

# GADAMER AND AQUINAS ON LANGUAGE, BEING, AND THE BEAUTY OF TRUTH

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SUMMARY: 1. *The Expressive Character and Intelligibility of Language and of Being*. 2. “*Being that can be understood is language*”: *The Beauty of Being and its Light*. 3. *The Affinity between Mind and Beauty: The Light of Nous and the Agent Intellect*. 4. *A Metaphysics of the Light: Beauty, Truth, and Understanding*.

## 1. THE EXPRESSIVE CHARACTER AND INTELLIGIBILITY OF LANGUAGE AND OF BEING

ALASDAIR MACINTYRE has noted Gadamer’s rejection of the Thomistic tradition and of the metaphysics that is requisite for Aristotle’s ethics.<sup>1</sup> At different moments in his writings, Gadamer recognizes that a metaphysical and theological grounding was once given, for example, for the conformity of human knowledge with objects or things, but he prefers, as he says, “the way of language”, to “the task of metaphysics”.<sup>2</sup> Gadamer’s “way of language”, as he develops it in the last section of his magnum opus *Truth and Method*, provides fundamental insights regarding not only the relationship between language, thought, and world, but also regarding being as self-presentative and regarding beauty’s mode of being as light. He also closely connects beauty

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<sup>1</sup> A. MACINTYRE, *On Not Having the Last Word: Thoughts on Our Debts to Gadamer*, in J. MALPAS, U. ARNSWALD, and J. KERTSCHER (eds.), *Gadamer’s Century: Essays in Honor of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, The MIT Press, Cambridge 2002, pp. 157, 169.

<sup>2</sup> H.-G. GADAMER, *The Nature of Things and the Language of Things*, in D. E. LINGE (ed.), *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1976, p. 77. See pp. 74-75: “To be sure, classical metaphysics’ concept of truth – the conformity of knowledge with the object – rests on a theological correspondence. For it is in their creatureliness that the soul and the object are united. Just as the soul is created to encounter beings, so the thing is created true, that is, capable of being known. An enigma that is insolvable for the finite mind is thus resolved in the infinite mind of the Creator. The essence and actuality of the creation consists in being such a harmony of soul and thing. [...] the task of metaphysics continues, though certainly as a task that cannot be solved as metaphysics, that is, by going back to an infinite intellect. [...] There is a way that attests to [the infinite correspondence of soul and being] [...], one toward which philosophy is ever more clearly directed – the way of language”.

to truth. While Gadamer draws heavily from the Thomistic treatment of the interior word – the word that is formed in every act of understanding and is spoken interiorly – and aligns himself with Aquinas in distancing understanding from subjective idealism, he is certainly more influenced by the Platonic and Neoplatonic tradition in his treatment of being, beauty, and truth. In fact, it has been said that Gadamer's entire project has as its basic presupposition Neoplatonic thought, for which all things emanate from the One who diffuses his goodness and light, and where the source is not depleted by what emanates forth but rather expresses itself in its emanations.<sup>3</sup> Even though Gadamer avoids metaphysical and theological foundations, he enters fully into the Neoplatonic metaphysics of light and the beautiful, together with the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation.

According to Gadamer, the theological encounter with the Greek *logos* provides a conception of language unlike the culturally entrenched view of language as a tool for conveying preconceived meanings. The mystery of the Trinity and the Incarnation are mirrored for Gadamer in the mystery of language, providing us with a conception of language that describes as he puts it, “a word that is true, because it says what the thing is..., having nothing from itself, but everything from that knowledge from which it is born. It has its being in its revealing”.<sup>4</sup> For Gadamer the idea of something coming to be in language, which he sees as similar to becoming incarnate as the Word, does not diminish the being of the thing but rather is a kind of realization of the thing. Language does not simply copy being, but rather in language the intelligible forms itself. In language there is a shining or showing forth.<sup>5</sup> The being of things thus becomes accessible to us in their linguistic appearance through an interior word which we utter to ourselves.

Gadamer speaks of the speculative nature of language, that is, language distinguishes itself from itself, it presents itself, and it expresses meaning.<sup>6</sup> Lan-

<sup>3</sup> D. CARPENTER, *Emanation, Incarnation, and the Truth-Event in Gadamer's Truth and Method*, in B. R. WACHTERHAUSER (ed.), *Hermeneutics and Truth*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston 1994, p. 98.

<sup>4</sup> H.-G. GADAMER, *Truth and Method*, trans. rev. by J. Weinsheimer and D. G. Marshall, Crossroad, New York 1990, p. 421. Hereafter referred as *TM*.

<sup>5</sup> J. RISSER, *The Remembrance of Truth: The Truth of Remembrance*, in B. R. WACHTERHAUSER, (ed.), *Hermeneutics and Truth*, cit., p. 129. For Gadamer, as Risser sees it, the word is more like an image than it is a sign, for as he understands it, the image allows the thing itself to appear or to present itself, without there being a distinction between the appearance of the thing and the thing itself. To this effect, Gadamer says, “To come into language does not mean that a second being is acquired. Rather, what something presents itself as belongs to its own being. Thus everything that is language has a speculative unity: it contains a distinction, that between its being and its presentations of itself, but this is a distinction that is not really a distinction at all” in *TM*, p. 475.

<sup>6</sup> “Language itself [...] has something speculative about it [...] as the realization of mean-

guage thus explained is not only art and history but according to Gadamer, everything that may be understood. And so Gadamer extends the speculative character of language to being itself: not only is language expressive but so also is being. For Gadamer language is incarnate meaning, which signifies for him that thought and word belong together, that reality and word belong together. Extending therefore his notion of language to being, it is not surprising that Gadamer should describe his life's work in the following terms: "We wanted to grasp in what way reason was incarnate in existence itself. [...] We were in search of a way to think in which we could see the truth of things, to discover the truth that was there in each thing before us in the world. And this meant that we were utterly distanced from [...] efforts to control things, to make things, to manage things".<sup>7</sup> If reason or the *logos* permeates being, as thought permeates language, then the utilitarian stance toward things must be replaced by a contemplative stance which is certainly more in consonance with the nature of the human person, whose end consists in the contemplation of truth.

In this article my intention will be to consider briefly how Aquinas's discussion of the interior word serves as an analogy for the intelligible emanation of the Word from God. Creation through the Word explains the truth of things, as well as their beauty and light. Had Gadamer been more sympathetic to Thomistic thought in its original texts and not simply in what he considered to be "the dogmatic overlay superimposed on Aristotle by... Neo-Thomism", he would have perhaps seen in Aquinas an ally in his recovery of the truth of things.<sup>8</sup> I will relate the expressive character of language to being, as is found in Gadamer's own exposition, and I will insist on the beauty of being and its light. I also refer at some length to the light of *nous* and of the agent intellect, which are simply mentioned by Gadamer without further development. And finally, I will end this article with a consideration of truth, whose manifestation is related to the light of beauty. Truth is explained as an event and as light.

Aquinas's work on the inner word serves not only to explain language in terms of its revealing reality and thus making us participants, as it were, of

ing, as the event of speech, of mediation, of coming to an understanding. Such a realization is speculative in that the finite possibilities of the word are oriented toward the sense intended as toward the infinite". See H.-G. GADAMER, *TM*, p. 469. According to Gadamer, the speculative structure of language is not "the reflection of something given but [...] the coming into language of a totality of meaning", p. 474. Every language, for Gadamer, "has a direct relationship to the infinity of beings", p. 453.

<sup>7</sup> H.-G. GADAMER, *Praise of Theory*, trans. C. Dawson, Yale University Press, New Haven 1998, p. vii.

<sup>8</sup> See A. MACINTYRE, *On Not Having the Last Word*, cit., p. 9. It should also be noted here that while Aquinas is heavily indebted to Aristotle, there is no doubt that he is also influenced by Plato, Augustine, and the Neoplatonic tradition.

reality and of truth, but also serves to explain how the Word proceeds in God as an intelligible emanation, and how the Word conceived in God from all eternity is both expressive of God and of creatures. As Aquinas puts it, in the Word God utters both Himself and His creatures. The Word is not only expressive but also operative of creatures, which are in fact imitative likenesses of their exemplar, the Divine Word. Creation through the Word, to whom the light is attributed not metaphorically but properly,<sup>9</sup> can provide us with the elements to develop a metaphysics of the *logos* and of the light, which grounds the truth of being and also its beauty and light. This light is participated in by the being of creatures but accounts as well for the participated light of the human intellect, which can apprehend the truth and beauty of all things, and from these can know their Source, even if only in a limited way, and can also respond to their Source. God's utterance is thus illuminative of both reality and of man. As Aquinas says, "Omnis Dei locutio... est illuminatio".<sup>10</sup>

As the apostle Paul tells us, "The invisible things of God are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made".<sup>11</sup> Because creatures are thought and willed by God and thus really related to Him, because they imitate His perfections, we should be able to know something of their cause. Given the truth and intelligibility of all things that have been created, our intellect (*intus-legere*, to read into) should be able to read, as it were, the presence of the Creator in the universe. The universe has therefore been termed a book (*liber naturae*),<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> J. McEvoy, *The Metaphysics of Light in the Medieval Ages*, «Philosophical Studies», 26 (1978), p. 139.

<sup>10</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 107, a. 2, ad 3: "Every speech of God [...] is an enlightening". Hereafter cited as *ST*.

<sup>11</sup> *Romans* 1:20, quoted in *ST* I, q. 13, a. 5, resp.

<sup>12</sup> D. VESSEY, *Engaging the Tradition of Reading Nature as a Text*, manuscript, p. 3. Revised version: *Philosophical Hermeneutics and the Liber Naturae*, «Philosophy Today», 58/1 (2014), pp. 85-95. According to Vessey, Augustine laid the foundation for seeing nature as a text and for conceiving human understanding as textual interpretation, although the full articulation of the notion of the book of nature is found in the 12<sup>th</sup> century Hugh of St. Victor, who writes, "the whole sensible world is like a kind of book written by the finger of God – that is, created by divine power – and each particular creature is somewhat like a figure, not invented by human decision, but instituted by the divine will to manifest the invisible things of God's wisdom" (D. VESSEY, *Engaging the Tradition of Reading Nature as a Text*, manuscript, p. 3). While it would be of interest to take-up the thought of Augustine on the inner Word and his influence on Gadamer (which I may do in the future elaboration of this topic), it would seem that this would lead us beyond the scope of the present article which concentrates rather on the thought of Aquinas and on Gadamer's recovery of the truth of things, on the relation of the expressive character of language to being, and on the beauty of being and its light, as we noted above. For reference however to Augustine, see J. Grondin's chapter entitled *Augustine: The Universality of the Inner Word*, in his *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1994, pp. 32-38.

where we can find traces and images of the Creator.<sup>13</sup> As the likeness of creatures to the Creator is imperfect,<sup>14</sup> creatures will not reflect the Creator perfectly, and for this and other reasons not explained here, not all men will be able to know the existence of the cause, nor understand something of the essence of the cause through experience of the effects, even though having the capacity to know being they also have the capacity to know God.

While Aquinas thinks that created reality consists primarily of substances, and that these differ from everything else precisely in that their essences refer to nothing but themselves, it is also true for Aquinas that created substances are effects, and as effects they point to their cause, although their being effects is not in their very essence. It may be said here that Gadamer is not congenial to a substance metaphysics. However, if the relational character of substances to the divine mind is emphasized, as can be argued for in Aquinas, due to the radical dependence of creatures on their cause and their similarity to him, then their relation to this divine mind will account for the truth or intelligibility of beings, as we saw above. Things thus have, as it were, a verbal or signifying character, which makes possible the expression or manifestation of the Divine *Logos* through created things. As Aquinas says in his *Commentary on the Prologue of the Gospel of St. John*, “As a human vocal sound is to a human word conceived in the mind, so is the creature to the Divine Word; for as our vocal sound is the effect of the word conceived in our mind, so the creature is the effect of the Word conceived in the divine mind. ‘For he spoke, and they were created’”.<sup>15</sup> Elsewhere, also in his mature work, in his *Lectures on the Letter to*

<sup>13</sup> *ST I*, q. 93, a. 6, resp.: “While in all creatures there is some kind of likeness to God, in the rational creature alone we find a likeness of image as we have explained above (aa. 1, 2); but in other creatures we find a likeness by way of a trace. [...] An image represents something by likeness in species, as we have said (a. 2), while a trace represents something by way of an effect, which represents the cause in such a way as not to attain the likeness of species. [...] Therefore we may observe this difference between rational creatures and others, both as to the representation of the likeness of the Divine Nature in creatures, and as to the representation in them of the uncreated Trinity. For as to the likeness of the Divine Nature, rational creatures seem to attain, after a fashion, to the representation of the species, since they imitate God, not only in being and life, but also in intelligence, as above explained (a. 2); but other creatures do not understand, although we observe in them a certain trace of the Intellect that created them if we consider their disposition...”.

<sup>14</sup> *ST I*, q. 13, a. 5, ad 2.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Prologue of the Gospel of St. John*, lect. 5, n. 135. This commentary represents the mature thought of Aquinas. In the *Sentences*, an early work, Aquinas compares creatures to the voice, or exterior word, of the interior word and that just as the voice manifests the interior word, so do creatures manifest the divine art: “Creatura non potest dici proprie verbum, sed magis vox verbi: sicut enim vox manifestat verbum, ita et creatura manifestat divinam artem; et ideo dicunt sancti, quod uno Verbo Deus dicit omnem creaturam; unde creaturas sunt quasi voces experimentes unum Verbum divinum”, *In Sententiarum* 1, d. 27, 2, 2, ad 3. See also my article, *A Metaphysics of the*

*the Romans*, Aquinas will again speak of how man manifests his own thought to another by unfolding it through external signs such as vocal sounds or writing, whereas God manifests something to man by endowing him with an inner light through which he knows or by proposing to man “external signs of his wisdom, namely, sensible creatures”.<sup>16</sup> According to Aquinas, by reason alone, then, the Gentiles could know the existence of God, not his essence, in two ways: “God manifested it to them either from within by endowing them with a light or from without by presenting visible creatures, in which, *as in a book, the knowledge of God may be read*”.<sup>17</sup>

2. “BEING THAT CAN BE UNDERSTOOD IS LANGUAGE”:  
THE BEAUTY OF BEING AND ITS LIGHT

By briefly insisting in Aquinas on creation through the Word or the *Logos*, we are able to arrive at the intelligibility of creation and with this to the comparison of the universe as something readable, capable of being interpreted and understood, and thus *like* language. For Aquinas creatures are thus in a certain manner like utterances or language, that is, signs, because of their relation to the divine mind.

We can now connect to what Gadamer says when he speaks of the language of nature, of the language of things, and in fact of the “book of nature”.<sup>18</sup> It is here where hermeneutics becomes truly universal, extending its scope even to nature as a text, although Gadamer, unlike St. Augustine or Hugh of St. Victor who both articulated the idea of a *liber naturae*, will have little to say about the interpretation of nature and less about its author, since in reading a text we are not trying to capture, according to Gadamer, the author’s original intention but rather, we are being attentive to what the words of the text disclose.<sup>19</sup> As Gadamer puts it, “The hermeneutical phenomenon... projects

*Logos in St. Thomas Aquinas: Creation and Knowledge*, «Cauriensia, Revista Anual de Ciencias Eclesiásticas», 9 (2014), pp. 95-111.

<sup>16</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Lectures on the Letter to the Romans*, lect. 6, n. 116. See also nn. 114-115.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*. Emphasis is mine.

<sup>18</sup> TM, p. 475. It seems that Gadamer is going farther than Aquinas, who in the texts we cited above where he is commenting on St. John or St. Paul, he is presenting an important analogy whereby the expression of the interior word through the exterior word serves to better understand how the creatures proceed from the Divine Word, in such a way that the multiplicity of creatures manifests the one divine wisdom. See *Lectures on the Letter to the Romans*, lect. 6, nn. 117-118. In n. 118, Aquinas says, “For just as an art is shown by an artist’s works, so God’s wisdom is shown by his creatures. ‘From the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their creator’” (Wis. 13:5).

<sup>19</sup> D. VESSEY, *Engaging the Tradition of Reading Nature as a Text*, cit., pp. 8-9. If Aquinas does not speak more often of nature as a book, even though he would have had some precedent for doing so, it may be precisely because of his substance metaphysics, to which we

its own universality back onto the ontological constitution of what is understood, determining it in a universal sense as language and determining its own relation to beings as interpretation. Thus we speak not only of a language of art but also of a language of nature – in short, of any language that things have”.<sup>20</sup> Being therefore presents itself so as to be understood and according to Gadamer, “Being that can be understood is language”.<sup>21</sup> In their self-presentation things are displaying as it were their being, their form, which is their principle of intelligibility and of being; they are manifesting themselves just as the exterior word manifests or expresses the interior word.<sup>22</sup>

It is undoubtedly true that the infinite mind of God or his eternal wisdom is not part of Gadamer’s philosophical framework, and that the task of metaphysics, according to Gadamer, can no longer be solved by recourse to the divine mind, but rather must follow the way of language.<sup>23</sup> However, Aquinas’s metaphysics which is indebted not only to Aristotle but also to Plato and to Neoplatonism – a tradition in which Gadamer has great interest, as will become clear in this article – can help to further explain or complete some of Gadamer’s fundamental intuitions. In making use of Aquinas’s thought in this way, I am taking my cue from Alasdair MacIntyre who claims that much of contemporary philosophy, or any philosophy for that matter, can be better understood by recourse to Aquinas.<sup>24</sup>

Now for Aquinas things are intelligible in so far as they are in act; they have

referred above. Language, words, are essentially signs, and the very essence of a sign lies in its referring to something other than itself. While we did mention that this is not the case with the essences of substances, as effects they nevertheless do refer to their cause. See my explanation in the first part of this article.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>21</sup> *TM*, p. 474. This sentence is italicized in the text, but I have not done so here.

<sup>22</sup> In *TM*, p. 475, Gadamer says, “It is not by accident that one could talk about the ‘book of nature’, which contained just as much truth as the ‘book of books’. That which can be understood is language. This means that it is of such a nature that of itself it offers itself to be understood. Here too is confirmed the speculative structure of language. To come into language does not mean that a second being is acquired. Rather, what something presents itself as belongs to its own being. Thus everything that is language has a speculative unity: it contains a distinction, that between its being and its presentations of itself, but this is a distinction that is really not a distinction at all. *The speculative mode of being of language has a universal ontological significance. To be sure, what comes into language is something different from the spoken word itself. But the word is a word only because of what comes into language in it. Its own physical being exists only in order to disappear into what is said.* Likewise, that which comes into language is not something that is pregiven before language; rather, the word gives it its own determinateness”. Emphasis is mine.

<sup>23</sup> See H.-G. GADAMER, *The Nature of Things and the Language of Things*, in D. E. LINGE (ed.), *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, cit., pp. 74-75, quoted in n. 2 above.

<sup>24</sup> See A. MACINTYRE, *First Principles, Final Ends, and Contemporary Philosophical Problems*, Marquette University Press, Milwaukee 1991.

being or actuality through their form. It is of special interest here that according to Aquinas the actuality of things (their *esse*) is luminous.<sup>25</sup> In Thomistic metaphysics there exists an intimate relationship between form and the act of being;<sup>26</sup> form is described as “a participation in the divine brilliance”,<sup>27</sup> a share of the divine similitude, and as “something godlike and desirable”.<sup>28</sup> All the forms in the universe are participations in the divine light, emanating or proceeding as they do from the Word or the Son, to Whom are attributed the three conditions of beauty: integrity or perfection, due proportion or harmony, and brightness or clarity.<sup>29</sup> The Son as the Word is described as “the light and splendor of the intellect”,<sup>30</sup> “as the perfect Word, not wanting in anything, and, so to speak, the *art* of the omnipotent God”.<sup>31</sup>

Given the intelligibility and luminosity of things in the universe, it is not surprising that after describing things as presenting themselves, as that which can be understood, and thus as language,<sup>32</sup> Gadamer should move from the ontological turn that his hermeneutical inquiry has taken to the concept of the beautiful. He is not referring to the beautiful as it may be found in the aesthetics of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries but rather to an ancient and medieval concept, present in Greek, Christian, Neoplatonic, and Scholastic thought. As Gadamer puts it, “The concept of the beautiful [...] was once a universal metaphysical concept and had a function in metaphysics, the universal doctrine of being, that was by no means limited to the aesthetic in the

<sup>25</sup> “Ipsa actualitas rei est quoddam lumen ipsius”. In *De Causis*, prop. 6, n. 168.

<sup>26</sup> See L. DEWAN, *St. Thomas and Form as Something Divine in Things*, Marquette University Press, Milwaukee 2007, pp. 38-51. See also p. 12, where Dewan quotes from Aquinas’s *Commentary on Aristotle’s Physics*, 1.15 (7 [135]): “Form is something divine and best, an object of appetite. It is divine, because every form is something of a participation by likeness of the divine act of being [*divini esse*], which [divine act of being] is pure act: for, each thing just to this extent is actually [*est in actu*], that is, inasmuch as it *has form*. It is something best, because act is the perfection of potency and its good; and consequently it follows that it is an object of appetite, because each thing has appetite for its own perfection”.

<sup>27</sup> In *De Divinis Nominibus*, chap. 4, in V. J. BOURKE (trans. and ed.), *The Pocket Aquinas*, Washington Square Press, New York 1960, p. 272.

<sup>28</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Contra Gentiles* III, chap. 97. Aquinas is quoting here from ARISTOTLE, I *Physics* 9.

<sup>29</sup> *ST* I, q. 39, a. 8, resp. As the Image of the Father, Pure Being or Actuality, the Form of all forms, the Son is said to be beautiful.

<sup>30</sup> ST. JOHN DAMASCENE, *De Fide Orthodoxa*, Book I, chap. 13 (PG 94, 857), quoted in *ST* I, q. 39, a. 8, resp. Emphasis is mine.

<sup>31</sup> ST. AUGUSTINE, *De Trinitate* VI, 10 (PL 42, 931), quoted in *ST* I, q. 39, a. 8, resp. Emphasis is mine.

<sup>32</sup> Describing things as self-presentative enables Gadamer, in my estimation, to argue for the “belongingness” of man and world, of being and truth known by man, of conscious spirit and world. The expressive character of being addresses us and we can respond to it.



narrower sense".<sup>33</sup> It would seem then from what Gadamer says in referring to the tradition that he singles out, that he recognizes the role of the beautiful as a transcendental property of being and thus within the metaphysical framework.

While Gadamer shuns so to speak metaphysical thought, he seems to enter fully here into the metaphysical concept of the beautiful, considering it a decisive moment in his hermeneutics. According to Gadamer, for the Greeks the beautiful is that whose value is self-evident; it is desirable for its own sake and not for the sake of something else.<sup>34</sup> "The beautiful is what can be looked at, what is good-looking in the widest sense of the word".<sup>35</sup> There is also in Plato a close connection between the idea of the beautiful and the idea of the good. As Gadamer says, "The beautiful-in-itself is the one, the uniform, the boundless (*Symposium*), just like the idea of the good that lies beyond everything that is conditional and multiform – i.e., good only in a certain respect (*Republic*). The beautiful-in-itself shows itself to be as much beyond all beings as is the good-in-itself (*epekeina*). Thus the order of being that consists in the orientation toward the one good agrees with the order of the beautiful".<sup>36</sup> Through the path of love which Diotima in the *Symposium* teaches, we are to rise beyond beautiful bodies, beyond what is visible to the senses, and focus rather on beautiful souls, beautiful institutions, laws, sciences, to the "wide ocean of beautiful utterance",<sup>37</sup> and to the realm of intelligible being and beauty. For Plato, therefore, the teleological order of being is also the order of beauty; beauty is found more purely in the realm of the intelligible than in the realm of the sensible, of the visible, which so often is lacking in harmony and in perfection.<sup>38</sup> As Gadamer rightly points out, medieval thought also held to the close connection between the beautiful and the good.

While Aquinas does say that beauty and goodness in a thing are fundamentally identical, since they are based on the same thing, that is, the form, there is however a difference since the good properly relates to the appetite and so has the aspect of an end, whereas the beautiful relates to the cognitive faculty, for beautiful things are those the apprehension of which pleases, and

<sup>33</sup> TM, p. 477.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>35</sup> TM, p. 478.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*. It is evident from what Gadamer says here that he is emphasizing the beautiful *simpliciter*, not the beautiful *secundum quid*.

<sup>37</sup> PLATO, *Symposium*, 210d, quoted in TM, p. 478. Gadamer points to the fact that "utterance" here is equivalent to "relations". Plato significantly puts it, "And, turning his eyes toward the open sea of beauty, he will find in such contemplation *the seed of the most fruitful discourse and the loftiest thought*, and reap a golden harvest of philosophy, until, confirmed and strengthened, he will come upon one single form of knowledge, the knowledge of the beauty I am about to speak of". Emphasis is mine, in order to stress the radiant intelligibility of the beautiful which proceeds from discourse and thought; the latter are at the heart of the origin of being.

<sup>38</sup> TM, p. 478.

therefore the beautiful properly pertains to the notion of a formal cause.<sup>39</sup> Although Aquinas maintains, then, the real identity of the beautiful and the good based on the form, he does nevertheless note their conceptual difference (*ratione*).

However, in keeping with his preference for Platonic thought, Gadamer points to the fact that Plato recognized the distinction between the beautiful and the good and that he accorded a “special advantage” to the beautiful. The latter is distinguished from the intangibility of the good in that it can be seen, that it is “visibly manifest”.<sup>40</sup> While it is the case that we seek the good, Plato will say that “the good takes flight into the beautiful”.<sup>41</sup> In our search for the good, then, we will find the beauty of things manifesting themselves, presenting themselves; for the human soul, the beautiful is then the characterizing mark of the good. We long for and love what presents itself in the perfection of form which shines forth.<sup>42</sup> Gadamer then quotes Plato on what best characterizes the beautiful: “Beauty alone has this quality: that it is most radiant (*ekphanestaton*) and lovely”.<sup>43</sup>

Gadamer thus focuses on the self-presentation and on the immediate self-evidence of the being of the beautiful. He maintains that the beautiful’s ontological function is to mediate between idea and appearance, and calls this “the metaphysical crux of Platonism”.<sup>44</sup> The idea of the beautiful is thus present in what is beautiful (rather than speak in Platonic terms of the idea of the beautiful, it may be said that there is a presence of Beauty in the beautiful, without which the beautiful could not be). As Gadamer sees it, then, “Through the example of the beautiful, the ‘parousia’ of the *eidos* that Plato has in mind can be made evident... However much beauty might be experienced as the reflection

<sup>39</sup> *ST* I, q. 5, a. 4, ad 1. As Aquinas puts it in this text: “Beauty consists in due proportion; for the senses delight in things duly proportioned, as in what is after their own kind – because even sense is a sort of reason, just as is every cognitive faculty. Now, since knowledge is by assimilation, and similarity relates to form, beauty properly belongs to the nature of a formal cause”.

<sup>40</sup> *TM*, p. 481.

<sup>41</sup> PLATO, *Philebus*, 64e5, quoted in *TM*, p. 481.

<sup>42</sup> *TM*, p. 481.

<sup>43</sup> PLATO, *Phaedrus*, 250d7, quoted in *TM*, p. 481. In speaking of the distinction which Plato makes between the beautiful and the good, specifically, the moral good, Gadamer says, “The beautiful disposes people in its favor immediately, whereas models of human virtue can be only obscurely descried in the unclear medium of appearances, because they have, as it were, no light of their own. Thus we often succumb to impure imitations and appearances of virtue. The case of the beautiful is different. It has its own radiance, so that we are not seduced here by deceptive copies”. I think what Gadamer says here through Plato is not always true, for we can be deceived by a beautiful appearance that is lacking in moral beauty. See chapters 9 and 10 which deal with the recognition of moral action and also moral beauty in my *Dynamic Transcendentals: Truth, Goodness, and Beauty from a Thomistic Perspective*, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington D.C. 2012, pp. 147-204.

<sup>44</sup> *TM*, p. 481.

of something supraterrrestrial, it is still there in the visible world".<sup>45</sup> Again, it is the presence of the form in the particular beautiful thing that shines forth and manifests itself. According to Gadamer, the beautiful is where the hiatus between the sensible world and the ideal world is overcome.<sup>46</sup> The beautiful is what is "well-formed" and "most radiant". And it is this radiance which is not only a quality of the beautiful but which constitutes its very being.<sup>47</sup> The beautiful appears and shines forth. Its mode of being is light; it reveals, discloses, makes known. Light is reflected in the beautiful and thus accounts for the visibility of the beautiful. But for Plato the beautiful is not simply relegated to the sphere of the visible, and so the human soul in its search for the good can ascend from sensible beauties to intelligible beauty.

### 3. THE AFFINITY BETWEEN MIND AND BEAUTY: THE LIGHT OF *NOUS* AND THE AGENT INTELLECT

There is then what I would call an affinity between the human soul or the mind, and beauty. For this reason Gadamer, again following Plato, points not merely to visible beauty and its light but also to the intelligible realm and the mind: "The light in which not only the realm of the visible but also that of the intelligible is articulated, is not the light of the sun but the light of the mind, of *nous*".<sup>48</sup> Gadamer refers here to that immediate apprehension of the truth by the mind, comparing the truth that discloses itself in its immediacy to the beautiful; the soul, like the beauty of the truth, is according to Plato, "radiant with intelligence".<sup>49</sup> According to Gadamer, this comparison or analogy is developed by Aristotle in his doctrine of *nous* and is also developed by medieval Christian thought as the *intellectus agens*. Gadamer succinctly puts his description of mind, when he says, "The mind that unfolds from within itself the multiplicity of what is thought is present to itself in what is thought".<sup>50</sup>

Gadamer does not develop further his reference to the Aristotelian *nous* nor

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 481-482. The emphasis is mine.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 482.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>48</sup> *TM*, p. 483. Gadamer refers to what he calls Plato's "profound analogy", which is found in *Republic*, 508d-e, and which reads as follows: "Why, you know, I said, that the eyes, when a person directs them towards objects on which the light of day is no longer shining, but the moon and stars only, see dimly, and are nearly blind; they seem to have no clearness of vision in them? Very true. But when they are directed towards objects on which the sun shines, they see clearly and there is sight in them? Certainly. *And the soul is like the eye: when resting upon that on which truth and being shine, the soul perceives and understands and is radiant with intelligence*; but when turned towards the twilight of becoming and perishing, then she has opinion only, and goes blinking about, and is first of one opinion and then of another, and seems to have no intelligence". Emphasis is mine.

<sup>49</sup> See PLATO, *Republic*, 508d-e; the passage is quoted in the preceding note.

<sup>50</sup> *TM*, p. 483. Emphasis is mine.

to the medieval Christian notion of the agent intellect. It seems however especially important to remark on both here, given the affinity mentioned above that exists between the radiance of the beautiful and the light of the mind and given Gadamer's own description of mind which has just been cited, in addition to the relation between language or *logos* and intuition or *nous*.<sup>51</sup> For Aristotle the knowledge of the first principles, which is knowledge of truth simply, without movement from one thing to another, is realized in an immediate noetic way; these principles are not understood here in a Platonic manner, that is, in terms of a precedence of the ideas. *Nous* in Aristotle is subordinated as it were to experience in order to receive its contents. Therefore, when sensible perception is given, the universal in it is understood (*noein*); *nous* grasps the supreme principles which are above those reached scientifically (that is, by *episteme*). This apprehension on the part of *nous* is what makes possible all further knowledge; for Aristotle *dianoia*, which is demonstrative and discursive knowing, depends on the first principles whose apprehension is the work of that superior function of *nous*.<sup>52</sup>

While the Greeks spoke of the differences between *nous* and *dianoia*, medieval thought will substitute for these the following terms: *intellectus* and *ratio*. When Gadamer refers to "the mind that *unfolds* from within itself the *multiplicity* of what is thought",<sup>53</sup> he is referring to discursivity, to *ratio*, but he also says that the mind is present to itself in what is thought, which I take to be the possession of what is thought in and by the mind such that the mind is in a state of repose, rather than in the laborious task of acquiring knowledge through discursive reasoning. Gadamer would not privilege what I am calling here the state of repose of the mind, for he holds that the working out of understanding in dialogue, the arduous work of reasoning, is all we humans

<sup>51</sup> R. J. DOSTAL, *The Experience of Truth for Gadamer and Heidegger: Taking Time and Sudden Lightning*, in B. R. WACHTERHAUSER (ed.), *Hermeneutics and Truth*, cit., p. 64. According to Dostal, "Gadamer finds in Plato a guide to the resolution of this fundamental problem with respect to the human experience of truth. These two aspects of the human grasp of truth are named by Plato and Aristotle *logos* (language) and *nous* (intuition)".

<sup>52</sup> See in ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics*, IV, 1012a2 and *Metaphysics*, XII, 1074b36, quoted in J. CRUZ CRUZ, *Intelecto y Razón: Las Coordinadas del Pensamiento Clásico*, EUNSA, Pamplona 1982, pp. 18-19.

<sup>53</sup> TM, p. 483. Emphasis is mine. The unfolding of the mind may be termed an *explicatio*, since the conclusions contained in the principles (this containing in the principles may be called a *complicatio*) are explicated through the reasoning process. In this we can see how the human mind which is in potency for all things and is the place of all forms is made in the image of the Divine Mind which is the Form of all forms: The Word which is one unfolds itself, as it were, in the multiplicity of creatures. This is the "explicatio" of the Word, just as from interior words or the first principles there is an "explicatio" and then a return to the first principles. There is then a circularity from first principles to first principles, as from the Word to the Word in the "exitus-reditus" scheme of creation and of redemption.

have. However, the movement of reasoning needs a grounding in rest, as it were, a starting point and an end point, as we shall now see. The repose of the mind is termed *intellectus* in medieval thought.

According to Aquinas, *intellectus* and *ratio*, that is, intellect or its very act, which is understanding,<sup>54</sup> and reason are not two distinct powers in man, for as he says, “to understand is simply to apprehend intelligible truth,<sup>55</sup> and to reason is to advance from one thing understood to another, so as to know an intelligible truth... Reasoning, therefore, is compared to understanding, as movement is to rest, or acquisition to possession; of which one belongs to the perfect, the other to the imperfect”.<sup>56</sup> Given the grounding role of *intellectus* in its simple understanding of the first principles from which human reasoning advances in its inquiry, it cannot but be superior, as it were, to *ratio*. This is corroborated by the following: “Boethius takes intelligence as meaning that act of the intellect which transcends the act of reason. And so he also says that reason alone belongs to the human race, as intelligence alone belongs to God, for it belongs to God to understand all things without any investigation”.<sup>57</sup> Given the dis-

<sup>54</sup> See *ST* I, q. 79, a. 10, s.c. and resp. In referring to *De Anima* III. 6 of Aristotle, Aquinas makes clear that the intelligence is not a power distinct from intellect. In his response, he says, “This word *intelligence* properly signifies the intellect’s very act, which is to understand. However, in some works translated from the Arabic, the separate substances which we call angels are called *intelligences*, and perhaps for this reason, that such substances are always actually understanding. But in works translated from the Greek, they are called *intellects* or *minds*. Thus intelligence is not distinct from intellect, as power is from power; but as act is from power”.

<sup>55</sup> I am inserting a note here which does not appear in Aquinas’s text, as it is important to stress that understanding or *intellectus* is compared to *intuition* or *vision*, as *In Sententiarum* I, d. 3, q. 4, a. 5, resp., where Aquinas says, “Intelligere autem dicit nihil aliud quam simplicem intuitum intellectus in id quod sibi est praesens intelligibile. [...] Sed secundum quod intelligere nihil aliud dicit quam intuitum, qui nihil aliud est quam praesentia intelligibilis ad intellectum quocumque modo”. Emphasis is mine.

<sup>56</sup> See *ST* I, q. 79, a. 8, resp. Emphasis is mine. Aquinas’s response is too lengthy to quote in the body of my text, however, it is important to note here that he contrasts human knowing with that of the angels who because of their nature, being disembodied spirits, possess perfect knowledge of intelligible truth and thus do not need to advance from one thing to another. Aquinas quotes Dionysius on angelic knowing: [They] apprehend the truth simply and without mental discussion (*Div. Nom.* VII). In addition, Aquinas makes another important point by referring, as Aristotle did before him, that human reasoning is grounded on the prior apprehension of the first principles; to this effect, Aquinas says, “And since movement always proceeds from something immovable, and ends in something at rest; hence it is that human reasoning, by way of inquiry and discovery, advances from certain things simply understood – namely, the first principles; and, again, by way of judgment returns by analysis to first principles, in the light of which it examines what it has found”. There is then a circular movement of the mind beginning from first principles and then returning to these first principles and thus to repose.

<sup>57</sup> *ST* I, q. 79, a. 10, ad 2.

inction made by Boethius here, it is not surprising then that *intellectus* should be compared to eternity and *ratio* to time,<sup>58</sup> and moreover, that the Greeks should have thought that man had within him something similar to the gods, namely *nous*, although in a limited way; for our intellect does not see the force of the conclusions in the first principles nor does it have the knowledge of all that can be attributed to a thing from its understanding of the quiddity of the thing. Our intellect does not therefore understand many things as one.<sup>59</sup> Although the knowledge that is proper to the human soul takes place through the process of reasoning, it nevertheless participates in that *simple knowledge* which exists in higher substances and for this reason human souls are also said to have *intellective power*.<sup>60</sup> That simple knowledge is what Aquinas calls understanding or *intellectus*, which he interprets etymologically by saying, “And one is said to understand (*intelligere*) because in some sense he reads (*legit*) the truth within (*intus*) the very essence of the thing”.<sup>61</sup> Gadamer would, I think, have sympathized with this explanation of understanding as being akin to his own hermeneutic project, even though as we noted above he does not ground discursive reasoning in *intellectus*.

Now that we have seen the medieval counterpart of the *nous/dianoia* distinction and have just introduced the notion of participation in simple cognition, we will turn briefly to the *intellectus agens* which Gadamer mentions in speaking of the light of the mind. While Plato compared the active intellect, which he held to be a separate substance, to the sun, Aristotle compared the active intellect to light participated in a material substance.<sup>62</sup> For Aquinas, the illuminating power in human knowing is not an external sun; the light of the agent intellect is rather an internal power to make something in our mind.<sup>63</sup> The agent intellect lights up the phantasms, that is, it abstracts universal forms from their particular conditions, thus making them actually intelligible, so that they can then be received and exist in the passive intellect (which is in po-

<sup>58</sup> *ST I*, q. 79, a. 8, ad 2.

<sup>59</sup> See *ST I*, q. 58, a. 4, resp. and also q. 58, a. 2, resp.

<sup>60</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *De Veritate*, q. 15, a. 1, resp. Higher substances such as angels know all things under one intelligible species, which is the divine essence. God, on the other hand, knows Himself and all things in the One Word that He begets from all eternity. In keeping with Pseudo-Dionysius and the *Liber de Causis*, Aquinas presents the universe as a hierarchy of cognitive powers with God at the summit, animals below us, and angels above us. See W. J. HANKEY, *Participatio divini luminis, Aquinas' Doctrine of the Agent Intellect: Our Capacity for Contemplation*, «Dionysius», 22 (2004), p. 4.

<sup>61</sup> *De Veritate*, q. 15, a. 1, resp. See also *ST II-II*, q. 8, a. 1, resp.: “The word ‘intellect’ [*intellectus*] suggests a deeply penetrating knowledge: the [Latin] word ‘*intelligere*’ suggests ‘reading the interiors’”.

<sup>62</sup> *ST I*, q. 79, a. 4, resp. See other references in W. J. HANKEY, *Participatio divini luminis*, cit., p. 5.

<sup>63</sup> See *ST I*, q. 79, a. 3 and a. 4, ad 3, ad 5.

tency for all forms).<sup>64</sup> According to Aquinas, the agent intellect, or the soul's intellectual light, is derived from the soul's Creator; Aquinas quotes from Psalm 4:7: "The light of Thy countenance, O Lord, is signed upon us".<sup>65</sup> This light which has been stamped, as it were, upon the human soul at creation cannot be extinguished; this intellectual light is spoken of in different ways: as the agent intellect, as the *intellectus* or habit of the first principles, or even as *synderesis*. As Aquinas says, "It is impossible for *synderesis* to be extinguished, just as it is impossible for the soul of a man to be deprived of the light of the agent intellect, through which first principles in speculative and practical matters are made known to us. For this light belongs to the nature of the human soul, since by reason of this the soul is intellectual".<sup>66</sup> For Aquinas, the certainty of scientific knowledge arises from the certainty of the principles which have been imprinted on the intellectual light of the soul. Therefore, according to Aquinas, "that something is known with certainty is due to the light of reason divinely implanted within us by which God speaks within us".<sup>67</sup> The light of reason is thus godlike, for it is a kind of reflected likeness of the uncreated truth.<sup>68</sup> And the forms made intelligible by the light of the agent intellect are also a likeness of the cause that shines in the effect. Just as the light of reason is godlike, so also are the forms which participate in divine brilliance. Man's intellectual light thus enables him to respond, as it were, to the forms in the world and to thus actualize the soul's potency unto the infinite whereby the soul is in a certain sense all in all.<sup>69</sup> And in this *response of understanding*, man brings the forms to a higher level of actuality and thus to their perfection,<sup>70</sup> reflecting or mirroring in this way the intelligible forms in the Divine Mind,

<sup>64</sup> See *ST I*, q. 79, a. 4, resp. In this response, Aquinas also says that we know "by experience" that our soul has a higher power whereby it is able to illuminate the phantasms, since we perceive the abstraction which takes place in our knowing.

<sup>65</sup> *ST I*, q. 79, a. 4, resp.

<sup>66</sup> *De Veritate*, q. 16, a. 3, resp. In this response Aquinas also quotes from Psalm 4:7 and also 4:6.

<sup>67</sup> *De Veritate*, q. 11, a. 1, ad 13.

<sup>68</sup> *De Veritate*, q. 11, a. 1, resp.

<sup>69</sup> *De Veritate*, q. 2, a. 2, resp.: "The soul is, 'in some manner, all things', since its nature is such that it can know all things. In this way it is possible for the perfection of the entire universe to exist in one thing. The ultimate perfection which the soul can attain, therefore, is, according to the philosophers, to have delineated in it the entire order and causes of the universe. This may be held to be the ultimate end of man. We, however, hold that it consists in the vision of God; for, as Gregory says: 'What is there that they do not see who see Him who sees all things'". The containing of all things in the soul is analogous to the containing of all forms in the Word, who knows them and thus sees them.

<sup>70</sup> O. BLANCHETTE, *The Perfection of the Universe According to Aquinas: A Teleological Cosmology*, The Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park 1992, pp. 298-307. From these pages, it may be said that human being compensates for the imperfection of things by knowing them and also provides for the final perfection of the universe.

and thus uniting himself to those things of which he possesses the forms or the intentional likenesses in his mind and also to their Origin. In this knowing man also perfects himself.

#### 4. A METAPHYSICS OF THE LIGHT: BEAUTY, TRUTH, AND UNDERSTANDING

Having spoken of both the radiance or beauty of things and the light of the mind, Gadamer then says that the Platonic and Neoplatonic metaphysics of light influenced the Christian doctrine of the Word, and more specifically, the *verbum creans*, to which we will refer as the Divine Mind or Word and to which, as we saw above, is attributed beauty and the three conditions of beauty. This creative Word is the Form of all forms, the font of perfection from which all things proceed – a font which is never depleted however much may flow from it. The light of the Word, its beauty, causes actuality, intelligibility, and radiance in all things. And so, a light metaphysics joined to the Word provides the ultimate ground for the truth, intelligibility, and luminosity of things – the truth of things, which Gadamer does not call into question. His insistence, however, on this metaphysics of the light is not to provide an ultimate grounding, but has as its fundamental purpose to establish a connection between the mode of being of the beautiful and the mode of being of language, for as he says,

We have described the ontological structure of the beautiful as the mode of appearing that causes things to emerge in their proportions and their outline, and the same holds for the realm of the intelligible. The light that causes everything to emerge in such a way that it is evident and comprehensible in itself is the light of the word. Thus the close relationship that exists between the shining forth (*Vorscheinen*) of the beautiful and the evidentness (*das Einleuchtende*) of the understandable is based on the metaphysics of light.<sup>71</sup>

Our experience of understanding which is mediated by language thus takes on the illuminating character of the beautiful.

Gadamer's development of a metaphysics of light and of the beautiful, as it may be found in Neoplatonism, together with the Christian doctrine of the creative Word, enables him to better understand the speculative nature of language whereby "the multiplicity of what is thought proceeds only from the unity of the word",<sup>72</sup> just as we might say that for Aquinas the multiplicity of forms in the universe proceeds from the beauty and the light of the *verbum creans*. Gadamer's analysis of the place of the beautiful in Greek philosophy provides the justification for his insight "that Being is self-presentation and

<sup>71</sup> TM, p. 483. See n. 127 on p. 483 where Gadamer recalls the Neoplatonic tradition from which he is working.

<sup>72</sup> TM, p. 484.



that all understanding is an event".<sup>73</sup> With this insight Gadamer will provide the ontological foundation for what has been called the truth-event. The fact that being presents itself, that it expresses itself, and so "happens", as it were, in our encounter with things; this is the ontological basis for the experience of truth as an event.<sup>74</sup>

Before continuing here with Gadamer's metaphysics of the beautiful, it seems fitting to address briefly what he terms the "happening" of being in our encounter with things as the ontological foundation for the truth-event. From a Thomistic point of view, it may be said that what Gadamer is expressing here seems to make reality have a per se relation or order to our minds, that is, being is only actuality, only "happens", in our encounter with it.<sup>75</sup> According to Aquinas, things have only a per accidens relation to our thought; the only mind to which they have a per se relation is God's (by depending on the divine mind). Gadamer does not wish however to return to this classical metaphysics and theological foundation, preferring as we noted in the beginning of this article, the way of language to the task of metaphysics, as when he says, "that which comes into language is not something that is pre-given before language, rather, the word gives it its own determinateness".<sup>76</sup> The risk that phenomenology and its heirs run here is that of making the being of things some sort of function of our understanding and naming of them. A philosopher in the Thomistic tradition will hold, however, that being or its actuality is not contingent on the human encounter with it; being is already actual and intelligible, for it derives its actuality and intelligibility from a higher instance, which is ultimately its dependence on the divine mind.<sup>77</sup>

If the truth of things, which is maintained by Gadamer, does not ultimately consist in the order of things to a divine mind which is their very origin because such a foundation for Gadamer is no longer available to us, then the truth and intelligibility of things would seem to consist in their order to the human intellect.<sup>78</sup> The problem which then arises is that every appearance to us is true. It seems to me that Gadamer would not say that all appearances are true, but once this is granted, we are almost bound to move toward the metaphysical and theological account from which Gadamer removes himself.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>74</sup> *Ibidem.* See also D. CARPENTER, *Emanation, Incarnation, and the Truth-Event*, cit., p. 120.

<sup>75</sup> The interpretation of Gadamer provided here may well be the way a Thomist would see it or explain it, in our opinion.

<sup>76</sup> *TM*, p. 475. See also n. 21 above.

<sup>77</sup> Gadamer recognizes the ultimate grounding of things on the divine mind, as he points out in his essay *The Nature of Things and the Language of Things*, in D. E. LINGE (ed.), *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, cit. (see nn. 2 and 22 above), but basically thinks that the metaphysical and theological framework is no longer available to us.

<sup>78</sup> I am referring once again here to the way in which Gadamer might be interpreted from a Thomistic perspective. See n. 75 above.

A text in Aquinas's *Summa* is of particular relevance here: The objection says that if truth is only in the intellect, then nothing is true except what is understood, and from this it follows that every appearance is true, or put in another way, that whatever seems to be true is indeed true, and that the contradictories can be true together. Aquinas replies that these problems occur when we make the truth of things consist in their relation to our intellect and not to God's.<sup>79</sup>

In addition, the question of the truth of appearances is of special importance in ethics. Aristotle distinguishes between a true good and an apparent good, and interestingly terms both these goods *kalon*, beautiful or fine.<sup>80</sup> Things can appear good to us, to our senses, which are not really true goods, that is, goods in conformity with our rational nature. Things may therefore appear beautiful to us because our vision or our reason is clouded by our passions or vices. And so, once again, not all appearances are necessarily true.

What has been said above about the truth of things and their metaphysical and theological foundation from a Thomistic perspective may seem to contrast sharply with Gadamer's own thought and may not represent him fairly, for in his hermeneutics, according to those who are steeped in his work, he did not think that being is dependent on our individual encounter with it. On this point we do well therefore to consider what one of his most apt disciples Jean Grondin says. According to Grondin, our understanding is focused on the subject matter or on the thing itself. As Grondin puts it, "To understand, in Gadamer's sense, is to articulate (a meaning, a thing, an event) into words, words that are always mine, but at the same time those of what I strive to understand".<sup>81</sup> But the thing, for example, can never be fully captured by what is said of it, although in order to be understood the thing or being moves, as it were, more and more toward language, "in an asymptotic way".<sup>82</sup> Understanding has, according to Grondin, a tentative nature: "It is an attempt on

<sup>79</sup> I am indebted to Stephen Brock for this clarification and for the reference to this important text, *ST* 1, q. 16, a. 1, ad 2. In his reply, Aquinas says, "The ancient philosophers held that the species of natural things did not proceed from any intellect, but were produced by chance. But as they saw that truth implies relation to the intellect, they were compelled to base the truth of things on their relation to our intellect. From this, conclusions result that are inadmissible, and which the Philosopher refutes (*Metaphy.* iv). Such, however, do not follow, if we say that the truth of things consists in their relation to the divine intellect".

<sup>80</sup> It is possible that Gadamer's recourse to the beauty or light of truth was indebted to or influenced by this Aristotelian distinction. See Aristotle's *Metaphysics* XII, 7, 1072a26-33, where he speaks of the apparent good as the object of irrational desire and of the real or true good as the object of the rational desire or will. See also chap. 9 of my *Dynamic Transcendentals*, cit., pp. 147-80.

<sup>81</sup> J. GRONDIN, *Gadamer's Basic Understanding of Understanding*, in R. J. DOSTAL (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2006, p. 41.

<sup>82</sup> I owe this clarifying point to an anonymous reader of my article.

my part to come to grips with what needs to be understood, but which can never be absolutely final. One can always find better *words* for what needs to be understood, more suited ‘applications’.”<sup>83</sup> While this notion of understanding has often been misunderstood in a subjectivistic sense, this is not what Gadamer intended. And so the truth of things, our understanding of them, cannot be reduced to a mere subjective encounter with things. For Gadamer, as we already noted, the foundation of truth on God’s intellect is no longer available to us; however, it may be said that what he substitutes for the divine intellect is a kind of transcendental subject that is *Sprachlichkeit* or linguisticity.<sup>84</sup>

To return now to the metaphysical interpretation that Gadamer does adhere to, we need to cite his own words where he says,

The metaphysics of the beautiful can be used to illuminate two points that follow from the relation between the radiance of the beautiful and the evidentness of the intelligible. The first is that both the appearance of the beautiful and the mode of being of understanding have the character of an event; the second, that the hermeneutical experience, as the experience of traditionary meaning, has a share in the *immediacy* which has always distinguished the experience of the beautiful, as it has that of all evidence of *truth*.<sup>85</sup>

In singling out the evidentness of truth, as he has singled out the evident character of the beautiful, Gadamer is not referring to the certainty and the truth of what is proven but rather likens what is evident to “a new light being turned on”.<sup>86</sup> It is not surprising then that Gadamer should also link this evidentness of truth and of the beautiful to the common sense, of which he

<sup>83</sup> J. GRONDIN, *Gadamer’s Basic Understanding of Understanding*, cit., p. 43. Emphasis is mine.

<sup>84</sup> See n. 82.

<sup>85</sup> *TM*, pp. 484-485.

<sup>86</sup> *TM*, pp. 485-486. In speaking of the beautiful, Gadamer says, “The beautiful charms us, without its being immediately integrated with the whole of our orientations and evaluations. [...] The hermeneutical experience belongs in this sphere because it too is the event of a genuine experience. This is in fact always the case when something speaks to us from tradition: there is something evident about what is said, though that does not imply it is, in every detail, secured, judged, and decided. The tradition asserts its own truth in being understood, and disturbs the horizon that had, until then, surrounded us. It is a real experience in the sense we have shown. The event of the beautiful and the hermeneutical process both presuppose the finiteness of human life. We might even ask whether the beautiful can be experienced by an infinite mind in the same way that it can by us. Can this mind see anything other than the beauty of the whole that lies before it? The ‘radiance’ of the beautiful seems to be something reserved to finite human experience. There was a similar problem in medieval thought, namely how beauty can be in God if he is one and not many. [...] Similarly, the universality of the hermeneutical experience would not be available to an infinite mind, for it develops out of itself all meaning, all noeton, and thinks all that can be thought in the perfect contemplation of itself”. Gadamer raises some interesting questions in this passage, which require more thought than can be given here for a proper answer.

wrote in the first part of *Truth and Method*, since this faculty refers according to Gadamer to that “communal sense for what is true and right, which is not a knowledge based on argumentation, but enables one to discover what is evident”.<sup>87</sup>

Just as Gadamer maintained, together with the tradition, the connection between the beautiful and the good, now he will connect the beautiful to the true, applying in this way the metaphysical tradition to the hermeneutical experience. He recalls Aquinas for whom the beautiful is defined in terms of knowledge, and the good in terms of desire. And so Gadamer will say, “The beautiful is that in the vision of which desire comes to rest: *cuius ipsa apprehensio placet*. The beautiful has an orientation not only toward goodness but towards the cognitive faculty: *addit supra bonum quemdam ordinem ad vim cognoscitivam*. The ‘radiance’ of the beautiful appears here like a light that shines over what is formed: *lux splendens supra formatum*”.<sup>88</sup> Even though Gadamer does appeal to the Thomistic relationship between the beautiful and the true, he will concentrate rather on Plato’s notion of the beautiful as *aletheia*.<sup>89</sup> In this way Gadamer can once again refer to the beauty of being in terms of self-presentation. As he puts it,

The beautiful, the way in which goodness appears, reveals itself in its being: it presents itself. What presents itself in this way is not different from itself in presenting itself. It is not one thing for itself and another for others, nor is it something that exists through something else. Beauty is not radiance shed on a form from without. Rather, the ontological constitution of the form itself is to be radiant, to present itself in this way. From this, then, it follows that in regard to beauty the beautiful must always be understood ontologically as an ‘image’.<sup>90</sup> It makes no difference whether it ‘itself’ or its copy appears. As we have seen, the metaphysical distinction of the beautiful was that it closed the gap between the idea and the appearance.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>87</sup> *TM*, p. 21. See Part I of *TM*, section B (ii), where Gadamer speaks of the tradition on *sensus communis*, a concept very different from the Kantian common sense. The communal sense resolves the many into one.

<sup>88</sup> *TM*, p. 487.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibidem*. Gadamer hesitates in his appeal to the metaphysical tradition, for he says, “By again appealing to Plato, we can again attempt to free this statement [... *lux splendens supra formatum*] from its connection to the metaphysical doctrine of *forma*”. It seems to me that what Gadamer is saying here is impossible since he returns in what follows this statement to speak of form.

<sup>90</sup> Through an image something is made known to us, and therefore through the beautiful that presents itself, through the beautiful as image we come to know as well. The separation of the beautiful from the true, which came about through Kant’s aesthetics, is critiqued by Gadamer. It should be noted here, however, that Gadamer’s reading of Kant on the separation of beauty from truth has been challenged by a number of authors, for example, R. A. Makkreel in his book *Imagination and Interpretation in Kant: The Hermeneutical Import of the Critique of Judgment*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1990.

<sup>91</sup> *TM*, p. 487.

That the beautiful should be ontologically understood as an image means that the beautiful is no longer to be taken as a copy that appears as a semblance of something behind it, so to speak, but rather that beauty itself appears in the image and so expresses itself.<sup>92</sup>

For Gadamer self-presentation characterizes not only the mode of being of the beautiful but also the mode of being of the true. Understanding is, according to Gadamer, “an encounter with something that asserts itself as truth”.<sup>93</sup> In saying this, Gadamer wishes to better define the meaning of truth in understanding and so brings to bear on this question the case of language and interpretation; words present things. As Gadamer says, “We have seen that the words that bring something into language are themselves a speculative event. Their truth lies in what is said in them, and not in an intention locked in the impotence of subjective particularity”.<sup>94</sup> The emphasis here is being put not on the speaker but on what is spoken, for as Gadamer sees it, “In using words what is given to the senses is not put at our disposal as an individual case of a universal; it is itself made present in what is said – just as the idea of the beautiful is present in what is beautiful”.<sup>95</sup> For Gadamer, then, the thing is made present in what is said, just as the beautiful, or beauty itself, is present in what is beautiful. Language reveals reality, is a participation of reality, through the interior word in which the thing is understood and is made present, visible, to the knower.<sup>96</sup>

Gadamer will moreover speak of the truth as event: when we understand, we are, as it were, drawn into an event in which the truth, meaning, asserts itself.<sup>97</sup> In the truth, reality is illumined. The truth that is grasped also illumines us and because of its light or splendor may be termed beautiful. Gadamer thus remarks on the connection between the true and the beautiful, highlighting

<sup>92</sup> This can be better understood if we take as an example the arts. In drama, for example, Gadamer says, “the world that appears in the play of presentation does not stand like a copy next to the real world, but is that world in the heightened truth of its being”, *TM*, p. 137, quoted in J. RISSER, *The Remembrance of Truth*, cit., p. 127. Meaning in this case is intrinsic to the presentation. See A. MACINTYRE, *Conflicts of Interpretation: Reflections on Hans-Georg Gadamer’s Truth and Method*, «Boston University Journal», 26 (1980), p. 176, where MacIntyre speaks of truth as a property of internal representation, such as in the case of drama, and not merely of external representation as in the relationship which holds between a photograph and its subject. Regarding the recognition of truth in our experience of the arts, of interest is Gadamer’s article entitled *Artworks in Word and Image: ‘So True, So Full of Being!’*, «Theory, Culture & Society», 1/23 (2006), pp. 57-83, and his book *The Relevance of the Beautiful*, trans. N. Walker and ed. R. Bernasconi, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1986.

<sup>93</sup> *TM*, p. 489.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>95</sup> *TM*, p. 490.

<sup>96</sup> See J. PIEPER, *Qué quiere decir ‘Dios habla?’*, in *La Fe ante el reto de la cultura contemporánea*, trans. J. J. Gil Cremades, Rialp, Madrid 1980, p. 126. In the interior word we know reality.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibidem*.

their evident character, rather than the certainty of what is supplied by science, for his investigation in *Truth and Method* makes clear that the certainty that can be achieved by using scientific methods is not the sole way to truth:<sup>98</sup> “When we understand a text, what is meaningful [or true] in it captivates us just as the beautiful captivates us. It has asserted itself and captivated us before we can come to ourselves and be in a position to test the claim to meaning that it makes”.<sup>99</sup> The truth or meaning here shines with the radiance of the beautiful. We are therefore inwardly touched by meaning, by truth, just as we are touched by the beautiful; there is indeed an affinity between the light of the mind, the light of understanding, and the splendor or beauty of the intelligible.<sup>100</sup>

What Gadamer is describing here, I think, is a moment of insight or of immediate vision, which for Aquinas we participate in with higher substances and with God, given the intellectual light which is ours, enabling us to reach a certain transcendent level of infinity of meaning; but given the weakness of this intellectual light in a finite nature, this insight which is luminous will need to be explicated by discursive reasoning and by language, thus losing perhaps some of its luminosity. In this explication, however, we can return to the original insight, illuminating reality not only for ourselves but also for others, and thus enabling others as well to contemplate the beauty of truth. At the end of *Truth and Method*, through his insistence on truth as light, Gadamer seems to be telling us that *logos*, understood as reason and language, depends on *nous* or on *intellectus*, on that interior reading or intuiting the essence of the thing, that is, that the discursivity of reason depends on our contemplative resting in the presence of the object contemplated. This moment of intellectual insight is not given apart from conceptual representation or the interior word, nor without the unrelenting effort, according to Gadamer, of question and answer which is dialogue and dialectic,<sup>101</sup> but to explain this would take us beyond the scope of this article and so we shall leave this task to another time.<sup>102</sup>

<sup>98</sup> For Gadamer truth is above all the manifestation of being and not primarily the result of what can be ascertained by the use of modern scientific methods. I owe this clarification to Francisco Fernández Labastida.

<sup>99</sup> *TM*, p. 490. See also p. 491.

<sup>100</sup> D. CARPENTER, *Emanation, Incarnation, and the Truth-Event*, cit., pp. 120-122, especially p. 122. According to Carpenter, Gadamer has been criticized for speaking of truth in these terms, as event. But if we see his concept of truth as rooted in the Neoplatonic tradition of emanation, of expression, and in the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation, then perhaps the question of truth will be better appreciated.

<sup>101</sup> R. J. DOSTAL, *The Experience of Truth for Gadamer and Heidegger: Taking Time and Sudden Lightning*, cit., p. 65.

<sup>102</sup> I would like to thank John Arthos, Stephen Brock, and Francisco Fernández Labastida for their helpful comments on this article. In addition, I am indebted to two anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments and suggestions, some of which I have been able to incorporate here by way of footnotes or within the text of this article itself, and others which may serve for future work on this topic or related topics.

ABSTRACT · In this article my intention will be to consider briefly how Aquinas's discussion of the interior word serves as an analogy for the intelligible emanation of the Word from God. Creation through the Word explains the truth of things, as well as their beauty and light. Had Gadamer been more sympathetic to Thomistic thought in its original texts and not simply in what he considered to be "the dogmatic overlay superimposed on Aristotle by... Neo-Thomism", he would have perhaps seen in Aquinas an ally in his recovery of the truth of things. I will relate the expressive character of language to being, as is found in Gadamer's own exposition, and I will insist on the beauty of being and its light. I also refer at some length to the light of nous and of the agent intellect, which are simply mentioned by Gadamer without further development. And finally, I will end this article with a consideration of truth, whose manifestation is related to the light of beauty. Truth is explained as an event and as light.

KEYWORDS · Language, Being, Beauty, Truth, Light.