less, be a sacrament to the world (11).

Nowhere is the conjunction of Beauty and the beautiful more completely communicated than in the Incarnation. As the center point where divine and human unite in an ineffable unity, the Incarnation provides the exemplar of a variety of similar unities that guide García-Rivera along his way, unities expressed primarily through Hopkins’ poetic imagery.

The first of such images is “glory and praise,” where glory corresponds to the divine dimension and praise to the human dimension. It is a coupling that García-Rivera claims provides the grounds for distinguishing a proper theological aesthetics from a mere philosophical aesthetics. The latter emerges out of the development within modern philosophy in which, according to García-Rivera, the tension between the ‘objective’ and the ‘subjective’ dimensions of existence give rise to the eventual turn to the subject. This turn culminates in the development of transcendental analysis such as the sort found in Kantian thought. But where Viladesau, for example, sees this turn as beneficial for a theological aesthetics, García-Rivera views the matter negatively as disengaging beauty from the beautiful. “One is forced to choose,” he writes, “between the mistaken, primitive discussion that had Beauty as purely objective (from the modern perspective) over the irrational, modern overemphasis on the subjectivity of the beautiful (from the classicist perspective)” (13 – 14). Philosophy as it takes shape in the modern period is unable to reconcile this dichotomy, since it largely remains mired in the tension between ‘objective’ and ‘subjective.’
This tension has significant impact on the way that modern philosophy approaches the issue of aesthetics.

Thus, the category of “Glory and Praise” provides a necessary remedy for this bipolarity in philosophical aesthetics. While Glory expresses the ‘objectivity’ of Beauty, it goes further as it evokes the Praise from the created subject. Glory and Praise allow a distinction that bespeaks an ever-arriving unity. Glory spills over into Praise, while Praise always already gestures towards Glory. The distinction is evident but never in such a way as to eclipse an always prior unity. Both of these phenomena are actualized in the liturgy, something that García-Rivera describes as “the ultimate aesthetics of human work” (17). Employing yet another Hopkins image, that of ‘nature and plow,’ García-Rivera casts liturgy in a broad sense to identify the human art that receives Glory and returns Praise. Liturgy is best understood as a harmony between the Praise that is potentially latent in all human work (plow) and the Glory of what is given (nature).

The primary image that García-Rivera borrows from Hopkins in order to express the various dyads in the context of a theological aesthetics is that of “pied beauty” (22). In order to think and speak the complex relation of contrasts that constitutes beauty, an image like “pied beauty” is necessary. “Pied beauty” describes this notion of a contrast of opposites, the chiaroscuro that inhabits every beautiful entity. Another Hopkins image is used to provide greater visibility to such pied beauty, namely, “dawns dappling light.” It is an image that expresses how Beauty is “fathered-forth in the shadows and highlights of the dawn’s dappling light, revealing and concealing, a ‘pied’ mystery of a world” (22). Dawn’s dappled light reveals nature’s own pied beauty, prompting the ‘plow’ of thought toward inquiry into ever higher realms of beauty.
For García-Rivera, the crucial feature of this pied beauty is the sense of mystery that is at the heart of every theological enterprise. Theological aesthetics, with recourse to beauty and artistic imagery, is most fittingly equipped to think and speak the mystery inherent in every theological endeavor. As mystery is considered in García-Rivera’s poetic approach, it designates not a lack but a plenitude of intelligible content that perpetually evokes desire from the human heart. As García-Rivera describes this:

Mystery, as theologians well know, both reveals and conceals. As such, mystery is not ignorance. Neither would mystery lead us to silence as Wittgenstein’s maxim in the *Tractatus*, no. 7 suggests: “what we cannot speak about, we must be silent about.” Something, or rather, Someone becomes known in mystery even as mystery makes us realize how little we know. Similarly, the beautiful allows Beauty to be felt even as Beauty itself slips, in the end, past the grasp of our affections (23).

Before the plenitude of intelligibility given in mystery is discursively known, it is explored by the imagination, a feature of human intellection that García-Rivera locates ‘between’ sense and intellect (23). But the proper role of the imagination, as García-Rivera sees it, is not to be the artist of the senses or intellect, but rather to be the communicator of ‘Original Mystery.’ This is a theological affirmation that proposes not an epistemological understanding of imagination, but one that is theologically aesthetic.

All of this reveals the larger concern in García-Rivera’s project, namely, the move from form to sign. This is a move that involves a subtle, but not complete, rejection of form. With the publication of Von Balthasar’s massive trilogy, the role of form in theological aesthetics becomes central. Theological aesthetics is precisely the enterprise that aspires toward ‘seeing the form’ of particular things in light of the Christological form that alone can properly illuminate the true form of any given thing. For García-Rivera, however, the reality of a form struggles to escape the heavy burden placed upon it by Platonic thought. Form always risks locating the true reality of a thing, and consequently the true reality of

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beauty, in a transcendent, other-worldly realm beyond the particularities of the created world in the here and now. For this reason, García-Rivera returns to Augustine in whom he discovers where form becomes sign. In Augustine, the anagogical dimension of form provides the foundation for the semiotic theory that García-Rivera believes can alleviate the problematic aspects of form. Tracing the development of Augustine’s semiotics through Duns Scotus, García-Rivera contends that “the key strategy in Scotian realism was to connect a single effect to two causes” (31). Both Augustine and Scotus, then, furnish a semiotics that, like the poetic images provided by Hopkins, enable a unity of distinctions that neither swallows the distinctions nor elevates them beyond the unity. Summarizing the advantage of all this, García-Rivera writes:

The significance of this rather lengthy exposition is to set a foundation for the startling claim that the uniting category for a theological aesthetics is not form but sign or symbol. This new development in the theory of signs encompasses both Nature and plow, the cosmos and the human spirit. Moreover, the category of signs lends itself more intrinsically to the category of praise. But perhaps, most significantly, the unifying nature of sign reveals the centrality of the incarnation for a theological aesthetics of sign … Thus, theological aesthetics’ foundational principle, the incarnation, finds its widest application in the action of sign rather than form (33).

In effect, where the category of form risks smuggling an equivocation between the ‘other-worldly’ and the ‘this-worldly’ into theological aesthetics, semiotics poses no such risk. The category of sign (or symbol) is inherently and in essence unitive of the particular sign or symbol and that which it intends to signify, or to borrow scholastic terminology, unitive of the modus significandi and the res significata. The category of sign is an antidote to the equivocating tendencies associated with form.

The advantage provided by a sign is the emphasis it places on the invisible becoming visible. Beauty that identifies the transcendent reality of the divine is a phenomenon that exceeds the limits of visibility. It must therefore ‘descend,’ so to speak, into the visible world
where it discloses itself through a sign. García-Rivera turns to the work of C. S. Peirce for the way that Peirce incorporates Scotist metaphysics into his logic and theory of semiotics.

In Peirce one finds a way to think and speak of the invisible becoming visible that avoids both the nominalist and the formalist problematic. “If Von Balthasar’s aesthetics is a matter of ‘seeing the form,’” writes García-Rivera comparing the two, “then Peirce’s logic is a matter of seeing the invisible universal in the visible sign” (107). Peirce’s logic posits a sign-making function to thought, revealing the way that thought makes itself visible outside the mind and so revealing the indelible objectivity of thought. Thought’s objective dimensions reflect an important attribute of the universe itself, revealing it to be hospitable to thought and so “thought-like” (108). In other words, the universe is constituted everywhere by signs waiting to be determined.

Such a proposal has the effect of renewing an aesthetic dimension to the true, configuring truth not as an ‘object’ sought by the mind but as a habitude of mind, or in Peirce’s own words, as “the fixation of belief” (109). García-Rivera is quick to point out, however, that Peirce’s contentions regarding belief are not properly grasped if read, as William James does, as a psychological description of belief that unites practical actions to mental conceptions. In such a reading, belief merely generates an action as a copy of a mental conception. Rather, as García-Rivera understands Peirce, belief as such identifies the encompassing whole. Concepts and actions present themselves as signs of this whole without exhausting the full content of its wholeness. In this way, belief is primarily a communal phenomenon requiring the beliefs and actions of all others in order to become

26 As García-Rivera notes, this is precisely why Peirce’s philosophy of signs has been called “objective idealism.” The Community of the Beautiful, 108.
fully manifest. Belief as such presupposes truth; that is to say, belief is inherently constituted by an assent to that which is taken as truth. The ‘fixation of belief’ then identifies the way in which persons attempt to disclose their beliefs and consequently truth itself. Thus does García-Rivera speak of all this in terms of the ‘community of the true.’

The consequences for García-Rivera’s appropriation of Peirce’s logic is the way in which truth organizes a community of interpreters around itself. As the community of the true, this interpretive community has as its mission the task of discerning the facticity of reality. However, this task cannot but be guided by an ideal always desired at a distance. This ideal identifies the Good, and reveals how the community of the true is also the community of the good. As both the community of the true and the community of the good, there is an intrinsic tension between fact and ideal. Such a community, then, requires the aesthetics of sign and symbol in order to confront this tension.

García-Rivera reads this tension in terms of the determination of fact and the not-yet-determination of the ideal (Good). Because all determination is of individuality, “[t]he individual … is the key to Truth”(129). At the same time, experience and reality always remain in excess of such determinate individuality. Consequently, reality will always remain an object of hope, love and desire. Within this hope, love and desire, the community of interpretation must practice an ethic of ‘loyalty’ that seeks to always read the other – that is to say other interpretations – in such a way to bring that other into greater communion with the community itself (133). Through such an ethical practice, the good ever-increasingly manifests itself in and through the loyalty of all interpreters. “Loyalty is dedication to interpreting an ideal in such a way that it results in the loving union of individuals”(141). A community of interpretation that aspires toward a mutual longing – and in this way the
“good” is not a determinate entity but an excess of determining desire – transforms the interpretive act into a power to unify all differences. When these differences are recognized for their value, that is to say for their beneficial contributions to the community, the community of the true and the community of the good also reveals itself to be a community of the beautiful. Difference is the second primary principle operative in García-Rivera’s thought. In this regard, his doctrine of beauty bears similarity to Thomas’s understanding of *proporrio* or *consonantia*. But where Thomas derives his understanding of the role of difference primarily from the Trinitarian theology of the Son, García-Rivera derives his understanding from the dynamics of culture. It is thus fitting to turn to it now.

4.4.2. **Beauty as the Truly Different**

Beauty always arrives as an unexpected interruption of the normal state of affairs, which is to say that beauty announces itself in and through difference. In his analysis of this aspect of beauty, García-Rivera turns to an image well-known in his Hispanic cultural heritage, namely, Our Lady of Guadalupe. According to his analysis, her appearance to Juan Diego in 1531 reveals a different kind of beauty primarily because she appears as a half-breed of Indian and Spanish. “An Indian-Spanish Mary,” writes García-Rivera, “a half-breed, (is) the incarnation of human difference…”(39). It is this apparition that sets the foundation for García-Rivera’s entire project: “This book is in a sense an attempt to understand not so much Our Lady of Guadalupe *per se*, but, rather, the nature of the beauty she so graciously possessed, a beauty many of us believe truly came from God”(40). A theological aesthetics whose object is “different” beauty operates most significantly through signs and symbols, a claim that emphasizes the issue and nature of difference.
How better to understand the issue and nature of difference than by examining an event in which the different per se performs a fundamental role? García-Rivera thus looks to his cultural past to discover a concrete context in which difference is most evident, namely, the age of exploration and the discovery of the Americas by the Western European powers. Turning to the first of Latin America’s intellectuals – Fernando de Oviedo, Jose de Acosta and Bartolomé de las Casas – García-Rivera looks at how they examined the concrete event of difference in which the European arrival immersed them. The experience of the ‘new world’ presents to these first intellectuals of Latin America a difference that is more than ‘new,’ even more than ‘different.’ Rather, it presents to them a notion of difference that is ‘essentially other,’ that is to say, ‘other per essentiam’ (43). “Such “difference,” radical “difference,”” observes García-Rivera, “becomes the source for Latin America’s greatest gift to human thought: a new concern for the treatment of the poor and a new study of the relationship between symbols and culture”(43).

In García-Rivera’s telling of the story, the beauty of Latin America’s difference is quickly exploited by the Encomienda system, in which all lands and resources, and by extension its peoples, are given to the Spanish by Pope Alexander VI’s bull Inter caetera and Dudus sidiquem. Yet out of this historical injustice, contends García-Rivera, arises a new awareness of social sin, made possible by the first Latin American theological statement made by the Dominican Fray Antón de Monstesinos. This statement characterized the

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Encomienda as an unjust social structure and made participation in it a mortal sin. Despite being reprimanded by his provincial superior, as García-Rivera reads it, Montesinos’s declaration inspires a new theological tradition stretching from Bartolomé de las Casas to Gustavo Gutiérrez (44). It is a theology of “difference” that, eschewing traditional categories, “lies less in arbitrary authority than in lived experience” (44).

The most significant aspect of this historical-cultural analysis concerns the impact it has on the use and nature of signs and symbols. The encounter between European and Latin American peoples creates a context in which cross-cultural communication becomes necessary. At the same time, the immense difficulty involved in such communication poses serious problems, which require some form of a lingua franca. It is precisely in the very midst of this difficulty where García-Rivera locates the power of a theological aesthetic:

Such linguistic challenges led to a dilemma. On the one hand, if Spanish became the lingua franca, the preaching of the Gospel would be unintelligible to the Mexican. On the other hand, if Nahauatl was adopted, the precision of the Church’s dogmatic precepts would be lost; their meaning quite possibly altered. The missionary solution to this dilemma was as creative as it was astounding. Dominican, Augustinian, Franciscan, and Jesuit missionaries all, in their own way, managed to merge Christian and indigenous signs and symbols via aesthetics. The missionary turn to an aesthetic of symbol aimed to communicate Christian concepts less with the precision of language than with the incision of the aesthetic sign. Dramas, music, and paintings all were called into missionary service. As if responding to a genuine communication, the indigenous response was striking. Almost instantaneously, native Americans began to make such aesthetic and symbolic catechism their own. Such symbolic aesthetics allowed Western and indigenous elements to co-exist; neither usurping the traditional meaning of the other yet, at the same time, creating a new understanding at once traditional and new (46).

For García-Rivera, the experience of beauty that derives from aesthetic experience provides a plenitude of intelligible content. Only in such a plenitude can meaning mutually cohabitate two distinct cultural contexts, allowing the contraction of this meaning into more determined forms. In other words, if cross-cultural communication begins with an already determined concept from one culture that is then forced to ‘dress’ itself (so to speak) in the preexisting conceptual clothing of another culture, such communication collapses in the event that a new ‘size of clothing’ or a ‘whole new wardrobe’ becomes necessary. The
construction of new concepts requires a freedom provided when intelligibility is given in its trans-conceptual state. Only in beauty’s plenitude of intelligibility can such a need even be discerned, a fact that García-Rivera attributes to what transpires in 16th century Latin America.

When beauty works cross-culturally allowing a communication through aesthetic symbols, it reveals a ‘semiotics of culture.’ García-Rivera is first turned on to this idea by his teacher Robert Schreiter, and finds its most profound expression in the work of the esteemed Hispanic theologian Virgilio Elizondo. The primary idea is that “culture could be treated as a linguistic text which consisted of a “grammar” of signs … (and) if one can treat culture as a “text,” then that “text” could both be a cultural incarnation as well as a “word” of redemption” (60). But García-Rivera goes even further, arguing that the linguistic model of culture makes it difficult to assimilate the overlapping of diverse modes of “speaking” that characterizes most contemporary cultures. García-Rivera discovers the key in music.

“Culture is not so much a language,” he writes, “as it is an aesthetics! Culture can support various conversations at once because like an opera, they complement one another” (60). When beauty is sought in the various cultures that communicate its deepest wealth, it illuminates itself as a musical-grammar that sings the glory of difference.

This takes the issue back to García-Rivera’s reasons for shifting theological aesthetics from form to sign. Where an emphasis on form has the tendency to superficialize difference as the mere ‘appearance’ of a more important and primal identity, an emphasis on sign necessarily bears a reference to the sign-signified interval. This interval is the sine qua non of any sign. It is also the locus of difference’s perpetual presence in every aesthetic element of culture. It is the presence of such difference that prompts and nurtures the human capacity
to know and love the “insuperable difference, the “capacity” for God, the *Capax Dei*
(76). García-Rivera notes two dominant approaches to the human capacity for the divine-
human difference among twentieth century theologians, both issuing from Blondel’s critique
of the neoscholastic notion of extrinsicism.30 One emphasizes the *unity* between Creator and
creature found in the subject itself, as found in the transcendental anthropology of Juan
Meréch, Karl Rahner and others. The other stresses the *difference* between the divine and the
human. For García-Rivera, this approach is exemplified in the work of Eric Pryzwara, Von
Balthasar and others, most significantly expressed in the doctrine of the *analogia entis*.

As García-Rivera understands it, the *analogia entis* identifies the essential difference
embedded within the very fibers of being itself. And it is here where both Aquinas and
Dionysius become key figures for theological aesthetics. Aquinas famously advanced the real
distinction between *esse* and essence in his metaphysics. As García-Rivera contends, “[i]f all
things can claim a real distinction between what they are and that they are, then the distinction
between “whatness” and “isness” in things finds a kind of analogy in the unity of
“whatness” and “isness” in the divine “I am”” (80). In other words, Aquinas discovers in the
very depths of being the divine presence as difference itself. Dionysius promotes something
very similar in his doctrine of the ‘dissimilar similitudes,’ according to García-Rivera:

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30 This critique is most clearly elaborated in his *Action: Essay on a Critique of Life and Science of Practice*, Olive
Blanchette (trans.) (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984); originally published as *L’Action*
García-Rivera suggests that Dionysius’ principle of dissimilar similitude establishes anagogy as a ‘dynamic analogy.’ Analogy is not just a mode of thinking of God, but a real, existential phenomenon wherein the lowliest of creatures may be uplifted into the glory of God. Recognizing this provides the power to see how all things can become moments in which the Creator may be contemplated. Finitude, rather than some transcendental horizon, becomes the passageway into the infinite itself.

Theological aesthetics emphasizes the importance of difference, and in so doing provides for an aesthetic conception of being. At the heart of this conception is the intelligibility of the universe from the perspective of both the natural scientist and the theologian, and the question of contingency/necessity. García-Rivera examines this issue from three perspectives, namely, that of Ockham, Scotus and Aquinas. He contends that both Ockham and Aquinas make the intelligibility of the universe difficult to the natural scientist and the theologian. If one follows Ockham, one collapses any distinction between God’s absolute power and God’s ordained power. By affirming solely the contingency of the universe and overemphasizing the potentia Dei ordinata, one affirms that God’s absolute power accounts for the entire divine omnipotence (162). One can therefore only focus on the existential, or ontic, dimensions of the universe to the neglect of the universe’s intelligibility. On the other hand, if one follows Aquinas, one makes too sharp a distinction between God’s absolute power and God’s ordained power. This means that the universe can be understood apart from its intrinsic contingency, leaving one with little to say about the universe’s intelligibility.
In contrast to these, García-Rivera contends that the Scotist position is the via media. It is Duns Scotus who makes the question of contingency relevant to the question of intelligibility.

God’s act of creating this world was both an act of absolute power and an act of ordaining power. It was an act which like the crucified Seraph reveals the awesome power of God in the weakness, i.e., the limitations, of a particular creation. The theologian who takes Scotus’s position finds, then, a common ground (the intelligibility of the universe) yet distinctive approach (the contingency of the universe) in the natural order of this world with which to converse with natural scientists (163).

When this position is maintained, the universe can be illuminated as a divinely inspired order in which all beings participate. It reveals the uniqueness of this particular universe as a created gift of a loving God rather than either a necessary diffusion of the divine self, or an arbitrary by-product of a divine will.

This aesthetic conception of being is finally summarized in the image of “foregrounding.” García-Rivera borrows this image from Mukarovsky’s semiotic aesthetics, in which it is defined as “the lifting up of a piece of background and … giving it value” (35, 167). It is a principle that applies most significantly to the words of a poem, but it can also be applied to visual and audio arts as well. It is a principle with an essentially embodied dimension, making it an analogy of the incarnation. “It implies that all human “foregroundings” are, in a sense, an image of the incarnation, and as such possess a redemptive character” (36). Foregrounding is an act in which a marginalized element of a work is invested with greater conscious presence. It is a mode of comparison, but a comparison of a very special type.

...foregrounding's comparison gives meaning to the whole by creating a dynamic but bounded tension. This dynamic but bounded tension acts as a beacon to something beyond itself. As comparison giving meaning, foregrounding follows the logic of signs. Indeed, foregrounding is the logic of aesthetics. It is a semiotic aesthetics. As such, foregrounding’s semiotic aesthetics reveals a unique dimension of the logic of signs perceptible only in the beautiful ... foregrounding reveals not only the meaning of some particular “difference,” the particular accent, but also the meaning of the entire “difference,” i.e., the whole. Indeed, foregrounding is “the difference ‘difference’ makes”(168).
The different beauty, or ‘beauty of difference,’ that inhabits and is expressed in the Hispanic culture allows being itself to be understood as foregrounding. García-Rivera’s own work can be read as an attempt to illuminate the beauty of his Hispanic culture in order to uplift it into the beauty of the whole itself. This is not, however, an act of cultural triumphalism nor some postmodern attempt to undermine other grand narratives through the particularity of culture. “Being as foregrounding,” García-Rivera explains, “helps the Hispanic theologian understand the meaning of difference without sacrificing either the relative nature of cultural differences nor the normative demands of all that is True or Good” (170). It is the community of the beautiful that is imbued with the task of discerning the meaning of difference. Such difference includes the good of desire, the knowledge of truth and the harmony between head and heart, thought and feeling, that marks the beautiful.

So much of García-Rivera’s project overlaps with many aspects of the Dionysian-Thomistic configuration of beauty as a divine name. Like Dionysius and Thomas, García-Rivera stresses from the beginning the importance in theological aesthetics to distinguish the beauty that is associated with the divine itself from the beautiful as the creaturely communication of beauty. It is this distinction that safeguards against both making beauty into a mere category, and absorbing God and creatures under this one, univocal category. His emphasis on signs or symbols allows him, like Dionysius and Aquinas, to bring beauty into relation with the cognitive dimensions of human existence, as well as allowing him to integrate this cognitive dimension into a broader, more complete communion with the whole of being. His semiotic approach also enables him to recognize the importance of difference that must be stressed in theological aesthetics, and his use of Aquinas and Dionysius in this regard bespeaks their
influence. Most beneficial is the way that García-Rivera develops these many Dionysian-Thomistic dimensions into a contemporary project that takes account of socio-cultural foundations, linguistic components and most especially a concern for the poor. In accomplishing all this, he demonstrates how the Dionysian-Thomistic configuration of beauty as a divine name has relevance for theology today.

The questions that are generated by his project serve to contribute to the remarkable development found in his work rather than standing as points of criticism. The most significant question concerns his turn from form to sign. It might be worthwhile to ask whether this turn overemphasizes sign over form? Can the integration of form as symbolon, or the symbolic dimension of form, such as that found in Albert and by extension in Aquinas, be more properly integrated into a theological aesthetic methodology? Does such a stark distinction perhaps create a problematic conception of form that in the end precludes seeing its symbolic dimension? For Thomas and Albert, form identifies an anagogical and analogical aspect of a thing’s constitution. In this regard, the very fabric of form is comprised of the same dynamic that García-Rivera discovers in signs and symbols. Form is that aspect of an entity that accounted for its relation to other entities as well as to its proper telos. That is to say, form is inherently relative to an otherness much in the same way that a sign or symbol is. Although the danger of Platonizing form is real, one may ask whether García-Rivera throws the baby out with the bathwater, so to speak.

Conclusion

This chapter serves merely to gesture toward the relevance that the Dionysian-Thomistic configuration of beauty as a divine name has for constructing a methodology for
contemporary theological aesthetics. The three projects examined in this chapter are selected for the diversity of their approaches to the methodology for a theological aesthetics. Each project offers valuable features to this end. The comparison with the Dionysian-Thomistic project is not intended to argue for its normativity for theological aesthetics. Rather, what is intended is to draw out the contribution that the Dionysian-Thomistic approach to beauty offers. And although the Dionysian-Thomistic configuration is not normative, it can be understood as the origin of beauty’s association with the divine. In this regard, it bears a unique and indispensable role in any enterprise that aspires to inquire into or implement this association. The Dionysian treatise On the Divine Names, as was argued in chapter two, marks the first point wherein Christian thought explicitly identifies God as Beauty itself. Consequently, it marks the historical starting point for every theological enterprise that approaches God through beauty. It is a starting point that initiates a long and complex tradition of thought that reaches its zenith in the high Middle Ages. Aquinas’s contribution to its development, while not normative, provides important insight into Dionysius’ significance for theology, and several aspects of the Dionysian program shape Thomas’s overall thought.

The three projects considered in this final chapter can be evaluated then in terms of how they fit into the continuity of the Dionysian-Thomistic tradition. Such an evaluation is meant only to raise questions and propose concerns regarding the general nature and direction of theological aesthetics. Given the relative novelty of theological aesthetics, its viability as a branch of theology requires some element of unity. Measuring, examining and evaluating the various methodologies, then, requires some criteria by which an underlying
unity may be established. The Dionysian-Thomistic project offers a helpful unity given its originating quality and its enduring influence.
General Conclusion

The argument throughout this effort has been that there is an inherent and indispensable association between beauty and the divine that permeates Western consciousness from its earliest origins up into the High Middle Ages. Beauty’s association with the divine originates in Greek philosophy as something of an enigma, frequently proving its recalcitrance to the determination of Greek philosophy. It is an association that has an amorphous presence in the various dimensions of Biblical thought. In the twilight of the ancient world, when the Christian revolution is gaining significant momentum, these two cognitive forces collide in the author of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*. The thinker who claims the apostolic name ‘Dionysius the Areopagite,’ for the first time, makes beauty’s association with the divine explicit. In so doing, however, Dionysius does not drastically alter the state of affairs in order to impose some particular understanding of either Neoplatonism or Christianity. Rather, the identification between beauty and God affirms what is already gestating in the wombs of both Greek and Biblical thought. Consequently, Dionysius stands as an historical moment with a twofold significance for the destiny of Western thought. In one way, Dionysius reflects back upon the world that preceded him an understanding of beauty that had always been present, but that continually struggled to show itself fully. Beauty never fails to attract the philosophical curiosity of the most astute thinkers of the ancient world. Still, time and again beauty eludes the efforts of even such acute minds as Plato and Aristotle. Both esteemed philosophers attempt to capture beauty within the limits of discursive reason, but both in one way or another come up short. Plotinus appears to gain more ground on the matter, though this may be the result of the more explicitly religious nature of his thinking. One might also mention the likely influence that the
fledgling Christian community has upon Plotinus in some way or another. Nevertheless, despite his greatest efforts he is unable to overcome all ambiguity with respect to the association between beauty and the highest principle, the One.

The ancient Greek world is never finally able to establish an explicit and unequivocal identity between beauty and the supreme principle, never finally able to take beauty all the way into the divine. The extent to which this inability derives from the limits of Greek philosophy itself is difficult to discern. If indeed beauty identifies a mode of intelligibility that exceeds the limits of discursive of reason – even if such excess is understood as an excess of discursive reason itself and so not wholly other to discursive reason – then it almost follows necessarily that reason on its own can never arrive at the sort of knowledge necessary to identify it as a divine name. In identifying beauty as a divine name, Dionysius reveals to a world in the final breaths of its slow demise the limits of reason, while simultaneously suggesting the plausibility of revealed knowledge.

This revelation itself marks the second significant feature of Dionysius as an historical moment. For in revealing the limits of the ancient world to itself, Dionysius displays before the newly emerging order of Christendom something that was to be Christianity’s unique inheritance. The identification of God as beauty itself carries with it massive implications about the world, human nature, the social order, God’s relationship with the created world and God’s nature as it is in itself. The identification of God as beauty at once impregnates the world of things with the divine presence. No longer can the divine be understood as some abstract notion of the good whose self-diffusion finally never permeates to the lowest levels of matter. No longer can the divine be understood as the truth abstracted from things and confined exclusively to the timeless and immaterial order of
the mind. For if God is beauty itself, if beauty identifies a personal attribute of the divine that at once bespeaks the divine presence in things, then both the good and the true as divine attributes are also constitutive of things in the world.

The identification of the divine as beauty introduces something novel into the history of thought. It necessarily implicates the world of things into cognitive reflection, not just as vehicles of a higher reality, but as lovable and valuable in themselves. Beauty demands a reevaluation of the material order as everywhere imbued with the divine spirit. With the Dionysian legacy, the world can be understood as a divine appearing, a theophany, through which the divine inspires and attracts the searching intellect every beyond its own limits. It is in the dynamic of theophany where Dionysius’s doctrine on beauty is most succinctly crystallized, at once embodying both dimensions of the coincidence of originality that marks Dionysius’s efforts. These two moments of originality – the synthesis of the two Parmenidean hypotheses into two attributes of the one appearing God, and the inclusion of beauty to the list of divine names – appear to have an intrinsic relation to each other; that is to say, with the one comes to the other. The treasure that Dionysius bequeathes to posterity is a world in which the names of God overflow the very constitution of created entities in their beauty.

There is no greater evidence that the Christian world welcomed this inheritance than the richness of scholastic thought. The Dionysian inheritance follows a tumultuous passage through the tension between a declining Roman empire in the West and a burgeoning Byzantine empire in the East. In the West, the identification between beauty and God becomes so entrenched by the time the ancient world dies out, however, that it is able to survive even through a period where the literature and learning barely escape extinction.
Through the concerted efforts of a few remarkable individuals, the Dionysian corpus finds its way to the Latin West where it takes its point of circulation at the University of Paris. Inspired in a multitude of ways by this Dionysian inheritance, the schoolmen expend every effort to plum the depths of the divine mystery as given through both revelation and in the natural things of the created order. As a doctrine, beauty as a divine name makes its way into the earliest schools of thought, where, guided by the Victorines, Chartreans, and Cistercians, it undergoes a diversity of development as it makes its way to the interests of the high Middle Ages.

Perhaps the most universal of scholars, Albert the Great is deeply inspired by the Dionysian vision of God and God’s relationship to the world. Everything Albert writes bespeaks a profound understanding of the identification between God and beauty, and by extension, God and the created order. His enthusiasm inspires his most well-known student, Thomas Aquinas, who becomes one of the few in the thirteenth century to write a commentary on the Divine Names of Dionysius. Following Albert, Thomas applies his philosophical and theological acumen to uncover the complex metaphysical dimensions of beauty. He emphasizes not only beauty’s cognitive dimension, but he locates it as that phenomenon by which the good gives itself to cognition. Beauty is, in Thomas’s view, between the good and the true as a dimension where the good and the true are harmonized. For Thomas, identifying beauty as a divine name signifies not only how God is the beauty in which all beautiful things participate, but that such participation implies the causal power and efficacy of beauty. Through his Trinitarian theology of the person of the Son, Thomas discovers the foundation for understanding the various dimensions of this participation and causality. Beautiful things please when they are seen (placent) because they emanate from a
surplus of being. In so emanating, they simultaneously contract that surplus within the limits of their form, even as they point beyond these limits to that surplus itself (*integritas*). Beautiful things, therefore, manifest a proportion that delights the sight and intellect by giving formal determination, that is to say, perceivability, to the ontological surplus behind every being (*proportio*). Through this proportion, the surplus of a beautiful thing’s being, wherein resides the illumination of its intelligibility (its *claritas*), is capable of conforming to cognitive limitations of determinate thought. All of this is also a concrete, existential encounter with the person of the Son in whom the fullness of the Father is manifest in both unity and difference. Through the Son, that is to say, through beauty, the intellectual soul ascends more profoundly into the intensive depth of being’s perfection, and therefore closer to God the Father.

In Thomas’s development of the Dionysian assertion that beauty is a divine name, the person of the Son is the one, true normative criterion with which all beautiful things are measured. It is the index within which all beautiful things are made known as beautiful. There is no beauty outside the Son that can be used to measure the Son’s beauty. Thomas adds this Trinitarian dimension to Dionysius’s original doctrine, which only implies the identity between beauty and the Son. Nevertheless, it is a development that emerges from the continuous trajectory within Western thought from Plato to Dionysius to the Latin West. It marks, in many ways, the triumphant moment in which beauty’s association with the divine becomes most pronounced.

The association between beauty and the divine, especially insofar as it is metaphysically expounded by Aquinas, announces a number of ramifications for thought in general and for theology in particular. As a principle of determination, beauty communicates
formal causality as well as the intelligible content that such a form acquires. There is a mutual inclusivity, or cognitive reciprocity, then between beauty and the knowledge of things; an increase or intensification of the one implicates an increase or intensification of the other. That is to say, the more one comes to understand beauty, which is to say understand it within its theological index, the more one increases the inborn capacity to know the world of things. Likewise, knowledge of worldly things serves to increase an understanding of beauty, so long as such knowledge is brought within a theological context.

A second, higher, mutual inclusivity then reveals itself: that between knowledge of the world and knowledge of God. When one seeks to know beauty by knowing the things of the world, one becomes capable of seeing how such knowledge uplifts the knower into being’s intensive depths, where the divine’s self-communication is more intensely encountered. Through beauty, all worldly knowledge is invested with a loftier nobility as a means of knowing the divine itself. Moreover, given that participation in beauty by a beautiful thing is a participation in the fullness of beauty rather than just a part, the particularities of the world become passageways into the divine precisely as particular. Beauty augments the value of the thing in itself, making all things worthy of contemplative examination.

Arguably, the association between beauty and the divine that achieves its lofty status by the thirteenth century begins to corrode not too long afterward. Why this is so remains a topic for another project. Nevertheless, it is scarcely controversial to point to the Cartesian-Kantian turn as one in which the association between beauty and God, and consequently, God and the world, is decimated. What was once the shining inheritance of a world thirsting for the divine in all its aspirations is quickly spent on the costly attempts to invest the subject with an unprecedented autonomy. The result is a return of sorts to a time when the divine
can only be sought as the good of the virtuous life, or the timeless essence of truth, but no longer is the world a divine appearing, a theophany. The Western mind has been split into so many cognitive disciplines that the question regarding the end of knowledge has become meaningless at best and tyrannical at worst.

Theology, as a discourse and a cognitive discipline, can never cease to ask this question, however. Now that it has renewed its once great alliance with beauty, theology can once again establish the context in which the question regarding the end of knowledge might make sense to ask. Still, given the modern demolition of beauty’s association with the divine, contemporary theology’s alliance with beauty remains fragile. If it is to become more secure and solid, it must look to strengthen its roots and foundation. This project has been an effort to do just that. It is hoped that these pages have not only demonstrated the fact of the association between beauty and the divine from the ancient world to the high Middle Ages, but also gestured toward the fruits that are born from this association especially within the Dionysian-Thomistic configuration. The world of the high Middle Ages was certainly no utopia. But it was a world where learning and knowledge were, for the most part, unified in one common effort to know God. In no small measure, this is the result of understanding how God’s presence in the world makes it beautiful, makes it attractive to the longing of the intellect. Above all, it derives from searching after the God who is the beautiful itself, the God whose name is beauty.
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