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**I. Ku (pięknym) rzeczom samym w sobie****Josef Seifert****Dietrich von Hildebrand's Defense of the Objectivity of Beauty in Music  
and His Critique of Aesthetic Subjectivism****Abstract**

This article builds on Hildebrand's fundamental contribution to aesthetics, i.e., his elaboration of the objectivity of aesthetic values. The specific presentation of the objectivity of the beauty of music developed in the main part of the article is based on an analysis of Hildebrand's distinction (absent in Plato's aesthetics) between ontological beauty that is an emanation of the value of its bearer and the completely different relation that what he calls "beauty of the second power" (in music and in the visual spheres of nature and art) holds to its bearer. The analysis of this relation leads to a reconstruction of Hildebrand's argument against Humean and Santayanan emotivism, which attempts to show that beauty, like other aesthetic values, can be reduced to subjective feelings. The main point that the article develops in defense of Hildebrand's objectivism is the following: If beauty were a feeling, it would have to be experienced from within as feelings are. Beauty is, however, never given to us in the basic form of consciousness. Beauty *can* never be an experience like that of our being moved by beauty from within; rather, it is always given on the side of the object. Three particular emotivist-subjectivist points that the article refutes through a Hildebrandian approach to the aesthetics of music are associations with certain feelings, the projection of qualities, and the understanding of beauty as a fulfillment of immanent strivings. Lastly, the Hildebrandian understanding of aesthetic values is shown to be valid not only in the appreciation of art and nature but also for an understanding of the person, education, and morality.

Keywords: aesthetic value, beauty, emotivism, Dietrich von Hildebrand, music, objectivism, ontological value, subjectivism

**I. The Central Importance of the Objectivity of Beauty**

Dietrich von Hildebrand was profoundly in love with beauty, and particularly with beautiful music. The way in which Hildebrand took art seriously appears very impressively in the first sentences of his article on Beethoven:

If anywhere in the sphere of art we are reminded that God is the infinite embodiment as much of beauty as of goodness and truth, if anywhere the ultimate and mysterious unity in God of the sphere of beauty with that of goodness and truth flashes up, if anywhere we encounter clearly the ultimate, deep seriousness of beauty and its supreme mission: of being a voice which descends from God and leads back up to Him, then we encounter all this in the works of ... Beethoven.<sup>1</sup>

Hildebrand was deeply convinced that beauty is an objective value that cannot, in any Kantian or post-Kantian manner, be subjectivized or declared dependent on our emotions or subjective judgments. In this sense, his aesthetics is quite Platonic. The objectivity of the beauty of music is asserted in various Platonic dialogues, most clearly in the *Republic*.<sup>2</sup> The question of the objectivity of beauty is the most foundational problem of aesthetics, because it touches the very subject matter of aesthetics. It is also a key issue in Hildebrand's aesthetics.<sup>3</sup>

Beauty occurs on all levels of being – in the spiritual being of a person, in the beloved person, and in love, as well as in the kindness and moral virtues of a person – but also in the physical beauty or gracefulness of a woman or of a child, in a feast, a landscape, etc. The religious person will be convinced that beauty is a pure perfection and supremely embodied in the infinite beauty of God. The Christian will be convinced, with H. U. von Balthasar or N. Gogol, that the divine glory of Christ is an aesthetic value that lies at the very center of Divine Revelation. If this religious beauty were subjective, then religion would be attacked at its core, to which the beauty and glory of God belong.<sup>4</sup>

The first chapter of Hildebrand's *Aesthetics*,<sup>5</sup> with its elaboration of the objectivity of aesthetic values, is one of the most extraordinary contributions ever made to aesthetics. The elaboration of the objectivity of the beauty of music, however, requires in addition another discovery encountered in Hildebrand's aesthetics: a distinction absent in Plato's aesthetics between ontological beauty that is an emanation of the value of its bearer and the completely different relation that the higher beauty in music and in the visual spheres of nature and art possesses to its bearer.<sup>6</sup>

Since phenomenology is regarded by many as a 20<sup>th</sup>-Century movement of subjectivist philosophy, the profound aesthetic objectivism found in Hildebrand might come as a surprise. Instead of severing himself, however, by a careful phenomenology of aesthetic values from the distinctly ontological foundations of beauty affirmed by medieval and ancient philosophers, Hildebrand rather fulfilled – through such a phenomenological return to the aesthetic data themselves – the ultimate intention of medieval and ancient philosophy: to go back to the "veritas rerum," to the truth of things and the ontological roots of beauty. And

1 See D. von Hildebrand, *Mozart Beethoven Schubert*, Regensburg: Habel, 1964, 45.

2 See Plato, *Rep.* 4.424 b ff., 3.397 b, 3.398 c ff., 3.399 c ff., 7.522 a, 3.401 d – 403 c, 3.410 c ff., 2.376 e.

3 See D. von Hildebrand, *Aesthetics*, vol. I, trans. Fr. B. McNeil, Steubenville, Ohio: Hildebrand Legacy Project, 2016, 16-17.

4 On this, see D. von Hildebrand, „Beauty in the Light of Redemption,” *The New Tower of Babel*, Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1977, 196 ff.

5 D. von Hildebrand, *Aesthetics*, 13-73.

6 See *ibidem*, 100-101. See also J. Seifert, „Beauty of Higher Forms (Second Potency) in Art and Nature,” in: *Annales d'Esthetiques*, vol. 21-22 (1982-83).

Hildebrand's phenomenology fulfills the ideal of such an objectivist aesthetics in even far more radical a way than medieval aesthetics.

## II. Hildebrand's Refutation of the Chief Forms and Arguments of Aesthetic Subjectivism

### 1. Emotivist Aesthetic Value Subjectivism: Its apparent 'Obviousness' and Refutation

Aesthetic values are, as Hildebrand shows, the radiance, emanation, and splendor of things, of their forms, of values, of truth. Being the *splendor formae, veri et boni*, aesthetic values address themselves essentially to a beholder and are in fact "that which pleases when perceived." Therefore, aesthetic values are – by their very nature – more destined to give rise to the famous "aesthetic experience" than moral values would be destined to lead to a comparable "moral experience."

Seduced by this essential subject-directedness of beauty, a first form of aesthetic value subjectivism lies in the attempt to reduce beauty to a feeling. Emotivist value theories were developed, for example, by Hume, Kant, Santayana and Stevenson. In the emotivist form of aesthetic subjectivism, one attempts to show that beauty (or other aesthetic values) really can be reduced to subjective feelings. According to the same position, the language that refers to beauty is not descriptive and does not contain any truth-claim but is "emotive"; i.e., it just expresses our feelings towards objects.

This position – criticized by John Barger in the spirit of Hildebrand<sup>7</sup> – tries to reduce all utterances about moral and other values to the expression of subjective feelings. Emotivism takes a linguistic turn and says that 'pure value words' such as 'beautiful' or 'sublime' have no conceptual meaning but "only express feelings to influence others."<sup>8</sup>

The general tendency of value emotivism, the reduction of values to feelings, is more widespread in aesthetics than in ethics or other field, probably for the reason that with respect to aesthetic values affective experiences play a more essential role than with respect to other values. St. Thomas defines beautiful things – and not, for example, moral values – as "*pulchra sunt quae visa placent*" (beautiful are those things which, when perceived, delight).

David Hume applied quite expressly to aesthetic values the modern subjectivist reduction of values to feelings or the association of objects with feelings. He observes that Euclid has discussed all other qualities of a circle but never

<sup>7</sup> See J. Barger, „The Meaningful Character of Value-Language: A Critique of the Linguistic Foundations of Emotivism,“ *J Value Inquiry* 14 (1980), 77-91. There Barger also criticizes A. J. Ayer's emotivism and the prescriptivist dimension in C. L. Stevenson's value philosophy. According to Stevenson, value language „is emotive so as to be persuasive“ (Barger, op. cit., p. 78). Barger's critique aims at showing Ayer's and Stevenson's misinterpretation of value-language itself. It is thus a linguistic critique of emotivism, to serve as preface to a properly aesthetic and ontological critique of their standpoint.

<sup>8</sup> Ch. L. Stevenson, *Ethics and Language*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976, 13 ff.; Barger, *ibid*, 79 ff.; Hildebrand, *Ethics*, Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, <sup>2</sup>1972, ch. ix, 122 ff.

said a word about its beauty.<sup>9</sup> And he continues: the reason for this is obvious. Beauty is a purely subjective thing, identical with the feeling that we experience when we perceive circles and which we then associate with perceiving them. Thus Hume offers in terms of a radical subjectivist reduction of beauty to feelings the reason why Euclid has not spoken of the beauty of the circle. The apparent ‘obviousness’ of his conclusion, however, is a case of what Alice von Hildebrand has termed “pseudo-obviousness”.<sup>10</sup> It seems at first clear that Hume is right when he identifies the reason why Euclid has omitted to speak of beauty. If beauty is nothing but a subjective feeling, an objective mathematical treatise would not mention the feelings caused in people by looking on squares and circles.

However, against Hume’s logically unsound argument and his thesis that beauty is just a feeling, Dietrich von Hildebrand raises a number of objections. For example, Hildebrand objects to Hume on logical grounds. From the truth “A implies B” no valid syllogism to “B implies A” is possible. From the fact that the alleged reducibility of beauty to a feeling would constitute a good reason why Euclid did not mention the beauty of the circle, it does not follow that his silence about beauty is due to the reducibility of beauty to an emotive reaction. The task of the geometer is to explore the specifically mathematical, not the aesthetic, properties of the circle – and this simple fact would be a sufficient explanation why the mathematician doesn’t speak of its beauty.<sup>11</sup>

#### **Hildebrand’s Distinction Between Sense-Related Beauty of the Second Power and Ontological Beauty as a Refutation of Aesthetic Subjectivism**

The relationship between the beauty and that which is beautiful is very different in the case of the beauty of music than in that of the “ontological beauty” that is a radiance and emanation of love or justice. The ontological beauty of an act of justice is the “intelligible splendor” or “intelligible perfume” of the inner goodness of justice. The comeliness and bright splendor of mercy springs from the innermost nature of mercy itself. Similarly, the ugliness of injustice or unfaithfulness springs from its inner nature.

Take the radically different kind of beauty that Hildebrand once called the higher beauty of (sensible) forms and later called “beauty of the second power.” Think, for example, of the beauty of the “Cavatina” in Beethoven’s String Quartet, Op. 130. This beauty is not rationally grounded in the nature of the sounds that bear it in the same way that the beauty of justice flows quite intelligibly from the nature of justice. It is also not limited to the “sensible sphere,” as if it were just the splendor of sensible forms like that of the circle. Likewise, it is not the lower, non-spiritual, “mere sense-beauty” of the first power, such as the

<sup>9</sup> See D. Hume, *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, Chicago: Open Court Publishing Company, 1930, App. I, 3. See Hildebrand’s critique of this view in: *Aesthetics*, op. cit., 29 ff.

<sup>10</sup> See A. von Hildebrand, “On the Pseudo-Obvious,” in: B. Schwarz, ed., *Wahrheit, Wert und Sein*, Regensburg: Habel, 1970, 25-32.

<sup>11</sup> Besides, according to Proclus, Euclid’s *Elements* have been designed to culminate, “as the end of the whole *Elements*,” in the exploration of the five Platonic figures or regular solids that antiquity regarded as archetypes of beauty and order of form. See *Euclid’s Elements*, I, ed. T. L. Heath, New York: Dover, 1956, 2 ff.

beauty of the sound of a Stradivarius violin or the magnificent smell of some dark red rose. Plato and Plotinus tend to see beauty of the senses as simply a non-spiritual and lower kind of beauty, although Plato's most significant statements on music anticipate Hildebrand's discoveries. Hildebrand elaborates on Plato's fundamental insight: ontological beauty strictly follows the being and value-rank of that of which it is the beauty. The greater charity is more beautiful than the lesser; a man is more beautiful, ontologically speaking, than an animal; the animal is more beautiful than the non-living thing; etc. If sense-beauty were just the radiance of the sensible world, if it just spoke of material things, then it would have to be a lower ontological beauty, in strict dependence on the lower ontological rank of its bearer, of which it would be an emanation.

Such a theory, however, does violence to the facts. The higher beauty in music possesses a similarly sublime spiritual quality to the beauty of justice or of prayer or charity. Yet this is only possible because there is a discrepancy here between the nature of the bearer of that beauty – musical notes – and the highly sublime quality of that beauty itself. Unlike in the case of the metaphysical beauty of justice that is an emanation of the inner value and preciousness of the being that possesses it, the higher beauty of music is not an emanation of the dignity of its bearer. Rather, it is a surprise and a very mysterious thing that some sequences of tones – which are in their being no more valuable than the tones in any other piece of music, however ugly – unexpectedly can bear such a high and unforeseeable spiritual beauty. The beauty of the second power of music – while being wholly embodied in the world of sense objects – speaks of a higher world of spiritual goods and constitutes a radiance from above – from the abode and homeland of the soul, as G. Marcel put it in his inaugural address for the Salzburg Festivals.<sup>12</sup> Allow me to quote here a text from the University Sermons of Cardinal Newman, a text that Hildebrand himself quoted repeatedly and that expresses poetically and beautifully what Hildebrand has in mind:

There are seven notes in the scale; make them fourteen; yet what a slender outfit for so vast an enterprise! What science brings forth so much out of so little? Out of what poor elements does some great master in it create his new world? Shall we say that all this exuberant intensiveness is a mere ingenuity or trick of art like some game or fashion of the day without reality, without meaning? Or is it possible that that inexhaustible evolution and disposition of notes, so rich yet so simple, so intricate yet so regulated, so various yet so majestic, should be a mere sound which is gone and perishes? Can it be that those mysterious stirrings of the heart, and keen emotions, and strange yearnings after we know not what, and awful impressions from we know not whence, should be brought in us by what is unsubstantial, and comes and goes, and begins and ends in itself? It is not so; it cannot be. No; they have escaped from some higher sphere, they are the outpourings of eternal harmony in the medium of created sound; they are echoes of our home; they are the voice of angels, or the Magnificat of the Saints, or the Living Laws of Divine Governance, or Divine Attributes; something they are besides themselves,

12 See G. Marcel, *Die Musik als Heimat der Seele. Rede zur Eröffnung der Salzburger Festspiele 1965*, Salzburg: Festungsverlag Salzburg, 1965, 45: "The sudden eruption, from some hidden depths in my innermost being, of the idea of music being the abode (*Heimat*) of the soul was just as unexpected as another idea thirty years ago that was to prove the pivot of my concrete philosophy: being is the place of fidelity... the idea of music being the abode of the soul has to do with Salzburg".

which we cannot encompass, which we cannot utter, though mortal man, and he perhaps not otherwise distinguished above his fellows, has the gift of eliciting them.<sup>13</sup>

That such a thoroughly spiritual quality of beauty can be borne by sensible formations is amazing.

The ontological discrepancy and incommensurability between the low ontological nature and dignity of tones and the high aesthetic quality that music can possess, however, seems to justify the following argument for aesthetic subjectivism: "These entities which you call sublimely beautiful, while others do not recognize such a beauty in them, are just tones. So if you think that they are sublimely beautiful, you do so only because of your subjective feelings." This argument is not cogent, however, but flawed by another kind of pseudo-obviousness. It jumps much too quickly and unphilosophically from the correct observation of the discrepancy between the low ontological nature of tones and their high beauty to a conclusion that the premise does not warrant: the reducibility of beauty to feelings.

The beauty of music can be perfectly objective without it being intelligible in the same way as the ontological beauty of justice. Why should there not be quite a different relationship between beauty and its musical bearer that is clearly given – but which does not involve the same type of evident objective correspondence between the value-bearer and its corresponding beauty as do instances of ontological beauty?

### **An Epistemological Argument for Aesthetic Subjectivism and Its Refutation by Hildebrand**

Beauty of the second power seems to draw us into a sphere of pure subjectivity of judgment. Who judges about this beauty? Where is the sense-perception and experience that verifies our statements about such beauty? Especially if we admit the discrepancy between the low ontological rank of the bearer and the alleged high spiritual quality of the beauty of music, where does one derive the evidence for such quaint things that are not given to the senses or similarly verifiable "intersubjectively"?

We answer: each object demands its own mode of knowledge. We cannot know the truth, or even the truth-*claim* of a proposition, in the way in which we can know, for example, that a sentence is written in words on a piece of paper. We see the letters of these words with our eyes, but not beauty. Analogously, sounds can only be heard. If we want to see them, we cannot; we must accept the mode of their givenness – being heard. We can see in oscilloscopes visual representations of sound-waves, but we cannot ever see musical tones. And we can neither see nor hear beauty through our ears or eyes, but must perceive it mentally *in* what we see and hear. There are things that can only be seen, others that only can be heard, and still others that can only be perceived mentally, and we must respect that. If we insist that what can only be seen should be heard, then we fail to perceive it. Similarly, there are many things

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<sup>13</sup> J. H. Card. Newman, *University Sermons*, xv. See also D. von Hildebrand, *The New Tower of Babel. Manifestations of Man's Escape from God*, Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1977, 202.

that can be known but not perceived through the senses. If we demand that there be a sense-verification for all judgments including aesthetic judgments and cognitions of beauty, we would also be unable to claim any truth for our own position or logical cogency for our arguments for aesthetic subjectivism. We see the absurdity of this argument for aesthetic and axiological agnosticism or subjectivism, as Finnis points out, as soon as we think about how we know those things that the empiricist and aesthetic subjectivist himself presupposes, such as truth or the logical consistency of his argument. Neither one of these properties, which are crucial for the theory of the empiricist, can be seen or verified through the senses. Both are "quaint" in Mackie's sense of the term.

### **The Distinction Between Facts and Values as a Motive for an Epistemological Argument for Aesthetic Subjectivism: On the Epistemological Difference Between Knowing Facts and Knowing Values**

Hildebrand distinguishes a further epistemological argument that Hume gives for his reduction of values to feelings, namely the apparent impossibility of objective value-knowledge in view of the distinction between facts and values. This distinction plays a special role in G. Santayana's aesthetics.<sup>14</sup> All we can really know objectively (or know at all), according to this theory, are facts. Values, however, are not facts, and therefore they can only be subjective feelings and certainly cannot be known objectively.

We may respond with Hildebrand: I certainly know something completely different when I say "Mozart's string quintet KV 516 is sublimely beautiful" than when I say "It is written in g-minor." One could say that the one is a fact – it is written in g-minor – and the other a value: it is incredibly sublime and beautiful. If by 'fact' one just means the neutral characteristics of music, then beauty is indeed not a fact. If one calls fact, however, anything that 'is the case' or any predicate that really and objectively belongs to something, then beauty is also a 'fact'; it just is another kind of fact.

To take another example, should we deny the *existence* of a tree or of a man because of the fact that existence, certainly, is not a property on the same level as color or extension? We must open our minds; we must overcome a narrow-mindedness that looks for predicates only in one way and denies them when they do not adapt to the Procrustean bed of our expectations. The beauty of the first movement of Beethoven's 9th Symphony is neither identical with the acoustic character of the violin or the horn, nor does it have a pitch as do musical tones. It is quite unique a predicate, but a fully objective one. Beauty belongs to the thing in quite a unique way, as a 'consequential' property that is unlike any physical or psychical predicate of an object. And yet it is truly and objectively that thing's beauty.

Due to the different kind of reality they involve, radically different cognitive activities and 'organs' come into play when we recognize beauty, on the one hand, and the neutral properties of a work of art, on the other. The same is true

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<sup>14</sup> See G. Santayana, *The Sense of Beauty*, New York: Random House, 1896, I, 2. See Dietrich von Hildebrand's critique in *Ästhetik*, 1, *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. V, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1977, 33 ff.

about moral values and disvalues. It is one thing to understand that a man has sexual relations with a woman with whom he is not married or that he doesn't do what he has promised his wife, and it is another thing to understand that adultery and breaking one's promises are morally wrong. But that does not hinder the immorality of adultery or the beauty and the goodness of faithfulness from being qualities of these attitudes that are just as objective as their other properties.

#### Hildebrand's Argument Against Emotivist Subjectivism from the Essentially Different Givenness of Beauty and of Feelings

Against Santayana and Hume Hildebrand brings another objection by developing a phenomenology of aesthetic feeling and comparing the nature of feelings and the mode of their givenness with the nature of beauty and the mode of its givenness.

Our feelings, like all other conscious experiences, are given to us in a very unique mode. We experience them in the conscious living of these experiences from within. They are part of our conscious stream of experience rather than objects of our intentional acts.<sup>15</sup> Everything that is not part of our conscious life, like a tree or mathematical laws, can only be given to us as an object of our conscious life. We have consciousness of them and grasp them, but they are in front of us, spiritually or even physically. My own conscious life can also be given in that way when I make it an object of an act of reflection or self-knowledge. Even my self *can* be given to me in that form of consciousness. This act of reflection is not "the normal subject-object relationship" but one that is permeated by the awareness that it is myself upon whom I reflect.

If beauty were a feeling, it would have to be experienced from within as feelings are. Beauty is, however, never given to us in the first form of consciousness. Beauty *can* never be an experience like our own being moved by beauty from within, but is always given on the object side. It is the object of contemplation or aesthetic enjoyment, but it is never given from within. Even less is beauty a body-feeling, that peculiar kind of experience of how we experience our own body.

It is an essential necessity that we grasp here: beauty can never be a feeling and can never be given in that mode, but is always something of which we are conscious. To perceive it as a sentiment or emotion is a misconception of both and of values as such. Values are never sentiments or feelings. It contradicts their essence to be a feeling (though of course feelings can possess value). It thus becomes evident that beauty cannot be reduced to feelings.

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<sup>15</sup> The term "intentionality" as used here goes back to Franz Brentano, and further to Scholastic philosophy. It had been adopted by Husserl and was later modified. As understood here, it refers to that fundamental character of the subject-object relation in virtue of which conscious acts are directed towards objects that stand over and against them. So when we perceive, we always perceive something, a book, a color, etc.

### Our Feelings Are Often Qualitatively Opposed to the Aesthetic Values in Objects

In many theories, beauty is not so much reduced to a feeling but to the work of art's causal power to produce feelings in someone. According to this theory, some bodily or psychic feelings caused by a work would make us attribute beauty to it.

However, we often experience aesthetic qualities in works of music or art without ever having had an experience of feelings that could faintly be the reason why we attribute these qualities to the work. Besides, we may feel many changing emotions towards a work whose aesthetic quality remains permanent. A happily married man may hear a Mozart aria as expression of the happiness of love. When his wife becomes unfaithful, he may feel deep sorrow and weep when listening to the same piece. Precisely because he perceives the same aesthetic quality in the work, it awakens opposite feelings.

Moreover, strong and beautiful feelings may be associated by us with a work regardless of its low aesthetic value – perhaps because the object had a connection with a person we love. We can clearly distinguish the relative absence of aesthetic beauty in the object – maybe in a recording of the first song sung by our deceased son – and the deep joy when we heard it first from the mourning we feel when hearing it now. Thus experiencing a melody as beautiful and experiencing sweet or bitter feelings upon perceiving it are wholly different things.

The impossibility of either reducing beauty to feelings or seeing it as the mere aptitude of a musical piece to engender good feelings is evident in the thought (which Hildebrand draws from C. S. Lewis and Max Scheler) that the quality of beauty often stands in contrast to our feelings.<sup>16</sup> How could Hume or Santayana be right in reducing aesthetic values to our own feelings, if the feelings that we have when encountering many aesthetic qualities possess radically different qualities from the aesthetic value-qualities perceived on the side of the object? When we perceive a magnificent, sublime, grandiose waterfall, like *Niagara Falls*, we perceive a majestic quality, but we don't have majestic feelings; rather, we have humble feelings, or we may be frightened by the grandiosity of the object. Or take a sublime work of music, such as Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis*: we may feel humbled in its presence and not at all sublime. Upon seeing the demonic expression in Goya's "Saturn Devours His Son" we perceive a grandiose but demonic quality, and yet we neither have demonic nor grandiose feelings but might rather feel frightened or fascinated. The beauty or the witty and comical quality of a work is likewise irreducible to feelings: the comic quality of Maritorne and the indecent but extremely funny events in the tavern in Cervantes' *Don Quixote* move us to laugh, but our feeling is not comic at all.

These aesthetic qualities can hardly be explained by our feelings; it is rather only in response to such perceived qualities that we have the respective feelings. For example, Strauss's *Emperor Waltz* affects us in a radically different way from Mozart's *Don Giovanni* or Verdi's *Requiem*. The perception of different aesthetic qualities alone explains our different feelings. Any causal link or association

<sup>16</sup> See D. von Hildebrand, *Aesthetics*, 38, esp. footnote 27 and C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, New York: Collier Books, 1962, 14-15, as quoted there.

is quite insufficient to explain the emotional qualities of our response. To laugh at that which is funny, to be moved by a tragic tune, involves a radically different relationship to an object than a mere causal link by which the latter would produce feelings. Not only is our experience meaningfully and intentionally related to the object and not simply caused by it, but our experience also corresponds in each nuance to the perceived quality of the aesthetic character of the perceived object. The aesthetic enjoyment of an object presupposes the perception of its aesthetic qualities and involves their meaningful link with the perceived object, which alone can explain the content of the conscious experience. An external causal or associative link between an object and a feeling is quite incapable of explaining that relationship.

If we look at the aesthetic experience itself, we would see that it is not just caused by some irrational factor in the world or in our psycho-physical make-up – and then we would ascribe the aesthetic quality to the object. We do not first experience laughing and then we ascribe the funny quality to an object. If the discussed theory had any chance of being true, the actual sequence of events would have to be entirely different. Beauty cannot consist in the fact that the aesthetic object causes aesthetic delight in us, for the simple reason that the aesthetic experience already presupposes the conviction and perception of beauty in order to arise.

### **The Projection Theory of the Beauty of Music and Its Inability to Account for Aesthetic Cognition**

Someone might put forward a more intelligent form of aesthetic subjectivism, according to which beauty and aesthetic qualities are not just ascribed to a work because it causes certain feelings, or because we associate it with certain feelings. These qualities are indeed perceived in the work. They are not found in it originally, however, but are projected into the work by us in the first place. We would project ideas, feelings, or other value qualities into certain forms of melodies and musical rhythms, and then we would perceive them there. But we would still be their origin, albeit unconsciously.

In response to this view, we may first admit that simply associating a certain man X with a feeling is very different from projecting some qualities into him. Psychoanalysis speaks of *Übertragung*. Freud claims that he had a dream in which he projected both his anger regarding a colleague and the reason for being angry – each onto a different person.

There are many other psychological phenomena in which some kind of projection occurs. And if not only neurotic people but everybody projects onto things qualities that are not found in them, then it becomes understandable why we indeed believe that we *perceive* the comic, the funny, or the sublime in music – and in a certain way we do find these qualities there. Yet we do not find them there because they are there; rather, we find them there because we have projected them into things. This theory really posits two feelings, of which the first gives rise to the projection and the other is the response to the projected quality. Yet this theory, too, is quite inadequate and can be rebutted by the following considerations.

In the first place, this theory appears to be refuted by an observation made by C. S. Lewis and others. Very often the aesthetic quality of the work that we perceive constitutes the very opposite of the quality of our feelings. The aesthetic quality of an object may also totally surprise us: we had never thought or felt anything that would resemble the characters of Goya's paintings or the qualities found in Bartók's Hungarian dances. Both the element of surprise and the character of the object's aesthetic quality as something opposes the quality of our feeling make the theory of projection untenable.

Someone might retort by saying, "Do we not in many forms of projection project onto the object qualities that are *not* the same as what we experience in our own feelings? Rather, we project totally different qualities into objects: they may indeed correspond to our feelings – however, not in the sense that they are similar but in the sense that they can motivate a given feeling. For example, the timid man or child who doesn't dare to stay alone in a darkened room will not project into that room timid people who have characters similar to his own but rather monsters or other courageous creatures that instill fear in him."

While this objection cannot be refuted by the aforementioned C. S. Lewis's observation, it can be refuted by other arguments. Such a theory of projection presupposes in the first place that certain feelings always precede our experience of aesthetic qualities. It presupposes, secondly, that aesthetic qualities are not meaningfully dependent on the structure of an object but are just subjectively projected into them by us. Thirdly, the theory presupposes that whatever aesthetic character we perceive in objects can be accounted for by our projecting aesthetic qualities into objects. But every one of these three assumptions is open to severe criticism.

1. In actual aesthetic experience we do not normally have any particular feelings beforehand. Most aesthetic experiences are not like the case in which we are already feeling very timid and then go into a forest and imagine it is all filled with robbers. It is rarely the case that we first feel humiliated and then come to St. Peter's Square and project majestic qualities onto it. Thus the whole starting point of the theory, the idea that we go around with many feelings and project them constantly onto objects, does not seem to be tenable.

2. The beauty of, for example, the third movement of Beethoven's String Quartet 132, appears to us in the object itself and is intelligibly rooted in the nature and structure of the object. Even though the principles according to which the exact sound of a musical piece gives rise to its beauty remain mysterious to us, we still intuit the beautiful quality of melodies and harmonic formations and – most of all – of the composition of the whole. And in so doing, we experience how the "splendor of the perceived forms" proceeds meaningfully from the perceived objects. The way in which the sober beauty of a Gregorian chant flows from the melodic forms and tonal elements from which it proceeds is given just as clearly as the way in which the sensuous charm of Strauss's melodies flows from the rich and brilliant instrumentation and the melodic tunes and rhythms of a Viennese *valse*. These aesthetic qualities are not externally attached to the perceived tonal gestalt-qualities but essentially and intelligibly wedded with

them. The direct insight by which we intuit this fact constitutes – in the last analysis – the best refutation of emotivism in any form.

3. The theory of projection is guilty of a *hysteron proteron* confusion. It claims that some experience in us projects the aesthetic quality into the object, while in reality our aesthetic experience depends on the aesthetic quality perceived in the object.

If we hear the *Dies Irae* of Verdi's *Requiem*, we perceive many different aesthetic and religious qualities: the terrifying quality of the Last Judgment, the "tuba mirum spargens sonum" with its intimations of the transcendent and magnificent yet terrifying appeal to appear before God, the holy wrath of God embodied in the "Confutatis maledictis," and the incredible beauty and quality of charity and mercy in the "quaerens me, sedisti lassus" and "Recordare, Jesu pie, quod sum causa tuae viae." If we are moved by the terrifying, majestic, and all-penetrating quality of justice embodied aesthetically in the sounds of Verdi's *tubas* and are profoundly moved by the beauty and sweetness of the *Recordare*, then these qualities are clearly given to us in the object, in the text and in the whole of the musical harmonies, melodies, and instrumentation. We grasp these aesthetic qualities even prior to understanding the meaning of the words spoken in the text to Jesus: "remember, o merciful Jesus, that I have been the cause of your coming to the world. Seeking me, you sat down tired, suffered your passion and died on the cross." If the music were ugly or trivial, we would not perceive any of these sublime aesthetic qualities in the music but would be upset by the disharmony between the beauty of the word-meanings and the lack of beauty or the ugliness of the music. Our feeling is nourished by perceiving these aesthetic qualities and corresponds exactly to them. It is thus an absurd misconstruction to present the case as if we first had the feelings that correspond to listening to Verdi's profoundly moving *Recordare* and then projected our feelings onto the aesthetic object. The delight, the reverence, and the being moved by the 'religiously aesthetic quality' of the work obviously presuppose the perception of the beauty. These feelings can only be produced by the object and would never come into being without it. Thus, the mechanism of projection is in no way capable of explaining the aesthetic qualities of works.

4. Let us assume that there are two people, one who is depressed all the time the other is a sanguine, witty man. Now both listen to J. Strauss's *Anna-Polka*. If the projection theory were true, they should project totally opposite qualities into this work: the one would weep all the time when listening to it, and the other would find it very cheerful. But in reality, the two people with their completely different feelings may perceive the same aesthetic qualities in the work. The sanguine person will not find the *Dies Irae* hilarious: only a totally unartistic person – whom we would criticize precisely for his lack of aesthetic sensibility – would really project his own feelings into works.

5. Let us carefully analyze cases of recognizing a symbolic or religious meaning in objects that also possess a purely aesthetic character. When we actually do project, for example, our religious faith into a work, this phenomenon is quite distinct from the perception of an objective aesthetic quality. We can have the same religious background as an artist and still see that his statue

of Christ is artistically bad. Even the 'kitsch' statue of the Madonna of Lourdes may have profound *religious* meaning for us, while we dislike it aesthetically – as St. Bernadette disliked it, too.

It goes without saying that in the ideal case the aesthetic beauty of the object enters into a 'marriage' with its religious meaning, as in Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis*. Similarly, while disagreeing with Buddhism, a Christian may recognize the superior aesthetic beauty of a beautiful statue of Buddha as opposed to a sentimental and ugly statue of a saint. This, too, proves the irreducibility of aesthetic qualities to such linking of aesthetic objects with our feelings.

Moreover, why should a man in a very happy mood be indisposed to listen to an extremely sad, tragic, piece – like Schubert's *Winterreise*? If the aesthetic qualities were only the fruit of his projecting his own feelings, the happy man might even ask that it be sung on his wedding day.

6. The aesthetic qualities of musical pieces cannot be restricted to the undoubted dimension of expressing qualities of feeling. Musical pieces contain many other aesthetic qualities, such as the majestic peace and dynamic order of a fugue by J. S. Bach or the national character embodied in Russian songs. Many of these qualities are not present in any feeling we had before.

### **The Inability of the *Appetitus* Theory and Libido Theory to Account for the Beauty of Music**

Many of these objections also apply to another subjectivist theory of beauty as fulfillment of immanent strivings. This aesthetic subjectivism takes its starting point from a theory of *appetitus* and drives. We must distinguish here, however, the metaphysical from a merely psychological and relativistic appetite theory.

#### *A) Aesthetic Values as Illusions Caused by Drives*<sup>17</sup>

Mephisto in Goethe's *Faust* says, "with this potion in his body, he will soon see Helena in each woman." However, while strong sexual drives or euphoric moods can indeed lead us to see extraordinary aesthetic qualities where they are not, this case clearly differs from the perception of a real aesthetic quality. Moreover, true and sober love may open one's eyes for a real beauty in the other person that nobody else sees. We could not speak of the illusions of him who sees Helena in every woman, if we did not distinguish "seeing Helena in every woman" and seeing Helena.

#### *B) Aesthetic Values as Real Properties and More Than the Ability of Objects to Delight the Beholder*

Think of an agreeable taste that we certainly do not project into a food. Nevertheless, it is possible that one person may be nauseated and another delighted by gorgonzola cheese. These qualities constitute themselves in relationship to some subjective appetites; they do not exist in themselves but *for* someone.

17 See D. von Hildebrand, *The Nature of Love*, South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine's Press, 2009, ch. 1.

Thus the significance of that which appeases an appetite – and still more those qualities that are merely subjectively agreeable – depend by their nature on the given subject who has specific appetites or for whom an object is agreeable.

The most subtle form of aesthetic subjectivism holds that the same applies to beauty. Beauty would, under this interpretation, not belong to the beautiful form or color *per se* but would consist in fulfilling the most intellectual appetite in us. Beauty would provoke intellectual delight in its beholder. Three facts about aesthetic experience are explained by this subjectivist interpretation:

1. There are at least some relatively universal agreements in the judgment of beauty, some objects that fill every person who sees them with delight.
2. We do experience aesthetic qualities in objects, while they still depend on the subject (which is a partial explanation for differences in taste).
3. Aesthetic taste is not arbitrary, but there is an objective foundation for aesthetic delight in the splendor of forms themselves. Certain well-ordered forms should please us; deformity should not.

Thus, the aforementioned theory seems to take into account all the facts that we have discussed thus far and yet maintains the subject-dependence of aesthetic qualities.

However, this theory, too, is faulted in many ways. The authentic aesthetic experience is quite different from encountering something that is merely subjectively satisfying. In a merely subjectively satisfying object, the object's significance is reduced to it giving us the respective satisfaction. For example, the significance of the taste of a cigarette that some people hate and others like consists in the relationship of the object to our pleasure. Only inasmuch as the cigarette satisfies us is it declared good.<sup>18</sup>

Now, when we listen to Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*, we understand that its beauty in no way depends on whether we like or dislike it. We delight in it because we find it of admirable beauty. When we are moved by Bach's *Concerto for Two Violins* we are fully convinced that we stand in front of a work whose importance and beauty are in no way dependent on our delight. If we hated or ignored the work, it would be our fault.

This is most clearly the case in the example of metaphysical beauty that is a radiation of the preciousness of a being. When we are moved by the beauty of the justice of a judge who refuses to condemn a person who is falsely accused, even though he will be killed by the regime for it, this beauty is in no way reducible to its capacity of pleasing us. Unlike in the case of the cigarette, the beauty is here the *principium* and our delight is the *pricipiatum* – exactly the opposite of the situation in which our delight in the cigarette is the *principium* and the fact that we call the cigarette good the *pricipiatum*, the consequence of that.

This axiological objectivism that Hildebrand defended so forcefully can be known in its truth only by means of an immediately evident insight: listening to the *Laudate Dominum* of Mozart, we perceive clearly that its aesthetic qualities render it beautiful regardless of any satisfaction we experience in listening to it. Its beauty is in no way given to us as its mere capacity to satisfy

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18 On this, see D. von Hildebrand, *Ethics*, Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1972, ch. i-iii.

us subjectively. While beauty is somehow the “face” and emanation of things and has to do, as Hildebrand shows, with a “metaphysical dimension of the aspect” of things that addresses itself to someone to perceive it, it clearly has the character of intrinsic preciousness and value.<sup>19</sup>

For this reason, beauty also cannot be defined sufficiently as “that which – when being perceived – delights.” For the delight and fulfillment of the person in contact with beauty requires an encounter with a value that is important in itself and entirely irreducible to our fulfillment as subject and to our happiness. Like other forms of deeper happiness, only the man who responds to the splendor of beauty as such will be delighted by it. One of the deepest misunderstandings of happiness occurs when all other things and values become instruments for our happiness and fulfillment.

### **The Central Role of Beauty in Hildebrand’s Ethics, Philosophy of Love, Philosophical Anthropology, and Philosophy of Religion**

Beauty also plays a central role in Hildebrand’s ethics and in other parts of his philosophy. The deepest dimension of morality requires the full recognition of the goods and values from which moral calls issue, and this is not possible as long as the beauty of these goods (as well as of the moral values of the adequate value-response to them) is not recognized. Beauty reveals, as it were, the most intimate aspect of value; it proceeds from the very heart of the intrinsically precious goods. This is most clearly seen in love. Only when we see not only the awe-inspiring character of value, its majesty that demands recognition, but also how beautiful the good or the beloved person is, can we truly love him. Only when not only the majesty but also the inner beauty and *delectability* of moral values move our hearts can moral goodness be properly understood.

Thus beauty plays a central role not only for the understanding of aesthetic values in art and in nature but also for the full understanding of the person, of love, of education, and of morality. Similarly, in the love of God and in the liturgy, beauty plays an indispensable role, to which Hildebrand dedicated many pages in his *Liturgy and Personality* and in various essays on the Sacred, as well as in his unpublished works on philosophy of religion.<sup>20</sup> Thus the question of the objectivity of beauty is not merely a matter of aesthetics but of many other central dimensions of value and being.

We conclude this text with another quote from Hildebrand’s article on Beethoven, a passage on the *Missa Solemnis*, in which is reflected the unique flavor of Hildebrand’s philosophy of the objectivity of the beauty of music, but also the relationship between his philosophy of beauty, ethics, and philosophy of religion – as well as the unique ‘tone’ of his own personality and his profound religious faith:

19 Cf. D. von Hildebrand, *Ästhetik*, 1, *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. V, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1977, ch. 2.

20 See D. von Hildebrand, *Liturgie und Persönlichkeit*, 5ths ed., St. Ottilien: Eos Verlag, 1989; latest English edition, 2016, by the Hildebrand Project. See likewise Cyril Rüttsche, *Person und Religion. Eine Darstellung und Würdigung der wesentlichen Beiträge Dietrich von Hildebrands zur Erkenntnistheorie, Ethik, Metaphysik und Religionsphilosophie*, Tübingen: Narr Francke Attempto, 2017.

His (Beethoven's) great Mass is so Catholic throughout as hardly any other... For no other (composer) was so great and ultimate as artist that he would have been able to give so adequate an artistic expression as Beethoven to the greatest thing that exists between heaven and earth, the holy sacrifice of the Mass, this event in which the ultimate fate of humanity and of each individual man is in the balance. No-one was so comprehensive and in this sense "Catholic" that he could have served as spokesman for humanity as such. When the violin resounds at the beginning of the Benedictus, it is as if heaven descended from on high, when the "Dona nobis Pacem" is heard, as if mankind looked up in prayer to God from its absolute metaphysical position. Truly, if anywhere in art we may say this, we must say it here: "It is the Pasch of the Lord."<sup>21</sup>

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21 See D. von Hildebrand, *Mozart Beethoven Schubert*, 75-76 (my own translation).