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Beauty and transcendentals in St. Thomas Aquinas

Abstract:

Thomas Aquinas did not give us a treatise on beauty. Thus, his thoughts on aesthetics are not always clear. In this paper, I engage in the well-known contemporary dispute, as to whether Aquinas takes beauty to be a transcendental. I distinguish between primary and secondary transcendentals and argue that it is not a primary transcendental. In doing so, I propose a necessary condition for something to be a primary transcendental, and I investigate Aquinas' division of the primary transcendentals.

Keywords:

Beauty, Transcendental, Thomas Aquinas

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1. Introduction*

The present paper addresses the question of whether, according to Aquinas, beauty is a transcendental, to be counted as such side by side with *res*, *unum*, *aliquid*, *verum*, and *bonum*. My thesis, which I will defend in brief form in this paper, is that beauty, though coextensive with being, is not a transcendental. This topic is, of course, an already beaten track, and I must apologise beforehand, as it is undeniable that many relevant works are beyond this paper's capacity to treat, even though many of them are working on its background. Some worth mentioning are Jan Aertsen's *Medieval philosophy and the transcendentals: the case of Thomas Aquinas*, a cornerstone on this topic; Francis Joseph Kovach's *Philosophy of beauty*; and Jacques Maritain's *Art and scholasticism*, which is an interesting exposition, so much so because it engages explicitly on the relationship between beauty and art. More recently, Christopher Sevier's *Aquinas on beauty*, and Alice Ramos' *Beauty and the good: recovering the classical tradition from plato to Duns Scotus* (editor), and *Dynamic transcendentals: truth, goodness, and beauty from a thomistic perspective* (author); and even more general works, which are nonetheless relevant, like Étienne Gilson's *Elements of christian philosophy*; Pasquale Porro's *Thomas Aquinas: a historical and philosophical profile*; and John Wippel's *The metaphysical thought of Thomas Aquinas*.

This long list, still very much *un*-exhaustive, already points to how voluminous the topic is. It is not infrequent for the problem to be divided into two sole possible positions: either Aquinas' position is that beauty is a transcendental *simpliciter*, or that beauty is not a transcendental at all. These may be exemplified, respectively, by De Haan (2020) and Aertsen (1996). On the other hand, some scholastic authors will distinguish between immediate and mediated transcendentals (e.g., Woodbury, 1952–1962: §945), and even Sevier will draw a similar distinction, between “tertiary or supernumerary” and “secondary” transcendentals (Sevier 2015: 125). In short, it suffices to be coextensive with being to be a transcendental, but direct modification of being is a requisite to be an “immediate” or “secondary” transcendental, with modifications of these being catalogued as a “mediated” or “tertiary” transcendental¹. Of course, this nuanced view is, to my mind, on the right track.

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¹ The “primary” transcendental, which Sevier's choice of terminology implies, is being (*ens*) itself.

Given the extension of the topic, I will, in this paper, only consider whether *pulchrum* is an immediate transcendental, as, to my mind, that is what the contemporary discussion is focusing on. My reasons for doing so are the following: (i) claims for the transcendentality of beauty are claims that beauty is a transcendental, to be counted as such *side-by-side with truth and goodness* – which are unanimously considered immediate transcendentals; and (ii) as this paper deals with Aquinas' position, no such distinction, to the best of my knowledge, occurs in his writings. Furthermore, I will focus my discussion on a recent paper from Fr. Thomas Joseph White, O.P., *Beauty, transcendence, and the inclusive hierarchy of creation* (2018), where the author argues that beauty is a transcendental. The reason for my choice is that White is one of the most prominent Thomistic authors of our time, whose argumentation is clear, concise, and well-informed within the literature. This makes him a privileged entryway into the topic and a fine representative of the "affirmative position", and thus ideal for a short paper such as this.

Now, the question whether beauty is a transcendental is no small problem, as it is the leading issue within the so-called "Thomistic aesthetics", which, being Thomistic, lead with metaphysics. Moreover, this question draws also on the paramount question of the Divine Names, a topic relevant to catholic theology broadly, particularly to the Thomistic approach. Furthermore, from the point of view of contemporary aesthetics, this question may help to bring light to the debates around the relationship between art and beauty.

Unfortunately, Aquinas does not have a full treatise on beauty, nor on the transcendentals. For this reason, Thomists have recollected the scattered bits throughout his *corpus*. The discussion around beauty's transcendentality springs from the apparent contradiction between Aquinas' "lists" of transcendentals – such as in *De veritate* (DV), q. 1, a. 1, and DV, q. 21, a. 3 – where Aquinas does not mention beauty, and places like *In De divinis nominibus* (In DDN), ch. 4, lec. 5, where beauty is taken to be coextensive with goodness (and therefore with being). This subject has its own interest in itself, considering the reality of things and the nature of beauty, relating to such topics as above-mentioned; but it receives all the more interest, as an historical question about the mind of Aquinas, due to contemporary disagreements on the topic. In his paper, White argues that beauty is a transcendental – or, more precisely, that Aquinas "can be read" to hold, implicitly, that position. Now, right off the bat, we have to deal with a, so to speak, "translation problem". Above, I have pointed to a distinction within transcendentals, namely, between immediate and mediat-

ed transcendentals. White, however, does not draw such a distinction. The question arises, therefore, whether he means that beauty is an immediate transcendental, or a mediated transcendental. On the one hand, White's paper is not addressed to scholastics – an “inner school paper”, so to speak –, which justifies the absence of the terminology from his paper. For this reason, I do not doubt that, if the distinction between immediate and mediated transcendentals were to be pointed out to him, he would agree that beauty falls into the second category. On the other hand, however, unity, goodness, and truth are immediate transcendentals, and White claims that beauty is to be reckoned among them. For this reason, on the overall, it seems natural to “translate” White's position as that beauty is a transcendental of the same kind of goodness, unity, and truth, that is, that beauty is an immediate transcendental. Having this in mind, from now on, I will refer to immediate transcendentals simply as transcendentals, and not consider mediated transcendentals for the most part.

2. *White's argument*

Let us now state concisely White's argument. His paper begins by acknowledging that, whenever Aquinas speaks of transcendental notions, he does not mention beauty – thus leading some to think that beauty is not a transcendental. Nonetheless, there are at least two texts which give us reason to reconsider such a conclusion – the above-mentioned *In DDN*, ch. 4, lec. 5, and *Summa Theologiae* (*ST*), Ia, q. 39, a. 8 (White 2018: 1216). Drawing from Aquinas' description of beauty (and its relation to God), one can then make the case that beauty is a feature of reality coextensive with all that exists. In fact, in *In DDN*, ch. 4, lec. 5, Aquinas will make assertions such as that beauty is the splendour of the form, and that everything has a form, and therefore everything is beautiful; or that the divine nature is the exemplar of beauty in created things; or that the *esse* of all things comes from divine beauty. From such-like considerations, White builds the argument that goes from that (i) the *esse* of everything comes from divine beauty, and that (ii) everything that has *esse* is somehow beautiful by virtue of its form, to that (iii) beauty, according to Aquinas, is a feature of being coextensive with all that exists. He says: “Evidently, if the *existence* of everything derives from divine beauty, and if everything that has existence is in some way beautiful by virtue of its intrinsic form, then it would seem to follow logically that beauty, for Aquinas, is a characteristic of being that is coextensive with all that exists” (White 2018: 1217). Jump-

ing into the second of Aquinas' texts, White sketches a new argument, which draws from that (i) God is beautiful by essence, and that (ii) He created all things with wisdom, and concludes that (iii) all existing things are beautiful in some way or another. He says: "God is essentially beautiful, and God has created all that exists in light of the eternal Word and Wisdom of God, who is the Son. Consequently, all that exists and that derives from God is in some way beautiful" (White 2018: 1218).

Then, White dwells on the relationship between truth, goodness, and beauty. It is at this point that he will say such things as that beauty is the goodness of the truth of a thing, or the appetibility of its intelligibility, thus emphasising truth over goodness. Another way of talking about beauty, switching tables, would be to say that beauty is the intelligible determination of goodness. He says:

We might say that beauty is the goodness of the truth of a thing, the delightfulness (or appetibility) of its intelligibility. To state things in this fashion is to place emphasis on the formal determination as the key element, rather than the splendor, a decision that gives primacy to the truth of the beautiful reality, emphasizing its goodness only secondarily. However, we could also say that beauty is the species or intelligible determination of goodness. This way of speaking places emphasis on the goodness of beauty. (White 2018: 1218-9)

But beauty, while related to goodness and truth, does not conflate with them. Thus, White briefly states how they differ: beauty is not truth *simpliciter*, but a truth of a definite kind; and, while goodness is rooted in final causality and gives purpose and meaning, beauty is rooted in formal causality, and has the power to "hold our gaze". He says: Beauty "implies formal determination (and thus a truth) of a definite kind. This is why beauty invites admiration, while goodness perfects. Goodness is grounded in final causality, while beauty is grounded in formal causality. Beauty has the power to hold our gaze. Goodness has the power to give our lives ultimate purpose or meaning. The two are not to be confused, even if they are often found together" (White 2018: 1219).

3. *Why beauty is not a transcendental*

In the argumentation that follows, I shall disagree with this interpretation of Aquinas' position. To my mind, the proper methodological way of framing the question is not only to consider what beauty is – which White does exceedingly well –, but also what a transcendental is – which White, in this paper, does only tangentially. Only then will we be able to determine whether or not beauty is a transcendental. For this reason, my kind answer will not disagree with White's notion of beauty. Rather, I will do three things. First, I will begin by considering some conditions that something has to meet in order for it to be a transcendental, proposing three necessary conditions². Secondly, I will make the case that White's account of beauty does not satisfy at least one of them. Finally, I will draw from the texts of Aquinas, suggesting such an interpretation as that beauty is not a transcendental. Let us start the arguing.

3.1. *Conditions for transcendentality*

First, as for the conditions for transcendentality. Let us first consider White's conception of transcendental. He seems to take coextensivity with being (*CB*) as the sufficient condition of transcendentality: if *x* is *CB*, then *x* is a transcendental. Now, for *x* to be coextensive with *y* simply means that *x* and *y* have the same extension, that is, any *a* which is *x* must also be *y*, and any *b* which is *y* must also be *x*. Returning to *CB*, this means that, if all beings are *x*, then *x* is a transcendental. Now, this is evidently true of being itself, and Aquinas argues as much for the other transcendentals. So, for example, in *ST*, Ia, q. 5, a. 1, he argues that *ens* and *bonum* differ only in reason, but not in reality – that to which I can point and say “Behold! An *ens*! That *is*!”, to that same thing I should be able to point and say “Look! A *bonum*! That *is good*!”³. Does not, then, Aquinas agree with White? My answer, in short, is no: on a closer look, what we have seen suffices only

² Please notice that whether or not these conditions, taken together, are sufficient, is beyond the scope of this paper.

³ I would, of course, be saying “is” and “is good” for different reasons. Such difference, then, constitutes a notional distinction, but no real distinction. It would be like pointing at an individual and saying “Peter Parker”, and, pointing at the same individual, saying “Spiderman”.

to assert that, if x is a transcendental, then x is CB . In other words, CB is a *necessary* condition, but not necessarily a *sufficient* one.

Unfortunately, White does not offer any other considerations that would help us to posit any other necessary condition for transcendentality. For this reason, let us consider two other authors. Sevier, for instance, says: "In defining the notion of transcendentality, I can do no better than to quote Jorge J.E. Gracia's introductory article on the concept", which then claims that transcendentals are predicates who can be truthfully predicated of every being, and lists 'being', "'one', 'true', 'good', 'thing', and 'something'" as the "most commonly noticed" (Sevier 2015: 124). Sevier then summarises Gracia's "three parts of the medieval doctrine of the transcendentals: (A) Being *qua* being has certain attributes; (B) Being *qua* being and its attributes are transcendental; and (C) The attributes of being *qua* being are convertible with it" (Sevier 2015: 124). Of these, even though, *prima facie*, only (C) seem to establish a condition (which is the same as CB), it seems to me that (B) also supposes another condition, which could be stated thus: If x is a transcendental, then x is an attribute of being *qua* being – not an attribute of being *qua* anything else. Again, this is evidently true about being itself ("to be" is an attribute of being *qua* being), and Aquinas argues as much for "thing", "one", "true", "good", "thing", and "something" in *DV*, q. 1, a. 1.

De Haan, on the other hand, lists three conditions (De Haan 2020: 301), but it is unclear how some of them are formally distinct from the others: in order for x to be transcendental, (i) x needs to be said of all; (ii) x needs to share the same subject, but to add a new notion; and (iii) x is ultimately convertible with being. Now, De Haan claims that (iii) come from the previous two; (i), and the first half of (ii), seem to be the same as CB . As for the second part of (ii), it does establish, to my mind, a new, distinct necessary condition, which, as it draws on the rational, conceptual, or notional, distinction between x (the putative transcendental, i.e., that of which we are yet uncertain whether it is a transcendental) and being, let us call it ND . Albeit his separating these concepts here, it seems to me that De Haan seems to take ND and CB together – for him, convertibility with being means that the concepts have the same extension, but a different "intension" (De Haan 2020: 296).

Please, notice the difference between Sevier's notion that transcendentals are attributes of "being *qua* being", and De Haan's notion that transcendentals need only to be "ultimately", and not directly, convertible. This difference will be relevant later on. As for White, I believe that

ND is implicit in his treatment of the problem, and it shall bear no implications in the body of my paper.

Now, this paper does not aim at listing all the necessary conditions – i.e., to the set of necessary conditions which, together, could be taken as sufficient –, but simply at showing that there is at least one such condition that beauty does not meet. If CB were the sole condition, it seems to me, there would be no way of preventing a superfluous multiplication of transcendentals. One could, for instance, claim that “woolah” is the conjunction of truth and unity, and so claim to have established a new transcendental. But things get worse, as one could do this indefinitely, conjoining woolah and truth, thus making “aween”; and aween with truth, thus making “peerin”. Perhaps, one could say that I am just being ridiculous. It is true: my examples are bizarre. However, they seem to touch exactly what De Haan is doing in his paper, for, according to him, the notion that beauty adds to being is “a perfection of a cognition and appetite *nexus* that is not signified by cognition as such or appetite as such” (De Haan 2020: 301). But the fact is that such multiplication needs not be drawn on bizarre examples as mine, for such things as privation, unintelligibility, and multiplicity also seem to be coextensive with being, but they are not transcendentals, even though they can be said to be “*de transcendentibus*”⁴. In order to avoid such problems, I propose the following as a necessary condition for transcendentality: If *x* is a transcendental, then *x* is formally non-reducible to other transcendentals (FNR). In other words, *x* cannot be a transcendental, if it is formally reducible to other transcendental,

⁴ Aquinas treats this explicitly at least as it comes to multiplicity, which is formally reducible to the *unum*. In dealing with it, Aquinas says that multiplicity “*est de transcendentibus*”. Remarkably, this establishes a relation between multiplicity and transcendentals, so that multiplicity is “from the transcendentals”, or, as Mary C. Fitzpatrick and John J. Wellmuth have translated it, “derives from the transcendentals” (*De Spiritualibus Creaturis*, a. 8, ad 15). Surveying the translations present in aquinas.cc, one notices that some other translations oscillate between “is transcendental” (*ST*, Ia, q. 30, a. 3, translated by the fathers of the English Dominican Province; and *In III Physicorum*, lec. 8, n. 352, translated by Fr. Pierre H. Conway, O.P.); “is a transcendental” (*In III Physicorum*, lec. 12, n. 394, again by Conway); and even “is reckoned among the transcendentals” (*ST*, Ia, q. 30, a. 3, again by the fathers of the English Dominican Province). It could, of course, be suggested that this same expression simply has different meanings in different contexts. However, even though some minor changes (as between “is transcendental” and “is a transcendental”) could be thus justified, it is simply the case that the meaning of the preposition “*de*” with the ablative expresses rather provenience.

“other” simply meaning “other than itself” (given that a thing may be formally reducible to itself)⁵.

In a sense, of course, this presupposes being as the “first” transcendental. The question at hand is how to determine whether *x* belongs to the same group as being, goodness, unity, and so on. So, one must first see if *x* is coextensive with being (*CB*), or with any other transcendental (given that coextensivity is transitive, if *x* is coextensive with, say, goodness, and goodness with being, then *x* will be coextensive with being). Then, we must check if *x* meets *ND* regarding, not only *one* transcendental, but *all* transcendentals: “bueno”, for example, is notionally distinct from “being”, but not from “goodness”, and so does not constitute a new transcendental. Finally, *x* must also be formally non-reducible (*FNR*) to any already accepted transcendental. Thus, let us now consider how *FNR* differs from *ND*.

Besides the examples I mention above, another example of an implicit application of *FNR* by Aquinas is when, in *DV*, q. 1, a. 1, co., he distinguishes three definitions of truth – according to (i) that in which truth is grounded, (ii) that which constitutes truth formally, and (iii) that which springs from truth. Now, all of these meet *CB* (for they belong to truth, which meets *CB*). And they equally all meet *NB*, since, even if the “ground of truth”, the “formal notion of truth”, and “that which springs from truth” were the same *thing*, they are nonetheless said according to different *rationes* (respectively, grounding truth, formally determining truth, and springing from truth). On the other hand, Aquinas is perfectly happy to distinguish these – precisely in the article where he distinguishes the transcendentals – without claiming that they are different transcendentals. The reason, I propose, is that they are formally reducible to one another, and thus do not meet *FNR*.

3.2. *Does beauty meet the conditions?*

Having established three necessary conditions for transcendentality, let us now try to see whether beauty meets them. This having been said, I take for granted that it meets *CB* and *ND*. Regarding the first, as already re-

⁵ Even though Fr. Woodbury explains it, not on analytical, but on scholastic terms, to my mind, the distinction between immediate and mediated transcendentals can be traced back to *FNR*. In other words, the *FNR* would be the *differentia* specifying immediate transcendentals.

marked, Aquinas, in *In DDN*, ch. 4, lec. 5, clearly remarks that beauty is coextensive with goodness; and, as I have already said, since goodness meets *CB*, it follows that so does beauty. Regarding the second, I believe that the abovemade exposition on beauty made it clear that it is notionally distinct both from truth and goodness, and I take it to be evident, for the purpose of this paper, that to be beautiful is also notionally distinct from being one (*unum*), being a thing (*res*), and being something (*aliquid*).

Being so, beauty meets *CB* and *ND*. The question, now, is whether beauty meets *FNR*. Let us, first, following White's depiction of it, consider beauty as it relates to truth and goodness. Now, it is clear in *In DDN*, ch. 4, lec. 5, that beauty is closely connected to goodness. For beauty, as goodness, attracts; not, however, as a final cause (which is the case of goodness), but by its splendour, i.e., as a formal cause. Since this formal dimension relates to truth, one can say that beauty is the appetibility of a thing's formal determination (in a sense, a "desired truth"). Another way of putting it is by conceiving beauty as the intelligible determination of goodness (a sort of "perceived goodness"). But both these conceptions of beauty fail to meet *FNR*: saying that "beauty is the good *qua* true", or "the true *qua* good", even if it suffices to offer some notional difference between beauty, goodness, and truth, it fails to give a formally non-reducible conception of beauty. Aquinas himself seems to endorse this, by virtue of the following contrast, that, when treating of truth, goodness, and unity, at the beginning of *ST*, always asks whether they are coextensive, or convertible, with being (respectively, *ST*, Ia, q. 16, a. 3; *ST*, Ia, q. 5, a. 1; and *ST*, Ia, q. 11, a. 1); however, in *In DDN* ch. 4, lec. 5, he puts beauty as coextensive, or convertible, not with being itself, but with goodness. Now, two things ought to be noticed here. First, I am by no means claiming that beauty does not meet *CB*. As I have argued above, beauty's coextensivity with goodness guarantees its coextensivity with being. All I am saying is that Aquinas' change of language emphasizes that beauty does not modify being, so to speak, directly (as all transcendentals do, according to *DV*, q. 1, a. 1, co.), which might be read as a sign of beauty's formal reducibility to goodness and truth. Secondly, as I have pointed to above, I believe that beauty is a mediated transcendental, but not an immediate transcendental (and so, not a transcendental "to be reckoned amongst" goodness, truth, etc.). Furthermore, and, again, as I have already pointed to above, it seems to me that *FNR* is precisely the *differentia* which distinguishes these two brands of transcendentals. Immediate transcendentals modify being directly, while mediated transcendentals, although transcending the categories of being, modify some other transcendental, but

not being directly. This will, I believe, be made clear through the remainder of this paper.

After having considered whether beauty meets *FNR* having in mind its relation to goodness and truth, let us now inquire apart from such relations, i.e., considering its own definition. Following passages as *ST*, Ia, q. 39, a. 8, it has become the standard reading of Aquinas' view that beauty requires three things, to wit, integrity (or perfection or wholeness), proportion (or harmony or consonance), and clarity (or brightness or splendour). But this does not help the case for beauty's transcendentality, for, if beauty were not formally reducible to truth, goodness, or unity, it would, at least, be so to these three characteristics. Shouldn't then these be made transcendentals, before beauty? But then, perhaps they already are – for integrity, after all, means that a thing is a complete being, which is predicated either affirmatively by *res* (for to have a quiddity or essence is proper of the complete whole), or negatively by *unum* (for that which has unity cannot lack anything); proportion, on the other hand, I argue, draws on the notion of *bonum* (for it dwells on the realm of final causality); and clarity draws on *verum* (for it is declarative and manifesting of being, which is one of truth's definitions), or else in *bonum*.

For *claritas* as truth, one can draw from the third definition of truth given in *DV*, q. 1, a. 1: "Truth is defined in a third way, according to the effect which follows from it. Thus, Hilarius said that truth is declarative and manifestative being; and Augustine, in his book *De Vera Religione* said that truth is that which shows that which is". This may be fittingly complemented with a recourse to Aquinas' explanation of *claritas* as a part of beauty in *ST*, IIa-IIae, q. 180, a. 2, ad 3. He says: clarity "is found radically in reason, to which pertains to be also a manifesting light". Just a few lines below, Aquinas seems to identify this "manifesting light" with the "light of reason" – at least this is Sevier's interpretation (Sevier 2015: 112). He further states: "When applied to things other than persons, beauty (*pulchrum*) relates to the splendor (*claritatem*) of its own genus (*sui generis*) [...]. What can Aquinas mean by 'splendor of its own genus' if not the intelligibility of the object's form made manifest to others? And this is consistent with Aquinas' previous statement that *claritas* is the 'light that makes beauty seen' (*lumen manifestans*)". In this line of interpretation, it is equally valuable Aquinas' explanation of why the Second Person of the Holy Trinity is beautiful: "However, as for the third [i.e., clarity], it agrees with the Son Himself, inasmuch as He is the Verb, which is certainly the light and splendor of the intellect" (*ST*, Ia, q. 39, a. 8, co.).

For clarity as goodness, one can draw from *In DDN*, ch. 4, lec. 5. There, Aquinas says: “Even though beauty and goodness are the same in subject (for both clarity and consonance are contained under the *ratio* of good), however, they differ in reason: for beauty adds on to the good an order to the cognoscitive power”. Thus, albeit underlying the notional difference between beauty as a whole – which includes, but is not only, clarity – and goodness, Aquinas still argues that clarity has the *ratio* of good.

Furthermore, this identification of *integritas*, *proportio*, and *claritas* with, respectively, *unum*, *bonum*, and *verum*, seems to me to be totally consistent with the traditional conception (i) of *claritas* as the formal principle of beauty, (ii) of *proportio* as the proximate material principle, and (iii) of *integritas* as the remote material principle (Woodbury 1952–1962: § 945). If my “transposition” is correct, then (i) truth as *forma manifestans* (clarity) is the formal principle of beauty; (ii) goodness, which adds to *ens*, but already as related to the will, is the material principle, but proximate; and (iii) unity, which adds to *ens* in itself, is the remote material principle. As I will point to below, a further investigation might help to determine whether *integritas* would be better connected to *unum*, *res*, or *aliquid*, even though I think that *DV*, q. 21, a. 3, helps us to settle for *unum*.

At any rate, these considerations, I believe, render manifest that beauty fails to meet *FNR*.

3.3. *The division of transcendentals*

My last argument tries to bring some new light into one of Aquinas' most mentioned texts on this subject. White starts his paper by acknowledging that Aquinas does not count beauty, when he explicitly treats the transcendentals. White does not mention a particular text or set of texts, nor does he specify his views on those. De Haan, on the other hand, refers to *In I Sent.*, d. 8, q. 1, a. 3; *DV*, q. 1, a. 1; and *DV*, q. 21, a. 1, calling these the “three basic texts” (De Haan 2020: 295).

Naturally, absence of proof is no proof of absence, and the fact that Aquinas does not include beauty in a particular list does not mean that he would not, if one were to ask him that, include it. After all, Aquinas will sometimes list only *ens*, *unum*, *verum*, and *bonum* (as in *DV*, q. 21, a. 3)⁶, while in other expositions he will also add *res* and *aliquid* (as in *DV*, q. 1,

⁶ Also, in his exposition about the attributes of God, the same four are mentioned – *ST*, Ia, qq. 3-26. The same happens in *In I Sent.*, d. 8, q. 1, a. 3.

a. 1). Should not we then conclude that these lists are made *ad hoc*, and that one is not automatically granted permission to make of any particular list a definitive manifestation of the mind of Aquinas?

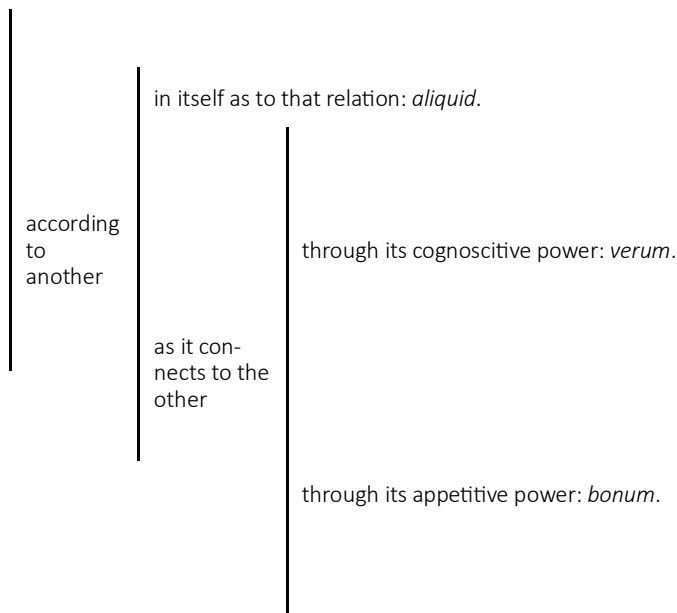
This seems to be the mind of De Haan. According to him, while these texts are certainly the “starting point” for an inquiry on Aquinas’ notion of transcendentals, it would be a “baseless assumption” to assume that they portray a complete and clear theory, or even exposition, of the transcendentals. Furthermore, he thinks that one cannot sustain the hypothesis that Aquinas wants to present a “canonical statement” about which notions count as transcendentals (De Haan 2020: 295). As I am about to explain, I disagree, inasmuch as I believe that one of those “primary texts” amounts to a systematic approach.

While it is a good principle not to take *ad hoc* claims as representative of Aquinas’ mind in a systematic way, the case here is that one of those texts is not giving an *ad hoc* answer. On the contrary, it is offering a general systematic introduction for a particular problem – it is explaining how transcendentals are divided, as a preamble for defining truth. I am speaking, of course, of DV, q. 1, a. 1. This formal division from “*genera*” into “*species*” by “*differentiae*”⁷ allows one to build a sort of “porphyrian tree”, in which additions to *ens* are divided into, firstly, those made according to the being itself, and, secondly, those according to its relation to others. The former is then divided whether the addition is made affirmatively, in which case we have *res*, or negatively, in which case we have *unum*; the latter being subsequently divided according to whether we consider the *ens* itself, inasmuch as it relates to something else, in which case we have *aliquid*, or that to which the *ens* is related, which can be either the intellect, in which case we have *verum*, or the will, in which case we have *bonum*⁸. This tree is depicted as follows.

Addition on <i>ens</i>	according to itself	affirmatively: <i>res</i> .
		negatively: <i>unum</i> .

⁷ Of course, being belongs to no genus – hence the quotation marks around genera, species, and specific differences.

⁸ I wonder whether this systematic division of Aquinas is not the best illustration of *FNR*, even if he never mentions such a condition explicitly.



4. Conclusion

For all the reasons underlined in this paper – the addition of *FNR* as a necessary condition for transcendental; the wanting of beauty when faced to such a condition; and the systematic formal division of transcendentals in *DV*, q. 1, a. 1 – it seems to me that, contrary to what White argues for, it is more plausible to read Aquinas as not endorsing beauty as a transcendental to be held amongst truth, goodness, unity, etc.

I have not argued for this vision *albeit* such texts as *In DDN*, ch. 4, lec. 5 and *ST*, Ia, q. 39, a. 8; rather, I have made the case that, in this way, they are better reconciled with other elements of Aquinas’ doctrinal *corpus*. It seems to me that this paper furthers the topic in academic Thomism in two ways. First, by bringing explicitly into the table a new necessary condition for transcendental, which I didn’t find in other treatments of the topic. Secondly, by recovering *DV*, q. 1, a. 1 as the *locus* of the formal division of transcendentals, rather than a mere paradigmatic “list of transcendentals”.

In this paper, I addressed the question of whether or not, according to Aquinas, beauty is a transcendental. My thesis is that, even though beauty

is coextensive with being, nonetheless, it is not a transcendental in the same sense as truth, goodness, unity, thing, and something. The research done in this paper could be developed very richly in the following way. First, by elaborating and better establishing *FNR* as a necessary condition for transcendentality. Secondly, by conducting a deeper metaphysical research into the relation between beauty and the transcendentals, namely the true, the good, and unity. For example, it would be interesting to press the investigation on the relationship between beauty and unity, in order to determine whether this is really preferable to a reference to either to thing or something. Thirdly, by conducting a realistic search for possible alternative definitions of beauty, complementing those addressed by White in his paper. Finally, by centering the discussion around the distinction between immediate and mediated transcendentals, thus also clarifying how beauty is a transcendental in that qualified sense, proposing more arguments for its transcendentality. A – to my mind – enlightening way of doing this would be to sketch an “analogy of beauty”. This could be done, for instance, by considering the difference of beauty on accidents and on substances; and an elaboration of the consequent notion that degrees of beauty correspond to degrees of being. But, again, this can only be done after a definition of beauty is argued in realistic terms – starting with the senses towards concepts, ascending from sense experience, through physics, into metaphysics.

4.1. *A last note: on the importance of the question*

I believe that all of these paths might lead to a deeper understanding of beauty. But is that truly the case? Does the transcendentality of beauty really matter? Sevier ends his discussion on the transcendentality of the beautiful with the following: “I wish to suggest that, even if Aertsen is correct [in suggesting that beauty, according to Aquinas, is not a transcendental], it will have little (if any) significant practical effect on how we interpret Aquinas’ view of beauty. The reason is that it makes no difference to the extension of the concept of beauty whether it is convertible with Being or merely with Good” (Sevier 2015: 126-7). Of course, Sevier is right, in the sense that, in that chapter, his purpose was to establish that beauty is objective; to that end, in fact, *CB* is a sufficient condition. As he says: “The fact is that Beauty will be attributable to the exact class of entities to which Being is attributable. This is sufficient to justify the objectivity of Beauty, if such justification was still wanting” (*ibidem*).

Also, it is true that neither Aertsen's objection, as portrayed by Sevier and De Haan, nor any of my objections, will have any bearing on the question of which things are beautiful. But to know which things are beautiful is only to know what beauty is *materially* speaking. On the other hand, to know whether or not beauty modifies being directly (Aertsen's objection) or whether it satisfies *FNR* (my objection), helps us to know what beauty is *formally*. And this, after all, has a great bearing on our understanding of beauty.

Furthermore, I wonder whether Sevier has shown as much as he thinks he did. To my mind, he has been successful in showing that all things are beautiful; he has shown, consequently, that beauty is objective. But how can this help us show that aesthetic judgments are objective? After all, the metaphysical fact that all things are beautiful seems to help us to determine what paintings are beautiful, just as much as the metaphysical fact that all things are good helps us to determine which chocolates are tastier. I believe – and it would prove an interesting point of development of the research started by this paper – that the sort of formal considerations brought by *FNR* and Aertsen's objection, contrary to not having any practical relevance, precisely because they represent inquiries about the formal *ratio* of beauty, would be most helpful to contemporary discussion on the value of aesthetic judgments.

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