

PART THREE: The Nature of Beauty and the Desire for Perfect Beauty

I. Ontological Status of the Beautiful

It is good at this point to talk about 'Beauty' from the philosophical point of view. In his book, *New Proofs for The Existence of God*, Fr. R. J. Spitzer, SJ, treats the subject of beauty within the main topic of his book. Fr. Spitzer draws on the traditional philosophical treatment of the subject, which would include Plato's view as foundational, "Beauty itself is inextricably linked to Truth itself, Justice/Goodness itself, and Love itself, which is perhaps the most fundamental insight of this chapter. Inasmuch as all of these transcendentals are absolutely simple, they must be unique, and therefore the same Reality," (p.257)

It is good to know that Fr. Spitzer also makes the connection of beauty to beautiful objects, music, visual arts, architecture, and poetry. I am sure that he would also include mathematical formulas if he had read Jim Holt's book, *When Einstein Walked with Godel*. However, he reminds us that "though beauty is frequently a part of art, art need not be beautiful," (P.253), and that goes for math as well.

Spitzer quotes Johannes Lotz, who going back to Albert the Great, suggested that there are *three characteristics* that give rise to the aesthetic emotions: perfection of a particular form (*essence*), *harmonious resonance*, and 'shining forth' (*luster of splendor*) pointing beyond itself, (P.254).

The first characteristic referred to by Lotz is called "*what we enjoy in natural objects coming to perfection*," which could have a wide range of meaning. He mentions that "...it is a delight to see." Of course, the opposite evokes no emotion at the least but revulsion at worse. "***Individual form brought to perfection is intrinsically beautiful.***"

Second characteristic of beauty that he mentions is "*harmonious resonance*," and he uses *music* to express this with two notes in harmony, whereas the two notes are unrecognized in their isolation. He says this holds true when applied to the visual arts, and again, architecture, poetry, etc.," (p.255). Lotz also points out that there is more to harmony than "...evoking of deeper delight, repose, reveling and enjoyment." In their complexity as in a Bach, Beethoven or Brahms symphony, architecture, or in poetry like Eliot's *Four Quartets*, they point to a kind of ecstasy, or a '*mysetrium tremendum*.'" And he adds that, "...the more complex, grand, and

sustained the harmony, the more it evokes the sublime or exalted emotions, and ***the more it seems to connect us with the glorious, the beautiful, and the Sublime Itself.***”

[What is interesting is that Spitzer notes that Roger Fry’s “*matter of infinite importance*” (who initially quoted Johannes Lotz who quoted Albert the Great – yes, one can get lost in all the quotes!) whose explanation lies in the “depth of mysticism,” ***mysticism!*** (We will explore that subject another time.)

And the third characteristic of beauty is a *shining forth*, splendor, and luster, refers to “access to perfection of form or harmony.” As suggested above, complex, grand, and sustained beauties ***point “beyond”*** their complementary unified forms to unity, perfection, and sublimity itself. Again, Fr. Spitzer uses music to point this out (p.255).

When one hears Mozart’s *Requiem*, one recognizes and then reposes and revels in more than music brought to its perfection, more than the human emotions evoked by the harmonies and melodies.

One enjoys the more perfect manifestation of unity, and then reposes and revels in it, feeling a deep and abiding sense of exaltation and glory. Now, when the *Requiem* is performed within a magnificent church with magnificent art, and the music, art and architecture are unified as a whole, one feels drawn into a perfection bigger than all the forms combined. ***One is drawn into the perfection of complex unification to which one appends the name “glorious” or “magnificent.”***

The author then uses other examples like a beautiful ocean, a beautiful mountain, waterfall, sky, and all three taken as a “contiguous whole,” and other such examples. He mentions that this kind of unity “...seems to have no intrinsic limit.” And ...it seems that all forms have an ideal complementarity with all other forms, revealing yet another kind of ideal or perfect unification withing the *phenomenon of beauty.*”

In the end, the author connects beauty as one of several attributes to God. We will explore this more in another part.