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Suspended Beauty? The Mystery of Aesthetic Experience in the *Summa Halensis*

Abstract: The *Summa Halensis* has been one of the first Western European scholastic works to offer a systematic treatment of beauty (*pulchrum*). There have been many controversial claims about exactly what the status of beauty is in the *Summa* and how important it is to its general framework. The present chapter reexamines the main contexts of the discussion of beauty in the *Summa*, examines several modern interpretations of beauty in the *Summa*, specifically that of Hans Urs von Balthasar, debunks several views on the ‘key’ role of beauty in the *Summa*, especially that beauty is a transcendental, and the most important one at that, but reaffirms the importance of ‘aesthetic argumentation’ in this work.

The Background

The subject ‘medieval aesthetics’ was popularized – or, some would claim, invented – by Edgar de Bruyne in the 1940s.¹ Various 20th-century Thomists, culminating in Hans Urs von Balthasar, jumped on the bandwagon.² They presented beauty in scholastic theology, beginning with the *Summa Halensis*, as a transcendental with a special ‘suspended’ status in that it connects all other transcendentals, thus being reminiscent of the circumincession of persons within the Trinity, the one, the true, and the good standing for the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, respectively. This ‘circumincession’ of transcendentals within being makes being into a true image of God. Thereby beauty is turned into a Trinitarian trace in the world, and its discussion grows into a full-blown Trinitarian aesthetics supposedly present in the *Summa* and later scholasticism. This view of beauty supposedly present in the *Summa* has been resurrected recently, e.g. by Justin Coyle.³ However, is there really any textual

1 Edgar de Bruyne, *Études d'esthétique médiévale*, 3 vols (Bruges: De Tempel, 1946).

2 See D.H. Pouillon, ‘La beauté, propriété transcendante chez les Scholastiques (1220 – 1270),’ *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge* 15 (1946), pp. 263 – 329; D. Halcour, ‘Tractatus de transcendentalibus entis condicionibus (Assisi, Biblioteca Comunale, Codex 186),’ *Franziskanische Studien* 41 (1959), pp. 41 – 106; H.U. von Balthasar, *Im Raum der Metaphysik*, in H.U. von Balthasar, *Herrlichkeit: Eine theologische Ästhetik* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1965), vol. 3.1; the English translation of this work is H.U. von Balthasar, *The Realm of Metaphysics in Antiquity*, in *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. 4, ed. J. Riches, trans. B. McNeil et al. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989).

3 Justin Shaun Coyle, ‘An Essay on Theological Aesthetics in the *Summa halensis*’ (PhD, Boston College, 2018).

support for it? And what is the true status of beauty and the role of aesthetic experience in the *Summa*?

Von Balthasar's View

The most advanced defense of 'transcendental aesthetics' – in the medieval meaning of this term – in the *Summa* and later scholasticism is mounted by von Balthasar. Like most Thomists of his time, such as D.H. Pouillon and D. Halcour, Balthasar assumes that beauty (*pulchrum*) in medieval scholastic thought is a transcendental: a view that has been decisively debunked by J.A. Aertsen.⁴ The only evidence that exists of such a view in the Franciscan milieu is an anonymous Assisi manuscript (edited by Halcour, see n. 2) previously attributed to Bonaventure where beauty does appear to have such a role. The only evidence that I found among Dominicans is one passage in Ulrich of Strassburg's *De summo bono*, which expressly says that 'the beautiful (*pulchrum*), just like the good, is coextensive with being (*convertitur cum ente*) as far as their suppositis are concerned.'⁵ However, Balthasar makes rather much of this scanty evidence and develops the teaching about the transcendental properties of being into a grandiose Trinitarian-aesthetic picture of the structure of being, which assigns a systematic place to the beautiful: 'as the one, true, and good of being point back to the Trinitarian causality of God as the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, it appears that there is no more free place in God for another transcendental.'⁶ The way most traveled here, after the Greeks, is to see the beautiful as a species of the good. However, the 'proximity of the beautiful to the concept of form, and in addition to [something] that rests in itself (...) not ordered to any end allows one to order the beautiful under the true as well.'⁷ The anonymous author of the Assisi manuscript has in mind 'this suspended state (*Schweben*) of the beautiful between the transcendentals as an ultimate, intangible value of being.'⁸ It is precisely this drawing on the 'transcendental status' of the beautiful (as it is a species of other transcendentals) that allows one to speak of the 'universal extension' of the beautiful as an interplay of all the transcendentals that corresponds to the circumincession of the persons of the Trinity, thus making being into a true 'likeness' of God

4 J.A. Aertsen, 'Beauty in the Middle Ages: A Forgotten Transcendental?' *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 1 (1991), pp. 68–97; see also his latest book on the subject: J.A. Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy as Transcendental Thought: From Philip the Chancellor to Francisco Suarez* (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

5 Ulrich von Strassburg, *De summo bono, liber II*, in *Corpus Philosophorum Teutonicorum Medii Aevi*, ed. A. de Libera (Hamburg: F. Meiner, 1987), vol. 1, pt. 2, p. 57.73–77.

6 Balthasar, *Im Raum der Metaphysik*, p. 339 (Riches and McNeil, p. 377).

7 Balthasar, *Im Raum der Metaphysik*, p. 339 (Riches and McNeil, p. 377).

8 Balthasar, *Im Raum der Metaphysik*, p. 339 (Riches and McNeil, p. 377).

the Trinity.⁹ The term *Schwebe/Schweben* becomes the key characteristic of the elusive nature of beauty as the fourth transcendental.

Balthasar's treatment of scholastic aesthetics, including that of the *Summa*, is dependent on older studies, such as those of M. Grabmann, E. de Bruyne, D.H. Pouillon, D. Halcour, and others, who tend to view beauty as a transcendental. Proceeding from his main assumption that 'theological aesthetics' is an *a posteriori* affirmation of certain theological positions, Balthasar thinks that the 'leap' from *a posteriori* aesthetic experience to the 'proposition that being as such is beautiful' (i.e. that beauty is a transcendental) 'can hardly be attempted from below.'¹⁰ This leap was attempted for the first time by the Franciscans and is evidence of the 'theological *a priori* of scholastic philosophy.' Francis had a certain 'experience of being' that is clarified by subsequent Franciscan theologians such as Bonaventure. It is not clear how 'experience' of being could lead to an *a priori* position, but it is true that Franciscan theology is generally based on phenomenal experience.¹¹ Francis' experience of being is summed up as follows: 'the Franciscan life is therefore pure, glorifying (*verherrlichender*) praise of the glory of God's grace and love that stream through every existent (*Seiende*).'¹² It is closely linked to the experience of highest poverty: 'the one who praises makes himself poor, in order to be able to experience *all* being as God's streaming love (...).'¹³

Out of early Franciscan scholastic thought, Balthasar focuses only on the *Summa*. He sees its aesthetics as part of the theory of transcendentals. The *Summa*, first of all, is seen through the lens of Aquinas, for, according to Balthasar, it is Aquinas, and not the Franciscans themselves, 'who will first definitively clarify this issue and at the same time satisfy the deepest concern of the *Poverello* to find God's glory in the humility-poverty-beauty of all being.'¹⁴ The *Summa* is also seen through the lens of Halcour's analysis of the anonymous Assisi manuscript, which, according to Balthasar, 'adds' (*beifügt*) to his interpretation of the *Summa*, as the lat-

9 Balthasar, *Im Raum der Metaphysik*, p. 340 (Riches and McNeil, p. 377).

10 Balthasar, *Im Raum der Metaphysik*, p. 340 (Riches and McNeil, p. 378).

11 See also Oleg Bychkov, 'The Status of the Phenomenal Appearance of the Sensory in Fourteenth-Century Franciscan Thought after Duns Scotus (Peter Aureol to Adam of Wodeham),' *Franciscan Studies* 76 (2018), pp. 267–85; idem, "'He Who Sees Does Not Desire to Imagine': The Shifting Role of Art and Aesthetic Observation in Medieval Franciscan Theological Discourse in the Fourteenth Century,' in *Religion and Art: Rethinking Aesthetic and Auratic Experiences in 'Post-Secular' Times*, ed. D. Džalto, *Religions* 10:3 (2019), pp. 15–27. Published online March 18, 2019. DOI: 10.3390/rel10030205; idem, 'The Status of Sensory and Aesthetic Experience in Fourteenth-century Franciscan Theology, from Peter Aureol to Adam Wodeham,' in *Aesthetic Theology in the Franciscan Tradition: The Senses and the Experience of God in Art*, eds. O. Bychkov and X. Seubert (New York; London: Routledge, 2020), pp. 354–68.

12 Balthasar, *Im Raum der Metaphysik*, p. 341 (Riches and McNeil, p. 379).

13 Balthasar, *Im Raum der Metaphysik*, p. 342 (Riches and McNeil, p. 380), my emphasis.

14 Balthasar, *Im Raum der Metaphysik*, p. 344 (Riches and McNeil, p. 382).

ter does not expressly place beauty among the transcendentals.¹⁵ Beauty – following not the *Summa* but the Assisi text – is a ‘moment’ that ‘reveals itself’ in the outpouring of the good, while binding together all the transcendentals. The beautiful describes precisely the extent, to which the ‘form’ in its revelation ‘remains unattainable and unavailable;’ this opens up the way to theological aesthetics, as the form here ‘shows its ontological (*seinshafte*) glory.’¹⁶ ‘Here it becomes finally clear,’ Balthasar concludes, ‘how these thinkers could elevate beauty to a property of being as such, and how they must have done that already based on the interrelation between the one, the true, and the good, with none of which does the beautiful fully and definitively overlap.’ And he calls the beautiful ‘the fourth transcendental’.¹⁷

Sources, Terminology, and Context of the Discussion of Beauty and Aesthetic Experience in the *Summa Halensis*

No discussion about the role and meaning of aesthetic terms in the *Summa* is possible without looking at its sources and the issue of transmission of aesthetic terms from the sources.¹⁸ The text of the *Summa*, as those of other early scholastic works, sometimes consists entirely of selections of quotations from Patristic and early medieval sources, and its position is expressed through the way the sources are selected and matched. This sort of ‘patchwork’ hermeneutics means that the *Summa* inherits terminological problems from its sources, many of which are translated from the Greek with various degrees of accuracy. The main sources for the discussion of aesthetic issues are two: Augustine on the Latin side and pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite on the Greek. Occasionally Boethius and some other late ancient or early medieval authors are quoted as well, but the trend overall is obvious: the material on beauty and aesthetic issues comes from Christian Neoplatonism – which makes perfect sense given the importance of beauty and aesthetics in the Neoplatonic tradition.

The translation of terms from the Greek in this case is important. Even ancient Latin authors such as Cicero and Augustine, who were mined for aesthetic terms

¹⁵ Balthasar, *Im Raum der Metaphysik*, p. 344 (Riches and McNeil, p. 383).

¹⁶ Balthasar, *Im Raum der Metaphysik*, p. 345 (Riches and McNeil, p. 383).

¹⁷ Balthasar, *Im Raum der Metaphysik*, p. 346 (Riches and McNeil, p. 384).

¹⁸ All the information in this section is based on my doctoral dissertation on the topic, Oleg Bychkov, ‘A Propos of Medieval Aesthetics: A Historical Study of Terminology, Sources, and Textual Traditions of Commenting on Beauty in the Thirteenth Century’ (PhD thesis, Toronto, 1999), as well as my monograph, Oleg Bychkov, *Aesthetic Revelation: Reading Ancient and Medieval Texts after Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), which substantially reworks, amplifies, and develops the material collected for the dissertation.

by the *Summa*, operated with Greek material translated into Latin, e.g. Hellenistic Greek material in Cicero's own translation, which is absorbed into Augustine, or the Latin translation of Plotinus. Pseudo-Dionysius existed in several Latin translations made from the 9th to the 13th centuries with varying degrees of accuracy. The most important factor is that the Greek term for general excellence, either moral or physical, τὸ καλόν, is translated into Latin by Cicero as *honestum*, and τὸ πρέπον, the term for fittingness – again, either moral or physical – as *decorum*. As this fact was widely known, and *decor/decorus* could simply mean 'beauty' in Latin, occurrences of the terms *honestum/honestas* or *decorum/decor* could be interpreted as 'beauty'/'the beautiful' (*pulchritudo/pulchrum*), and, in fact, in some translations of Dionysius are rendered as such. This brings in a host of contexts, both from ethics and from theology, that have little to do with what we would call 'aesthetic' beauty, and, indeed, creates an impression that in some Patristic sources 'beauty' is an all-pervasive notion that certainly must be discussed. In addition, τὸ καλόν in Dionysius, and thus 'beauty' in translations, is one of the divine names, which makes the discussion of beauty even less avoidable in theology. The 'aesthetic' theme is also boosted by the use of 'aesthetic' argumentation in two distinct topics inherited from antiquity and co-opted by Augustine into the Christian scheme. The first is the cosmological argument for the existence of divine power from the beauty and order of the universe, and the second is the 'aesthetic' justification of evil in the universe in the sense that it creates a flattering contrast with the good. Both arguments were used by Stoics, are reported by Cicero, and are included in Plotinus' *Enneads*.

It is also important to trace the authorship of the discussion of beauty and aesthetic issues in the *Summa* and indicate its significance for the subsequent medieval tradition. Curiously, the contexts related to beauty, in particular the 'aesthetic' theory of evil and especially the way the sources of aesthetic material are used, point to Alexander himself as the author. Studies from the 1940s by Doucet and Lottin analyze the dependence of the *Summa* on Alexander's own *Sentences Commentary*.¹⁹ The *Prolegomena* to the edition of Alexander's *Sentences Commentary* identifies it as a major source for the *Summa*. The *Summa* copies from the Commentary 'not only Pro and Contra arguments, but also solutions and sometimes entire chapters verbatim.'²⁰ The dependence of the sections related to beauty in the *Summa* on the authentic works of Alexander also can be demonstrated textually. Thus, parts of book 1 of the *Summa*, which discuss Augustine's argument that the existence of evil in the universe can be justified through the beauty of contrast that it creates,²¹ have textual

¹⁹ See Victorin Doucet, 'A New Source of the *Summa fratris Alexandri*: The Commentary on the Sentences of Alexander of Hales,' *Franciscan Studies* 6 (1946), pp. 403–17; O. Lottin, 'Le Commentaire d'Alexandre de Hales sur les Sentences,' *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 14 (1947), pp. 93–96.

²⁰ Alexander of Hales, *Magistri Alexandri de Hales Glossa in quatuor libros Sententiarum Petri Lombardi* (Quaracchi: Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 1951), vol. 1, d. 8, p. 101.

²¹ The text is cited and discussed below.

parallels with Alexander's *Sentences* Commentary. The similarity between the *Summa* and Alexander's *Sentences* Commentary is best expressed through the way they use Augustine's text as a source. The selection of Augustinian passages in the sections with matching contents in the *Summa* and Alexander's *Sentences* Commentary is very similar, even regarding the way the passages are cut. For example, as far as the discussion of the place of evil in the universe is concerned, Alexander's *Sentences* Commentary contains about one half of the material from *De libero arbitrio* 3.9.24–27 used in the section on beauty in the *Summa*, with many passages almost exactly corresponding to the ones used in the *Summa*.

As far as the later tradition is concerned, subsequent scholastic authors, both Franciscan and Dominican, are heavily dependent on the *Summa* for their discussions of beauty. The evidence is clear in Bonaventure,²² but also in Dominican authors, beginning with Albert's *Summa Theologica* and commentary *On the Divine Names*, which have influenced the work of his two disciples: Aquinas' *Sentences* Commentary, *Summa Theologica*, and commentary *On the Divine Names*, and Ulrich of Strassburg's *De bono*. Albert's *Summa Theologica*'s dependence on the *Summa Halensis* has been acknowledged on many occasions. For example, the editors of the *Summa Halensis* notice a 'great affinity' existing between the *Summa Halensis* and Albert's *Summa Theologica*. According to them, 'those Sums frequently agree with each other,' and Albert makes a constant use of the *Summa*, which he 'continuously had at hand.'²³ As far as the discussion of beauty is concerned, the dependence of Albert's *Summa Theologica* on the *Summa Halensis* is also striking. First of all, the structure of Albert's *Summa Theologica* 2, tract 11, question 62²⁴ is almost identical to that of *SH* 2 discussed below.²⁵ Both have sections on the 'evil of punishment',²⁶ on 'monstrosity',²⁷ on the 'changeable good',²⁸ and on miracles.²⁹ This dependence can also be clearly demonstrated through textual similarities. The similarities between the two works as far as their respective treatments of beauty are concerned also extend to the selection of sources. For example, they exhibit similar textual se-

22 Cf. Oleg Bychkov, 'Decor ex praesentia mali: Aesthetic Explanation of Evil in Thirteenth-Century Franciscan Thought,' *Recherches de théologie et philosophie médiévales* 68:2 (2001), pp. 245–69.

23 Victorin Doucet, 'Prolegomena in librum III necnon in libros I et II *Summa Fratris Alexandri*,' in *Doctoris irrefragabilis Alexandri de Hales Ordinis minorum Summa theologica*, vol. 4 (Quaracchi: Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 1948), pp. ccxxxv–vi; cf. Bychkov, 'A Propos of Medieval Aesthetics,' pp. 27–29, 211–12.

24 Albert the Great, *Summa Theologica*, pars II, qu. 1–67, ed. S. Borgnet, in *Opera omnia* (Paris: L. Vivès, 1895), vol. 32, pp. 596ff.

25 Alexander of Hales, *Doctoris irrefragabilis Alexandri de Hales Ordinis minorum Summa theologica* (*SH*), 4 vols (Quaracchi: Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 1924–48), II, In1, Tr2, Q3 (nn. 75ff.), pp. 99ff.

26 Albert the Great, *STh* 2, p. 599; *SH* II, In1, Tr2, Q3, C3, Ar2 (n. 78), p. 101.

27 Albert the Great, *STh* 2, p. 599; *SH* II, In1, Tr2, Q3, C3, Ar3 (n. 79), p. 101.

28 Albert the Great, *STh* 2, p. 600; *SH* II, In1, Tr2, Q3, C6, Ar2 (n. 83), p. 105.

29 Albert the Great, *STh* 2, pp. 600–1; *SH* II, In1, Tr2, Q3, C6, Ar3 (n. 84), pp. 106–7.

lections, up to the exact order of lines, from Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 16.8 and *De libero arbitrio* 3.9.26–27.

After having established some textual and terminological facts about the context of the discussion of beauty and aesthetic experience in the *Summa*, the rest of the analysis will proceed as follows. It is logical to start with the discussion of the beautiful in the context of the *Summa*'s teaching on the transcendentals in book 1, as this is the subject that has generated the most debate in modern times. Beauty comes up once again in book 1 in the context of the 'aesthetic' proof of the existence of evil in the universe. The third major context where beauty is discussed is in a similar segment on evil contributing to the beauty of the universe in book 2, except that this time the discussion is much more extensive. The beginning of the section in book 2 contains another general discussion of the nature of the beautiful, and it makes more sense to analyze this passage together with the context of the transcendentals. Finally, I will look at several contexts where the *Summa* uses what we might call 'aesthetic reasoning', or an 'aesthetic' way to construct an argument, in order to determine whether it really presents suitable material for a Balthasar-style theological aesthetics.

Beauty and the Transcendentals in the *Summa*

Beginning with the section on the transcendentals in book 1 of the *Summa*,³⁰ one notices that the beautiful is discussed strictly under the rubric of the good: question 3, 'On the goodness of the divine nature,' division (*membrum*) 1, 'On goodness in general,' chapter 1, 'What is the implied meaning of the "good"?' Article 2 of this chapter deals with the question 'whether the good is identical to the beautiful (*pulchrum*) as far as their meaning is concerned.'³¹ The arguments in favor are based on translations of some excerpts from Dionysius, according to which it appears that he applies the terms *decorum* and *pulchrum* to God indiscriminately together with 'good'. Thus beauty appears to be the final cause just as the good, i.e. identical with the good. Arguments to the contrary suggest that there is some difference between the two. First, the 'term "beautiful" is applied when the meaning of the formal cause is intended; hence, God is called beautiful when he is understood as the exemplary cause.'³² In addition, '*decorum* and *speciosum* in creatures refer to one and the same thing: namely, a thing is called "shapely" or "beautiful" (*speciosa*) based on its shape, which is the form of the thing. However, the term "good" refers to the

³⁰ SH I, P1, In1, Tr3.

³¹ SH I, P1, In1, Tr3, Q3, M1, C1, Ar2 (n. 103), pp. 162–63.

³² The translations from the *Summa Halensis* in this essay are mostly mine, with a couple of exceptions where they are by Lydia Schumacher with my adjustments; most of the translations are taken from Lydia Schumacher and Oleg Bychkov, ed. and trans., *A Reader in Early Franciscan Theology: The Summa Halensis* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2021).

final cause.’ In addition, Augustine’s well-known definition of beauty in *De civitate Dei* 22.19.21, which comes from the Stoic background, is that ‘all beauty consists in congruence of parts with some sweetness of color.’ This definition, then, suggests that ‘there will be no beauty in simple and spiritual things. However, there is goodness in them: for the most part in God and therefrom in spiritual things.’ In other words, the *Summa* resurrects the old Plotinian argument as to whether there is beauty in simple things or only in complex patterns.

The *Summa*’s reply is based on Augustine’s distinction between *utile*, or ‘useful’, and *honestum*, or ‘excellent’, in *Quaestiones* 83, question 30. As is well known from ancient Greek thought, excellence is pursued for its own sake, while utility for the sake of something else. Augustine famously equates ‘excellence’ (*honestas*) with ‘intelligible beauty’, which can be properly applied to God. ‘It is clear,’ the *Summa* concludes,

that insofar as the good is referred to as ‘excellent’, it is the same as ‘the beautiful’, while insofar as the good is useful it is not. For these [two aspects of the good] differ: indeed, the term ‘beautiful’ denotes the ability of the good to please our faculty of perception, while the term ‘good’ denotes its ability to delight our affective faculty. This is the difference as far as the consideration of the final cause is concerned.³³

First of all, it is clear from this text that Aertsen’s assessment is correct: the beautiful is an aspect of the good, not a separate transcendental property of being that is convertible with it. Second, it is clear what aspect of the good it is. It is its ability to become manifest or to reveal itself externally to something that is capable of perception. Also, this manifestation is accompanied by pleasure, which has been a mark of aesthetic experience from time immemorial. Aesthetic experience is a particular way of revealing its value – the aesthetic value – that is not based on reasoning but on feeling, and the mark of this value that signals its presence is one’s immediate reaction of aesthetic pleasure. The reply to objection 1 confirms that the beautiful is interchangeable with the good, not with being.³⁴ The *Summa* argues that sometimes the formal cause is viewed as an end, and sometimes we consider the final cause formally, as a set of rules to achieve the end. ‘In a similar way, the beautiful puts on the garbs of the good, and the good the garbs of the beautiful, although the primary meaning of “beautiful” seems to be based more on exemplarity, just as the primary meaning of “good” on finality.’³⁵

³³ SH I, P1, In1, Tr3, Q3, M1, C1, Ar2 (n. 103), Respondeo, p. 162.

³⁴ One can make an argument that by virtue of the good being interchangeable with being, this ‘aesthetic’ aspect of the good will be interchangeable with being as well. However, as is explained below, it appears that not all levels of the good are interchangeable with being, and some of its aesthetic aspects are precisely not, which might explain why the ‘convertibility of the beautiful’ position was never expressly articulated in the *Summa* or other major medieval texts.

³⁵ SH I, P1, In1, Tr3, Q3, M1, C1, Ar2 (n. 103), Ad obiecta 1, pp. 162–63.

The *Summa*'s reply goes on to address another feature that is commonly attributed to beauty and aesthetic experience: that it has to do with a pattern or arrangement, i.e. something complex. If one considers the efficient cause, the difference between the good and the beautiful is that the term "good" denotes the flow [of effects] from a cause without considering [their] distinction, while "beautiful" describes this flow with regard to distinction (...).' A similar line of reasoning applies if one considers the exemplary or formal cause: the "good" stands for the exemplar upon which something is modeled, insofar as the end is, as it were, a set of regulations – an art – for a craftsman who works toward a final goal (...).' At the same time, the "beautiful" refers to the exemplar itself, insofar as it is an art that distinguishes and brings into harmony different elements.³⁶

This set of statements points to one common classification in medieval thought that goes at least as far back as Boethius. There are two levels of goodness in created things. The first level is convertible with being: things are good in some way simply by virtue of existing, as beings. However, there is another, second, level of goodness that results from arrangement, order, and pattern, and can only exist in things that can be ordered. Beauty is commonly associated with this second-level goodness that exists in an arrangement and within an order. A reply to objection 2 based on Augustine's texts solidifies this position: 'For just as "bodily beauty consists of a fitting arrangement of parts," in the same way the beauty of souls consists of the harmony and ordering of mental faculties, and beauty in the divine consists of the sacred order of divine persons (...).'³⁷

The *Summa* continues to clarify its conceptualization of the beautiful in book 2. The context of question 3 is the discussion of creatures under the aspect of their quality (*De creatura secundum qualitatem*).³⁸ It is clear that the context here is similar to the discussion of transcendentals in book 1. The previous question 2 (*De creatura secundum quantitatem*) discusses creatures under the aspect of quantity and includes topics such as oneness/multiplicity and being/non-being, i.e. being and at least one other transcendental. Among the 'creaturely conditions' to be discussed under the rubric of 'quality' the introductory text to question 3 mentions the 'true', the 'good', and the 'beautiful', i.e. two other transcendentals plus the beautiful.³⁹

Chapter 1 of this question is dedicated to the essence of the beautiful (*Quid sit pulchrum*).⁴⁰ Based on pseudo-Dionysius, *Divine Names* 4.7, the *Summa* suggests that the 'beautiful and the good are identical as far as their substance is concerned' but are different conceptually. The question is, then, 'since each of them adds to being, what it is that the beautiful adds to being that is different from what the

³⁶ SH I, P1, In1, Tr3, Q3, M1, C1, Ar2 (n. 103), Ad obiecta 1, pp. 162–63.

³⁷ SH I, P1, In1, Tr3, Q3, M1, C1, Ar2 (n. 103), Ad obiecta 2, p. 163.

³⁸ SH II, In1, Tr2, Q3, p. 99.

³⁹ SH II, In2, Tr2, Q3, p. 99.

⁴⁰ SH II, In1, Tr2, Q3, C1 (n. 75), p. 99.

good does.’ First of all, once again, it is clear that the *Summa* assumes that the beautiful is convertible with the good, not with being,⁴¹ and that both add to being. The initial arguments, again, revolve around various types of causes. Since the good definitely has to do with the final cause, if the beautiful is conceptually different from it, it can only be associated with the formal cause, i.e. with arrangement, order, and pattern. Engaging this subject further, one could narrow down what exactly the beautiful is associated with in terms of pattern, and it seems to be the *species* (out of the classical triad *modus*, *species*, and *ordo*). Indeed, the adjective *speciosus* (‘shapely’) is synonymous with *pulcher*. Now both *species* and beauty are related to form. However, this creates a problem, because truth is also commonly associated with some sort of a formal pattern. But then how is the beautiful different from the true? In other words, the formal aspect does not make the beautiful distinct.

In its reply the *Summa* basically reiterates what it says in book 1, confirming that this way of thinking about the beautiful is consistent throughout books 1 and 2: ‘Truth is a formal disposition that is related to the inside, while beauty is a formal disposition that is related to the outside: for we habitually call that thing beautiful, which of itself possesses an ability to be perceived visually as something harmonious or becoming (*conveniens*).’⁴² Once again, beauty describes the ability of things to appear and to be perceived in a certain way, i.e. as harmonious and thereby pleasing to the faculty of perception. Beauty is the revelatory aspect of both the good and the true.

The *Summa* also uses the text of Dionysius’ *Divine Names* to determine how exactly the beautiful is related to the final cause. In fact, when the Latin translation of Dionysius reads that ‘all things desire the beautiful (*decorum*) and good,’ *decorum* in this case translates the Greek term for general excellence τὸ καλόν, which makes it into a trite statement common to Greek thought: of course all things desire excellence! However, the *Summa* operates under the assumption that it says that all things desire beauty. It seems from this statement that *decorum*, which the *Summa* freely glosses as *pulchrum*, is related to the final cause. However, if one uses the common meaning of ‘desire’, ‘everything that quenches one’s appetite is called the end (*finis*), for example, we [commonly] say that the intellect desires that which is delightful to it, and so does the faculty of sight. (...) And from this perspective the beautiful falls under the natural appetite of all things.’⁴³

It is clear from the discussion of the nature of the beautiful in the *Summa* up to this point that the Summists present a standard Greek – Platonic or Neoplatonic – teaching about beauty, which would appear non-controversial even to modern aestheticians. So far, there is not much that would make this aesthetics distinctly theological or distinctly Christian.

⁴¹ See n. 36 that addresses the possible argument that if the beautiful is convertible with the good, it is automatically convertible with being.

⁴² *SH* II, In1, Tr2, Q3, C1 (n. 75), Respondendum, p. 99.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

The Beauty of Contrast and Arrangement in the *Summa*

Another significant block of topics where beauty and aesthetics feature prominently in the *Summa* is its ‘aesthetic’ interpretation of the order of the created universe, and specifically its ‘aesthetic’ defense of the place of evil, badness, and ugliness in this arrangement. The first occurrence of this topic is in the same question 3 (‘On the goodness of the divine nature’)⁴⁴ as where the discussion of transcendentals occurs. Division (*membrum*) 3 is devoted to the ‘created good’, and the topic of chapter 5 is the ‘good of the universe.’⁴⁵ As an answer to the question ‘whether God permits evil to arise in the universe,’⁴⁶ the *Summa* uses a well-known passage from Augustine’s *Enchiridion* 11:

Therefore, God permitted evil things to exist for the sake of the beauty of good things: for if evil did not exist, the good would only possess absolute beauty, namely of the good itself; however, when evil exists, the relative beauty of the good grows, so that in comparison with its opposite – evil – the good shines forth more beautifully.⁴⁷

The answer to objections is also based on Augustine: ‘It says, then, that if evil did not exist, things in the universe would have lacked some beauty.’ These texts suggest, again, that beauty is an aspect of the good, not of being, and that at least one type of beauty is only present in a complex pattern and thus cannot be a property of being as such. Article 2 asks ‘whether the universe could have been better without evil things.’ The answer is, again, based on Augustine’s passage from *De civitate Dei* 11.18, where he employs the example of the use of antitheses in rhetoric in order to solve the problem of evil. Using antithetical statements increases the beauty of speech; in the same way, the presence of evil, badness, and ugliness increases the beauty of the universe. Once again, both Augustine and the *Summa* here speak of the second-level ‘good of arrangement’ that is not immediately convertible with being.

Answers to objections provide more aesthetic examples from both rhetoric and visual experience to illustrate the same point. Thus ‘just as the beauty of speech is greater when we interject pauses into it than if it flowed continuously without them, in the same way the beauty of the universe is greater when evil things are well placed within it.’⁴⁸ Further, ‘a woman can have a blemish in such a place that it would be fittingly placed and result in greater beauty. Another example is a

⁴⁴ *SH* I, P1, In1, Tr3, Q3, p. 160.

⁴⁵ *SH* I, P1, In1, Tr3, Q3, M3, C5, Ar1–2 (nn. 120–21), pp. 188–91.

⁴⁶ *SH* I, P1, In1, Tr3, Q3, M3, C5, Ar1 (n. 120), pp. 188–89.

⁴⁷ *SH* I, P1, In1, Tr3, Q3, M3, C5, Ar1 (n. 120), Respondet, p. 189.

⁴⁸ *SH* I, P1, In1, Tr3, Q3, M3, C5, Ar2 (n. 121), Ad obiecta 2, p. 190.

scar on the face of a soldier: if it is in a fitting place, he looks more handsome.⁴⁹ Augustine provides another visual example in *De civitate Dei* 11.23, about using black color in a painting: of itself, black color is not beautiful, but if used appropriately in a chiaroscuro technique, it enhances significantly the total beauty of the painting.

The *Summa* returns to the same line of ‘aesthetic’ argumentation in book 2 in question 3 on creatures ‘as far as their quality is concerned,’⁵⁰ so this section harmonizes well with the discussion in book 1. After laying out the essence of beauty in chapter 1 discussed previously, the *Summa* goes to considerable length in a number of chapters to address the same subject: how evil and ugly things can result in beauty.⁵¹ The answer is basically the same: evil or badness of crime and punishment are only such in a qualified sense, but within the total picture of universal justice they are beautiful. Again, the *Summa* here speaks of relative beauty, or beauty in a qualified sense (*pulchrum secundum quid*), that is, the beauty of order and pattern. A couple of statements from this segment also reinforce the position that beauty is convertible with goodness, not with being. Thus one initial argument for chapter 5 states directly that ‘the beautiful and the good are interconnected’ (literally, ‘one accompanies the other,’ *pulchrum et bonum sese concomitantur*), and if one is defined in a certain way, so is the other.⁵² And a counter-argument from the following chapter 6 states that ‘beauty follows goodness’ (*bonitatem consequitur pulchritudo*).⁵³

Beauty and Theology in the *Summa*

So far, what we have seen in the *Summa* is a summary of the ancient pagan view of beauty that was adapted during the Patristic period to Christian cosmology and theodicy. If we look at this material through a Balthasarian lens, even leaving aside the unsubstantiated claim that beauty is a transcendental, we do see some correspondence to Balthasar’s scheme of theological aesthetics. Thus our experience of reality, even apart from any belief system, contains an element of fascination, wonder, awe, and delight in the face of certain phenomena – especially complex patterns – that we traditionally describe by aesthetic terms, such as beauty, fittingness, and so forth. This is Balthasar’s ‘horizontal dimension’ of theological aesthetics that starts with our universally accessible experience of beauty that suggests that there is something more to reality. But does this experience lead directly to God in the *Summa*, and, which is more important for theological aesthetics, does the *Summa* apply aesthetic principles to the construction of theological arguments?

⁴⁹ SH I, P1, In1, Tr3, Q3, M3, C5, Ar2 (n. 121), Ad obiecta 3, p. 190.

⁵⁰ SH II, In1, Tr2, Q3, p. 99.

⁵¹ SH II, In1, Tr2, Q3, C3–6 (nn. 77–85), pp. 100–8.

⁵² SH II, In1, Tr2, Q3, C5 (n. 81), Ad quod sic a, p. 103.

⁵³ SH II, In1, Tr2, Q3, C6, Ar4 (n. 85), Contra 1, p. 107.

As it happens, the *Summa* also does contain the standard Augustinian line of thought that establishes a direct link between our aesthetic experience and the revelation of the divine behind phenomenal reality. This view that sees beauty as a trace of the divine in created reality becomes pervasive in Bonaventure. For example, the *Summa* in book 2 devotes a whole chapter to the question ‘whether a trace leads us to the cause of which it is a trace.’⁵⁴ The reply engages the notion of beauty:

There are two ways to consider visible and even invisible creatures. For one can consider them under the aspect of beauty or delightfulness (*pulchritudinis sive delectabilitatis*) that they have without relating this [beauty] to God, from whom they have [it]: and this way brings about error. Another way [to consider them is] insofar as they have beauty from the supremely beautiful one and delightfulness from the supremely delightful one: and in this way traces do lead us to him, of whom they are traces. An example from Aristotle, *De partibus animalium* 1.5, illustrates this. One can consider a painting in two ways: as a painting or as an image. If [one appreciates it] as a painting, the appreciation does not go beyond the painting itself (...); if [one evaluates it] as an image, under this aspect it leads us to something else, [i.e. to that] of which it is an image.⁵⁵

The reply ends by quoting Augustine’s ‘aesthetic’ comparison from *De vera religione* 22.43, along the same lines: one can appreciate the versification aspect of poetry, such as the delightful movement of the meter in your hearing experience, or one can appreciate the art of the poet who wrote it. In the same way, one could be delighted by created reality without thinking of the divine power that is responsible for it. In other words, an object of art or an aesthetic object can be enjoyed and appreciated for its aesthetic features or the experience it provides, in a secular fashion. Or one’s aesthetic experience of it can trigger a further movement of the mind to the origin of this experience, which, either in Augustine or, subsequently, in German Idealist philosophy, can be styled ‘transcendental’ (in the modern sense of the term). The proper way of handling aesthetic experience, either in medieval thinkers or in Balthasar, of course, is the second one. As the *Summa* sums up this position in another context, ‘the beauty of creatures is a certain sign that opens up a cognitive path toward uncreated beauty.’⁵⁶

Aesthetic Argumentation in the *Summa*

According to Balthasar, practicing theological aesthetics amounts to solving crucial theological problems by aesthetic means or by applying typically aesthetic ways of

⁵⁴ *SH* II, In1, Tr1, S2, Q1, M2, C7 (n. 40), pp. 48–49.

⁵⁵ *SH* II, In1, Tr1, S2, Q1, M2, C7 (n. 40), Solutio, p. 49.

⁵⁶ *SH* II, In1, Tr2, Q3 (*De creatura secundum qualitatem*), C5 (n. 81), Ad quod sic *b*, p. 103: ‘Pulchritudo ergo creaturae est vestigium quoddam perveniendi per cognitionem ad pulchritudinem increatam.’

reasoning. As it happens, the *Summa*, just as subsequent Franciscan thought (for example, Bonaventure and Scotus),⁵⁷ often exhibits such ways of reasoning as opposed to logical deduction. In fact, the Prologue to the *Summa* states clearly that theology is an emotional discipline that proceeds not by way of logical deduction but by way of ‘taste’, playing on the etymology of the word *sapientia* and inadvertently introducing the aesthetic undertone to the modern ear.⁵⁸ In what follows I will examine several cases of using aesthetic reasoning in the *Summa* in addressing key topics of Christian theology: the Trinity, creation, the Incarnation, and the limits of the divine will.

In book 1 the *Summa* discusses the question ‘whether there is generation in God.’⁵⁹ The relevant passage is contained in one of the Pro arguments,⁶⁰ but since the reply upholds the position of the Pro arguments and there is no refutation of this point, one can assume that the *Summa* at least silently supports this reasoning. The aesthetic terms that are used in the argument instead of logical inference are ‘to be fitting’ (*convenire*) and ‘to be congruent’ (*congruere*).

If it is said that it is fitting (*congruit*) for eternal generation to be in God, but it is not necessary, (...) [then] Anselm [says] to the contrary [in *Cur Deus Homo* 1.9]: ‘Whatever is unfitting (*inconveniens*) for God is thereby impossible, and whatever is fitting for God is thereby necessary.’ Therefore, if generation is congruent (*congruit*) with or befits (*convenit*) God, then it is necessarily present in God, especially speaking of the necessity of immutability, because such is present in the divine, and not the necessity that imposes coercion; so eternal generation is necessary.⁶¹

That is, the argument is that if something befits God, therefore it is necessarily present in him, which can only be interpreted as ‘aesthetic necessity’: ‘it is fitting; therefore it is necessary.’

The aesthetic argument *ex convenientia* or *ex congruitate* is used again in this same question in the answer to objection 6. The objection claims that the ‘likening of natural things to the divine involves a comparison of exceedingly remote things, because the distance between creatures and the creator is exceedingly great. For this reason, what is found in created things does not necessarily have to be posited in the divine (...).’⁶² This objection weakens some of the arguments for the existence of generation in God. The reply to this question generally upholds the parallel with the operation of nature, so the refutation of objection 6 is crucial. Interestingly, an

⁵⁷ See Oleg Bychkov, “‘But Everyone Experiences the Opposite’: John Duns Scotus’s Aesthetic Defense of Anselm’s “Proof” of the Existence of God in Light of Present-day Thought,” *Franciscan Studies* 72 (2014), pp. 259–303.

⁵⁸ See Oleg Bychkov, ‘The Nature of Theology in Duns Scotus and his Franciscan Predecessors,’ *Franciscan Studies* 66 (2008), pp. 5–62; the appendix contains translations, including relevant excerpts from the *Summa Halensis*, *ibid.*, pp. 63–99.

⁵⁹ *SH* I, P1, In2, Tr1, Q1, Ti1, C1 (n. 295), pp. 414–18.

⁶⁰ *SH* I, P1, In2, Tr1, Q1, Ti1, C1 (n. 295), Pro *f*, p. 415.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *SH* I, P1, In2, Tr1, Q1, Ti1, C1 (n. 295), p. 416.

aesthetic argumentation from fittingness is used again. No fitting (*conveniens*) parallel can be drawn between God and creatures when creatures are considered ‘in themselves’,

However, when creatures are considered as vestiges of their cause, it is possible to find both necessary and fitting (*convenientes*) parallels between the creature and the Creator; thus from the power of the creature, we necessarily infer the omnipotence of the Creator, and from wisdom, the highest wisdom, and from goodness, the highest good.⁶³

The *Summa* continues to employ the ‘aesthetic necessity’ argument in book 2. One of the important theological questions is about the reasons for creation: ‘Does God become an efficient cause by will or of necessity?’⁶⁴ In its answer to objection 1, the Summists deal with the question about the necessity of God’s goodness, or whether he created out of necessity. The reasoning proceeds as follows:

However, if one were to speak of the necessity of what is congruous or fitting (*necessitas congruitatis sive idoneitatis*), as in one of the authoritative statements [the apparatus cites Dionysius, *Divine Names* 4.19], then one can say that God created things out of the necessity of goodness. However, it does not seem fitting (*congruere*) to say [that he created things] out of the necessity of nature. For although his goodness is identical with his nature, nevertheless if one were to say [that he created things] out of the necessity of nature, one would seem to posit the sort of necessity [in God] that exists in natural things (...).⁶⁵

Aesthetic reasoning is also used in the discussion of the most important Christian theological issue of the Incarnation, where Franciscan thought is generally known to be innovative. The discussion in book 2 comes up at the end of the segment on the beauty of evil and order discussed above.⁶⁶ Chapter 6, article 4 of this segment examines the question ‘whether the Incarnation (...) pertains to the beauty of the universe.’⁶⁷ As the question is about the beauty of the *universe*, the proof should be based on what obtains in the created world. In the Pro argument *a* the Summists observe that there are intermediate beings between minerals and plants, such as sponges, between plants and animals, such as birds, and so forth. Based on the aesthetic

⁶³ SH I, P1, In2, Tr1, Q1, Ti1, C1 (n. 295), p. 418. In a related Trinitarian topic, ‘Is there a procession of the Holy Spirit?’ (SH I, P1, In2, Tr1 Q1, Ti2, C1 [n. 304], pp. 438–40), the Summists use the ‘fittingness’ argument as well; cf. Ad obiecta 5: ‘That however the persons are three in number can be shown in this way: if we posit a fourth person, and there are two modes of production, namely, the mode of nature or the mode of the will, then this fourth person is either produced through the mode of nature or through the mode of the will. If however it is produced through the mode of nature, since this mode is the same as generation, then the person produced will be the Son, and there will be two sons in the Trinity, which is unfitting.’

⁶⁴ SH II, In1, Tr1, S1, Q2, Ti1, M4, C2 (n. 18), pp. 27–29.

⁶⁵ SH II, In1, Tr1, S1, Q2, Ti1, M4, C2 (n. 18), p. 28.

⁶⁶ SH II, In1, Tr2, Q3 (*De creatura secundum qualitatem*).

⁶⁷ SH II, In1, Tr2, Q3, C6, Ar4 (n. 85), pp. 107–8.

principles of completeness and harmony, the *Summa* concludes that there should be an intermediate being between humans and God as well:

Therefore, in order to achieve perfect unity and connection (*coniunctio*), a union of the divine and human natures is necessary, to allow the beauty of the universe to shine forth [also] in this manner; but this can only happen through the Incarnation; therefore, the Incarnation contributes to the beauty of the universe.⁶⁸

In other words, there is also an aesthetic reason for the Incarnation: in order to maintain the aesthetic principles of harmony, completeness, and beauty in the universe.

Of course, the perennial point of discussion is whether the restoration of the human kind was possible without the Incarnation, and if yes, why was the Incarnation necessary? The Pro argument *b* engages this point by stating that the 'restoration of the human kind through the Incarnation was of the most becoming sort (*decentissima*),' not that it could not be accomplished without it. The *Summa* quotes Augustine's *De Trinitate* 13.10.13: 'Another way of restoring us was possible, but none was more fitting (*convenientior*).' This most fitting type of restoration, therefore, completes the beauty of the universe.⁶⁹ The solution confirms that the Incarnation does contribute to the beauty of the universe in the post-lapsarian state. The difference is that achieving the state of the restoration of the human nature, and thus of the beauty of the universe, 'can be considered generically or as far as the best and most seemly (*decentissimum*)' way of achieving it is concerned. Now the 'Incarnation was not a contributing factor to the beauty of the universe as an absolutely indispensable factor (*sine quo non potuerit*) for the restoration of the fallen human nature, but as an absolutely indispensable factor for accomplishing this in the most seemly way (*sine quo non potuit decentissime*).'⁷⁰ In other words, there could be an alternative, but it would not be an aesthetic one; it could be otherwise, but it would not be as beautiful. One could compare this aesthetic line of reasoning, e.g. to ancient Greek aestheticized discussions of ethics: there can be alternatives to achieving one and the same goal in moral behavior, but some are more noble or beautiful, which are to be preferred. Finally, in the answer to objection 3 the *Summa* wraps up its position: 'although the beauty of the universe (...) could exist without the Incarnation, nevertheless it would not be possible for it to exist in such a way as to preserve multiple [types of] congruence (*multiplex congruentia*).' The restoration of the human kind 'could not happen in a congruent way (*congruenter*) without the satisfaction by the Son of God [become] man.'⁷¹

The *Summa* continues to apply aesthetic argumentation to the question of the Incarnation in book 4, where it discusses directly the topic of the 'fittingness of

⁶⁸ SH II, In1, Tr2, Q3, C6, Ar4 (n. 85), p. 107.

⁶⁹ SH II, In1, Tr2, Q3, C6, Ar4 (n. 85), p. 107.

⁷⁰ SH II, In1, Tr2, Q3, C6, Ar4 (n. 85), p. 108.

⁷¹ SH II, In1, Tr2, Q3, C6, Ar4 (n. 85), p. 108.

the Incarnation.⁷² Specifically, medieval theologians were curious about the ‘fittingness of the Incarnation should nature not have fallen due to sin, namely, whether there would be any reason for the Incarnation or whether it would be fitting.’⁷³ The Pro argument *c* suggests that

three scenarios are logically possible: three persons in a single substance; the opposite of this, i.e. three substances in a single person; and in between these two scenarios, three persons in three substances. Now one of the opposite scenarios – three persons in one substance – does really obtain, namely in the Trinity. So does the intermediate scenario – three persons in three substances – when three human beings or three angels are present (alternatively, if one takes one person of the Trinity, one angel, and one human being). Therefore, so should the third scenario, namely, one person in three substances. But this can only happen through a union of the divine and human natures. Indeed, no other creature, except for the human being, contains two substances, namely spiritual and corporeal, or soul and body. Also, no creature can perfect the human being by uniting with it: indeed, no angel can accomplish this, because the human being is equal to an angel as far as his or her superior part is concerned. Therefore, in order to achieve perfection in the order of things, it is fitting (*convenit*) that the divine nature be united to the human nature in a single person, so that just as there are three persons in one nature and three persons in three natures, there would be three natures – namely, divine nature, body, and soul – in one person.⁷⁴

It is difficult to interpret this argument *ex convenientia* as anything else than aesthetic: there is no reason mentioned here except completing the harmony or balance by realizing all possible combinations of persons and natures!

Finally, the *Summa* uses the language of fittingness navigating the tricky issue of the range of the divine will. Throughout the medieval Franciscan tradition, up to Duns Scotus and his followers, the debate went on as to whether God’s absolute power was limited in any way by his ordained power and to what extent. The issue as to whether one can set limits to God’s power is obviously tricky, especially in a tradition that is often dubbed ‘voluntarist’ where the power of the will holds primacy over intellectual powers. The ‘aesthetic’ solution in terms of what ‘befits’ God, which is not entirely rationally based, appeared to the Summists, as later to Duns Scotus,⁷⁵ very attractive.⁷⁶

72 SH IV, In1, Tr1, Q2, p. 25.

73 SH IV, In1, Tr1, Q2, Ti2 (n. 23), pp. 41–42.

74 SH IV, In1, Tr1, Q2, Ti2 (n. 23), p. 41.

75 Cf. Oleg Bychkov, “‘In Harmony with Reason’: John Duns Scotus’s Theo-aesth/ethics,” *Open Theology* 1:1 (2014), pp. 45–55. Published online November 14, 2014. DOI: 10.2478/opth-2014–0005.

76 See some of the argumentation in the question ‘Is divine power limited by God’s goodness and justice?’ at SH I, P1, In1, Tr4, Q2, M2, C2 (n. 141), pp. 219–21: [Ad obiecta I.2] To the second argument it must be said that this verb “to demand” is strictly speaking a verb of requirement, but no verb of requirement befits God. Nevertheless, accepted improperly, it signifies something that is congruent with God. Thus we must draw the following distinction: when we say “God is not able to do anything unless his justice demands it,” if the verb “demand” implies habitual congruence, it is true, as if the sense were, “if he were to do anything, he is not able to do anything except what would be consistent

Granted, the *Summa* does not invent most or any of its aesthetic argumentation, which can be traced back to Anselm, who borrows it from Augustine, who draws on the ancient tradition. However, at the very least it can be seen as a *promoter* of this line of argument for the Franciscan tradition. So ultimately it does present a case for theological aesthetics, if not through the theory of transcendentals.

with his justice.” If it implies congruence that actually exists now, however, it is false to say that “he is not able to do anything except what currently befits his justice.” (...) [Ad objecta II, general] In reply to the objection that deals with “whether he can do by his absolute power what he cannot do by his justice,” it must be distinguished that the justice of God in one sense connotes what befits (*condecet*) the divine goodness. And in this sense, whatever he can do from power, he can do from justice, meaning from what befits his goodness; for it befits the highest goodness to be able to do whatever is possible for its power. In another sense it connotes what is congruent with merit; and in this sense he is not able to do by his justice, which is given to us according to what is consistent with our merit, whatever he is able to do by his power. (...) [Ad objecta II.1] For God, however, what is possible in principle and by right is the same, insofar as what is “right” refers to what befits the divine goodness.’