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Philosophical Reflection on Beauty in the Late Middle Ages: The Case of Jean Gerson

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Abstract: The late Middle Ages witnessed a recapitulation of medieval reflection on beauty. Jean Gerson is an important representative of these philosophical and theological contributions, although he has been largely neglected up to this time. A first dimension of his ideas on beauty is the incorporation of beauty (*pulchrum*) into the number of transcendentals, i.e., the concepts “convertible” with the notion of being (*ens*), that is, unity, truth, and goodness (*unum, verum* and *bonum*). This article revisits Monica Calma’s study on Gerson’s theory of beauty and suggests new hypothetical sources that may have inspired this aspect of his thought. The second aspect emphasised here is Gerson’s classification of beauty, which entails some similarities to the one of Ulrich of Strasbourg, but also differs from it. Moreover, its incorporation of a division entirely devoted to artistic beauty is highly remarkable.

Keywords: transcendentals; art; aesthetics; Alexander of Hales; Henry of Ghent; Dionysius the Carthusian; ontology; metaphysics; theology; intellect

1. Introduction

Despite their limitations, studies developed during the twentieth century (Maritain 1920; Panofsky 1951; De Bruyne 1955; Tatarkiewicz 1962; Assunto 1982; Eco 1987) have put beyond doubt the existence of an important medieval reflection on beauty. These “words” about beauty written by medieval authors cannot be overlooked to understand how men during that historical period understood beauty and even art. Certainly, most of the discourse of medieval authors deals with a beauty that is not properly “aesthetic”, since they focus on an unperceivable beauty: The beauty of God, of angels, of virtue, of souls, and so on. Nevertheless, this conception of invisible beauty also permeates their ideas about visible beauty.

The transposition of ideas about non-perceivable beauty to sensible beauty becomes quite evident in the author we are going to study in this article, a prominent figure of the early 15th century, Jean Gerson. His conception of beauty has already been discussed by Calma (2007), whose main concern was the metaphysical status of beauty, related to the question of transcendentals. Since her approach can be balanced by further remarks, the first section of these pages is devoted to the assessment of Gerson’s sources to explain the inclusion of beauty (*pulchrum*) among the transcendental notions, and mostly Calma’s preference for Ps.-Bonaventure.

Turning away from Calma’s approach, another rich aspect of Gerson’s theory of beauty will be examined in the second section: The classification of the sorts of beauty. The study of the levels of beauty will provide us with a map for exploring the landscape of ideas about beauty in the late medieval world. In Jean Gerson’s classification, artistic beauty makes an important appearance, something that makes his contribution to the subject particularly valuable.

2. The *Pulchrum* as Transcendental

Monica Calma (2007) devotes an important article to the question of *pulchrum* in the later medieval period. In it, she particularly studies Gerson’s contribution to the insertion



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of this notion in the list of the transcendentals. This work deserves special recognition for having drawn attention to Gerson's important pages on beauty in his *Collectorium*, which, as she states, "have been totally ignored by authors of works on medieval aesthetics and have not even been the subject of analyses about the transcendentals" (Calma 2007, p. 474).

According to this author (Calma 2007, p. 477), "at the level of language and at the conceptual level, there is a perfect coherence between Gerson's text and the medieval way of dealing with the problem of transcendentals". To verify this statement, let us read for ourselves the relevant passages of Gerson's work.

First, we must consider his definition of beauty, based on Augustine: "numerical equality" ("aequalitas numerosa": Gerson 1971, p. 198). It must be said that the edition of Gerson's complete works does not include an apparatus of sources. For this reason, it is appropriate to recall here that this definition is found in *De musica*, VI, 13, 38 (Jacobsson 2017, p. 221, l. 16). Hereafter, Gerson (1971, p. 199) evokes another famous definition of beauty formulated by Augustine, often quoted by medieval authors: "The beauty of the body is a congruence of the parts with a certain softness of colour".¹ Gerson quotes these words to clarify the difference between *formositas* and *pulchritudo*, since the latter, beauty, means a certain addition to the mere presence of form (*forma*). According to him, form can exist in something even without beauty being present in it.

This association of beauty with form could reveal a latent influence of Albert the Great, who defines beauty as the "splendour of form" ("splendor formae").² Despite the relevance of this author's thought for later medieval reflections on beauty (from his disciples Thomas Aquinas and Ulrich of Strasbourg onwards), Calma does not mention him in her article. Another important source, even more fundamental and neglected by Calma when studying Gerson, is the *Summa Halensis* where we are also told that "the beautiful properly speaking is attributed to something because of its species or form".³

In line with Franciscan thought, Gerson also understands beauty as a feature oriented to an archetype. To explain this, he refers to pictorial art:

"Let us observe that the beauty of a painting or picture refers to the tablet itself which, for that reason, is called 'beautiful.' Let us add, moreover, that beauty refers above all to the model if the image or copy is entirely in conformity with its model, even if the model is very ugly. Thus, for example, we say that the image of a jester, an owl or a bat is beautiful. That is why people say that the jester has been beautifully painted."⁴

This reference to the plastic arts is remarkable, since it is not always easy to find in the context of medieval philosophical-theological meditation on beauty, which tends to wander into the realm of natural beauty and almost always leaves the dominion of the visible to enter the one of the invisible.

Gerson (1971, pp. 201, 205) links beauty with the four Aristotelian causes. As Calma (2007, p. 476) has pointed out, this aspect of his doctrine certainly has a parallel in Ps.-Bonaventure's treatise on the transcendentals (Halcour 1959). However, a much more plausible precedent is the *Summa Halensis*, where we are told of final and formal causality in relation to beauty.⁵ Likewise, we will notice below how the genuine Bonaventure is the closest source for this teaching as developed by Gerson.

Gerson (1971, p. 205) studies the question of beauty as "transcendental" to explain what he calls "natural beauty":

"Natural beauty can be described as numerical equality born and resulting from unity, truth, and goodness; or from measure, number, and weight; or from mode, species, and order. Thus, the properties of being are unity, truth, and goodness, so that being and truth, being and goodness are interchangeable. It is not possible to be any being to which these three [properties] do not suit. [Such properties] are not distinguished in reality but only in the meaning of signification. This also what happens with mode, species, and order; and with measure, number, and weight."⁶

This passage seems a development of the thought of Bonaventure, who had written: “Creatures are the effect of the creative Trinity by a threefold kind of causality: efficient causality, from which creatures receive unity, mode and measure; exemplary causality, from which creatures receive truth, species and number; final causality, from which creatures receive goodness, order and weight.”⁷

Already the *Summa fratris Alexandri* had employed the Augustinian triad of species, number, and weight to describe beauty (Costarelli Brandi 2020, pp. 1404–5). Now, unlike Alexander of Hales and Bonaventure, Gerson explicitly incorporates beauty as a property of things that actually coincides with unity, truth and goodness, so that “there is no positively contrary entity that consists positively in natural ugliness” and, as a consequence, like the good “the beautiful is also interchangeable with the entity as a property resulting from these three [properties]”.⁸ The proper characteristic of beauty as the fourth “transcendental property” is, for our author, a result of the presence of the other three transcendental properties in an entity. Hence, Gerson compares beauty to the figure of the triangle that is created by the harmonious arrangement of three straight lines, a harmony that, as a perfect unity, would be best represented by the circle. Therefore, sublimating the geometrical metaphor, Gerson speaks of a “triangulated circle and a circular triangle”.⁹

We see here an express insertion of beauty within the doctrine of transcendentals, also assigning to the *pulchrum* the terminology proper to these concepts. However, it is debatable whether, as Calma (2007, p. 477) affirms, this treatise “is inscribed within the doctrinal descent of the treatise of Ps.-Bonaventure” on the transcendentals, that is, within the framework of the opusculum edited by Halcour (1959). Calma herself doubts the historical possibility of relating Gerson’s text to that of Ps.-Bonaventure. Nevertheless, she attaches so much importance to this anonymous thirteenth-century work because it expressly counts beauty among the transcendental properties of the entity. According to Aertsen (1996, p. 350), such a step would not have been taken by other contemporary authors. The Pseudo-Bonaventurian treatise would represent an exception and would become the first medieval writing in which *pulchrum* clearly appears together with the other traditional transcendentals: *ens, unum, verum* and *bonum* (Halcour 1959, pp. 64–67).

Now, there is no need to link Gerson’s text with this treatise, since the inclusion of the *pulchrum* in the list of transcendentals is a development of the medieval scholastic doctrine (Alexander of Hales, Albert, Thomas. . .), which has not been carried out exclusively by the treatise of Ps.-Bonaventure. For instance, although it is doubtful whether Gerson knew his work, Ulrich of Strasbourg affirmed that “the beautiful, as well as the good, is interchangeable with the being”.¹⁰ For him, beauty is not only interchangeable with goodness, as Albert and Thomas had said, but even with being. Likewise, one of Gerson’s sources, a theologian who was contemporary with the other thirteenth-century authors mentioned, Henry of Ghent, lists *pulchrum* together with *ens, bonum, unum* and *verum*.¹¹ Consequently, this development of the medieval doctrine of the transcendentals may have come to Gerson by a different road from the aforementioned Pseudo-Bonaventurian treatise. This explains why Gerson does not use the same terminology as Ps.-Bonaventure: as Calma (2007, p. 477) has already observed, Gerson designates the “transcendentals” as *proprietates* while Ps.-Bonaventure spoke of *conditiones*.

If the pages of Gerson’s *Collectorium* are to be dated between 1427 and 1428 (McGuire 2006, p. 31), they will be followed, a few decades later, by the only medieval treatise expressly devoted to the question of beauty, Dionysius von Rijkel’s *De venustate mundi et pulchritudine Dei*, which must have been written sometime after 1452 (Stoelen 1954, col. 433). We know of Dionysius’ appreciation for Gerson, as he counts the latter among his great authorities (Mazour-Matusevich 2006, pp. 366–67). Like Gerson, Dionysius explicitly introduces beauty into the list of transcendentals: “According to the commentators of St. Dionysius, as the good, the true and the one are interchangeable with the being, so also the beautiful. In such a way, every being is beautiful, just as every being is said to be good, true and one”.¹² Later he adds: “The interchangeable with the being, that is, the good, the

true and the beautiful, add nothing real to the being, but only a certain consideration and a notional property".¹³

Dionysius evidently recognises that beauty is not only interchangeable with goodness, as Albert and Aquinas had said, but even with the being itself. Like Gerson, Dionysius understands beauty to be—to use the later accepted language—a “transcendental” of the being. Calma (2007, p. 479), however, disagrees with this interpretation. She refers to an important article by Emery (1996), an expert on Dionysius, who had studied the question of beauty in *De venustate*. As Calma interprets Emery’s view, Dionysius would not have held the transcendental status of *pulchrum*. Calma (2007, p. 480, n. 95) sustains her interpretation on an article in which Emery (2003) studies the passages in which Dionysius the Carthusian explains the conventional list of transcendentals, where we cannot find beauty alongside the others. Now, Calma does not seem to have considered that, when Emery (1996, p. 315) presents *De venustate*, he expresses himself in these words: “Beauty can be interchangeable with the transcendentals, the unique, the true, the good and the being”. Moreover, he explicitly asserts that “beauty is transcendental being” (Emery 1996, p. 320).

Although Calma disregards it, she could have adduced a similar passage from Gerson, who, like Dionysius, also once ignores beauty when he refers to the transcendentals (by the way, here he calls them by using almost the same terminology widely accepted later): “The univocity of the being transcendent to God and to the creature with its proper features or transcendent properties, which are the one, the true and the good, is of great help to contemplative and intelligent men”.¹⁴ The mere absence of beauty in this text could lead us to exclude it from the list of transcendental properties, but evidently this argument *ex silentio* is not valid here, as it is shown by the passage from the *Collectorium*, which we have read above, as well as by the other analogous Gerson’s texts cited in note.

In short, in both Gerson and Dionysius, we find a clear doctrine of the transcendentals that includes beauty among them, as a property of being. Whether Gerson is right or wrong in considering beauty as a true transcendental when, instead of bringing a specific formality to being, it is rather the mere result of the presence of the other transcendentals, is open to debate. But in any case, Gerson’s text leaves no room for doubt as to his conviction that beauty belongs to these properties.

However, its transcendental character is probably not the most important feature of Gerson’s study of beauty. It is a theory that helps us to recognise that it is not a specific field of reality, but an aspect that is linked to the very ordering of the real and the mutual composition of its entitative elements. The true aesthetic question, i.e., finding out what makes some entities more beautiful than others, has to do with discovering the nature of an appropriate arrangement of their constitutive factors. Moreover, if beauty were only a matter of essence, there would be no way to elucidate why one entity is more beautiful than another member of the same species. For this reason, the medievals insisted not only on this basic beauty of the real as real, but also on the different dimensions of a thing’s beauty, contemplating how its beauty is extended through its various articulations. Therefore, let us now consider the classification of beauty proposed by Gerson.

3. The Classification of Beauty

The most famous classification of beauty available to us in the Middle Ages is undoubtedly that of Ulrich of Strasbourg. This disciple of Albert the Great establishes the following division of beauty:

“Since there are substantial and accidental forms, in addition to uncreated beauty there is a double beauty, that is, an essential and an accidental one. Likewise, each of these beauties is double, because essential beauty is either spiritual (as the soul is animal beauty, or intellectual [beauty], as the beauty of the angel) or corporeal (as nature or natural form is the beauty of matter). Similarly, the accidental form is either spiritual (as science, grace and virtues are the beauty of the soul and ignorance or sins are its deformities) or it is corporeal.”¹⁵

This passage allows us to establish the following levels of beauty:

1. Uncreated beauty;
2. Created beauty;
 - a. Essential (i.e., substantial) beauty;
 - i. Spiritual essential beauty;
 1. Animal spiritual essential beauty;
 2. Intellectual spiritual essential beauty;
 - ii. Corporeal essential beauty;
 - b. Accidental beauty;
 - i. Spiritual accidental beauty;
 - ii. Corporeal accidental beauty;

This classification of beauty will resonate in the pages of Gerson's *Collectorium* that we are discussing in this article, although we will soon see that his division is somewhat different from Ulrich's and in some ways richer than it. If we go through his pages, we immediately see that uncreated beauty also appears, for Gerson speaks to us of the "first beauty",¹⁶ that is to say, God himself. In the divine Trinity, the consubstantiality of the Son and the Holy Spirit with the Father allows us to recognise a triangular-circular consummation of the supreme beauty, in continuity with the idea of the circular triangle or the triangular circle that we have already discussed regarding created beauty. This led us to speak of a "vestigium Trinitatis" in the triangular nature of beauty: Gerson (1971, p. 205) insists on the character of divine "imprint" that belongs to beauty connected with the possession of the other three transcendentals, the *unum* (linked to *modus* and *mensura*), the *verum* (linked to *species* and *numerus*) and the *bonum* (linked to *ordo* and *pondus*). Somewhat later, he proceeds to divide created beauty:

"Beauty, which is a numerical equality, is divided, according to its first division, into a natural and an artificial beauty. Natural beauty is manifold, for there is an intellectual, a rational and an animal beauty. Moreover, there is one, which is only vital, another one, which is only substantial, and another one, which is only accidental. Finally, artificial beauty is introduced by the art of reason into natural beauty, and it is either per se or accidental."¹⁷

We find here a certain continuity with Ulrich: For example, we notice that Ulrich's two spiritual beauties are set out by Gerson in separate groups, so that new groups emerge, such as the beauty of non-rational animals and that of vegetables, differentiated by him from mere "bodily beauty". It is thus very interesting how the distinction between the levels of beauty called by Ulrich substantial is extended by Gerson to a greater variety. But even more illustrative is the appearance of a completely new division: Artistic beauty, of no little importance for speaking of a medieval aesthetic reflection (Torrijos-Castrillejo 2020, pp. 117–19). This innovation perhaps warns us of the imminent arrival of the Renaissance. In this way, the division of beauty is reformulated as follows:

1. Uncreated beauty;
2. Created beauty;
 - a. Natural beauty;
 - i. Natural intellectual beauty;
 - ii. Natural rational beauty;
 - iii. Natural animal beauty;
 - iv. Natural vital beauty;
 - v. Natural substantial beauty;
 - vi. Natural accidental beauty;
 - b. Artificial beauty;
 - i. Per se artificial beauty;
 - ii. Accidental artificial beauty;

In the previous section, we noted that “natural beauty” is really identified with the being but differs from it by reason. For this reason, in the same way as different degrees of perfection can be found in being, so also different levels can be found in natural beauty. But this is not all. Within the divisions of natural reality listed here, Gerson finds further subdivisions:

“[i] There is the intellectual being, and this exists in two ways: either it exists by itself, or it is connaturally united to another, like the human intellect. [ii] There is, furthermore, the rational being according to its two parts. [iii] There is, moreover, the animal being, and this in two ways: either it is united to reason, as is the case with human beings, or it exists by itself, as is the case with brutes. [iv] There is also the vital or vegetable being, and this in two ways: either with sense or without sense. [v] There is also the only substantial being, such as the elements or prime matter, which is nothing by way of principle since it is part of the substantial compound. Now, [matter] considered without its form, is not a formal act and is called ‘formless’ or ‘ugly,’ and it tends to form as something beautiful. [vi] Lastly, there is the analogous being which we call accident, to which it corresponds ‘being in another,’ but not ‘being,’ as the philosophers say; nevertheless, faith asserts that it can exist by itself without a subject of inherence.”¹⁸

This text elucidates well the levels of reality listed above to identify the different types of beauty. The degrees of perfection identified in the intellectual, rational, animal, etc., nature are explained here by showing how the intellect can exist either in angels, without a link to a body, or in man, i.e., associated with a soul. Rationality occurs only in the human being, whose nature is twofold, corporeal, and animal. On the other hand, animality is either linked to rationality—and so it is in the human being—or on its own. “Vitality” refers to vegetative life, which can also occur in conjunction with the immediately higher degree of reality, sentient life, or on its own. Likewise, substantial entity indicates the most basic corporeal condition, with no link to life. Finally, Gerson does not place the accidental being in a separate group from the other degrees of substantial reality, as Ulrich did in distinguishing between essential and accidental beauty, but establishes accidental beauty as a sort of lowest degree of natural beauty.

It is worth reviewing Gerson’s analysis of these levels of beauty to see what would be comprehended by each of these levels. In speaking of intellectual natural beauty, he again uses his triadic scheme, evoking Augustine’s three powers of the soul: Memory, intelligence and will (Gerson 1971, p. 206). He acknowledges that the Thomists place them in the order of accidents, while the Scotists identify them with intellectual nature itself. He associates himself with the view of Henry of Ghent (Brown 1975, p. 493) and considers that they form a single reality with it but differ from intellectual nature only by a “distinction of reason” (they are distinguished by virtue of the formalities of their different objects).

This nature of the intellect reflects, as Augustine teaches, the vestige of the creator, being an image of the Trinity, even when it is united to the rational soul. The human intellect, despite its initial condition of *tabula rasa* (it comes into the world devoid of knowledge and intellectual habits), is also active intellect, endowed with its own light. It is therefore a great beauty, given the classical and medieval link between beauty and light (Vasiliiu 1997). It is further embellished by being clothed in such habits, both during life and after death, when the blissful life of the blessed has arrived.

Gerson establishes a second level of embellishment of intellectual beauty through the acts of the powers adorned by the habits. These additions to intellectual beauty can be considered “supernatural beauty”, for they complement natural beauty (Gerson 1971, p. 208). Earlier, he had already spoken of a “spiritual beauty” to refer to the gifts of grace given by God to intellectual creatures (Gerson 1971, p. 200). Thanks to this kind of beauty, the Mother of God can be considered more beautiful than the angels, even if they surpass her in merely natural beauty (Gerson 1971, p. 215). Let us recall that Ulrich of Strasbourg (*De summo bono*, II, tr. 3, c. 4; De Libera 1987, p. 63), after having elucidated created beauty, refers to a series of beauties that “do not form part of the natural beauty of the universe”,

which would consist in the supernatural actions of God, from the incarnation of Jesus Christ to the beatific vision, passing through the infused gifts, etc.

After speaking of intellectual beauty, Gerson turns to rational beauty and recognises the same threefold scheme: The plane of nature, the plane of habits and the plane of acts (Gerson 1971, p. 210). As for animal beauty, he refers to its beautification through the external and internal senses by the service they render to the liberal arts (Gerson 1971, p. 211). This aspect of sensibility serves to the rational part, but there is also an animal beauty that looks “downwards” to the merely corporeal. However, even in this aspect of sensibility, there is a certain participation of reason, as the instincts of animals clearly show. From these instincts spring not only the beauty of the “artifacts” produced by animals but even those made by human artisans (!): “The first art [sc. the art of God] has given to and infused in both human beings and the rest of animals many arts from which artificial beauties are born”.¹⁹ To exemplify this, he refers to the nests of birds or the skill of certain predators in hunting. Moreover, he recognises that this kind of beauty occurs even on the vegetative level of life, both in plants and in lower animals, such as bivalves, which are able to grow their own shells by themselves. This is how he arrives at vital beauty, praising the infinity of operations of the vegetative part of life, something that manifests the wisdom of the creator.

Concerning substantial and accidental beauty, Gerson (1971, p. 213) only says that its instances, present to the senses, are also infinite. He includes in this observation also artificial beauty, affirming that the multiplication of artificial beings has its origin in God, despite divine simplicity:

“All writing of letters and names is contained, not potentially but actually, before the gaze of God who beholds such numbers, letters, and figures. A sign of this taken from an image can be applied to other cases: for example, the maker of a statue can form a very beautiful image by merely removing some parts of a log of wood which existed before the artist and to which he has added nothing.”²⁰

We see, then, that the infinite variety of products made by human art cannot mean a novelty with respect to God, who is able to contemplate all the combinations of which human art could use. It is undeniable that this concise presentation of artistic beauty is somewhat unsatisfactory, but it is at least of great interest that in Gerson’s *Collectorium* it deserved a place in the medieval classification of beauty.

It is worth recalling that Gerson (1971, p. 205) had earlier referred to a distinction between an artificial beauty *per se* and one *per accidens*. Unfortunately, in his whole discourse he did not provide us with an explanation of this suggestive distinction: is he referring to the difference between the art made by animals and plants, as opposed to the introduction of beauty in nature by the art of human reason, albeit accidental to it?

4. Conclusions

We have delved into the pages of Jean Gerson’s *Collectorium* on beauty to find one of the first systematic formulations of the notion of *pulchrum* within the table of transcendentals. In contrast to Monica Calma, we have proposed other more plausible sources for this late medieval development of the doctrine of the transcendentals. However, our main contribution to the study of this work, neglected by scholars of beauty in the Middle Ages, has been the exposition of Gerson’s new classification of beauty. In addition to other significant insights, the multiplication of the levels of natural beauty in comparison with the previous classification by Ulrich of Strasbourg is worth mentioning. Finally, it is noteworthy that Gerson has established a specific category for artificial beauty as opposed to natural beauty.

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Notes

- 1 “[...] corporis pulchritudo est partium congruentia cura quadam coloris suavitate” (Augustinus, *De civitate Dei*, XXII, 19, 2; [Dombart and Kalb 1955](#), p. 838, ll. 41–42). Somewhat later Augustin also talks of a “congruentia numerosa” (Augustinus, *De civitate Dei*, XXII, 24, 4; [Dombart and Kalb 1955](#), p. 850, l. 135).
- 2 Albertus Magnus, *Super de div. nom.*, c. 4; ([Simon 1972](#), p. 182, l. 39).
- 3 “[...] pulcrum proprie ex specie dici sive forma” (Alexander de Hales, *Summa theologica*, inq. 1, tr. 2, q. 3, c. 2; [De Hales 1924–1948](#), vol. 2, p. 100, §76).
- 4 “Notemus ultra quod pulchritudo picturae vel imaginis refertur ad ipsam tabulam, quae proinde pulchra nominatur. Addamus praeterea quod pulchritudo maxime refertur ad exemplar si per omnia conformis est imago vel exemplatum suo exemplari, sit licet exemplar illud turpissimum; sic dicimus buffonis imaginem inde pulchram, sic bubonis et vespertilionis; ecce iniquiunt buffonem pulchre pictum” ([Gerson 1971](#), p. 199). These words recall Aristotle’s idea that art succeeds in pleasing even when it depicts the ugly (*Poet.*, 1448b11–12).
- 5 See Alexander de Hales, *Summa Theologica*, inq. 1, tr. 2, q. 3, c. 1 ([De Hales 1924–1948](#), vol. 2, p. 99, §75) and [Costarelli Brandi \(2020\)](#), p. 1399).
- 6 “Pulchritudo autem naturalis describi potest quod est aequalitas numerosa consurgens et resultans ex unitate, veritate, et bonitate; vel ex mensura numero et pondere, vel ex modo, specie et ordine. Itaque proprietates entis sunt unum et verum et bonum, sic quod ens et verum, ens et bonum convertuntur. Nec est possibile quod ens aliquod sit quin haec tria sibi conveniant, quae non re distinguuntur sed sola significandi ratione. Sic de modo, specie et ordine; sic de mensura, numero et pondere” ([Gerson 1971](#), p. 205).
- 7 “[...] creatura est effectus Trinitatis creantis sub triplici genere causalitatis: efficientis, a quo est in creatura *unitas, modus et mensura; exemplaris*, a quo est in creatura *veritas, species et numerus; finalis*, a quo est in creatura *bonitas, ordo et pondus*” (Bonaventura, *Breviloquium*, II, 1, 2; [Bonaventura 1883–1902](#), vol. 5, p. 219a). On the importance of this text for the understanding of beauty in Bonaventure, see [Salvador-González \(2021\)](#), p. 281; [2022](#), pp. 55–56).
- 8 “Pulchritudo igitur naturalis non habet aliquod ens positive contrarium quod sit positive turpitude naturalis [...]. Pulchrum similiter cum ente convertitur tamquam proprietates resultans ex tribus prioribus” ([Gerson 1971](#), p. 205). Later, in this work, [Gerson \(1971\)](#), p. 214 insists again on the merely negative character of ugliness, which cannot cancel the natural beauty infused into the creatures by God. There are also other passages in his earlier works, neglected by Calma, in which Gerson includes *pulchrum* among the transcendentals, with a truly remarkable systematisation: “[...] ens et bonum et pulchrum convertuntur; propterea tantumdem habet quaelibet res, sit substantia, sit accidens, de bono et pulchro quantum de ente nec habere potest malum contrarium” (Jean Gerson, *De passionibus animae*; [Gerson 1973](#), p. 6): this work was composed at 1408 or 1409 (Palémon Glorieux *apud* [Gerson 1973](#), p. viii). “Conceptus simplex entis recipitur multipliciter in se et in passionibus suis primis quae sunt unum, verum, bonum, pulchrum; nedum in intellectualibus et rationalibus et cognitivis; sed suo modo generaliter in omnibus creaturis” (Jean Gerson, *Centilogium de conceptis*; [Gerson 1973](#), p. 506): this work was composed at 1424 (Palémon Glorieux *apud* [Gerson 1973](#), p. xv).
- 9 “[...] circulus triangulatus et triangulus circulatus” ([Gerson 1971](#), p. 205).
- 10 “[...] pulchrum sicut et bonum convertitur cum ente” (Ulrich von Strassburg, *De summo bono*, II, tr. 3, c. 4; [De Libera 1987](#), p. 57, l. 3). Although he did not take this text into account when he wrote his book on transcendentals, [Aertsen \(2006\)](#), p. 430 did mention it in his article on beauty.
- 11 Cf. Henricus de Gandavo, *Summae Quaestionum ordinarium*, a. 1, q. 2 ([Wilson 2005](#), pp. 66, 716–20); a. 48, q. 1 ([Führer 2007](#), p. 35, 7–p. 36, 12); a. 14, q. 6 ([Gandavo 1520](#), vol. 1, f. 142rQ).
- 12 “Itaque, secundum B. Dionysii commentatores, quemadmodum bonum et verum ac unum convertuntur cum ente, ita et pulchrum: ita quod omne ens est pulchrum, sicut omne ens dicitur bonum et verum ac unum” (Dionysius, *De venustate mundi*, c. 1; [Dionysius 1907](#), p. 227a).
- 13 “Convertibilia entis, videlicet bonum, verum, pulchrum, reale nil superaddunt enti, sed solum aliquam rationis considerationem ac proprietatem” (Dionysius, *De venustate mundi*, c. 3; [Dionysius 1907](#), p. 229a).
- 14 “Univocatio entis transcendentis ad Deum et creaturam cum suis propriis seu proprietatibus transcendentibus, quae sunt unum, verum, bonum, plurimum confert viris contemplativis et intelligentibus” (Jean Gerson, *De modis significandi*; [Gerson 1973](#), p. 639). Here the term *univocatio* is under the influence of Scotus’ thought. However, due to Gerson’s severe view of Scotism ([Hoenen 2003](#), pp. 343–44), it is accepted by him only with nuances ([Bauer 1973](#), p. 382; [Vial 2006](#), p. 135). Another passage from *De modis significandi* by [Gerson \(1973\)](#), p. 633 should also be considered.

- 15 “Cum autem sint formae substantiales et accidentales, praeter increatam pulchritudinem est duplex pulchritudo, scilicet essentialis et accidentalis. Et harum pulchritudinum utraque est duplex. Nam essentialis est spiritualis, ut anima est pulchritudo animalis, vel intellectualis, ut est pulchritudo angeli, vel est corporalis, ut natura sive forma naturalis est pulchritudo materiae. Similiter forma accidentalis vel est spiritualis, ut scientia et gratia et virtutes sunt pulchritudo animae et ignorantia vel peccata sunt eius deformitates, vel est corporalis” (Ulrich von Strassburg, *De summo bono*, II, tr. 3, c. 4; De Libera 1987, p. 56, ll. 63–70).
- 16 “[...] pulchritudo prima” (Gerson 1971, p. 202). The referral to divine beauty is central to Gerson’s approach, which, like all medieval, understands created beauty in referral to divine beauty (Pradier 2022).
- 17 “Pulchritudo quae est aequalitas numerosa, dividitur prima sui divisione quod quaedam est naturalis, quaedam artificialis. Naturalis multiplex est: quaedam intellectualis altera rationalis, dehinc animalis. Rursus aliqua est solum vitalis, altera solum substantialis, altera accidentalis. Artificialis vero quaedam est per se, quaedam per accidens per rationis industriam superinducta pulchritudine naturali” (Gerson 1971, p. 205).
- 18 “Invenitur autem ens intellectuale et hoc dupliciter: vel per se existens, vel ut alteri natum uniri, ut humanus intellectus. Invenitur rursus ens rationale secundum duplicem portionem. Invenitur praeterea ens animale, et hoc dupliciter; vel conjunctum rationi, ut in hominibus, vel per se stans, ut in brutis. Proinde invenitur ens vitale seu vegetabile, et hoc dupliciter: vel cum sensu vel sine sensu. Amplius est ens solum substantiale, ut elementa vel materia prima quae de se non est principaliter nihil, cum sit pars substantialis compositi; sed considerata sine forma non est actus formalis, et informis dicitur, aut turpis, appetens formam sicut aliquid pulchrum. Tandem est ens analogum, quod appellamus accidens, cujus est inesse non esse secundum philosophos, cum tamen ponat fides ea posse sine subjecto per se esse” (Gerson 1971, p. 206).
- 19 “[...] ars prima dedit et indidit tam hominibus quam ceteris animantibus artes innumeras unde prodeunt artificiales pulchritudines” (Gerson 1971, p. 212). This conception of art as a divine gift is reminiscent of Plato’s ideas on artistic inspiration (Trado San Juan 2013, pp. 94–98).
- 20 Omnis insuper scriptura, litterarum et nominum, continetur nedum potentialiter sed actualiter in aspectu Dei videntis numeros hujusmodi, litteras et figuras. Cujus signum accipito de una imagine qualiter inferre licebit de ceteris. Potest itaque statuae factor per solam partium ablationem formare pulcherrimam imaginem ex uno trunco ligni qualis utique prius illic erat, cum nihil addiderit” (Gerson 1971, p. 213).

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