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The Antique Sources of Charles Maurras and Étienne Gilson’s Conception of Beauty

Despite the separation of aesthetics as a discipline distinct from pure philosophy, one cannot truly deal with beauty without considering it in philosophical reflection. The inseparability of aesthetic thought and the philosophical reflection on beauty, natural to classical philosophy, remains alive to those thinkers whose thought is rooted deeply in the thought of classical philosophers. A perfect example of such thinking is represented by two French philosophers, Charles Maurras and Étienne Gilson, whose thought influenced the intellectual culture of Western civilization in the twentieth century in a significant manner. The classical dimension of this philosophy makes them essentially close to each other in the view on reality in various areas, in some measure crowned by an attachment to the Catholic tradition perceived as “the Catholic order” (*ordre catholique*), which is fundamental for them both. However, the fact of being under the influence of classical antique thought by Maurras and on the other hand, the Thomistic position of Gilson, is the source of both common ground between them as

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well as fundamental differences. Since both of them decided to write about the question of beauty, a comparative view of their reflections in this area seems to be important and allow us to consider if the antique and Thomistic reflections on beauty have some importance for us today, as they had for those thinkers whose activity was largely influenced by the defense of the classical values of Truth, Good and Beauty. It is worth discussing beauty in the thought of Maurras and Gilson also because sensitivity to beauty was proper to both of them, as they tried to realize the ideal of beauty in their works, and their love for art accompanied them throughout their lives.

Charles Maurras and the essence of Greek aesthetics

In the second tome of his monumental history of ancient philosophy, Giovanni Reale reminds us that a *signum specificum* of the Hellenic culture is that it was a “seeing” culture, unlike other cultures, such as the Hebrew culture which was perceived as a “hearing” culture, listening to the words of God and prophets. According to the Italian scientist, this correct observation seems to be crucial for understanding the fundamental elements of the thought of many ancient thinkers, especially for understanding crucial elements of the thought of Plato, with a particular emphasis on his theory of ideas, which in the opinion of Reale is the most developed expression of this property of Greek culture.¹ In accord with Friedländer, Reale thinks that this is exactly what explains the mathematical aspect of Platonic idealism, bringing ideas to numbers and taking his theory of the highest principles out of numbers. The mathematical aspect of Platonic thought and of the Greek spirit is, in the opinion of Reale, perfectly confirmed in classical Greek art, which found the

¹ Giovanni Reale, *A History of Ancient Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 47–48.

perfection of the form in the *canon* which is a *signum specificum* of Hellenic art, the mathematically expressible perfect proportion.² This mathematical aspect of Greek culture was elevated to metaphysical heights by Plato, especially in his theory of the “highest” Good, perceived as the One and the highest measure and the Beauty which comes through numbers and measure, which is also present in the sensual beauty where harmony and order manifest in different ways.³

The above general observation on the Greek culture is crucial for understanding the aesthetical reflection of Charles Maurras who took his fundamental observations of beauty from the classical culture. The French thinker was looking for what makes Greece special and different than anything in the world (that is, what is the difference between Greeks and barbarians) and he found true beauty in the classical period of the Greek culture. Maurras, who understood perfectly the issues observed by experts such as Reale, found this beauty in what characterized Greek culture: properties of measure, proportion and order—“eurhythmics and harmony in art. Rational classification in science” and generally love of order, that is, of harmony—is for him a “deeply Greek thing.”⁴ This point of view has basically Greek roots and is present in many areas of Maurras’s Manichean vision of reality, for the key concept of Maurras’s philosophy is the concept of order (*ordre*). A complete explanation of this fact requires consideration of Maurras’s concept of the reason. By reason, Maurras means not only reason as the individual human ability, but he identifies it also with the highest principle of reality and source of the natural order.

A definition of this natural order is presented in Maurras’s *Prologue*

² Reale, *History*, 74–75.

³ *Ibid.*, 244.

⁴ Charles Maurras, *When the French Didn't Love Each Other: Chronicle of a Rebirth, 1895–1905* (Paris: Nouvelle Librairie Nationale, 1916), 189, 190. All translations from French in this text were done by the author.

d'un essai sur la critique. Ideal beauty—that is natural harmony existing in reality—is basically a hierarchical and qualitative structure where all that is lower (sensual) is subordinated to what is higher (rational).⁵ From this point of view, it becomes clear why we are talking about the Greek roots of Maurras's aesthetics. Perceiving beauty in the context of measure and proportion follows the aesthetical concept which comes from the Pythagorean tradition, present in and extended by Platonic and Neoplatonic thought. However, the notions of harmony and hierarchy are not enough to explain the phenomenon of beauty found by the Greeks. For Maurras, there is another attribute of the being, fundamental for it to be beautiful—finitude. On grounds typical for Hellenic thought, Maurras develops his critique of the concept of infinity which, according to him, is related to Romantic philosophy and art whose emblematic feature, according to Maurras, is the obsession with infinity. The being, on the other hand, is according to Maurras finite reality, where everything can be precisely defined.⁶

The reason understood in this way, as the principle and source of the natural order, is at the same time what gives Greek art its unique rank, for as it is rational, Greek art expresses the perfection of the unity. "For the Greek the notion of beauty coincides with the notion of order—it is the composition, hierarchy, gradation. A Greek beauty expresses a unitary character and it doesn't look for originality or singularity."⁷ A classical piece of art expresses some kind of general truth, which as Maurras emphasizes through the example of Greek sculptures, "do not want to express similarity but aspire to some general

⁵ Charles Maurras, "Prologue to an essay on criticism," *Revue encyclopédique Larousse*, 1896.

⁶ Charles Maurras, *The Way to Paradise. Philosophical Tales* (Lyon: H. Lardanchet, 1922), vi.

⁷ Charles Maurras, *When the French Didn't Love Each Other*, 187–188.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 188.

truth, to the typical beauty, to pick the flower of eternal life.”⁸ Universal elements penetrating every kind of art arise from the naturally philosophical Greek mind and relations with truth. That’s why Maurras, commenting on Plato, says that “only this, what is true is beautiful, only this, what is beautiful is true.”⁹ To this noble object of classical art, he opposes disgusting, exalted Romantic art, whose objects are the individual emotional states of its creators. In this sense, one should perceive the thesis of Maurras on romanticism as individualism realized in the aesthetics—an aesthetic realization of the revolutionary and Protestant spirit.

However, the aforementioned realization of natural order in the piece of art is not only about sculpture, but about every kind of art—maybe in a particularly significant way about poetry. In *Reflections préalables sur la critique et sur l’action*, Maurras clearly expresses his sense of aesthetics when he writes that the “art of the poet consists in giving order to the nation of ideas, words, colors and tones.”¹⁰ Maurras expresses a particularly important opinion about the work of the poet: “One can say that the poet summarizes the essence of the world. He translates it into our language, letting us feel its potential or real beauty.”¹¹ In this context, his reflection on the naturality of classical art as the basic source of its perfect beauty becomes understandable. Of course, there are no pure metaphysical conclusions in the work of Maurras, but in the light of the considerations above, this naturality of beauty as the expression of the classical view of Maurras on aesthetic questions shows that for him beauty seems to be an attribute of the being. On the ground of reflections on art, beauty is this work of art

⁹ Charles Maurras, “Plato’s Friendship,” *La Revue universelle*, February 15, 1933, 408.

¹⁰ Charles Maurras, “Preliminary reflections on criticism and action” in *Barbarity and Poetry*, by Charles Maurras (Paris: Nouvelle Librairie Nationale, 1925), xii.

¹¹ Maurras, “Prologue to an essay on criticism.”

which is the realization of order and harmony proper to the natural beauty of the reality expressed in its natural order. Maurras calls this beauty realized in the work of art the flower of being and the opposite of being.¹² The flower of being—because it realizes what is common and opposite—as it connects what is common with what is particular (that is the point where the conclusions of Maurras are similar to those of Gilson, who claims that the creation of the artist is fundamentally different than the creation of God or nature, because the artist is always able only to create a unique object). This is clearly seen from the point of view of the most important event of his life—his trip to Athens. It was during this trip, while contemplating the column of propylaea, that he saw the “sum and gloss of life and nature,” whose beauty, he claimed, was shown him by the highest order of the reason.¹³

The aforementioned search for unity as the basic property of the classical spirit becomes especially important in the context of the holistically perceived thought of Maurras. The reflection on beauty is not only about pure aesthetical considerations. It is necessary to make this article’s introductory remarks on classical culture more specific by mentioning another *specificum* of Hellenic culture which is *kalokagathia*. It is especially important in the classical reflection on beauty in the dimension of moral beauty, analyzed by Aristotle in his *Ethics* and opposed by him to moral ugliness. The observation of beauty as the function of the good, proper to classical reflection, is present in Maurras’s thought. Hereby it is clear that his reaching to the concept of *kalokagathia* allows us naturally to relate his aesthetical thought with his ethical considerations, as Maurras says about Greek reason: “The same renovation has been done in art; it was visible, that it is not enough to copy the forms, enlarge them and shorten [them], but that the true pleasure is in the rela-

¹² Charles Maurras, *Anthinea. From Athens to Florence* (Paris: E. Flammarion, 1900), 41.

¹³ Maurras, *Anthinea*, 42.

tionship of composition and harmony. The same rule was extended to the philosophy of life. We see that happiness is not in a mass of foreign objects, which is taken care of by common greed, nor in the miserable aridity of the soul that limits itself and wants to isolate itself.”¹⁴ It is therefore clear that we should not reject the emotional aspect of the human soul, but it is necessary for reason to rule over the inferior elements of the human soul (sensible elements). It is about the leading role of the reason especially pronounced in the figure, created by Maurras, of “the perfect man” (*l’homme parfait*), in whom reason, by ruling over the emotions, allows for a complete and good life. This accurate order, possible to be realized in the individual life, remains important in culture as well. Pre-revolutionary France is set here as a model, for it lived the classical ideal realized by the reason, what made it a sum of Hellenic-Roman discipline and Christian emotions, a sum which is the “natural order for humanity.”¹⁵ What makes individual life beautiful is at the same time what makes Latin civilization special—and that is where begins the “ennobling perfecting of this part of mankind, which understands beauty, practices and obeys it.”¹⁶

The reflection on beauty in the Maurras’s thought, discussed above, allows us also to explain the essence of his political theory, which crowns the reflection of Maurras as an essentially political thinker. The identification of Beauty with Good in the natural way connects aesthetic elements of his thought with reflection on a well-ordered country. For Maurras, it was clear that a good state is also a beautiful one. That means a state which realizes in its form (especially its constitutional form) the rules of order and the properties of harmony and hierarchy natural to order. According to M. Motte, it is difficult to separate the

¹⁴ Charles Maurras, *Ancient Athens* (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1918), 134.

¹⁵ Charles Maurras, *Three Political Ideas: Chateaubriand, Michelet, Sainte-Beuve* (Paris: Librairie Ancienne, 1912), 10.

¹⁶ Maurras, *Three Political Ideas*, 10.

aesthetical and political aspects of Maurras's thought because Maurras himself does not separate these aspects in order to convince himself that the rules of poetic art are identical with the rules of political art.¹⁷ The primary goal of politics is to make possible the realization of virtues in the country which in Maurras's reflection is naturally related to the aesthetical grounds (just like beauty is naturally related to the good) as the ground where virtues can grow in the best way. Now it becomes clear, as Maurras admits, that the roots of his nationalistic ideology are in aesthetics. The role of the politician could be in this view the realization of natural order in the political order. This makes Maurras's theory similar to Plato's vision of true politics, being true as long as it is philosophy—that means, as it realizes the ideals of truth, good and beauty.

This “aestheticization of politics” is possible not only because of the simply classical spirit of his thought, perceived as seeking unity, which leads Maurras to the identification of beauty, good and truth (and consequently to the lack of a clear separation of the aesthetical, ethical and political part of his thought). The classical search for a return to the strict relation between good and beauty, separated by modernity, is considered a desire to return to a Hellenic, kalokagathic reality, where beauty is realized in aesthetics, politics and ethics, which is of course fundamental for his thought. However, this is possible to some extent thanks to the rejection of the simple theory of art as imitation (*mimesis*). Art, in the view of Maurras, goes beyond the mimetic function and becomes a source which is able to give to modern reality the vital forces necessary for it to live and develop in the right

¹⁷ Martin Motte, “Aesthetics of Maurras, metamorphoses of classicism.” in *The Future of the Intelligentsia and Other Works*, by Charles Maurras, trans. into Polish by B. Biały (Dębogóra: Fundacja św Benedykta, Wydawnictwo Dębogóra 2020), 579.

¹⁸ Etienne Maignan, “A high school student like no other at the school of the Ancients: the unpublished “literary parallel” between the Iphigenia of Euripides and Racine by Charles Maurras,” *Anabases* 2017, no. 25: 17–18.

direction.¹⁸ In this view, the thesis of Maurras on the Parthenon, which we need more than it needs us, and his thesis on beauty as the only thing which is able to call to life, are given further justifications. These conclusions have to be discussed in the view of an order, which has to be realized in the piece of art—an order which does not consist in the copying of reality but in giving to an object its composition and harmony. This makes natural order a fundamental source of the truly beautiful art and it is not the rejection but the transcending of the ancient concept of art which makes truly possible the realization of the classical spirit in modern times. In this view, an artist (a poet particularly) is not a slave of the natural forms because artistic beauty is not identical with natural order. For Maurras, while prose is the way of the world's expression, poetry is creating something completely different than just a world—it is expression of what is best in ourselves.¹⁹

Summarizing Maurras's reflection on beauty, one can see that the natural character of this beauty shows the classical inspiration of Maurras's thought, where beauty is important attribute of being. Beauty is also able to be realized in a piece of art and that makes art a human activity able to realize the natural beauty of being, and so it is an important part of Maurras's theory—for he went beyond the simple theory of mimesis, especially that of Plato, where art is acceptable as far as it is subordinated to the rules of good and truth. This makes Maurras's concept closer to Neoplatonic ones, rather than Platonic reflections on art, where art becomes an important part of philosophical reflection. The role of art in the philosophy of Maurras was perfectly perceived by M. Motte, who showed the principled role of aesthetics in Maurras's political thought by showing the relationship between the rules governing politics and the rules of art in Maurras's philosophy.²⁰ Aesthetics itself is for Maurras the science of sentiment

¹⁹ Charles Maurras, "Irony and Poetry," *Gazette de France*, December 12, 1901.

²⁰ Motte, *Aesthetics of Maurras*, 579–580.

and it is good, as he writes, “to feel that beautiful Doric column is the perfect beauty.”²¹ It is then clear that art became an equal part of the essence of Latin civilization for Maurras and the defense of classicism from barbaric Romanticism and ugliness became, in this view, in fact a defense of humanity as a whole.

The vision of beauty of Étienne Gilson

Maurras’s point of view in his aesthetical reflection, where the ideal of art was found in classicism, does not find the approval of Gilson. Maurras at first sight seems to be one of this kind of aesthete, who by identification of artistic and natural order came to the conclusion that the ideal of beauty in art was already realized in ancient Greece. Analyzing this problem in the field of painting, Gilson noticed that even under the consideration of the mimetic conception of art, a return to classical art to take inspiration and rules of properly creating a piece of art basically moves the artist away from the reality he would like to copy and causes him to copy not what is real but an imitation of reality by someone else.²² In this view, Maurras would have fallen into a trap, for in demanding from art to become classicism as a guarantee of its relation to natural beauty, he would actually detach it from reality.

In spite of the rejection of the mimetic concept of art, Gilson basically holds the classical view on the participation of beauty in being, by affirming the participation of beauty in the transcendental unity of the being, just like Truth and Good. Perceiving Beauty as transcendental makes it possible to identify Good and Beauty and then to claim

²¹ Maurras, *Anthinea*, v.

²² Étienne Gilson, *Painting and Reality* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1957), 193.

²³ Étienne Gilson, *Elements of Christian Philosophy* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company inc, 1960), 163.

that “God is beauty because He is Good.”²³ To completely understand this concept of Gilson’s, it is necessary to find the fundamental sources of his philosophical attitude as a Thomist.

In the thought of Aquinas, transcendental beauty is principally identified with the Good and Truth. One must always perceive the considerations of Aquinas and Gilson on beauty on the grounds of philosophical realism, which for them makes beauty always a property of a real and concrete object. Gilson specifies it by noting that medieval realism notices that beauty is not in the Platonic idea or species of Aristotle, but in the particular object. According to the position of realism, Gilson continues, “beauty has to be found where it is, and if concrete individuals are the only true realities, then the painter has to find beauty in them, taken as they are, or he will never find it.”²⁴ In this sense, there is a radical breaking with the typically Platonic reference to the ideal model of beauty, taken from St. Thomas. However, Thomas’ reflection on beauty, inspired by Albert the Great, in a significant manner remains close not only to the reflection of Aristotle, but also to the medieval Platonic school.²⁵ Those ancient inspirations on the grounds of his “calology” came, according to Gilson, especially from the Neo-Platonist Dionysius the Areopagite.²⁶ This closeness with ancient thought in the most general way is in the objective view of beauty, which is deeply rooted in views proper to the Pythagorean, Platonic and Neoplatonic tradition. Thomas analyzes their view of beauty as having three properties: “[A]d pulchritudinem tria requiruntur. Primo quidem, integritas sive perfectio, quae enim diminuta sunt, hoc ipso turpia sunt.

²⁴ Gilson, *Painting and Reality*, 194.

²⁵ Paulina Tendera, *From the Philosophy of Light to the Art of Light* (Kraków: Uniwersytet Jagielloński, 2014), 120.

²⁶ Étienne Gilson, *Forms and Substances in the Arts* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1966), 9.

²⁷ Quoted after Piotr Jaroszyński, “Étienne Gilson: His Idea of Beauty and Art” *Studia Gilsonniana* 10, no. 3 (July–September 2021), 734.

Et iterum debita proportio sive consonantia. Et iterum claritas.”²⁷

The first characteristic proper to beauty is *integritas sive perfectio*, the property which was perceived by Gilson and Thomas in the categories of completeness of the object. The object includes this characteristic when it includes everything that an object like this should include, that is when it lacks nothing that, as Gilson said, makes it a “perfectly completed being.”²⁸

The second characteristic of beauty is harmony. This is the characteristic, which is closely related to the unity of the object as the first element, because harmony is in the composition of the work. The composition of the work is in this instance simply about creating the general compatibility of its components.²⁹ That means harmony is first of all in the fact that the work of art is completed as a whole so that any change in a particular element would lead to the destruction of the whole work.

These two elements of beauty are in accordance with the traditional view on the beauty, born in antiquity and accepted (however not always *explicite*), by Maurras. However, in the reflections of Gilson and Aquinas, they are not enough to determine the existence of beauty, for the third and most important characteristic of beauty is *claritas*. This is also where Gilson rejected the traditional interpretation of Thomas which related *claritas* to clearness or splendor. On the ground of aesthetics, *claritas* is for Gilson the realization of artistic working in the work of art. Defying this *claritas*, he perceives it first of all as the radiation of the object, that is what makes a thing radiates its own light and makes a work of art the object of a special kind of recognition.³⁰ By *claritas*, an object reveals its aesthetical value, so in a similar way to Thomas, this is the characteristic which is the most important element of the beauty, as it is the moment when transcendental beauty is realized in the object. This is also the point where, as it was said, we can see the Platonic inspirations of this concept.

²⁸ Gilson, *Painting and Reality*, 184.

²⁹ Jaroszyński, “Étienne Gilson,” 738.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 738–739.

Besides the above, in spite of the objective elements of the Thomistic reflection on beauty, Gilson analyzes also a subjective definition given by Thomas, which is referring to the scholastic tradition, according to which beauty is *id quod visum placet* (“that which pleases when seen”).³¹ This definition has its important ancient precursor, Basil the Great (*Pulchra sunt quae visa placent*).³² Gilson notices that in this view, beauty is some kind of good—the good which gives pleasure. This definition is also to be perceived on the grounds of the Thomistic realism of Gilson, because this is what shows that the Thomistic vision of beauty, although it includes the subjective element, is not subjectivist in the modern way that identifies beauty with the pleasure given by the object itself, that is, with the sensations of the subjects of the aesthetical experience, while for Gilson the element of pleasing is the characteristic of the object immanently proper to it, not to the mind of the subject who is recognizing and perceiving it.³³ In some measure, beauty is the attribute of the object, in which consists some kind of pleasing through the unity, harmony and radiation present in the object, as Gilson directly said “successfully achieved works of art are not beautiful because they please our eyes, they please our eyes because they are beautiful. Their beauty is coextensive with their duration as it is consubstantial with their being as works of art.”³⁴

In the light of the ancient concept, the subjective element is first of all about the fact of participation of the perceiving subject in beauty as such and the acceptance of this participation and that (being some kind of good), the beauty is in this concept related to love. Of course, there are some Aristotelian concepts that are close to this view on beauty related both to the good realized in the work and to the pleasure it

³¹ Gilson, *Painting and Reality*, 176.

³² Jaroszyński, “Étienne Gilson,” 734.

³³ *Ibid.*, 734–735.

³⁴ Gilson, *Painting and Reality*, 176.

gives, but perhaps the most important thing is that here is where we are able to see the Platonic inspirations of the Thomistic view on beauty. As it is known, the aesthetical experience was in Platonic reflection connected not with art, but with Eros, perceived by him as some kind of intermediate force between the sensible and the intelligible. On the highest level, this means a desire for the ideal Beauty, which in the natural way also means Good and Truth. In this view, ideal beauty has its special value, for it is the most transparent idea which through sensual beauty is able to give birth to a desire for the absolute—a desire which Plato identifies with Eros.³⁵ This thought, through St. Thomas, is present also in Gilson's thought, which while emphasizing the question of love connects it with pleasing and giving pleasure, to which man wants to return, almost without end.³⁶

The Platonic connection of beauty with love makes the contemplation of beauty the way of an authentic cognition.³⁷ Taking this question, Gilson develops his concept of metaphysical beauty, which is to perceive the beauty in this view as present both in nature and in art. "This is not an exclusive property of works of art. Every sense perception whose act is enjoyable for its own sake is an imitation of the objective presence of beauty in its object. Things of nature, such as landscapes, seascapes, animals, human figures and faces, even the works of man's industry, such as cities, utensils, and the most modest of man-made objects—in short, everything that in any sense of the verb can be said "to be" is susceptible, under favorable circumstances, of becoming an object of pleasurable experience. One then realizes that the thing is beautiful. The nature of this experience is the same with the works of nature as it is with the works of art. The beautiful is the same in both cases."³⁸ That is why

³⁵ Reale, *History*, 173–174.

³⁶ Jaroszyński, "Étienne Gilson," 737.

³⁷ Tendera, *From the Philosophy of Light to the Art of Light*, 121.

³⁸ Gilson, *Painting and Reality*, 176.

Gilson notices that the beautiful is the “good of sense knowledge for the sensibility of an intelligent being”³⁹ and as it is some kind of good able to be an object of love and desires, the beautiful seems to be, as noticed J. Pazgan, the object of some definition of authenticity.⁴⁰

The question discussed above is more problematic on the grounds of the philosophy of art and aesthetics, which Gilson distinguishes from calology, which was for him the study of transcendental beauty—a part of metaphysics.⁴¹ The objective perception of beauty in Gilson’s philosophy allowed him to perceive that art may be subject to other tribunals, though he wanted to recognize the autonomy of the arts of the beautiful.⁴² One needs to emphasize once again, that in the context of the considerations above, St. Thomas has already rejected the theory of art as a simple *mimesis*. However, in fact, a contemplation of beauty is the way of perception, through the emotional and reasonable act. A work of art, according to Aquinas, is not a simple imitation of reality because the artist, by his work, is realizing his purpose, which is the realization of unity in the work of art, and artistic creation is subordinated to this purpose. In this way, the artist is able to modify objects existing in reality for the realization of this purpose.⁴³ The role of the artist finds its further consequences in the thought of Gilson himself. As we know, in the view of Thomistic realism, the object of beauty is an object which exists for real in reality and is always a concrete object which makes the analysis of beauty in the arts related to the analysis of beauty in nature. That point of view on the beautiful is the same for

³⁹ Étienne Gilson, *The Arts of the Beautiful* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1965), 28.

⁴⁰ Jan Pazgan, “Art and politics,” *Legnickie Studia Teologiczno-Historyczne* 7, no. 2 (2008), 154.

⁴¹ Gilson, *The Arts of the Beautiful*, 22.

⁴² Ralph Nelson, “Music and Religion in Gilson’s Philosophy of Art” in *Beauty, Art, and the Polis*, ed. Alice Ramos (American Maritain Association Publications, 2000), 163.

⁴³ Tendera, *From the Philosophy of Light to the Art of Light*, 124.

beauty in works of art and in works of nature.⁴⁴ However, it is important to remember that these two orders are not identical for the French Thomist. Gilson consequently distinguishes between the order of nature and the order of art, which would suggest that there are at least two types of beauty, as Gilson writes “beauty certainly is found in nature”⁴⁵ and conditions of beauty in the works of art are other than those of nature.⁴⁶ Gilson’s proposal is to appreciate the artistic power of illusion, because there is no other sense of the work of art for its creation only for one purpose: to bring pleasure, that is to express beauty, and nothing else. This is a *signum specificum* of the work of art as the only one thing which has as its only quality expressing beauty. “There is not a single real being that has not something else to do than to please. There is not a single work of art that, taken precisely *qua* work of art, has anything else to do than to cause us the contemplative pleasure of enjoying its sight.”⁴⁷ That is also the role of the artist, as the one who realizes this beauty in the work of art—a kind of creation other than works of nature and of God. Works of art are also works which do not exist in nature and their only purpose is to bring pleasure caused by the experience of the beauty realized in them. That is where the difference between a creation of God and nature and “creation” of an artist is clearly shown—the work of an artist (an art) is an activity of the man only. In this context, as P. Jaroszyński rightly notes, artistic beauty has for Gilson a much larger dimension than natural beauty, because its source is not taken directly from natural reality, but from the imagination of the creator who is able to realize the beauty in art through forms which do not exist in nature or even to create reality which is not simply given to nature.⁴⁸ “In this sense, art would reveal

⁴⁴ Gilson, *Painting and Reality*, 176.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 195.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Jaroszyński, “Étienne Gilson,” 737.

to nature the true type that nature is eternally trying to achieve without ever completely succeeding.”⁴⁹ The Beauty traditionally perceived as “splendor of truth” is excessively right, but adequate only to beauty as a quantity of the being, that is to a manifestation of truth, but not to the work of art. In this way, truth has its own beauty, which is the highest beauty, and that is the reason of the pleasure caused by the experience of the intelligible truth.⁵⁰

However, it is important to see that the separating of these two orders has its relevant cognitive values, because if art is not knowledge, but production, then art is not the way of perception. Art does not contain knowledge as such, because this is not its goal. The goal of art is relevant for art as such and hence the disagreement with the “puritanism” of Plato, who accepted art only as long as it had a positive servant role for the republic.⁵¹ In this sense, the lack of any utilitarianism in the view of Gilson is rather contrary to the later thought of Maurras, who also rejected Plato’s negative attitude but, at least in his later work, established art at the service of the state. This fact was noticed by J. Madiran writing that Maurras, just like his master Plato, finally subordinates art to politics.⁵²

Conclusions

Antique inspirations, especially Platonic ones, are visibly present in the reflections of both Maurras and Gilson on beauty. This conclusion is true in relation to a reflection on beauty as such, perceived by both as an important quality of unity of being, which through Beauty as

⁴⁹ Gilson, *Painting and Reality*, 192.

⁵⁰ Gilson, *The Arts of the Beautiful*, 26.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁵² Jean Madiran, *Maurras* (Paris: Nouvelles Editions Latines, 1992), 54–55.

much as through Good and Truth is a part of common reality. This Platonic view natural to Maurras is also presented in Gilson's thought through St Thomas' conception of the relation of beauty and love in the subjective aspect of view on beauty (as what gives pleasure) and so also in Gilson's view on transcendental beauty as part of the unity of being.

At the same time, what is typical for both thinkers is the rejection of the concept of art as a simple mimesis which also leads them both to different conclusions. While for Gilson the differentiation between the order of nature and the order of art is cause for rejection of the classical thesis connecting art and knowledge, Maurras is nearer to St. Thomas in his views on the contemplation of the work of art as the way of authentic perception, being for Maurras actually a way of constructing political concepts. However, for both of them, art is a space for the creativity of an artist, for he is not enslaved by the natural forms as he was under the theory of imitation, but a work of art is the creation of something other than natural creations.

In spite of different conclusions in a few points made by both thinkers on the aesthetical grounds, the principal identity or at least strict closeness of beauty, good and truth proper to the classical philosophy of the West is alive for both of them *par excellence*. This closeness shows that both Maurras and Gilson fit into a powerful intellectual tradition, which is also evidence of the vitality of classical Greek reflection on beauty at least in a few points. As Maurras noticed, Plato, the one who negated art, was the great poet himself. Rejection of the mimetic concept of art, proper also to Plato, allowed both Maurras and Gilson to make art an important part of the philosophical view, especially for Maurras, who found in art a way of perception as much as a way of construction of political order.



The Antique Sources of Charles Maurras's and Étienne Gilson's Conceptions of Beauty

SUMMARY

The article contains the analysis of Charles Maurras's and Étienne Gilson's reflections on beauty in the light of the antique reflections on this ground which are present in the philosophical thought of the French thinkers either directly or through thinkers who inspired them. The article also analyzed the question of art from the point of view of reflections on beauty that they both made. This made it possible to show both the similar points and distinctions between them in light of classical tradition in its reflection on beauty, especially from the metaphysical point of view, which shows that both Gilson's and Maurras's reflections on beauty grew on classical grounds. It explains why the thought of Maurras and Gilson in this area is important also from the perspective of contemporary discussions.

Keywords: Charles Maurras, Étienne Gilson, art, beauty, aesthetics, Greece, antique

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