

Lecture 7: Beauty and Transcendence

Review and Recap

- **Beauty** is not fully objective or subjective. Like *relevance* and *insight*, it arises through a **transjective** relationship—between mind and world.
- **Kant** sees beauty as a free play between **imagination** and **understanding**. This is the *imaginal* process.
- **Gesture** and **conceptual metaphor** exemplify the *imaginal*, integrating sensory and conceptual modes.
- This points to **4E cognitive science**: cognition is **embodied, embedded, enacted, and extended**.
- **Michael Anderson** and **Barbara Tversky** show how cognition is **exaptive**: repurposing sensorimotor capacities for abstract thinking.

The Four Kinds of Knowing (4Ps)

1. **Propositional (Dianoia)** – knowing *that*, stored in **semantic memory**.
2. **Procedural (Techne)** – knowing *how*, stored in **procedural memory**.
3. **Perspectival (Noesis)** – knowing *what it is like*, in **episodic memory**.
4. **Participatory (Gnosis)** – knowing *by being with*, rooted in your **self-identity**.
5. All non-propositional forms support the propositional.
6. **Virtue** depends on all four. It's not just belief or rules, but embodied skills, perspectives, and identity.

Love and Beauty as Metaxu

- **Love** is not a feeling or emotion. It is an **existential mode**: a participatory binding of agent and arena.
- **Beauty** and **love** are **metaxu**—they bridge the **finite and the transcendent**.
- Holding this duality (Plato calls this **tonos**) is vital: emphasizing only finitude leads to despair; emphasizing only transcendence leads to hubris.

- **Beauty-love-anagoge** work together to help us inhabit our **finite transcendence**.

Logos and Reason

- **Logos**: not merely logic, but the organizing principle, proportion, speech, intelligibility.
- **Hyland** (following Plato): beauty makes space for logos, *between* *dianoia* and *noesis*.
- This **dialogos** (back-and-forth between silence and speech) keeps us from **nihilism**.

Brendan Thomas Sammon & William Desmond

- **Desmond**: primary experience of being is **metaxu**—both familiar and mysterious.
- **Sammon**: influenced by Christian Neoplatonism and Desmond.

Crash Course on Neoplatonism

- Integration of:
- **Aristotelian science** – taxonomy, organizing categories (e.g., mammals, reptiles, etc.)
- **Platonic spirituality** – contemplative **anagoge** (ascent and return)
- **Stoic ethics** – internalizing **Socratic dialogos** to cultivate **virtue**
- **Plotinus**: what's at the top of the hierarchy? Not a *thing*, but the power of **One-ing**.
- Later Neoplatonists: not just top-down *emanation* but bottom-up *emergence*.
- The **grammar of cognition** and the **grammar of being** are the same.
- Participating in this structure brings **flow, connectedness, and meaning in life**.

Is the One God?

- **Schellenberg** defines the **sacred** as **triple transcendent**:
- **Ultimately real**
- **Ultimately transformative**
- **Ultimately normative**
- The **One** meets these three criteria and thus can be considered **God** in a *non-theistic, metaxu* sense.
- Compatible with **Dao**, **Sunyata**, and **God**—bridging religion and secularity.

Critique of Christian Neoplatonism

- **Sammon** sees **incarnation** as Christianity's solution to bridging the spiritual and the physical.
- Vervaeke is cautious: this approach may still operate within a **two-worlds mythology** (natural/supernatural).
- He suggests considering:
- **Islamic Sufism**: names of God bridge physical and spiritual
- **Zen**: *dissolves* the dualism entirely
- Proposes a synthesis: **Zen Neoplatonism** – dissolving the two-worlds framing while preserving the depth.

Dionysus and Aquinas

- **Dionysus**: one of God's most important names is **Beauty**.
- Beauty is not just a label for God—it's how God *is* God.
- Beauty is the **metaxu** of **plenitude** (transcendence) and **determinate objects** (immanence).

Aquinas on the Transcendentals

- **Beauty binds the Good and the True**:
- The **Good** is the **fullness of being**, most transformative, most real.
- The **True** is **determinate content**, most intelligible.

- Beauty draws determinate things into fuller meaning and draws us toward the inexhaustible.

Beauty is the imaginal realization of the good into the true and the true into the good.

- The **True, Good, and Beautiful** interpenetrate and mutually reveal **being**.
- This triad is called the **Transcendentals**.
- Around this triad is **mystery**—for Aquinas, that mystery is **God**.

Closing Insight

- Beauty is not a thing to define, but a **process of metaxu**.
- Beauty **binds, reveals, guides, and transforms**.
- To live beautifully is to live **between**—to love wisely, to engage in anagoge, and to remember our **finite transcendence**.

"Beauty is the glue of the cosmos, the light by which we see the good and the true, and the invitation to become fully human."