John D. Dadosky

The Eclipse and Recovery of Beauty. A Lonergan Approach. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014. Pp. iv + 255. Hb, \$65.

In the Italian version of his encyclical on the environment, *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis uses the terms “beauty” and “beautiful” forty-seven times. Beauty, as he says, is a value that should be included in our discourse about the environment. Even apart from environmental concerns, beauty has become an increasingly frequent focus of religious and theological works. Recent years have seen a spate of books attempting to explicate the connections between aesthetics (understandings of beauty and art) and religion, faith, and theology. Many have been inspired by the works of Hans Urs von Balthasar, although his own “aesthetics” has little to say about beauty in the normal understandings of the word, and even less about art. Dadosky’s approach to beauty also begins with Balthasar—specifically with his premise that beauty has been “lost” in the modern world, and must be recovered for the sake of an adequate religious and theological stance not only on ecology, but on life itself.

Dadosky’s brief but excellent summary of Balthasar’s effort to establish beauty as a “transcendental” leads to a recognition of the need for a more critically-grounded approach. Instead of looking exclusively backward to Aquinas, Dadosky proposes a recovery of beauty that relies on Bernard Lonergan’s retrieval of Thomistic metaphysics. He thus hopes to improve and expand upon Balthasar’s concern for theological aesthetics. Lonergan’s philosophy of intentional consciousness (which is adeptly summarized) avoids the “subjectivist” and “idealist” dangers that Balthasar so feared (rightly or wrongly) in post-Kantian approaches like Karl Rahner’s. Lonergan also allows us—so Dadosky hopes—to overcome the “aesthetic relativism” and subjectivism exemplified by David Hume’s paradigmatic statement: “Beauty is no quality in things themselves. It exists merely in the mind which contemplates them; and each mind perceives a different beauty” (4). Dadosky’s very ambitious goal, then, is not only to recover the “transcendental” status of beauty in metaphysics, but also to provide a foundation, through Lonergan, for articulating aesthetic judgments “just as we do when we make judgments of fact and judgments of value” (14). Since Lonergan made few explicit statements regarding either beauty or the arts, such a project requires some expansion and revision to his work.

On the way to articulating his agreement with St. Bonaventure’s and Jacques Maritain’s idea of beauty as a kind of “summary” of all the transcendentals, Dadosky gives a very competent overview of the major Scholastic and neo-Scholastic views on the topic. Like Balthasar, he depends largely on

the work of Franz Kovach to locate the somewhat unclear position of Aquinas. The more difficult task is to relate beauty as a “transcendental” quality of all beings to a specifically “aesthetic” beauty, and to art. If we say that every being is beautiful (insofar as it “has” being), what is the specific meaning of “aesthetic” beauty? Clearly it must be being or goodness of a particular kind, just as every judgment is about a truth or a good or a being of a particular kind and in a particular context. But what kind? What context? With regard to art, the problem becomes even more complex, since art (as Dadosky admits) does not always seek beauty. These questions occupy most of the second half of the book.

Before confronting them, however, Dadosky engages in a lengthy excursus on the aesthetics of Friedrich Nietzsche and Søren Kierkegaard. Following René Girard’s critique, he sees a “perpetuation of violence that is related to the loss of beauty through its displacement and distortion” (55), as is seen in Nietzsche’s “Dionysian” aesthetics. Kierkegaard is criticized by Balthasar for a somewhat similar reason: he appears to separate the ethical from the aesthetic “stage” of existence, and both from faith. Dadosky agrees with Girard about Nietzsche but distances himself from Balthasar’s misconstrual of Kierkegaard. Part of the problem with Balthasar’s critique is semantic: “There are obviously different senses of the aesthetic, and not all of them include beauty” (78). And aside from ontological beauty, there is the beauty of art, aesthetics as an existential stage, and so on. Dadosky sees a resolution to the real limitations of Nietzsche’s aesthetics and the apparent limitations of Kierkegaard’s in Lonergan’s notion of differentiations of consciousness and corresponding “patterns of experience.” In the existential subject seeking authenticity, the world of immediacy (here, the “aesthetic”) can be “subsumed” (Lonergan refers to Georg Hegel’s idea of *Aufhebung*) and integrated into the world of meanings and values, leaving behind its limitations but preserving its positive aspects.

Presuming that beauty exists, Dadosky attempts to explain how it can be construed at each of Lonergan’s four levels of intentionality: experience, understanding, judgment, decision. This move is intended to imitate Lonergan’s method in *Insight* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1957), where he presumes the occurrence and the recognition of the act of knowing in the reader, and can call for the self-appropriation of one’s activity. But is there a parallel progression of activities in the aesthetic realm? One may wonder whether *Insight*’s phenomenology, based as it is on the ideal of scientific knowing, is entirely appropriate to describe the way we arrive at apprehensions of beauty, and hence whether the “levels” of the process of making judgments of fact are a coherent way of asking about what beauty means.

In four chapters, Dadosky attempts to expand Lonergan's ideas by putting them in dialogue with works more explicitly concerned with aesthetics. Although the proclaimed purpose is to examine how "beauty" is to be construed at each level of cognition, in fact Dadosky wanders through a number of topics, not all directly related to beauty. He also makes Lonergan's thought engage with a number of contemporary thinkers, in particular Robert Schusterman, who proclaims the "loss of aesthetic experience" in Western society. Attempting to discern a philosophy of aesthetic experience in Lonergan's works, Dadosky argues for a distinctive "pattern" of aesthetic experience, which for Lonergan falls between the biological and the intellectual "patterns." The pleasure of beauty stems partly from liberation from instrumentalization, but also from a "surplus of meaning" that we find in it: a significance that is perceived in the senses and apprehended by intellect, stirring affectivity. But there is a problem: Lonergan's statements about aesthetics are closely associated with art, not necessarily with beauty, which is Dadosky's supposed topic. Hence there is potential for confusion on the part of the reader. Do the various positions on beauty, aesthetics, and art finally give anything like a coherent view of any of them? Dadosky admits that we must distinguish between beauty as an ontological notion and beauty as an "aesthetic" notion. But he might have gone farther in pursuing the implications of the recognition that not all "aesthetics" is about beauty, much less all art. He also makes some concession to the "subjective" conception of beauty, admitting that "there is obviously a sense in which aesthetic experiences of beauty vary" because of taste, culture, etc. (120), and he gives a useful summary of positions regarding "the sublime." Again, however, it is not entirely clear how this relates to the main argument of the book.

More to the point of specifically "aesthetic" beauty is Dadosky's correlation of Christopher Alexander's fifteen characteristics of good architecture with Aquinas's three principles of integrity, consonance, and clarity. Although Lonergan locates the "aesthetic pattern" as prior to the intelligible, Dadosky thinks that these three characteristics are also present analogously in the way "forms" are grasped by the intellect in sense data. Hence the act of understanding is also delightful and beautiful. However, what is grasped in understanding is not being, but only form, a principle of being. So Dadosky moves on to the grasp of existence in judgment, appropriating Kant's four moments of aesthetic judgment into a Lonergan framework. Finally, in a very packed twenty-three pages, he deals with beauty on the level of responsible action. This includes not only the elements of a philosophy of art, but also a consideration of the contemplation and love of beauty ending with the move from aesthetics to ethics and to the love of God.

There is clearly great difficulty in trying to use Lonergan's vocabulary and his insights about knowledge in relation to a topic that he said little about, where his meaning is not always clear, and where there are apparent shifts in his position. Above all, there is a problem in "fitting" aesthetics into Lonergan's insights into a different form of knowing. At times, Dadosky seems to be forcing the data into Lonergan's categories. Sometimes, too, it is difficult to sort out the shifts between the interrelated topics: beauty (of different kinds), aesthetics, art. In places, the writing becomes somewhat elliptical. However, throughout his treatment Dadosky is appropriately modest and tentative. He admits that the book is incomplete, and invites revisions. His express hope is to show the provocative implications of his explorations, and thus to show the potential of Lonergan's philosophy in aiding a "recovery of beauty." In this he certainly succeeds.

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