

Since the theme of beauty appears only occasionally in the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas and in even those passages is regularly addressed in only an indirect way, it is notable that this topic has enjoyed considerable attention from modern interpreters of St. Thomas. These interpreters have delved into the heart of St. Thomas's account of beauty, bringing together its scattered elements into a coherent whole, filling in the gaps inherited from St. Thomas, and exploring its possibilities. One of the fundamental elements of this

transcendental. However, it seems to me that many of the explanations given by these scholars fail to construct, from St. Thomas's texts, a satisfactory argument for the beautiful as a distinct transcendental, and in large part this seems due to a failure to attend sufficiently to St. Thomas's understanding of the transcendentals. So, since the purpose of this paper is to determine whether, according to St. Thomas, the beautiful is a distinct transcendental, I think it necessary to begin not with St. Thomas's account of beauty but with his account of the transcendentals. To this end, rather than examining the primary texts of St. Thomas one-by-one, I will present a synthesis of his argument, indicating as I go along the texts that I think not only state the various propositions of his argument but also support my reconstruction of the argument, and having recourse to direct textual elucidation according as one text or another is particularly significant for the point in question. In doing so, I will

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In order to determine whether St. Thomas considers the beautiful to be a transcendental, it is necessary first to ascertain what, for St. Thomas, constitutes a transcendental.³ The first thing that should be noted is that, much like the texts in which he discusses beauty, St. Thomas seems always to introduce his discussions of the transcendentals as a way of answering a further question (such as the nature of truth, the nature of the good, or the order of the divine names). This greatly complicates our task, since re-constructing St. Thomas's argument regarding the transcendentals on the basis of such

transcendentals are derived from being. Thus, in these two other texts – *D v r t t* 21.1 and *D pot nt* 9.7 ad 6 – the co-extensiveness of various transcendentals with *ns* is taken as the given, the fundamental premise of the argument. Upon further examination, however, the seemingly *pr or* derivation of the other transcendentals from *ns* does in fact rest upon at least the possibility of such co-extensiveness. Thus, I take it that this is the starting-point for St. Thomas’s general argument regarding the transcendentals. To express it *n toto*: certain names (such as *onu* or *v ru*) express something real that extends to every being (i.e., that is divided into the ten categories).

St. Thomas expresses this in varying ways in different contexts. In the *D v r t t* , he says that the good applies to any being⁴ and that the true is co-extensive with being.⁵ In the *D sput u st ons on t rtu s n G n r* , he says of the transcendentals that they “encompass every being” (*r u unt o n ns*).⁶ And finally, in the first book of his *Co nt r on t nt n s*, St. Thomas says that the transcendental names, as regards

B t r r ns n nt sA to B n n Con ptu

This co-extensiveness of the other transcendentals with being determines the way in which they add to being. These transcendentals cannot add anything real to being: they cannot add something that is outside the *r t o* of being, for nothing can add to being in this way, nor can they add something that is potentially contained within the *r t o* of being, thereby limiting or determining being (as the categories add to being), for in that case they would no longer be co-extensive with being. Therefore, if these transcendentals add to being at all – and surely they must, for otherwise they would be mere synonyms of being – they must add to it something merely conceptual. For St. Thomas, this means they must add either a negation (*unu*) or a conceptual relation (*v ru* and *onu*), and one that follows

i.e., by ruling out their adding to being in a way that would contract it – he concludes that the transcendentals add to being only conceptually.

C *t r r n s n n t s A* *to B n* *Con ptu* *n D t r n t r r*

As St. Thomas makes clear on several occasions, the other transcendentals make their conceptual addition to being in a determinate order. Rather than each transcendental being constituted by unconnected conceptual additions to being, each transcendental, in fact, proceeds from being in an order determined by its *r t o*. First in the order, of course, is being, since it is that to which all the other transcendentals add. Following being is “one,”¹⁰ which adds to being only a negation, viz., non-division. Because “one” adds a negation rather than a relation,¹¹ and because the negation of non-division added by “one” is presupposed for the relations constituted by “true” and “good,” “one” is nearest to being.

This is an appropriate point at which to provide a more detailed explication of the way in which the true and the good add to being, especially because the relationship of the beautiful to the true and the good will be crucial for understanding whether it is a distinct transcendental. According to St. Thomas’s account in *D v r t t* 1.1, the true and the good add to being a mode of being following upon every being as considered in relation to another. The true adds to being the relation of *onv n nt* that obtains between being and the intellect, and the good adds to being the relation of *onv n nt* that obtains between

¹⁰ I do not address the question of the place of *r s* and *a qu* in this order – they are included in only one of St. Thomas’s derivations of the transcendentals, and they do not appear in any of the passages in which he lays out the order of the transcendentals.

¹¹ *In I nt.* 8.1.3 sol.: “Alia vero quae diximus, scilicet bonum, verum et unum, addunt super ens, non quidem naturam aliquam, sed rationem: *s unu a t rat on n v s on s t propt r oc st prop nqu ss u a ns qu a a t tantu n at on* : verum autem et bonum addunt relationem quamdam; . . . [emphasis mine]” (Mandonnet, 200).

order. So, “one” is included in both the true and the good. Therefore, as St. Thomas concludes, the order of the transcendentals is the following: first is being, after which is “one,” then “true,” and finally “good.”¹⁴

The critical point here is that the other transcendentals do not arbitrarily add to being. It is not as if the transcendentals follow upon or “proceed” from being as planes do from a factory, one after another with no relation of dependence existing between any of them. Rather, the order of the transcendentals is based upon the *r t o* of each of the transcendentals, so that they follow upon being in a logical order. The order of the transcendentals is like the making of a pearl.¹⁵ If some foreign object, say a grain of sand, gets trapped in a mollusk, that grain of sand slowly becomes covered, layer by layer, with a substance secreted by the mollusk, each layer building upon the last. Just so the transcendentals begin with being as the first, with the other transcendentals following in a determinate, logical order, building upon and presupposing those that come before, so that being always remains at the center of the transcendentals. Like each layer of pearl, each transcendental depends upon those that come before it, for those transcendentals that are prior in the order of the transcendentals to the transcendental in question are included in the understanding of that posterior transcendental.¹⁶

¹⁴ “Considerando ergo verum et bonum secundum se, sic verum est prius bono secundum rationem cum verum sit perfectivum alicuius secundum rationem speciei, bonum autem non solum secundum rationem speciei sed etiam secundum esse quod habet in re: et ita plura includit in se ratio boni quam ratio veri, et se habet quodam modo per additionem ad illam. Et sic bonum praesupponit verum, verum autem praesupponit unum, cum veri ratio ex apprehensione intellectus perficiatur; unumquodque autem intelligibile est in quantum est unum: qui enim non intelligit unum nihil intelligit, . . . Unde istorum nominum transcendentium talis est ordo, si secundum se considerentur, quod post ens est unum, deinde verum post unum, et deinde post verum bonum” (Leon. 22.3.598: 40-58, 59-63).

¹⁵ Or, to use an Aristotelian example, it is like the succession of geometric figures (*D An a* II.3).

¹⁶ This is clear from what has been said in *D v r tat (D)* 21.3 about “good” presupposing “true” and “true” presupposing “one.” It is also evident from *u a t o o a ()* Ia 16.4.

So what St. Thomas is claiming in *D v r t t* 21.3 is that each of the transcendentals adds not just to being, but to all the transcendentals that are logically prior to it. It is not as if one transcendental adds to being, and another adds to being, and another to being. Rather, one transcendental adds to being, the next adds to

It should be pointed out that St. Thomas argues for the real identity, merely conceptual difference, and convertibility among all the transcendentals not on the basis of their proceeding in a determinate order such as to add conceptually to all the preceding transcendentals, but merely on the basis of their adding something merely conceptual to being. Put another way, precisely because the other transcendentals add to being merely a *r t o* following upon every being (second element of St. Thomas's argument), they are really identical with and convertible with not only being but also with each other (fourth element): this does not depend intrinsically on the transcendentals' proceeding from being in a determinate order (third element).¹⁹ Nevertheless, it seems to me that the order in which the transcendentals proceed from being should still be considered the third element of St. Thomas's argument (rather than the fourth), since it describes the nature of the conceptual addition to being, which constitutes the second element of his argument, whereas the real identity and convertibility and merely conceptual difference among the transcendentals is the consequence of this second element. In addition, although St. Thomas nowhere says this, it is even easier to see how the transcendentals are really identical and convertible with each other if they are constituted by successive conceptual additions to being.²⁰

communitate. Si autem comparemus ea ad invicem, hoc potest esse dupliciter: vel s cun u suppos tu ; t s c conv rtuntur a nv c t sunt n suppos to n c unqua r nquunt s ; vel s cun u nt nt on s oru ; et sic simpliciter et absolute ens est prius aliis. Cujus ratio est, quia ens includitur in intellectu eorum, et non e converso. . . . Alia vero quae diximus, scilicet bonum, verum et unum, addunt super ens, non quidem natura a qua , sed rat on : . . . [emphasis mine]" (Mandonnet, 199-200).

¹⁹ *In I nt. 19.5.1 ad 3: "Ad tertium dicendum, quod verum addit supra ens, sicut et bonum et unum. Nullum tamen eorum addit aliquam differentiam contrahentem ens, sed rationem quae consequitur omne ens; sicut unum addit rationem indivisionis, et bonum rationem finis, et verum rationem ordinis ad cognitionem; et ideo haec quatuor convertuntur, ens, bonum, unum et verum" (Mandonnet, 488).*

²⁰ Briefly, since there is only a conceptual difference between the good and being, and since the good is the farthest removed from being in [9-70302d:AE[925279302d:AE[925279302d:AE[99E7902o:99[30032[90Q95]2 :AE-692 :Ai-#

procedure here are textually justifiable. The remaining steps will, I hope, proceed naturally from the first two.

A t t u r o B u t

St. Thomas's most famous account of beauty is found in Ia 5.4 ad 1. In distinguishing between the beautiful and the good, St. Thomas states that the beautiful pertains to the cognitive power, and consists in due proportion, because "we call those things beautiful that, upon being seen, please"²¹ us. This is St. Thomas's most famous, and (in virtue of its ubiquity) perhaps his favorite, description of the beautiful: *quod visum placet*. But I think a clearer and more fruitful description of the beautiful can be found in I-IIae 27.1 ad 3: "that, the very apprehension of which pleases" (*quod visum placet*)²². Taking together, these two replies to objections give us the following account of the beautiful. The beautiful is distinguished from the good in that the good is that which all things desire and, therefore, it is of the nature of the good that appetite rests in it as in an end, whereas it is of the nature of the beautiful that appetite rests in the sheer apprehension of it (via sight, hearing, or intellect). The beautiful, then, adds to the good a certain ordering to the cognitive power and thus properly pertains to formal causality rather than final. More particularly, precisely because the mere apprehension of the beautiful pleases, i.e., gives the

²¹ "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. E om

appetite rest, the beautiful most properly stands in relation to the cognitive power, not the appetitive power (although this is not to say, of course, that the beautiful has no relation to the appetitive power).

Let, t55V'B?z??FU5U95ViB?z--7?4FVsB t, e be4F-sMV?z--6-6-VhoB?z?U75-59VutB?z--6-6-

according to quantity, position, action, etc.).

Standing in sharp contrast to such passages as these are those passages in which St. Thomas affirms that every being is beautiful. In his *In Divinis nominibus*, St. Thomas seems clearly to follow Dionysius, who says that God is called “supersubstantial beauty” because He gives beauty to all created beings, i.e., He causes radiance (*radiatio*) and proportion (*consonantia*) to be in all created beings.²⁹ God is the cause of radiance in created beings insofar as He gives to them the gift of His luminous radiance. What St. Thomas and Dionysius mean by this is the following: every form, through which a thing has *essentia*, is a certain participation in the divine radiance. Through its very form, its very *ratio*, then, every individual thing is and is beautiful, because in having (or rather being constituted by) that form it exists and it shares in the divine *radiatio*.³⁰ This gives us a deeper understanding of the claim that the beautiful pertains to formal causality. Earlier, we saw that beauty consisted in a thing’s being such as to please merely in being apprehended, so that beauty is, properly speaking, ordered to the apprehending power and thus belongs to the nature of formal causality. Now we see St. Thomas explicitly extending this to all beings: beauty pertains to formal causality because all beings are beautiful precisely through their form’s participating in the divine radiance, in virtue of which every being is pleasing in its mere apprehension.

²⁹ 4.5 #339: “. . . Deus qui est *supersubstantia* *purpure* *color* *purpure* *propter hoc quod omnibus* *entibus creatis dat purpure* *rationem*, secundum *proportionalitatem* *in se usque* : alia enim est pulchritudo spiritus et alia corporis, atque alia huius et illius corporis. Et in quo consistat pulchritudinis ratio, ostendit subdens quod sic Deus tradit pulchritudinem, in quantum est *causa consonantia* *in se* *in omnibus* : . . .” (Ed. C. Pera [Turin-Rome: Marietti, 1950], 113, n. 339). The italics indicate words Thomas took directly from the *Summa Theologiae*.
³⁰ *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 27, a. 2, ad 2. [\[59\]\[E-7902T:E-7902T:AE\[E77337-2n:Ed9\[30032T:E\[6\]333E\[E73\]\[357Q2s:AE\[E77337-2 :AE\[E77337-2n:EuE0679302t:a&i:E\[900-](#)

In addition to causing radiance in created beings, God also causes a two-fold proportion (*in se et ad alios*) in them: first, insofar as they are ordered to Him as to their end; second, insofar as they are ordered to one another.³¹ So, although wholeness is not mentioned in this context (and, in fact, St. Thomas rarely includes it when discussing the

transcendentally) to every being is further emphasized later in the commentary on Dionysius, where St. Thomas, following Dionysius, says that “the beautiful is convertible with the good”.³⁴ if the good extends to all beings, and if the beautiful is convertible with the good, then the beautiful likewise extends to all beings.

With this connection of the beautiful and the good we return to where we began with beauty, viz., St. Thomas’s description of beauty. Earlier, we saw that St. Thomas affirms that beauty adds to good a certain ordering to the cognitive power; what I had left out in that earlier discussion was the context for this description, viz., St. Thomas’s affirmation that the beautiful and the good are the same in subject and differ only conceptually. It now behooves me to explain this.

In those very same passages from the *u* that we considered earlier, in which St. Thomas describes the beautiful as “that, the very apprehension of which pleases” (or as “that which, upon being apprehended, pleases”), St. Thomas begins his discussion with a broader claim about the beautiful and the good, viz., that the beautiful and the good are the same in subject but differ conceptually (*r t on*). His statements and arguments regarding beauty are part of his substantiating this broader claim. In particular, his conclusion that the beautiful adds to the good an ordering to the cognitive power turns out to constitute the conceptual difference between the beautiful and the good: i.e., whereas the good regards the appetite,

simply. But insofar as it has further actualities, further perfections that it ought to have, that thing is good simply and, *ut at s utan s*, beautiful aesthetically. At the most basic level, then – that of first *ss* – every being is said to be beautiful transcendentally and to be good relatively. But just as evil things, though good *s cun u qu*, are not good simply, since they lack the requisite perfections, so ugly things, though transcendentally beautiful, are not aesthetically beautiful, because they lack the requisite actualities superadded to their first *ss* (i.e., to their transcendental beauty).

³⁴ 4.22 #590: “Deinde, ponit ea quae consequuntur communem rationem boni; et primo dicit: *s n pu c r tu n*, quia pulchrum convertitur cum bono, ut supra dictum est” (Pera, 216, n. 590).

question is aesthetic (corporeal or spiritual) or transcendental. Transcendental beauty consists in a thing's ordination to God and to other creatures and in the radiance of the form, given it by God, through which it exists and participates in the divine radiance.

Transcendental beauty, then, belongs to every being insofar as it exists, since that through which it has being is also that through which it has beauty, viz., its form. Understood in this manner – i.e., as founded upon the form through which a thing exists – the beautiful is the same as the good, differing from it only conceptually: whereas the good pertains to appetite, and therefore has the nature of an end, the beautiful adds to the good a certain ordering to the cognitive or apprehensive power and therefore has the nature of a formal cause.

one of them is exhaustive, it must be the derivation of *D v r t t* 1.1: in all other lists and derivations, four or fewer transcendentals are named, but in *D v r t t* 1.1 St. Thomas identifies six transcendentals – the usual suspects plus *r s* and *qu* . However, St. Thomas does not claim that this list is exhaustive, nor does the language of his derivation compel us to conclude that it is exhaustive. Perhaps most significant in this regard: in a derivation of the transcendentals given later in *D v r t t* (21.1), St. Thomas says that the conceptual additions to being that he lays out are the only possible conceptual additions: “that which is merely conceptual can only be twofold, viz., negati 5?uusa

the brute fact that the beautiful never occurs in any lists or derivations of the transcendentals, and there is the supporting fact that beautiful receives only incidental treatment throughout St. Thomas's writings. The only answer to what remains of the objection, it seems to me, is to reiterate the first reply – that St. Thomas is not concerned in any of his writings to provide an exhaustive list of the transcendentals – and to add that St. Thomas either was not so concerned with what constituted a transcendental, or did not have a sufficiently developed account of beauty, so as to address explicitly the question of the status of the beautiful as a distinct transcendental. It seems foolhardy to me to rely upon the absence of beauty from non-exhaustive lists of the transcendentals as damning evidence against the teaching of St. Thomas, viz., that the beautiful is a distinct transcendental, especially given the generally ancillary treatment St. Thomas gives to the transcendentals and his penchant for inconsistency in his lists of the transcendentals. Ultimately, these textual peculiarities are a double-edged sword: they can work both for and against the thesis that St. Thomas holds beauty to be a distinct transcendental. So, it is better to attempt to explain the “textual silence” in other ways than to make it the determining factor regarding St. Thomas's teaching.

The second group of difficulties to which our thesis is subject is doctrinal, rather than textual, in nature. First, shouldn't we consider beauty as a transcendental of the good, so to speak, rather than as a transcendental of being? That is, as several scholars claim, the beautiful adds merely conceptually to the good, but this does not constitute an addition to being.³⁹ This objection, however, proposes a false dichotomy: adding merely conceptually to

³⁹ See, *inter alia*: Aertsen, *van der Meer's Philosophy of Transcendentals*, 344; Mark Jordan, “The Evidence of the Transcendentals and the Place of Beauty in Thomas Aquinas,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 29 (1989), 399; Kevin O'Reilly, *Aesthetic Reflection on Aristotle's Response* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007),

the good should not be set up against adding merely conceptually to being. As we have seen, St. Thomas makes clear in *De virtutibus* 21.3 that every transcendental (other than being) adds merely conceptually to the immediately prior transcendental, according to the order in which the transcendentals follow from being, and it is precisely in adding to its prior transcendental that every other transcendental adds to being. Therefore, the fact that the beautiful adds merely conceptually to the good, rather than militating against its being a transcendental, in fact constitutes a point in favor of its being a transcendental.

Second, one could enlarge upon a particular part of the prior objection and ask precisely in what way the beautiful adds to being: meaning, what it is that the beautiful adds to the good (and, thus, to being) that is not already included in the good and the true? The immediate answer, of course, is what St. Thomas repeatedly says: the beautiful adds to the good a certain ordering to the cognitive power. But according to this objection, the ordering to the cognitive power is precisely what the true adds to being, so it would seem that the beautiful is not at all different from the good: meaning, since the good includes and presupposes the true, and the true adds to being the mode of relation to the cognitive power, the beautiful does not appear to add to being a distinct, general mode of being that follows upon every being. Several things should be said in response to this objection. First, and most importantly for our considerations, St. Thomas, we have seen, insists (to the point of interrupting his commentary on Dionysius to make this point) that the beautiful is conceptually distinct from the good because it adds to the good a certain ordering to the cognitive power, and we have also seen that St. Thomas affirms that logically posterior

transcendentals add to and presuppose logically prior transcendentals. Given these two facts, and barring any change of mind on St. Thomas's part regarding these two facts (for which

(*o n o s t v*) power.”⁴⁰ So this is the most suitable point at which to begin crafting a solution, viz., by affirming that the beautiful makes a unique addition to being in adding to the good a certain ordering to the cognitive power. What we must do, of course, is distinguish this addition from the addition made by the true. The true is being as related to intellect, as intelligible, as perfective of intellects through its species; the good is, in addition to the true, being as related to appetite, as appetible, as perfective of anything through its sheer *ss*.⁴¹ The beautiful is, in addition to the true and the good, being as an end for cognitive beings precisely in being apprehended. What I mean is this: with regard to cognitive beings, the true is being as apprehensible, the good is being as desirable upon being apprehended, and the beautiful is being as desirable in being apprehended. This harmonizes well with St. Thomas’s position that something is beautiful “precisely if and when it delights us upon becoming known to us,”⁴² for this proposed addition of the beautiful to being encapsulates St. Thomas’

Perhaps we can address these in a few minutes. But let me first, in conclusion, make a final point. It seems to me that the task here is to understand thoroughly the principles and fundamental positions of St. Thomas with regard to this question and, realizing that St. Thomas's account requires fleshing out, to rely on these principles and positions to develop a satisfactory account of the beautiful as a transcendental.