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Minor ways to affective harmony

Abstract

The article examines how 13th-14th-century Franciscan reflection contributed to conceptions of harmony, particularly in its affective dimensions. The discussion begins with Roger Bacon's synthesis, which grounds the moral philosopher's preaching in the concept of musical harmony within the broader framework of his knowledge reform. Attention then turns to Bartholomaeus Anglico's encyclopaedic treatise and to Matthaeus de Aquasparta's sermons, which almost enact the rhetorical and musical criteria of harmony. The article concludes with two 14th-century case studies, those of Angelo Clareno and Franciscus de Marchia, which focus on the topic of altissima paupertas.

Keywords

Medieval aesthetics, Franciscan thought, Music

Received: 25/08/2025

Approved: 03/10/2025

Editing by: Lorenzo Manera

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*Introduction*¹

The relationship between Aesthetics and the Middle Ages remains a controversial one, arguably even more so than with other premodern epochs such as Antiquity or the Renaissance. Once again, the Middle Ages suffer, even in historiographical accounts of considerable merit, from the metaphor inscribed in its very name. This era – spanning a millennium – let us recall, is “in the middle”. Such positioning has rendered it uncomfortable, burdened by prejudices formulated in later periods, which, in seeking to distance themselves, constructed a stereotyped image of the Middle Ages to critique – even as they appropriated, assimilated and in some sense nourished themselves from the vital currents still flowing through those much-reviled centuries. This occurred, for example, during the Renaissance and again during the Enlightenment.

It is thus paradoxical to juxtapose two historiographical and disciplinary concepts whose very histories seem to jar: the Middle Ages and Aesthetics, a discipline famously born during the Enlightenment. Countless studies could be cited that aim to illuminate alternative facets of the medieval world, thereby liberating it from entrenched prejudice. Particularly insightful in this regard are the words of Elio Franzini (Franzini 2025: 11-12), who elucidates the genesis of the prejudice afflicting this era².

Yet, as with all historical phenomena, aesthetics – though it may have a singular birth, as Baldine Saint Giron (2000) has remarked – possesses multiple origins. These lie in concepts, terminologies and disciplines such as rhetoric, metaphysics, theology and epistemology, which often vanish into a distant and frequently forgotten past.

Following the seminal contributions of Edgard De Bruyne (1998) and Umberto Eco (2009), as well as more recent collective efforts such as those found in *Aisthesis* (Rodolfi 2018) and the rich, multifaceted volume edited by Olivier Boulnois and Isabelle Moulin (2018), it becomes meaningful once more to reflect upon the dual dimensions of “Aesthetics” and the

¹ The following contribution is part of the HarmoPicta project (“Harmonia et affectus. Franciscan aesthetics, Giottoesque painting and humanists”), funded by Fondazione Cariplo (Grant 2023-1129) and carried out at the Department of Philosophy ‘Piero Martinetti’ (University of Milan).

² Recent medieval scholarship, even if not always in dialogue with other philosophical disciplines – perhaps precisely due to lingering prejudices – has nonetheless contributed significantly to their erosion. For example, the work in journals such as *Doctor Virtualis* explicitly seek to dismantle such prejudices.

“Middle Ages”. This is not to impose anachronistic categories, but rather – mindful of the historical depth of historiographical categories – to enact a gesture of liberation: to reveal a complex and nuanced medieval world in which topics that would only achieve a unitarian scientific recognition centuries later were so prominent that they are often assimilated with what was then termed *ars* or *scientia*, or even explored in other disciplinary fields. The study of these two dimensions asserts its relevance to both Aesthetics and Historical-Philosophical inquiry.

The following pages propose a necessarily partial exploration of the theme of affective harmony – that is, the nexus between harmony and affects, whereby well-ordered, proportionate or consonant relations, as found in the sources, lead to various forms of pleasure, whether sensory or intellectual. This approach follows the trajectory outlined by Elio Franzini in his study of *Christian aesthetics* (2015), which investigates how terms, concepts and theories played a role in delineating the conditions of possibility for aesthetics as a discipline – conditions that were later profoundly re-signified. Harmony and affects are then examined as a problem for the elaboration of a terminological and conceptual framework that would attain disciplinary status in the 18th century, under the hypothesis that this nexus is primarily experiential, receiving different expressive, conceptual and theoretical modalisations.

The texts under consideration span the thirteenth to the early fourteenth century and focus on Franciscan authors who, though less conspicuous than other traditions, significantly shaped the notion of “affective harmony”. Their approach exhibits a distinctive tone – more dynamic and concrete, as we will see – yet always open to spiritual and intelligible dimensions. These distinctive traits position this study within a broader ongoing research project, which seeks to assess the relevance of a ‘minor aesthetics’ from both aesthetic and historical-philosophical perspectives.

The first section will outline the theoretical framework of the harmony-affect nexus (§ 2), examining, on the one hand, the brilliant theoretical synthesis of Roger Bacon (§ 2.1), who integrated rhetorical, musical and philosophical concepts – often treated in isolation – into his project for ecclesiastical reform, and, on the other hand, the encyclopaedic treatment offered by Bartholomaeus Anglicus (§ 2.2). The following point of the first section, still focused on the thirteenth century, will present an example in which affective harmony appears not only as a textual object but also as enacted and practised in the sermons of Matthaeus de Aquasparta, dedicated to Friar Francis of Assisi (§ 2.3). The final section will pre-

sent a case study of how the rhetorical-musical nexus of harmony and affect is treated within a distinctly Franciscan theme: the *altissima paupertas*. In the fourteenth century, this concept not only sparked internal debate within the Order but also challenged the institutional Church itself. Examples will be drawn from two texts by Angelus Clarens (§ 3.1) and Franciscus de Marchia (or Francesco d'Appignano) (§ 3.2), which, within the diverse Franciscan community, reveal a “minor” understanding of the harmony-affect nexus.

1. An overview on semantic variations of harmony and affection among the Friars Minor (13th-14th centuries)

Our central inquiry, therefore, concerns the extent to which Franciscan reflection has contributed to the conception of “harmony”, particularly in its affective dimensions as experienced by the perceiver or spectator. The appropriate relationships that constitute the forms of “harmony” – grounded in Pythagorean and Platonic philosophies – exert direct effects on the soul, shaping both subjective sensibilities and collective temperaments.

What, then, is the distinctive contribution of Franciscan thinkers to the long-standing and secular topic of the affective inflexion of harmony, a theme that became particularly significant, for example, within the framework of musical affect theory during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (e.g. Bartel 1997), or in some aesthetic reflections of the eighteenth century (Franzini 2009)³? Instead of adopting a teleological view that regards earlier philosophies merely as precursors to the modern era (see the critiques in Dal Pra (1956) and Preti (1956) on the teleological historiographical categories), it is important to highlight the different ways in which experiential dimensions – such as harmony and affect – are understood, interpreted and experienced.

In pursuing this objective, we propose an investigation based on the selection of key terms that encompass a broad semantic spectrum of harmony, or what Eco termed “proportional beauty” (Eco 2002), describing a structure composed of both intrinsic relations and interactions with others. Several of these terms are drawn from the rhetorical tradition, allow-

³ Both Baumgarten and Kant link well-proportioned relationships to aesthetic pleasure. However, Kant frames this on a transcendental, judgement-based level, where pleasure emerges from the ‘free play’ between intellect and imagination.

ing for the identification of more concrete inflections between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries (Salvestrini 2023; 2024). The selected notions are as follows: *harmonia* (/disharmonia), *proportio*, *consonantia* (/dissonantia), *conformitas* (/difformitas), *congruentia*, *compositio*, *sublimis*, *conveniens*, *decor*, *ornatus*.

2. Thirteenth-century variations on harmony and affects

The examples from the thirteenth century are drawn from friars of diverse origins and various literary genres, yet they share certain thematic threads. Selected passages from the works of Bartholomaeus Anglicus, Roger Bacon and Matthaheus de Aquasparta are presented for analysis. Bartholomaeus' contribution is excerpted from an encyclopaedic treatise in which music is addressed briefly across several chapters in Book XIX. Although largely composed of assimilations from late-antique and medieval sources, the text retains considerable significance.

Nonetheless, we begin this section with a later and more theoretically engaged work by the English friar Roger Bacon – namely, the *Opus Tertium*. Within a defined theoretical framework, this text outlines the relationship between music and rhetoric, a connection that appears only indirectly in Bartholomaeus' account, as recent scholarship has demonstrated (Loewen 2013).

Finally, we turn to two sermons by Matthaheus de Aquasparta, an Italian friar who, like the aforementioned authors, was active in Paris. Although his writings do not reflect the reformist impetus characteristic of Bacon's work, certain musical-rhetorical strategies identified by Bacon are nonetheless discernible in his sermons.

A more detailed exploration of the theme of affective harmony, as it emerges in the reflections of the rigorist faction within the Order of Friars Minor, will be provided in the following paragraph.

2.1. Roger Bacon

The most extensive treatment of harmony in Bacon's work is found in the chapters devoted to music and preaching in his *Opus Maius* and *Opus Tertium* (Loewen 2013: 136), which we shall examine in greater detail. Before doing so, however, it is worth noting how the theme emerges in more in-

direct discussions, as these offer valuable insights into the broader conceptual framework within which Bacon's reflections on the topic unfolds. In texts such as the *Compendium studii philosophiae* and *Metaphysica*, Bacon reasserts the limitations of human knowledge through analogies: the frailty of human intellect is compared to the congenital deaf person's inability to perceive the pleasures of harmony (*ad delectationem harmoniae*) (Bacon 1859b: 405), or to the eyes of the bat incapable of beholding the light of the sun – so much so that we are unable to grasp the *plena veritas*, the fullness that pertains instead to the beauty of God and His Kingdom, to the infinitude of His virtue and to the first principles (Bacon 1911: 36).

These passages are significant for at least two reasons. First, harmony leads to a form of delight that can be apprehended only through the activity of the senses and is thus incomprehensible to one born deaf. Here, Bacon refers to sensible harmony, but the connection between *harmonia* and *delectatio* is noteworthy, and we will return to it later. Nevertheless, a superior truth exists – a full and complete truth – unattainable in its entirety by human intellect, yet to be ceaselessly pursued through its manifestations in this world and via a practical ascent, with the awareness that true fullness and beauty reside in the origin of all things, in its virtue, in the Kingdom of God, and in the first principles or criteria by which He created the world. Human cognitive limitation, however, does not constitute an impediment for Bacon; rather, it is a source of *humilitas* – Francis can, one might say – and a spur towards the elevation of the soul to higher forms of knowledge.

Unlike Neo-Pythagorean and Boethian conceptions, Roger Bacon, in *Opus tertium* (ch. 59), does not admit the existence of the music of the spheres (Bacon 1859a: 229; see also Loewen 2013: 146-7; Panti 2008: 217). In the section where Bacon criticises the Neopythagorean view, he offers a remarkable definition of music in which the link between harmony and the affections emerges indirectly; he observes that “music considers only those things which, through similar motions, can be conformed (*conformo*) to singing and the sound of instruments for the delight (*delectatio*) of the senses” (Bacon 1859: 230). Music, in other words, concerns the very possibility of rendering diverse elements conformable, thereby producing sensory delight. In this context, the act of *conforming* specifies the relational process of bringing together elements that are both similar and different, in a dynamic interplay that, as will be seen, pertains to music and rhetoric.

In sacred music, harmonic relationships can take various forms, and Bacon, following Boethius, emphasises the distinct effects these may exert upon the listener's soul. In ch. 72, he identifies three *genera harmoniae*, or modes of conceiving the relations between sounds. Here, it is suggested that the term *harmonia* is best understood not in the vertical or polyphonic sense, but rather in the horizontal or scalar one: the diatonic is impetuous and abrupt, the chromatic lascivious and dissolute, and the enharmonic virile and constant. Only the third type is deemed suitable for liturgical use, as it alone can uplift the soul while delighting it with sincere sweetness (*suavitas sincera*) (Bacon 1859: 296).

However, Bacon's notion of harmony is not confined to the sensible realm; it is not limited solely to the ordered relationship between sounds as perceived by the senses. Harmony also possesses an intelligible dimension, grounded in a science of numbers – specifically, the Boethian science that studies quantity in relation to other quantities. Harmony, or appropriate relationality, thus becomes a criterion for other sciences and, in this way, proves useful to the Church within Bacon's broader project of reform⁴. It becomes a discipline applicable not only to sacred music but also to the moral philosopher's preaching (Jaeger 2024).

This aspect – the link between music and rhetoric – semantically enriches a fundamental facet of the notion of harmony: the idea of harmony as a dynamic relationality, whose criteria are intelligible yet also adaptable to concrete situations. Harmony entails relating abstract magnitudes to one another, whether in singing, instrumental sound or metre, as well as in the words of the rhetorician. In ch. 75, harmony – the proper relationship between terms – as studied in the “philosophy of music” (Bacon 1859a: 303) – is modulated and reconfigured in accordance with the specific circumstances of rhetoric, particularly in the *sermo affectuosus* or *sublimis*. This can be seen in the below passage, interwoven with terminology and concepts derived from both rhetoric (*sublimis*, *decorum*, *color*, *ornatus*, *rapio*, *elevo*) and music (*metrus*, *rythmus*, *suavis* – which is often used for the harmonic pleasure perceived by the ears):

Aristoteles enim et omnes ejus expositores in libris de his sermonibus testantur, quod hi sermones debent esse in fine *decori* et *sublimes*; et hoc non solum prosaice secundum omne genus *coloris* et *ornatus*, sed pro qualitate temporis, et personarum, et locorum, et materiae de qua fit sermo, debent *ornari* omni genere

⁴ Regarding Bacon's reform project, one can quote, for example: Massa 1955; Alessio 1985; Casagrande, Vecchio 2024.

metri et rythmi, ut animus subito *rapiatur* in amorem boni et odium mali; quatenus homo totus sine praevisione *rapiatur* et *elevetur* supra se, et non habeat mentem in sua potestate; sed si fuerit malus amore boni absorbeatur; si imperfectus, induat animum perfectionis, non violentia, sed virtute sermonis potenti et *suavi* ... Sed quantum ad *decorem* et *ornatum* et *suavitatem* argumenti, certe non potest logicus, sicut nec grammaticus, causas et rationes assignare, sed musicus ... Nam ut prius patuit, musica quaedam est prosaica, quaedam metrica, quaedam rhythmica; et hae dant omnes causas et rationes *ornatus* et *decoris* sermonis. (Bacon 1859: 306-7 [my italics])

The eloquence of the ‘moral philosopher’ integrates aspects of Augustine’s Christian eloquence, rooted in Cicero, with references to Aristotelian ideas, partly thanks to Arab thinkers. Drawing upon music for the criteria of the proportioning of ornate and decorous speech and its affective force, it turns them towards the crafting of beautiful discourse aimed at moving the emotions to foster love of the good, and elevates spirits beyond themselves towards the intelligible (see also Loewen 2013; Jaeger 2024; Casagrande, Vecchio 2024).

2.2. *Bartholomaeus Anglico*

After tracing the meanings of harmonic ratios in Roger Bacon, between the *philosophia musicae* and the preaching of the *philosophus moralis*, one may examine an earlier text on music by another English friar active in thirteenth-century Paris: the chapter *De musica* from *De proprietatibus rerum* by Bartholomaeus Anglicus. As Peter Loewen has noted, the Franciscan approach to music is evident in its development and application in preaching, following Francis of Assisi’s instruction to his friars to integrate music with preaching (Loewen 2013: 195).

In the theoretical section – strongly influenced by Isidore (Nagy 2023) – which precedes the discussion of musical instruments, Bartholomaeus employs a wide array of terms from the semantic field of *harmonia*, which is worth examining closely. After briefly outlining the cosmological framework in which harmony affects the listener’s soul – namely, that the world is composed of *harmonica proportio*, or “harmonic proportion”, and that its heavens perform their revolutions *sub consonantiae modulatione* (“under the modulation of consonances”) – Bartholomaeus states that music *movet affectus* (“moves the affections”) and stimulates the senses in various ways.

Even at this stage, we can observe how *consonant modulation* shades into *harmonic proportion*, although it is not yet clear whether the modulation of consonances introduces a dynamic dimension – a movement – within the structure of the world based on harmonic proportion, where that expression would otherwise suggest a more static relation of parts among themselves and with the whole.

What is crucial to emphasise – and Bartholomaeus uses an expression found in rhetoric, citing examples drawn from tradition⁵ – is that music, thus the science or discipline developed by humans and founded on the harmonic proportions of the world, *movet affectus* and stimulates the senses in diverse ways. In battle, trumpets rouse the spirits of combatants; the *concentus*, says Bartholomaeus, an accord at the level of feeling, is so attuned to the situation that it stirs the warriors to fight vigorously. Music also has a psychagogic effect, making any kind of labour bearable, and it likewise impacts animals that lack reason (Bartholomaeus 1964: 1251).

In the following section, devoted to the parts of music – divided into harmonic, rhythmic and metric – the semantic nuances hinted at previously are clarified. *Harmonia* is defined as that which concerns a proper relationship – horizontal or melodic, one might say – between high and low sounds, but it does not consist in the overlapping of voices, as is the case with *symphonia* (Nagy 2023):

Harmonica vero est, quae discernit in sonis acumen et gravem secundum arsim et thesim ... et *proportionalem* soni et vocis mutationem, et est *harmonica* dulcis cantuum *consonantia*, proveniens ex *proportione* debita, in diversis vocibus, flatibus, pulsibus sive sonis, ut dicit Isidor. (Bartholomaeus Anglico 1964: 1252 [my italics])

Harmonica thus relates to the relationship between sounds and the proportional progression of tones and voices, such that they are in mutual agreement and result in a sweet consonance of melodies. *Harmonia* therefore refers not only to a relationship of sounds but also all elements that contribute to making a song pleasant, such as breath and rhythm. It is worth noting that, as before, *consonantia* is used to describe a dynamic movement of the things it refers to – previously the movements of the heavens and now those inherent in songs. *Concordia* highlights the har-

⁵ The passage is taken up by Isidore of Seville (*Etymologiae* III, 17), who mentions the same examples cited by Bartholomaeus; it then reappears in Bacon, who nevertheless quotes Varro (Bacon 1959, ch. 73: 300).

monious relationship of elements of differing nature – such as sounds and voices that vary within themselves yet unite in an overall harmony that renders them as one. It is only this *concordant* union of diverse elements, not the dissonant diversity, that brings pleasure (*delecto*) and sweetness (*dulcis*) to the ear.

Symphonia, as mentioned, consists of a well-ordered whole, but considered in terms of the vertical overlapping of voices:

Symphonia, inquit, est dulcis modulationis temperamentum *concordans* sonis in gravibus et acutis, et per hanc *harmoniam* voces acutiores et graviore *conveniunt* et *concordant*, ita ut si quis ab eo *dissonuerit*, sensum auditus offendat, et talis *concordia* vocum dicitur *euphonia*, quae est vocis *suavitas*, quae a suavitate et melle dicitur melodia, cui contraria est dyaphonia, id est, vox dissonans sive discrepans et deformis ad melodiam. (Bartholomaeus 1964: 1252 [my italics])

Symphonia too is pleasing to the listener; it is a sweet modulation of temperaments that harmonises – or *concords* – diverse elements, both low and high sounds. Through it, the higher and lower voices converge and achieve vertical agreement. By contrast, dissonance relates to the inability to *soothe* the ears (*aurēs non placat*), as if the sense of hearing could never find satisfaction through the attainment of concord in what it hears; moreover, dissonance does not bring pleasure (*non delectat*) but rather offends (*sensum auditus offendat*). The kind of pleasure evoked by harmony, concord and consonance is *sensual delectation* – a sensory pleasure, in this case connected to hearing – and *suavitas*, which in many sources, from Cicero to Alberti is often (though not exclusively) associated with a specific kind of auditory pleasure.

It is also interesting that the terms used to denote the intervals between sounds – *diastema* and *diaesis* – are explained with explicit reference to space (*spacium*), that is, to the distance between one sound and another in scalar gradation (Piana 2010, Rocconi 1999 for the Greek roots of this concept). In the case of the former, they are considered appropriate, fitting or suitable (*aptatur*, a term derived from rhetoric), whereas *diaesis* refers to a smaller interval marking the transition from one note to another.

Finally, as Loewen observes when examining certain manuscript glosses (Loewen 2013: 179-95), in the treatment of vocal inflections (*cantus est vocis inflectio*), Bartholomaeus draws extensively on categories from rhetoric, demonstrating the fluid relationship between the two arts, which has continued through the centuries. Musical explanations have often borrowed

terminologies and concepts from rhetoric – especially due to its concrete expressive dimension – while rhetorical treatises (and later also other arts) are grounded in the science and art of music. Indeed, Bartholomaeus notes that a voice may be “high, sweet, strong and clear”, qualities that correspond to classical rhetoric, beginning with the *sermo sublimis* (Jaeger 2024), which, as we have seen, would later be developed by Bacon.

2.3. *Matthaeus de Aquasparta*

In the *Sermones* by Matthaeus de Aquasparta, one can observe the music-rhetorical instrumentation in action, particularly in the Franciscan practice of preaching by a refined philosophic-theological thinker⁶. The affective power of the discourse is evident in the careful arrangement (*dispositio*) of selected topics (*inventio*), the rhythmic flow of speech and the invocation of sonorous and harmonic figures. Such a harmonisation of word and sound exemplifies a practiced form of affective discourse aimed at moving and elevating spirits.

In the first *Sermo* devoted to Francis of Assisi, the theme is inspired by the biblical verse in the *Apocalypse* (7, 2): *Vidi alterum angelum ascendentem ab ortu solis, habentem signum Dei vivi* (Matthaeus de Aquasparta 1962: 1). The sermon is based on an analogy between Francis of Assisi and the Angel of the Apocalypse, following a structure that traces the friar’s *conformitas* with each order constituting the three angelic hierarchies. The final order of the third and ‘supreme’ hierarchy is of particular interest. The comparison of Francis to the Seraphim, through the account of his stigmatisation, reveals a distinctive variation in the harmony-affect relationship.

The harmonic ratios inherent in the notion of *conformitas* derive their affective power primarily from the loving relationship between subject and object. In contemplating Christ in the guise of the Seraphim, Francis is transformed – both in soul and in body – into the beloved object. Following the same Bonaventurian framework, Matthaeus proposes a transposition of a Neoplatonic-Augustinian and Monastic conception of the transformative idea of *amor* – articulated here through a quotation from Hugh of Saint Victor – into the Franciscan event of Friar Francis’ stigma-

⁶ For the art of preaching in the 13th century, we quote the recent extensive essay of Bériou (2023).

tisation. Francis is conformed (*conformō*) to the seraphic order by virtue of the *excessus amoris*, which carries him beyond himself, and the *sublimitas desiderii*, which elevates him above himself. Affects in the soul entail a corresponding affection in the body (*anima sic affecta simili affectione corpus affecit*), through which the effigy of the crucified Christ is revealed.

Matthaeus' prose vividly renders the images evoked by the detailed account of the stigmatisation, making them appear as living images – or *imagines agentes*, to borrow a rhetorical term. This is a clear instance of predicative rhetoric in action: the manifestation of the Seraphim and the wounds inflicted upon Francis' flesh are rhetorically and resoundingly reinforced by the alliteration of letters such as "r", "s" and "c" (*Ipsa vero acumina oblonga, retorta et quasi reperiussa, quae de ipsa carne surgentia, carnem reliquam excedebant latus, quasi lancea transfixum, rubra cicatrice obductum erat, quod sanguinem sacrum effundens, tunicam et femoralia respergebat*) (Matthaeus de Aquasparta 1962: 21).

In the second sermon on Francis of Assisi, based on the biblical verse *Creavit Deus hominem ad imaginem suam* (Matthaeus de Aquasparta 1962, Sermo 2: 22), Matthaeus again emphasises the relationship (*conformitas*) between Francis and Christ. Here, the harmonic-affective lexicon pivots around the act of accord (*formo/conformo*, *similis/consimilis*) and introduces rhetorically charged terms that are theologically redefined, such as *sublimis*, *dignis* and *conveniēns*. The theological background highlights the problem of the sin committed by the first man, who broke the likeness to God in which he had been created – a likeness later restored, first through Christ and then through Francis' *imitatio Christi*. Matthaeus de Aquasparta's discourse thus hinges on the semantic articulation of *conformitas*, structured around a triptych of verbs, often linked with the rhetorical figure of *transductio*: *conformo*, *difformo*, *reformo*.

The proper relationship between God and His Creation expressed in the phrase *Creavit Deus hominem ad imaginem suam*, is captured by the rhetorical and theological term *conveniēns*. In this framework, the subject or *auctor*, God, is *sublimis*, signifying – in accordance with the rhetorical meaning of the sublime – a supreme elevation that overwhelms the human intellect. The object, or the resultant work, i.e. *homines*, possesses a distinct *dignitas* or *nobilitas*, concepts which, in classical rhetoric, are often associated with *decor* and *honestas* (e.g. in Cicero's *De officiis*), yet in the context of the Late Middle Ages take on a more layered metaphysical, moral and theological significance (see Colli 2017 principally for the Aristotelian tradition). The aim of His creation – *ad imaginem suam* – thus

reveals another relational dimension: that of *conformitas* between the object and the divine act of creative expression.

In the final section of the second *Sermo*, Matthaeus de Aquasparta's use of analogy, which echoes that of Augustine and Bonaventure (Parodi, Rossini 1994; Parodi 2006)⁷, reaches its full theoretical and rhetorical potency. He explores how Francis, as the perfectly restored image of God, parallels six modes of artificial image-making. Three particularly resonant analogies can be highlighted. In the first analogy of the earthen jar, *imago* arises through *composition*, like a potter forms and shapes (*confingo, compono*) the image from the clay according to his will. In the second analogy of the painting, the image created through *overlay and colouration* (*per modum appositionis vel colorationis*) evokes the imitation of *Christoform virtues* (*Christoformium virtutum imitatio*). Finally, in the analogy of the liquefiable materials, the image emerges through *transfusion and transfiguration*, likened to a supreme pleasure that elevates the soul beyond itself (*per excessivam et exstaticam delectationem*). In Francis' case, it is his embodied *compassion* for Christ's sufferings that catalyses a profound transfiguration of both soul and body. The *suprema conformatio* entails both supreme pleasure and transformative elevation.

The *sermo* then proceeds with an explication of each of the six poetic analogies. In the first analogy, having artfully prepared the theological implications of these artistic metaphors, Matthaeus distils their significance in a rhythmic prose, which almost evokes that of Augustine and Bonaventure, punctuated by the assonances of the etymological rhetorical figure: *Igitur oportet ut ille qui creavit, recreet; qui fecit, reficiat; qui formavit, reformet; qui finxit et conpinxit, refingat* (Matthaeus de Aquasparta 1962: 26). Through a kind of *climax*, it culminates first in prayerful exhortation, in which he formulates a rhythmic supplication for the reformation and reshaping of the soul (*Clama igitur ad Deum, emitte ad eum gemitum contritionis, dic: Domine, tu me fecisti, ego defeci, refice; tu me formasti, ego me deformavi, reforma in me tuam imaginem! si forte per Verbum et Spiritum suum ille te reficiat, qui te fecit*, Matthaeus de Aquasparta 1962: 26); and second, in an interpretation of the *imago Dei* restoration by Francis through his activity as *artifex*.

⁷ Different analyses of the theme of stigmatisation in Franciscan thinkers can be read, for example, in Dezza (2018), which emphasises theological and philosophical implications and provides an overview of the Franciscan debate on the subject, and Salvestrini (forthcoming), which focuses on the theme of compassion in Bonaventure's *Legenda maior* and in Giotto's art.

In the third analogy, focusing on the image as painting or sculpture, Matthaeus de Aquasparta draws a parallel between *artifex-exemplar* and *soul-moral exemplar*, employing verbs such as *formo* and *figuro*. He uses rhetorical *repetitio* to list virtues with rhythmic precision: *Perfectam humilitatem, perfectam benignitatem et pietatem, perfectam puritatem et sanctitatem, perfectam caritatem et pacem, perfectam innocentiam, perfectam patientiam*. This culminates in a spatialisation of virtues – echoing Bonaventurian thought – all unified within the sign of the Cross: *In qua est profunditas humilitatis, latitudo caritatis, longitudo perseverantiae et sublimitas vel altitudo paupertatis*, in which *sublimis* not only denotes altitude but also gestures towards theological elevation and transcendence.

3. Fourteenth-century variations on harmony and affects

During the early decades of the fourteenth century, controversies surrounding Franciscan poverty reached their peak, particularly following Pope John XXII's condemnation of proponents of the thesis asserting the poverty of Christ and the Apostles (Tabarroni 1990; Piron 2009⁸; Alberzoni 2025; Potestà 2025). Within this context, certain texts are especially significant for their direct engagement with the question of *altissima paupertas*, or for their interpretative approaches to the Franciscan Rule. It is thus of interest to examine the particular notion of harmony – understood in its semantic richness – that emerged from these debates. Two illustrative texts are selected to provide a representative cross-section of the issue: *Expositio Regulae Fratrum Minorum* by Angelus Clarens, and *Improbatio contra libellum domini Iohannis qui incipit Quia vir reprobis* by Franciscus de Marchia.

References to harmony frequently appear in terms such as “to tune” or “to relate to”, particularly in connection with ideals conceived within a projective or aspirational framework. These often include the life-form of Christ, the ideal of evangelical poverty and Franciscan virtues such as simplicity, humility and purity of heart. Expressions like “to conform to” or “to convene with” suggest a dynamic process of attunement – one that en-

⁸ For a careful reconstruction of the stratified and fluid sphere of ‘Franciscan dissidence’ in the first half of the 14th century, particularly in relation to Olivi’s foundational texts, see Sylvain Piron’s collection of studies (2021).

tails a transformation of the subject and their practices in pursuit of the highest Franciscan ideal.

A textual foundation for this notion of “being conformed” to a life-form can arguably be traced to the *Testament* by Friar Francis of Assisi, where it is stated: *ipse altissimus revelavit mihi quod deberem vivere secundum formam sancti evangelii* (Franciscus Assisiensis 1976: ch. 2, § 14). This implies that both practical and spiritual life may be *attuned* to the *ideal* of evangelical living, serving as a *model* to aspire to. Intermediate developments that contributed to the widespread adoption of the lexicon associated with harmony likely stem from the layered theoretical elaborations within the philosophical-theological tradition, already evident in the works of Thomas of Celano and Bonaventure of Bagnoregio (Salvestrini 2023⁹).

3.1. *Angelus Clarenus*

In Clarenus’ *Expositio*, one finds fifteen occurrences of *conformo*, ten of *consono*, seven of *congruo*, twenty-two of *conveniens* and ten of *ornatus*, indicating a rich semantic field centred on notions of harmony, suitability and adornment. Conformity to the ideal of Christ encompasses all levels of life, from everyday practices to the loftiest moral aspirations. The friars’ manner of dress – simple garments consisting of a tunic and an undertunic¹⁰ – is “conformed” to the attire of the holy Fathers, *quod sanctorum patrum moribus consonant*, who themselves were conformed to Christ and the Apostles (*se habitu Christo et apostolis conformantes*) (Angelus Clarenus 1912: 62).

As is well known, the Rule of Saint Francis contains prescriptions that do not always demand absolute adherence to the vow of poverty; rather, it allows for exceptions in particular circumstances. Certain provisions are adaptable to the friars’ personal conditions. For instance, in cases of ill-

⁹ In this sense, Bonaventure’s reflection is fundamental, positioning within an Augustinian framework the thematisation of beauty as relationality – as *aequalitas numerosa*, or equality of relationships – founded trinitarianly in the *Sapientia* and the *Ars* of God, namely the Son. Albeit with different emphases, consider these crucial studies: Parodi 2007; Solignac 2018; Di Maio 2025a, 2025b; Mauro 2025. For further discussion of the Augustinian framework: Parodi 2006 and 2011.

¹⁰ Of particular importance was the question of the length of the friars’ robes (Piron 2021: 292).

ness or specific needs, they may wear simple footwear. In this regard, Angelus, commenting on the Rule, emphasises that such concessions, granted in exceptional situations, remain in conformity with the vow of poverty. This circumstantial conformity is expressed through the term *conveniens*, which, in its rhetorical usage, denotes the capacity to respond appropriately to concrete situations while preserving a criterion of moral beauty and elegance: *Et in tali necessitate vel infirmitate talia conceduntur calciamenta, qualia portare convenit profexoribus altissime paupertatis* (Angelus Clarenus 1912: 71).

On the matter of monetary possession and its prohibition in the Rule, in ch. 5, Angelus adds that this too is “conform” to the poverty of the Apostles: *Pecuniam vero vel denarios pro mercede laboris prohibet recipere, ut veram habeant conformitatem ad discipulos Domini, qui sine pecunia et auro et argento ad evangelij predicationem sunt missi* (Angelus Clarenus 1912: 115). Here, the term *conformitas* evokes the evangelical *form of life* described in the *Testamentum* of Friar Francis.

Regarding the prescription of the Divine Office, which the friars are to perform in the world rather than in a monastery, Francis' instruction to recite twenty-four *Pater Noster* prayers for laypeople is interpreted by Angelus Clarenus as an allusion to the twenty-four Elders of the Apocalypse. This analogy, in ch. 3, is introduced through the term *consonantia*: *ec autem XXIII-or initiantium et perfectorum spiritualia elementa in XXIII-or Pater noster ... consonantiam habent sacram cum XXIII-or senioribus habentibus cytharas et phylas aureas plenas odoramentorum, et coram agno procedentibus et novum vere prefatum perfectorum canticum cantantibus coram eo* (Angelus Clarenus 1912: 84). In this way, Francis' teaching is situated within the broader narrative of salvation history, because it exists in 'co-sounding' and "consonance" with it.

In his extended commentary on Chapter 6 of the Rule of Saint Francis, which addresses the theme of poverty, Angelus Clarenus invokes the authority of the Holy Doctors: Gregory, Basil and Ambrose. Here, the notion of *consonance* (*consono*) is reiterated in reference to a specific adherence to Christ's form of life, particularly to the "most exalted life and poverty of Christ and His disciples":

Ad maiorem autem veritatis declarationem sanctorum doctorum, qui evangelice vite et apostolice perfectionis regulam non assumpserunt ex voto, auctoritates ponantur, ut pateat legenti quomodo unus Christi spiritus loquebatur in sanctis differentibus vocationis et status de altissima Christi et discipulorum eius vita et paupertate consona, non diversa'. (Angelus Clarens 1912: 141)

Thus, the *form* of life embodied by Christ is understood to have been assumed by the Holy Fathers prior to the formulation of the Franciscan Rule. Angelus infers that the inspiration of Christ's Spirit speaks through all the Holy Doctors concerning the *altissima paupertas*, regardless of their particular vocation, so that their lives are *consona* – that is, in spiritual harmony, with the evangelical ideal.

Finally, it is worth noting the rhetorical tension inherent in the term *ornatus*, which carries both negative and positive connotations. Negatively, it refers to the superfluity of external goods; positively, it signifies spiritual adornment. This duality, which is not limited to Franciscan contexts, reflects a broader philosophical and rhetorical framework, which can still be found, for example, in Leon Battista Alberti¹¹: the negative sense implies an accidental exteriority, while the positive sense denotes an essential element that contributes to moral beauty and spiritual fullness.

This opposition is evident in two examples. Regarding clothing, Angelus warns against ornate garments and footwear: *Cavere autem oportet ornari in vestimentis aut calciamentis*, emphasising that such items should be used humbly and solely to meet bodily necessity. In this context, *ornatus* is associated with the accessory and non-essential – something to be renounced.

Conversely, *ornatus* is employed positively in the exposition of Franciscan virtues. To attain the proper form of preaching, one must first be purified in body and spirit and then adorned with the holy virtues of the Franciscan tradition: *Quare primo oportet purgari ab omni inquinamento carnis et spiritus, et secundo consequenter virtutibus sanctis, fide, humilitate, obedientia, caritate, veritate et pace, sapientia et castitate indui et ornari, ut induti veste nuptiali, non excludamur a regno* (Angelus Clarenus 1912, ch. 9: 196). Here, *ornatus* signifies a spiritual embellishment, an interior adornment that prepares the preacher's soul for the noble task of moving and elevating the souls of the faithful.

¹¹ This tension runs throughout the entire history of classical rhetoric, intersecting with philosophical-theological thought, arts and music and continuing into modernity. Providing an exhaustive overview is challenging. In addition to the medieval polemic wittily discussed by Eco regarding Bernard and the poverty of churches (Eco 2002), notable studies include those published in the journal *Les Cahiers de l'Ornement*, as well as the discussions on this topic in Di Stefano 2001 and 2019; Guest 2015. An issue of "Aesthetica Preprint" on *Dynamics of ornament: forms, structures, variations*, edited by E. Bacchi, A. Branca and A. Salvestrini, is in preparation.

3.2. *Franciscus de Marchia*

In Franciscus de Marchia¹², one finds a similar conception of harmony, understood as the capacity to “accord with” or “relate to” something – ranging from the realities of everyday life to the highest ideals of the Franciscan tradition. In his polemical treatise *Improbatio*, written against Pope John XXII, Franciscus de Marchia underscores the proper alignment between radical Franciscan theses, the teachings of Friar Francis of Assisi and the message of the Gospels.

In chapter 5, which addresses the notions of property and dominion as consequences of the sin of the first man, Franciscus defends the position that the Apostles held neither personal property nor dominion, but only the common use of goods. In the passage pertinent to our discussion, he emphasises that the Apostles’ renunciation of personal ownership and dominion corresponded to their adoption of a state “conforming” and “similar” to that of innocence, prior to the fall of the first man, from which the concepts of property and dominion originated (Franciscus de Marchia 1993: 182).

Chapter 7 is particularly relevant to our topic, as Franciscus highlights the importance of a fitting and harmonious relationship between the form of life chosen by the radical Franciscans – centred on poverty and evangelical perfection – and the opposing thesis advanced by John XXII. The central question posed is whether evangelical poverty excludes solicitude.

One of the points contested by John XXII concerns the claim that there exists a higher perfection in the soul – through which one is united with temporal things – than in external works, which allow for the maintenance of ownership and dominion over earthly possessions. In contrast, the Friars Minor are accused of excessive concern for material goods, precisely because they do not possess them.

Franciscus de Marchia responds by affirming that, while perfection in the soul and in one’s intentions is indeed essential, it is not sufficient; works are also necessary, as is evident in the practice of virtues such as chastity and obedience. Certainly, events beyond one’s control may affect the body, and in such cases, the holy intention remains intact. However,

¹² For Franciscus de Marchia (or Francesco d’Appignano), see the proceedings of the international conferences held in Appignano dedicated to this Friar Minor, reflecting a recent revival of studies on his thought, published in several issues of the journal “Pice-num Seraphicum”; in particular, note the last issue (2024). On the recent discovery of a fragment of the *Impugnatio* by Franciscus d’Appignano see Duba 2022.

where one's will is operative, it is imperative to strive for perfection in external works as well.

This marks the first fundamental step in our inquiry. Arguing that "for the perfection of virtue, the perfection of works, whether accomplished or intentional, is required", Franciscus de Marchia observes that, in certain circumstances, intention is appropriately and proportionately expressed through action:

Et ita ista doctrina eneruat omnem uirtutem quia omnis uirtus, quecunque sit, magis consistit in animo quam in opere et tamen, ad perfectionem cuiuscunque uirtutis requiritur quod aliquando, etsi non semper, pro loco et tempore, prorumpat in opus proportionatum et conueniens; ergo similiter ad perfectionem paupertatis euangelice requiritur quod aliquando reluceat proportionaliter in habitu exteriori secundum proportionem habitus interioris. (Franciscus de Marchia 1993: 228)

Here, we discern traces of a rhetorical notion of harmony, attentive to the circumstances of place and time, whereby intention or inner virtue is expressed in works in a manner that is both proportionate and fitting. Indeed, we recall that the rhetorical *conueniens*, a component of *elocutio*, serves as a criterion for appropriately attuning the parts of a discourse to one another and to external conditions. To the quantitative criterion of *proportio* is thus added the qualitative and rhetorical criterion of *conueniens*.

The beauty of the inner *habitus*, of virtue consolidated through praxis, must therefore "shine proportionately" in the outer *habitus*. In these words, Franciscus de Marchia admirably illustrates the superiority of inner virtue, which radiates outwards and lends beauty to external works. Yet perfection is realised both in interiority and exteriority, for when circumstances allow, the latter becomes a manifestation of the former's splendour.

After asserting that the Apostles neither possessed nor exercised dominion over anything, Franciscus de Marchia examines the thesis that "the abdication of ownership and dominion does not exclude a certain solicitude". He concedes that renouncing property and dominion may entail a degree of concern for material things, yet he maintains that this remains consistent with evangelical perfection. Firstly, the personal and collective renunciation of temporal possessions confers a form of perfection and elevates the moral condition. Secondly, dispossession "excludes love that is dissonant with respect to perfection", as defined by the Gospel.

This passage is particularly significant. Franciscus de Marchia employs the term *dissonum* to suggest that property and dominion engender a

form of love that is discordant with evangelical perfection. For the Friar Minor, the harmony between poverty and evangelical perfection is a foundational principle. Consider the passage:

455. Item, esto salua ueritate quod talis expropriatio non excluderet aliquam sollicitudinem, ut ipse dicit, tamen excludit aliquam affectionem seu amorem perfectioni dissonum, quia diuisio dominiorum uenit causaliter ex diuisione animorum que non stat cum summa perfectione caritatis, ut superius est ostensum. Ideo talis expropriatio dominii excludit amorem parcialem diuisiuum uoluntatum, unde, sicut expropriatio personalis excludit amorem perfectioni personali dissonum, ita expropriatio collegialis excludit amorem perfectioni collegiali dissonum, quia que proportio expropriationis personalis ad amorem personalem respectu personalis perfectionis, eadem est proportio expropriationis communis ad amorem communem respectu perfectionis communis, quia, sicut diuisio dominiorum personalium uenit ex diuisione animorum personalium, ita diuisio dominiorum collegialium uenit ex diuisione animorum collegiorum. (Franciscus de Marchia 1993: 236)

In this passage, Franciscus de Marchia constructs a compelling analogy, juxtaposed with a counter-analogy presented negatively, exposing the absurdity of the opposing view – represented here by John XXII and critics of *altissima paupertas*. Franciscus argues that although expropriation does not eliminate all material concerns, it does exclude any form of affection or love that is *dissonant* with evangelical perfection. He suggests that it is precisely those individuals or communities possessing property or dominion who are inclined towards a love misaligned with perfection.

Indeed, just as the division of souls leads to the fragmentation of personal domains, so too does the division of collective souls result in the partitioning of common domains. The love and affection that animate such souls are *not consonant* with evangelical perfection as they are partial and driven by division rather than unity. In contrast, souls moved by righteous love and mutual *concord* rightly choose dispossession. Here, Franciscus draws an analogy between dispossession, love and perfection, both personal and collective: personal dispossession corresponds to personal love *consonant* with personal perfection, just as collective dispossession corresponds to communal love *consonant* with collegial perfection.

The implicit premise of this argument is that communion of souls and wills, rather than division, fosters an affection and love *consonant* with evangelical perfection. Once again, *appropriate* and *proportionate relationships* yield affective consequences that, in this context, are directed towards ethical and spiritual ends. On one side stands *dissonum*: the rela-

tionship between love born of division and the ideal of perfection; on the other, *proportio*: the alignment between dispossession and love in relation to both personal and collective perfection. At the root lies either a *harmony* that generates righteous and full love, or a *disharmony* that produces *dissonant* affection.

Unlike the earliest Franciscan sources, such as the *Testament* of Francis of Assisi – notably the grounding sentence *secundum formam evangelii* (Merlo 2010) – in which conformity to the Gospel model is rarely framed in terms of harmonisation between subject and the ideal model, from Thomas of Celano and Bonaventure onwards (Salvestrini 2023), we observe a progressive development of an *affective harmony* in the relationship with the model. This development, facilitated by engagement with philosophical, rhetorical and musical sources, carries spiritual and ethical implications. This leads to the elevation of the individual, and, as the passages discussed here suggest, the community, towards an ideal of perfection that is distinctly Franciscan.

Concluding remarks

Our investigation into Franciscan thought between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries provides an insight into how affective harmony was conceived and theorised. The distinctive nuance that emerges in the sources we have examined lies in the close bond uniting the two auditory dimensions of the harmony-affections nexus: the power to move and elevate the spirit through musical sounds or rhetorical words, thus re-designing a theme very dear to Augustine, from *De musica* to the *Confessiones*.

This aspect of the problem must be considered with another: the friars' firm belief in the rhetorical faculty to stir the affections and elevate the soul, not only by means of sound but also through images. The extensive use of pictorial representations in Franciscan contexts – sometimes even in defiance of the Order's own regulations – attests to this conviction (Barasch 1987; Gardner 2011; Romano *et al.* 2018; Salvestrini 2025).

In debates concerning the affirmation of the *altissima paupertas*, references to the semantic field of affective harmony prove particularly illuminating. They reveal a use of the concept that is both relational and dynamic, approaching the rhetorical-musical dimension examined above. Here, "to relate to something", "to attune", "to be in conformity" or "in consonance with" are understood as a processual becoming of an ideal to

be attained, always oriented towards the exemplar – namely, the supreme poverty and the evangelical form of life.

Franciscan affective harmony thus emerges from these sources as a relational, dynamic dimension capable of reflecting – albeit variably according to context – the concrete circumstances while mediating and dialectically interpreting the relationship between the concrete and the abstract, the sensible and the intelligible, the body and the spirit.

What, then, is the contribution of Franciscan thought on affective harmony to the aesthetic dimension? It may be said to reside in the particular hue that harmony assumes in the Franciscan sources under study: a subtle, “minor” colouring. For even the purest, most rigorous, most resplendent ideals – or the first principles from which the world derives or to which it is destined – bear a trace (rhetorical and musical) of *attunement*, of being fitted to something. Yet they are never understood dogmatically as abstractions separated from the *hic et nunc* of things, without relinquishing awareness of their intrinsic structure and their dimensions of origin and aim.

Finally, from a more phenomenological perspective, we may pose one last question. In the sources we have surveyed – schematically speaking – harmoniously ordered relationships lead to pleasure, whereas unordered or dissonant ones produce displeasure. This schema, with its long history (adopted by the friars in various forms, particularly Augustine, but also present in Greek and Roman sources), continues well beyond the Middle Ages. Is it, then, a historical construct, or does it come structurally from human experience, a condition of successive layered understandings? Perhaps we will never be able to answer this question definitively as it depends on a fundamental epistemological choice. Nonetheless, it remains theoretically and historiographically important to investigate how this connection manifests itself across different historical contexts. The Greek origins, noted also by Cicero in the final part of *De oratore*, where poetic and musical language were the same – because, one might add, both are founded on sound matter – suggest that history was constructed on this experiential nexus. Even when the sense of this connection is overturned by the avant-garde movements of the twentieth century, this nexus remains present in an ever-renewed, ever-flowing experience that finds pleasure in well-ordered relations and displeasure in those that are not. Such an experiential flow, layered over historical time by means of diverse visual, auditory and conceptual apprehensions, emerges in the reflections of the late-medieval Friars Minor. This left a profound mark,

bringing to light a specific tune – often through intricate intertwining – across their images, music and textual expressions.

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