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# Comparing Empirical and Theological Perspectives on the Relationship Between Hope and Aesthetic Experience

An Approach to the Nature of Spiritual Well-Being

*Mark R. Wynn*

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## Abstract

While hope and the experience of beauty both have a claim to be key constituents of the spiritual life, it is not obvious that there is any deep-seated connection between them. Here, I examine three ways of developing the idea that there is some such association. I draw on empirically informed as well as theological perspectives, and, on this basis, I address a further question, one concerning the respective contributions of different kinds of enquiry to our understanding of spiritual well-being.

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In this chapter, I shall be concerned with the relationship between two dimensions of spiritual well-being: openness to aesthetic experience, and hope understood as a trait of character. For the most part, the experience of beauty in particular will provide the focus for our discussion, although on occasion our interest will be in aesthetic experience more generally. For present purposes, a spiritual ideal of life can be defined fairly minimally, as a vision of what it is to live well relative to some conception of the human condition and perhaps, in turn, some conception of the fundamental nature of things. The notion of spiritual “well-being” is to be understood similarly; that is, in terms of living successfully by reference to some conception of the human condition. As we shall see, Thomas Aquinas gives one way of filling out this account for a theistic reading of the human condition in particular.

In this context, the notion of “hope” is to be taken in a similarly broad way; that is, as a general disposition in life, rather than as pertaining simply to one or more isolated episodes of hopefulness, as when I hope that I will be able to make it to work on time today despite the Headingley traffic. When understood in this way, hope is capable, in principle, of serving as one of the core constituents of a well-lived life. Aquinas’s suggestion that hope concerns “a future good, arduous but possible to attain” provides a helpful specification of the target of hope in standard cases (Aquinas, 1947, ST 2a2ae 17. 1).

For present purposes, I shall mostly take for granted that the person whose relationship to the world is infused by hope enjoys to that extent a state of spiritual well-being, while the person who suffers a radical lack of hope is to that extent spiritually impoverished. In defense of this reading of the significance of hope, it is worth recalling that hope is, of course, a central value in traditional religious accounts of the spiritual life: in the Christian context, for example, it is one of the three theological virtues. (The *locus classicus* for this teaching is Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, ch. 13.) And it is not difficult to find secular accounts of spiritual well-being that share this commitment to hope as a key constituent of the well-lived life. See, for instance, Wielenberg’s (2005) defense of hope as a secular ideal of life and Cottingham’s (2009) theistic response.

Openness to the experience of beauty is also commonly regarded as significant for spiritual well-being. There is, for instance, a long-standing tradition of thinking of the divine or of fundamental reality otherwise conceived as in some sense beautiful and of human beings as able to apprehend, in some degree, that beauty. The single best-known example of this understanding is perhaps the account developed by the character of Diotima in the *Symposium*, a text whose influence on later philosophical theology has been pervasive, but a willingness to conceive of the divine nature in broadly aesthetic terms and to suppose that the divine beauty is revealed in some measure in the material world is also evident in, for example, biblically grounded accounts of the spiritual life (see, e.g., the much-cited words of Psalm 19: “the heavens declare the glory of the Lord”), and, once again, there are secular counterparts for these traditions. Sherry (2002) provides an instructive overview of ideals of beauty in biblical and theological tradition, and Wolterstorff (2004) explores the significance of aesthetic experience for secular forms of spirituality, noting for instance the quasi-religious seriousness that is characteristic of some forms of engagement with “high art.”

While hope and the experience of beauty both have some claim to be key constituents of the spiritual life, it is not just obvious, I take it, that there is any

deep-seated connection between them, so that the person of hope is more apt to experience beauty by virtue of being hopeful or that the person who is relatively susceptible to the experience of beauty is thereby disposed to be hopeful. In this chapter, I consider three ways of developing the idea that there is some such association between aesthetic experience and hope. If we can show that there is such a connection, then we will have a new appreciation of the significance of each for the spiritual life. For instance, if it turns out that the person who is relatively open to aesthetic experience is, to that extent, more likely to be hopeful, then openness to aesthetic experience will be important for spiritual well-being not only as one of its constituent elements, but also because of its contribution to the formation of hope.

So one aim of this chapter is to clarify the relationship between aesthetic experience and hope considered as constituents of spiritual well-being. In the course of the discussion, I shall draw on a variety of sources, including empirically informed and theological texts. And this diversity will enable us to address a further question concerning the contribution of different kinds of enquiry to the study of spiritual well-being. So, overall, the goal of the discussion is to examine the connection between two major dimensions of spiritual well-being—and in the process to consider the relationship between empirical and theological accounts of what it is to live well.

I begin by reviewing three accounts of the relationship between the experience of beauty and hope. I start by introducing a text from William James, where he considers the relationship between hope—or loss of hope—and the appearance of the everyday world. Then I turn to a recent study in empirical psychology of the relationship between hope and appreciation of beauty. And finally, I sketch a theological perspective on the relationship between hope and aesthetic experience. Having reviewed these methodologically diverse sources, I present some general conclusions about the respective contributions of different forms of enquiry to our understanding of the nature of spiritual well-being—and, in particular, the relationship between hope and sensitivity to beauty.

### **William James on Hope and Aesthetic Experience**

William James's classic text *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) is concerned not simply with experiences which are focally of God or sacred reality otherwise conceived but also with world-directed forms of religious

experience. And as we shall see, his discussion of this latter kind of experience bears very directly on the question of how we might conceive of the relationship between aesthetic experience, hope, and spiritual well-being. Let us approach these themes by first of all considering James's presentation of a secular example of the relationship between hope and the appearance of the everyday world. He writes,

In the practical life of the individual, we know how his whole gloom or glee about any present fact depends on the remoter schemes and hopes with which it stands related. Its significance and framing give it the chief part of its value. Let it be known to lead nowhere, and however agreeable it may be in its immediacy, its glow and gilding vanish. The old man, sick with an insidious internal disease, may laugh and quaff his wine at first as well as ever, but he knows his fate now, for the doctors have revealed it; and the knowledge knocks the satisfaction out of all these functions. They are partners of death and the worm is their brother, and they turn to a mere flatness. The lustre of the present hour is always borrowed from the background of possibilities it goes with. (James, 1902, p. 141)

On the view developed here, our ability to find objects in our environment of interest or significance is tied to our ability to locate them within a future-referenced narrative: these objects have import for us in so far as they form part of our own ongoing story. If that is so, James reasons, then when I learn that my death is imminent, so that there is no future for me, then my environment is liable to be drained of significance. And here he is describing the perceptual counterpart of that condition: as things cease to have practical significance for me because they are no longer folded into my future projects, so their appearance changes, with the result that the everyday perceptual world loses its "lustre."

It is natural to read James's talk of the "glow and gilding" of "present facts" as an allusion to the color or "hue" of the perceptual field. As he notes in the ensuing discussion, if a person is suffering from melancholy, then the world may appear to them as gray and lifeless. For such a person, James (1902, p. 151) comments, "the world now looks remote, strange, sinister, uncanny. Its color is gone, its breath is cold, there is no speculation in the eyes it glares with." (The closing phrase in this remark is of course an echo of Macbeth's address to the ghost in Act 3, Scene 4 of Shakespeare's play.) The experience of the old man in our text seems similarly to be one of the world as drained of color and significance.

We might take James to be referring to a similar but in principle distinguishable phenomenon when he speaks of how this man's relationship to the world has "turned to a mere flatness." In normal experience, the perceptual field is not only colored, rather than gray, but also structured, so that certain items stand out relative to others. And these patterns of salience reflect, of course, our assessment of the varying significance of things in our environment for our practical projects: we will be focally conscious of those things which we take to be in this respect most important, while others will be consigned to the periphery of our awareness. (In some cases, it may be better to say that patterns of salience constitute our assessment of the varying significance of items in our environment rather than reflecting some independently established sense of their import.) But when a person's practical relationship to the world has broken down, as it has for the man in James's text, then there will be no variation in the significance that attaches to the objects of experience because all such objects will then be equally devoid of practical import. And this truth, James seems to be suggesting, can be registered in experience, in the flatness of the perceptual field.

So this passage invites us to suppose that a loss of hope—here, the old man's loss of hope for his own future—can be associated with a change in the appearance of the everyday world, with the result that the world ceases to be an object of perceptual interest—and loses its capacity, therefore, to serve as a focus for aesthetic contemplation. As we might expect, James thinks that this correlation can also run in the other direction, from a renewal of hope to a restoration of the appearance of the everyday world. To understand this possibility, he turns to reports of conversion experience, noting that

When we come to study the phenomenon of conversion or religious regeneration, we shall see that a not infrequent consequence of the change operated in the subject is a transfiguration of the face of nature in his eyes. A new heaven seems to shine upon a new earth. (James, 1902, p. 151)

In striking contrast to the experience of the old man, in conversion experience, James is suggesting, everyday objects, including objects in the natural world, may appear brighter or more vivid. And we might suppose that in the convert's experience, these objects will also appear as more boldly defined so that the perceptual field is contoured rather than "flat."

For our purposes, we want to know, of course, whether this transformation in the appearance of the everyday world has an aesthetic dimension and

whether it is significantly related to a change in hope in rather the way that the experience of the sick man was, on James's account of the matter, a consequence of his loss of hope. Let's take these questions in turn.

When James speaks in this text of a "transfiguration in the face of nature" and of "a new heaven shining on a new earth," it is already at least implied that this renewal in the appearance of the everyday world is to be understood in aesthetic terms. He cites various reports of conversion experience that confirm this reading. One convert comments: "Natural objects were glorified, my spiritual vision was so clarified that I saw beauty in every material object in the universe" (James, 1902, p. 250). Another source writes: "Not for a moment only, but all day and night, floods of light and glory seemed to pour through my soul, and oh, how I was changed, and everything became new. My horses and hogs and even everybody seemed changed" (James, 1902, p. 250). And in a similar vein, the puritan theologian Jonathan Edwards, as cited by James, describes his conversion experience in these terms:

The appearance of everything was altered; there seemed to be, as it were, a calm, sweet cast, or appearance of divine glory, in almost everything. God's excellency, his wisdom, his purity and love, seemed to appear in everything; in the sun, moon, and stars; in the clouds and blue sky; in the grass, flowers, and trees; in the water and all nature; which used greatly to fix my mind. (pp. 248–249)

These texts speak of the everyday world, including "horses and hogs," and especially of the natural order, as newly glorified or infused with a kind of light following conversion. Of course, brightness or clarity has long been regarded as one of the defining qualities of beauty. See, for instance, Thomas Aquinas's suggestion that beauty consists in "brightness," *claritas*, together with "integrity" and "proportion" (1947, ST 1a 39. 8). And, among the divine attributes, it is perhaps the idea of divine "glory" which above all sustains the thought that the divine goodness has an aesthetic dimension. (Of course, believers also talk of divine beauty but this usage is, I take it, less common in, for example, biblically informed traditions.) It is significant, therefore, that these sources all speak of the world as newly glorified. It is also evident that what is being described is a change not in the world's intrinsic character but in its appearance to the convert. (See, e.g., Edwards's insistent use of the word "appear" and its cognates.) So these texts are concerned with the presentation of the world in perceptual terms to the properly appreciative viewer, and

aesthetic experience involves, of course, this same mode of engagement with sensory things.

Let's consider next whether James's discussion of conversion experience has some bearing on the connection between hope and aesthetic experience. In his account of the sick man, James invites us to suppose that hope, or lack of hope, can leak into the appearance of the everyday world. As he says, the man now knows that his present circumstances "lead nowhere." In short, this is a man who has ceased to find any practical significance in his environment and who is, to that extent, devoid of hope. In Aquinas's terms, for this man, it is no longer possible to attain the future good. And this hopelessness, James is suggesting, finds expression in his experience of the world, which now appears as flat and gray and can no longer serve, therefore, as an object of aesthetic contemplation. Might we consider conversion experience as the converse of this case, not only in so far as it involves a renewal in the appearance of the world, but also in so far as that change is driven by a restoration—rather than loss—of hope?

James gives us some reason to endorse this view. As we have seen, when discussing the case of the sick man, he notes that the "chief part" of the value of a "present fact" depends on its "framing." And he goes on to suggest that a person's framing or contextualizing of their experience of the everyday world can derive not only from their assessment of their worldly prospects, in medical or other terms, but also from their religious commitments. He develops the point in these remarks:

Let our common experiences be enveloped in an eternal moral order; let our suffering have an immortal significance; let Heaven smile upon the earth, and deities pay their visits; let faith and hope be the atmosphere which man breathes in;—and his days pass by with zest; they stir with prospects, they thrill with remoter values. Place round them on the contrary the curdling cold and gloom and absence of all permanent meaning which for pure naturalism and the popular science evolutionism of our time are all that is visible ultimately, and the thrill stops short, or turns rather to an anxious trembling. (1902, p. 141)

When set alongside James's discussion of the sick man, this passage suggests the following picture of the relationship between hope and aesthetic experience. A person's experience of the everyday world is framed by their "remoter schemes and hopes"—and these schemes and hopes can enter into



the appearance of the world through their contribution to the patterns of salience and hue of the perceptual field. Hence the sick man who no longer sees any enduring point in his current projects—and who is suffering, therefore, from a radical loss of hope—may find that the world has been drained of significance, where this change is registered in a loss of color and structure in the perceptual field. Conversely, the religiously committed person who breathes in an “atmosphere” of “faith and hope” and who takes their current endeavors to have a “permanent meaning” may find that their everyday environment acquires thereby a deepened significance. And, by analogy with the case of the sick man, we might suppose that this significance can also be registered directly in perceptual terms—only now, the world will appear as vivid rather than gray and as deeply contoured rather than flat. Arguably, this is exactly the sort of perceptual change that James’s converts are reporting when they take the world, post conversion, to be brighter and even newly “glorified.”

So James offers us one way of thinking of the relationship between hope and aesthetic experience and of the contribution of each to spiritual well-being. In general, the spiritual life requires, we might say, taking up some sort of practical stance in the world. And James’s discussion suggests that adopting any such stance depends on our capacity to live with at least a modicum of hope since hope is a condition of being practically oriented in our dealings with a given sensory context. And when we are so oriented, then the world will be perceptually engaging and, accordingly, at least potentially an object of aesthetic contemplation; when we are not, then the world is apt to appear flat and unsatisfactory. This account contrasts rather strikingly with the traditional emphasis in aesthetic theory on the idea that the object of aesthetic experience should be appreciated simply for itself and independently of any reference to its practical import. A classic account of this sort can be found in Clive Bell’s (1913) text *Art*. The implication of James’s discussion seems to be that even if the immediate object of aesthetic experience is not appreciated as an object of use, it is still necessary that the perceiver’s relation to the wider world should not be drained of practical significance.

In the *Varieties*, James is mostly interested in experiences of conversion which are not directly under the person’s control. But elsewhere—notably in his 1896 essay “The Will to Believe”—he allows that religious commitments can be chosen, whether directly or indirectly. And if we combine these accounts, then we might suppose that religious commitments can play an important therapeutic role in human life: on this view, by choosing to frame our

experience in the terms provided by a religious narrative, we may be able to gain access to an enlivened perceptual world. And if that is so, then we may have a good practical reason so to choose. However, these matters lie beyond the scope of our present discussion.

### **An Empirical Approach to Beauty Experience, Hope, and Well-Being**

I shall return to James's discussion of the relationship between hope and the experience of beauty at various points in the remaining discussion. But first of all, let's consider a modern empirical study of the relationship between hope and aesthetic experience. Rhett Diessner and his colleagues have addressed these matters using what they call the Engagement with Beauty Scale (EBS)—an instrument for measuring beauty experience of their own devising. Let us begin by taking note of some key features of this instrument.

When completing the EBS, subjects are asked to score their responses to various observations concerning three kinds of beauty: what Diessner calls natural, moral, and artistic beauty (Diessner, Solom, Frost, Parsons, & Davidson, 2008). These scores are recorded on a 7-point scale, running from "very unlike me" to "very much like me." For each of the three varieties of beauty, there are standardly four observations of the following form. (Here I have taken the case of natural beauty as representative of the general approach.)

1. I *notice beauty* in one or more aspects of nature.
2. When *perceiving beauty* in nature, I *feel* changes in my body, such as a lump in my throat, an expansion in my chest, faster heart beat, or other bodily responses.
3. When *perceiving beauty* in nature, I *feel* emotional, it "moves me," such as feeling a sense of awe, or wonder or excitement or admiration or upliftment.
4. When *perceiving beauty* in nature I *feel* something like a spiritual experience, perhaps a sense of oneness, or being united with the universe, or a love of the entire world (Diessner et al., 2008, p. 329, emphasis in the original).

It is clear, then, that the EBS is intended to track both a person's propensity to notice beauty and their tendency to respond to the experience

of beauty with feeling. Hence, as its name indicates, the scale aims to record “engagement” with (and not simply perception of) beauty: the higher a person’s scores across these four observations, the more deeply they will have engaged with the relevant kind of beauty. It is notable that the experience of beauty is here tied to “spiritual experience,” which in turn is related to a conception of the fundamental nature of things: see, for example, the idea that beauty experience may be connected to or involve “a sense of being united to the universe.” So, in this respect, Diessner’s notion of the “spiritual” is broadly comparable to the one that we have been using in our earlier discussion. Having introduced the EBS, let us now return to the question of how we are to understand the relationship between hope and the experience of beauty.

In a 2006 paper, Diessner and his co-investigators describe how they used the EBS to study this relationship. Twenty-nine students were invited to complete the EBS and then to keep a weekly log of their experiences of beauty over a 12-week period. For each week of the study, the students were asked to complete this task: “Describe something you *felt* was beautiful . . .” (Diessner, Rust, Solon, Frost, & Parsons, 2006, p. 309, emphasis in the original) and to write between three sentences and three paragraphs in their log for each of the cases of natural, artistic, and moral/behavioral beauty. At each of the weekly meetings of the class, the instructor would invite three students to read aloud from their log entry for that week, so the class would hear, each week, a description of one example of beauty experience for each of the categories of natural, artistic, and behavioral beauty. Finally, at the close of the semester, 1 week after the submission of their concluding log, the students completed the EBS once again.

At the beginning and end of the study, the students also completed the Adult Dispositional (Trait) Hope Scale (Snyder et al., 1991). Diessner notes that this measure aims to capture hope along two dimensions: “goal directed determination (agency) and the ability to plan ways for meeting one’s goals (pathways)” (Diessner et al., 2006, p. 308). (Hence the aim of the scale is to record both attachment to ends and the capacity to identify appropriate means for the achievement of those ends. Clearly, hope is being understood here as a general disposition, or trait of character, in keeping with the perspective that we have adopted in this discussion.) Finally, in addition to the experiment group, there was a comparison group, comprising 23 students, who did not participate in the log exercise but did complete the EBS and Hope Scale at the same times as the first cohort.

Diessner and his colleagues note that their study aimed to test these three hypotheses:

(1) College students who experience 12 weekly activities for engaging with natural, artistic and moral beauty will experience a significant increase in their trait hope; (2) Trait hope will significantly correlate with college students' levels of engagement with natural, artistic and moral beauty, as measured by the total score on the Engagement with Beauty Scale . . . (3) College students who experience 12 weekly activities for engaging with natural, artistic and moral beauty will develop higher levels of engagement with natural, artistic and moral beauty. (Diessner et al., 2006, p. 307)

With respect to (1), the research team concluded that participation in the weekly activities was correlated with an increase in hope, as measured on Snyder's scale: there was a significant rise in that trait in the intervention but not in the comparison group (Diessner et al., 2006, p. 311). Regarding (2), they found that there was a significant correlation between agential (rather than pathways) hope and engagement with moral beauty and beauty overall as measured by the EBS (Diessner et al., 2006, p. 311). This reflects, they surmise, the mostly conative character of agential hope, as compared with the more cognitive nature of pathways hope. (The distinction between these two dimensions of hope is grounded, I take it, in a distinction between means and ends, where grasping the necessary means involves knowledge of the relevant cause–effect relations and is, to that extent, cognitive, whereas grasping the end as an end requires only that one be attracted to it and is, to that extent, primarily conative.) Last, with respect to the third hypothesis, the team found that participating in the weekly exercises was significantly correlated with increased engagement with moral beauty but not with natural or artistic beauty.

While the investigators declined to make any causal claims on the basis of their study, it would be natural to take these findings to show that participation in the weekly exercise was not just correlated with an increase in hope and in engagement with moral beauty—see the first and third findings—but also, whether directly or indirectly, the cause of these changes. After all, the experimental setup was designed to ensure that any difference between the experimental and comparison groups, other than the first group's participation in the weekly exercises, would be irrelevant to any change in their

relative hopefulness or relative engagement with beauty across the course of the study. (If these changes could be explained by reference to the demographic of the groups, then the study would cease to be of interest, of course, as a measure of the relationship between participation in the weekly exercises and the tendency to be hopeful or engaged by beauty.) So if the increase in hope and engagement with moral beauty in the experimental but not the comparison group is to be explained at all, then, *prima facie*, it seems that there is only one difference to which we can appeal: namely, participation in the weekly exercises. The experimenters note that they feel unable to represent the connection with increased engagement with beauty and increased hope as causal because the students were not assigned to the experimental and comparison groups on a random basis. (The experimental and control groups were simply drawn from different classes of the same course; see Diessner et al., 2006, p. 307.) However, they do allow that the study “lends credence to” the idea that engaging in the log exercise produces an increase in hope (p. 311).

More speculatively, we might suppose that there is an explanatory link running from participation in the exercises to increased engagement with moral beauty and from there to increased agential hope. There is some reason to think in these terms because the students participating in the exercises were, after all, required to attend to moral beauty on a weekly basis over a period of some 3 months and there would be no cause for surprise if repeatedly attending to moral beauty in this regular, focused way, even if only for a short time each week, should produce, by the close of the study, an increased disposition to notice and respond to moral beauty even if this change were to prove relatively short-lived. It is not too difficult, then, to see how participation in the log exercise might produce an increase in sensitivity to beauty, given that attending to beauty in this structured way may be in some measure habit-forming, at least in the short run.

Moreover, given the form of the EBS questionnaire, it is relatively easy to see why increased sensitivity to, say, moral beauty may in turn involve (rather than cause) an increase in hope. The first four observations on the EBS regarding the experience of moral beauty read as follows:

9. I notice *moral beauty* in human beings.
10. When *perceiving* an act of *moral beauty* I feel changes in my body, such as a lump in my throat, an expansion in my chest, faster heart beat, or other bodily responses.

11. When *perceiving* an act of *moral beauty* I *feel* emotional, it “moves me,” such as feeling a sense of awe, or wonder or excitement or admiration or upliftment.
12. When *perceiving* an act of *moral beauty* I *feel* something like a spiritual experience, perhaps a sense of oneness, or being united with the universe, or a love of the entire world. (Diessner et al., 2006, p. 329, emphasis in the original)

So the person who scores highly for sensitivity to moral beauty is to that extent likely to register a relatively high score for these observations. That is, they are relatively likely to notice moral beauty, and, when noticing moral beauty, they are in turn relatively likely to experience positive emotions such as “wonder” and “upliftment” and to enjoy a felt sense of identification with the world, or a felt sense of the goodness of the world, and to experience correlative bodily changes. But if one person is in general more likely than another to experience such emotions and associated bodily responses—whether because they are more likely to notice moral beauty, or because when they notice moral beauty they are more likely to have such experiences, or for some combinations of these reasons—then, other things being equal, should we not think of this first person as the more hopeful of the two given simply what we mean by “hope” in this context?

It is worth recalling here that for the purposes of this enquiry, “hope” signifies not simply an occasional or localized attitude, but a generalized demeanor in life, one which is broadly positive about how events will turn out—or, at least, broadly positive about the spirit in which events may be received, however they turn out. And, if that is so, then the connection between increased sensitivity to moral beauty, as understood on the EBS, and increased hope will turn out to be at least in part analytic (i.e., true by virtue of the definition of relevant terms) given that a high score for engagement with moral beauty on the EBS will typically involve a high score for traits that in part comprise generalized hope of this kind: namely, traits such as the propensity to feel “love of the entire world,” or “awe” and “upliftment.”

In these ways, we can construct a narrative that goes beyond the relationship of succession that Diessner et al. report: there is reason to suppose not simply that participation in the weekly exercises is followed by an increase in hope and an increase in engagement with moral beauty, but also that it is the cause of the increased engagement with moral beauty, which in turn helps to explain, analytically rather than simply causally, the increase in hope. In this

way, we can also understand the second of Diessner's findings concerning the correlation between hope and engagement with beauty overall as measured by the EBS. In brief, the connection between engagement with beauty, as measured by the EBS, and hope should be seen, once again, as at least in part analytic: since this study takes "engagement" with beauty to be realized in experiences of "awe," "wonder," and so on, there is some reason to expect an association between such engagement and the conative dimension of hope in particular, by virtue simply of what we mean by hope in this context.

Allowing for all of this, it is natural to wonder why participation in the weekly exercises correlates with a higher score for engagement with moral beauty but not a higher score for engagement with natural or artistic beauty. There are, no doubt, various ways in which we might try to account for this discrepancy, and, for present purposes, we do not need to reach a view on the matter. Most simply, we might wonder if participants in the study had more of an opportunity to observe moral rather than natural or artistic beauty. If even simple actions like holding open a door for someone can count as instances of moral beauty, then in a campus environment (as elsewhere), there should be an abundance of opportunities in everyday life to observe moral beauty. By contrast, if the campus is relatively built-up or if students spend much of their time indoors, then a university environment may afford relatively little opportunity to observe natural beauty. And if paintings or other works of art are not much in evidence on the campus, then they may have similarly limited opportunity to engage with artistic beauty. If there is any such difference in the relative incidence of moral, natural, and artistic beauty in the university environment, that would help to explain why the process of habituation we postulated earlier may operate more readily for moral rather than natural or artistic beauty, so that participation in the study results in an increase in engagement with moral beauty but not with natural or artistic beauty. In thinking about why participation in the log exercise should be correlated with an increased engagement with moral but not natural or artistic beauty, it may also be relevant to note that, for the case of moral beauty, but not natural or artistic beauty, the EBS contains two additional observations along with the four standard observations we noted above, namely:

13. When perceiving an act of moral beauty I find that I desire to become a better person.
14. When perceiving an act of moral beauty I find that I desire to do good deeds and increase my service to others (Diessner et al., 2006, p. 329).

But again, these matters are not our immediate concern, so let us return to the main thread of our account.

As we have seen, in his discussion of the old man, William James presents a narrative that runs from the experience of loss of hope, to a state of practical disorientation, to an impoverishment of the perceptual world. And, conversely, in his discussion of religious experience, he points to the possibility of a narrative that runs from a restoration of hope (including here religiously grounded hope) to a revivification of the perceptual world, where this change in the world's appearance may have a strongly aesthetic character. In their discussion, Diessner and his colleagues are moving, I have been suggesting, in the opposite direction. Their study invites us to suppose that attending to beauty and reflecting on the experience of beauty in a regular, disciplined way may result in a greater propensity to engage with beauty (in particular, with moral beauty), which may in turn be associated with an increase in hope.

James and Diessner agree that hope is important for human well-being. For James, as we have seen, it is closely tied to the capacity to orient oneself in the world in practical terms. And, at the beginning of their paper, Diessner (2006, p. 301) and his colleagues remark that: "Hope correlates with, and may be necessary for, academic success, athletic achievement, various forms of social development, as well as the development of optimism and general happiness." Hence on this view, hope appears to be integral to the well-lived human life across a wide range of domains. And for both James and Diessner, it follows that an understanding of the nature and preconditions of hope can guide therapeutic interventions aimed at improving human well-being. For James, it seems that such interventions should start with the attempt to engender hope, which may in turn lead to an enhancement of the person's life-world. As we have seen, Diessner's account invites a movement in the other direction. (His paper is aptly entitled: "Beauty and Hope: A Moral Beauty Intervention.") On this approach, the person who undertakes the necessary practical exercises can become more fully engaged with beauty, and, in turn, they may then be more hopeful—and in so far as we take this connection between beauty engagement and hope to be analytic, then we should say that this increased disposition to engage with beauty involves of itself an increase in hope.

I shall develop a fuller account of the relationship between James's and Diessner's discussions at the close of this chapter. But first let us examine one further way of understanding the relationship between hope and aesthetic



experience and the significance of both for spiritual well-being. Here I turn to a theological perspective.

### A Theological Approach

I am going to begin this review of the relevance of theological sources for our theme by presenting one theologically informed account of the nature of spiritual well-being. For this purpose, I shall draw on the work of Thomas Aquinas, but it is not difficult, I suggest, to find close counterparts for his approach in a range of other religious traditions, including non-Christian traditions. So this discussion of the structure of the spiritual life, from the vantage point of religious traditions, is intended to be of general import. Having introduced this understanding of the nature of spiritual goods, we can then develop a further, theologically informed account of the relationship between aesthetic experience and hope to set alongside the two accounts we have already discussed.

At the core of any Christian account of the nature of the good or worthwhile human life will stand a conception of neighbor love and, accordingly, a consideration of Aquinas's understanding of the structure of the spiritual life might very naturally start here, with his account of neighbor love. Of course, Christians have thought of neighbor love as good and indeed, for themselves, as obligatory for a variety of reasons. Most simply, Christians are bound to think of this way of life as required, for them, because it is after all mandated by Jesus (see, e.g., Mark 12:31). While he accepts, naturally, that neighbor love is binding upon Christians for this reason, Aquinas provides a further rationale for its status—as obligatory—in the Christian understanding of the good life when speaking of neighbor love as a theological virtue.

In *Summa Theologiae* 2a2ae 25. 4, Aquinas puts to himself a question about the scope of neighbor love by asking whether it extends to our enemies, to ourselves, our bodies, the angels, and so on. In general terms, his answer is that I am to treat as my neighbor any creature who will share in the beatific vision. Here, for example, is his answer to the question of whether the angels properly fall within the scope of neighbor love. While this question may not seem to be of any very pressing importance from the perspective of our own time, Aquinas's answer is representative of what he says when determining the proper limits of neighbor love in other cases and is worth considering at least for that reason.

As stated above (Question [23], Article [1]), the friendship of charity is founded upon the fellowship of everlasting happiness, in which men share in common with the angels. For it is written (Mt. 22:30) that “in the resurrection . . . men shall be as the angels of God in heaven.” It is therefore evident that the friendship of charity extends also to the angels. (ST 2a2ae 25. 10, ellipsis in the original)

We are all familiar with the idea that truths about the history of our relationship to another person can shape the character of our moral relations with them in the present. (To take a simple example, if I have wronged someone, say, by breaking a promise, then, *prima facie*, I have a reason to make good that wrong in the present if there is an opportunity to do so at least by offering an apology and perhaps by other means.) In this passage, Aquinas seems to be envisaging another, less familiar kind of connection. Perhaps future-referenced, or eschatological, truths concerning our relationship with others can also shape the character of our moral relations with them in the present. Here, Aquinas’s suggestion seems to be that if, in the eschatological future, the angels will share with us in a “fellowship of everlasting happiness,” then that establishes the appropriateness of a certain attitude toward them here and now. The same kind of reasoning will apply to our dealings with our fellow human beings, he thinks—and accordingly, we have a duty to extend the love of neighbor to them as well as to the angels.

There are obvious practical reasons why future-referenced truths do not in fact play much of a role in shaping our sense of our moral relations to others since the future is, of course, from our human vantage point, very often uncertain. But the considerations that make it appropriate for me to apologize in the present for being the source of a past wrong would presumably make it appropriate for me to apologize in the present for being the source of a future wrong were I to know of that wrong in the present. For instance, if I were to know here and now that I will culpably harm another person, then it seems that, other things being equal, I have a reason to apologize to them here and now, if there is an opportunity to do so. (Of course, there is an air of paradox in the idea that I might in the present disavow an action that I will myself freely perform at a later time. But let us bracket that point.)

The case that concerns Aquinas is not quite so straightforward as that of harm, but it is not too difficult to think of parallels between his example of eschatological friendship and morally significant truths concerning the past. If I once had a close friendship with someone, one that involved sharing in

fundamental goods, then there is ready moral sense in the idea that I can be called upon to act in certain ways in the present as a condition of honoring that friendship. And we might suppose that this is so even if the friendship has now lapsed. Analogously, Aquinas seems to be proposing that a future truth concerning my friendship with another rational creature, where that friendship involves sharing in a uniquely profound good, namely the vision of God or participation in the divine life, in a further, postmortem state, can also call for practical acknowledgment in the present. Neighbor love, he suggests, is itself a form of friendship (ST 2a2ae 23.1) and its appropriateness is grounded in a prospective and perfected friendship that we will enjoy in our relations with others in the beatific vision.

The relationship between truths concerning my friendship with another person, whether in the past or the future, and the kind of conduct that I am called to exhibit in my relations with them in the present seems to be broadly one of existential congruence. If I know that a person has been or will be my friend, then my conduct toward them in the present is in principle open to assessment as being more or less adequate, more or less fitting—more or less congruent—relative to those truths about our friendship. These considerations need not, of course, be overriding, but they can form part of the mix of reasons that are relevant to the question of how I should relate myself to another person in the present. It is also worth being clear that, on this account of the matter, my treatment of my neighbor counts as appropriate not by virtue of making certain outcomes more likely (not, for instance, by making it more likely that I will attain the beatific vision or that my neighbor will do so), but because in this way I am able to give due acknowledgment to the truth that I will one day share with other human beings, and the angels, in the fundamental good of the vision of God. In this sense, the appropriateness of my action is more existential than causal: existential and causal ways of determining the appropriateness of a course of action are alike tied to an assessment of the future, but only the second case is concerned with bringing about a particular future.

While Aquinas's discussion of neighbor love turns on the idea of the beatific vision in particular, what matters for our purposes is the structure of his account, especially in so far as it involves the notion of existential congruence—a notion which could be employed by a spiritual tradition with very different metaphysical commitments. It is worth adding that, for Aquinas himself, the ideal of neighbor love can be grounded, it seems, not only in the claim that we will one day share with others in the beatific vision,

but also in the more modest proposal that it is possible that we will do so. In the article that follows the passage I have quoted here, Aquinas (ST 2a2ae 25. 11 ad 2) writes: “In this life, men who are in sin retain the possibility of obtaining everlasting happiness: not so those who are lost in hell, who, in this respect, are in the same case as the demons.” And, in the same article, he notes that for a person to be entitled to neighbor love, it is enough for them to “retain the possibility” of sharing in the beatific vision. Accordingly, if we take this text as our starting point, then we may wish to say that the relevant theological teaching against which we are to measure our relations to others in the present is not the claim that we will one day share with them in the beatific vision, but the claim that it is possible, metaphysically, that we will do so. The case I develop here could also be formulated in these terms.

Aquinas’s discussion of neighbor love falls within his wider account of the nature of the well-lived human life. Following Aristotle, Aquinas supposed, of course, that there are acquired moral virtues, produced by a process of habituation, where the measure of success in our dealings with the world is provided by our human nature. And in keeping with theological tradition, he thought that there are, in addition, theological virtues, which relate the person directly to God. Finally, alongside these two categories of virtue, he is proposing that there are also virtues which relate a person to God indirectly, that is, via their relation to the created world. Distinguishing between the latter two cases, he writes that the theological virtues

. . . are enough to shape us to our supernatural end as a start, that is, to God himself immediately and to none other. Yet the soul needs also to be equipped by infused virtues in regard to created things, though as subordinate to God. (Aquinas, ST 1a2ae 63.3 ad.2)

Let us call these further virtues that enable the person to relate to created things “as subordinate to God” *infused moral virtues*. While Aquinas does not classify neighbor love as an infused moral virtue, it is clear that neighbor love resembles these virtues in being directed at goods which have a hybrid character when compared with the goods of the acquired moral and the theological virtues: that is to say, the goods of the infused moral virtues are like the goods of the acquired moral virtues in so far as they concern the person’s relation to the created order, but, at the same time, they are grounded in a God-directed teleology and in this respect resemble the goods of the theological virtues.

So, in brief, the goods of the infused moral virtues and of neighbor love considered as an infused moral virtue are realized in so far as a person succeeds in their relations to the created order (here like the acquired moral virtues), where the measure of success in those relations is provided by relationship to God (here like the theological virtues). The notion of infused moral virtue serves, then, as a conceptual hinge, allowing Aquinas to bring together Aristotle's account of the well-lived human life and the account of the theological virtues that he had inherited from his theological forebears. Let us refer to the goods of the infused moral virtues, therefore, as "hybrid goods" to mark the fact that they concern our relations to created things, where the measure of appropriateness in our dealings with these things is provided by our theological context as disclosed in revelation. As we have seen, appropriateness in this context can be understood in terms of existential congruence rather than causal efficacy. In sum, at the core of the Christian ideal of the spiritual life stands the practice of neighbor love, which is directed at various hybrid goods in so far as it is concerned with our relations to other human beings, here and now, where the measure of success in those relations is provided by the narrative of the beatific vision and, in turn, therefore, by relationship to God.

We have been considering a theological account of spiritual well-being that turns on the idea of hybrid goods and the associated idea that our relations to the world can be more or less appropriate relative to our theological context. Let us consider next the relevance of this general approach for an appreciation of the contribution of aesthetic goods to the spiritual life. Aquinas's account of neighbor love invites us to suppose that a person's thoughts, feelings, attitudes, desires, and behavior are all open to assessment as more or less adequate relative to theological context. But his discussion and standard treatments of the idea of neighbor love do not, so far as I can see, touch on the idea that the quality of a person's perception of the world can also be assessed in these terms. If our perceptual experience can be deemed more or less appropriate on theological grounds, then we will have a further sphere of life in addition to those provided by our behavior, attitudes, and so on within which hybrid goods can in principle be realized. Let us think further about this possibility.

As we have seen in our earlier discussion, in our everyday dealings with the world, some objects stand out as relatively salient while others are consigned to the margins of our awareness. Implied in a given ordering of the perceptual field of this kind is a judgment about what is properly deserving

of attention. And accordingly, we can assess patterns of salience in moral and theological terms: a given pattern will be morally appropriate in so far as it affords most prominence to those objects that for moral reasons are most deserving of attention and will be theologically fitting in so far as the salience of objects tracks their importance relative to the relevant theological narrative.

It may be that we can understand the experiences reported by James's converts in these terms. As we have seen, these experiences are not directly of God, so they are capable, in principle, of realizing hybrid goods. For instance, we might suppose that in the convert's experience, the patterns of salience that inform the perceptual field conform to a divinely ordered hierarchy of values, so that what stands out in the perceptual field is what is deserving of attention given the relevant theological truths. To the extent that the world's appearance is so structured, then it will hold up a kind of mirror to the divine mind: the relative significance of objects, as is recorded in the patterns of salience that inform the perceptual field, will match the importance those objects hold from the divine vantage point. This is one way of understanding Jonathan Edwards's comment that, following his conversion, God's wisdom "seemed to appear in everything." Perhaps we can make sense of this remark, at least in part, by supposing that the patterns of salience that are inscribed in the perceptual field can track the relative importance of objects in the divine conception of the world. In such a case, the world as it appears would indeed present a kind of image of the divine wisdom.

In the same sort of way, we might suppose that the perceptual field can more fully image a divine scale of values when the patterns of salience by which it is structured become, in general, bolder or more sharply defined. After all, if the perceptual field is relatively flat, then it will fail to register any significant variation in the importance of objects. And this, we might suppose, must contrast with the divine perspective on the world, which involves, surely, a profound sense of the differentiated significance of things. Accordingly, we might suppose that, in relevant cases, the convert's experience will involve a generalized deepening in the patterns of salience that inform the perceptual field and that, in this way, too, it is possible for the divine wisdom to shine through the appearance of the everyday world.

Perhaps we can give a similar account when thinking about the change in hue that seems to be a recurring feature of conversion reports. As we have seen, these reports speak of the world as seeming brighter following conversion, or as newly "glorified." In this respect, too, it seems that we can assess the appearance of the world as more or less fitting relative to our theological

context. For if the world is divinely created, and if it bears in some degree the vestiges of its divine origins, then it might be said that it is, to that extent, only appropriate that it should appear to us as bright or vivid rather than as dull or lacking in lustre.

In these various ways, we can give some content to the idea that a person's experience of the everyday world can, in principle, be judged as more or less adequate relative to their theological context. And if that is right, then hybrid goods can be realized not only in our world-directed thoughts, behavior, and attitudes, but also with respect to the quality of our perception of the sensory world. Moreover, as we have seen, it seems clear that the new appearance of the world following conversion typically has a strongly aesthetic dimension: converts report that the world seems newly beautiful, or newly glorified, or, as James puts the point in his summation of such reports, as "transfigured" or such that "a new heaven seems to shine upon a new earth." In such cases, the alignment between the person's perception of the world and the relevant theological narrative will have an aesthetic dimension. Let us think a little more closely about the nature of the aesthetic goods that arise in such cases.

The newly brightened appearance of the world, as described by converts, could be regarded as beautiful, no doubt, from a purely secular point of view. Similarly, we might think of the bolder, more vivid definition of the contents of the perceptual field as aesthetically pleasing independently of reference to theological considerations. But it is also clear that at least some converts see the world in its post-conversion guise as beautiful because of its participation in the divine beauty or divine glory. Hence Edwards writes that "there seemed to be, as it were, a calm, sweet cast, or appearance of divine glory, in almost everything." And as we have seen, James remarks that the experience can be represented in terms of a new heaven seeming to shine upon a new earth. The language of "glory" also invites the thought that the new-found beauty of the world involves in some way a breaking in of the divine beauty. If we take these reports at face value, as a record of the phenomenology of the relevant experiences, then there is some reason to say that, in the experience of the convert, the world is found to be beautiful because of its perceived relation to a primordial divine beauty. To the extent that these experiences are to be read in these terms, then we should say that this new-found beauty has inherently a theological structure: this experience of beauty consists, at least in part, in material objects appearing as translucent to their divine source. Conceived in these terms, the aesthetic goods that arise in conversion cannot

be adequately identified using a purely secular vocabulary since the beauty that is disclosed in such experiences has inherently, from the vantage point of the experiencer, a theological structure.

Once again, we can try to make sense of this possibility by reference to the notions of salience and hue. For instance, as we have seen, we might understand the convert's report that the sensory world appears as diaphanous to the beauty of the divine nature by supposing that their perceptual field now conforms to a divinely ordered scale of values, so that the world as it appears to them images the divine vantage point on the world. If that conformity of the world's appearance to the divine mind is at least a possibility, then we can make some sense of the idea that the divine nature might in some way be disclosed in or, to use a language that is closer to our sources, shine through the appearance of the everyday world. In this way, we can understand how the convert's experience is capable of realizing an aesthetically charged hybrid good: their world-directed experience is now congruent with their theological context because aligned with a divinely ordered scale of values, and, as a result, the divine nature—and the divine beauty—can now shine through the appearance of the everyday world.

It is worth noting that these theologically constituted aesthetic goods are, potentially, both pervasive and deep—pervasive because they can be realized, in principle, whenever we perceive the world, which is to say in much of our experience, and deep because they concern the appropriateness of our lives as perceivers not simply in relation to some finite good or localized context, but with respect to the divine good and our ultimate context. Accordingly, there is some reason to suppose that if they arise at all, then these perceptual hybrid goods will be of fundamental importance for spiritual well-being.

Drawing on the ideal of neighbor love, we have been considering Aquinas's account of the structure of hybrid goods and, in turn, the nature of spiritual well-being, and the ways in which aesthetic experience may contribute to human well-being so conceived. We have yet to examine the implications of this approach for an account of the relationship between hope and aesthetic experience. A full treatment of these matters would require a detailed discussion of Aquinas's conception of faith. We can note at least the main outlines of that conception here. Aquinas is clear that faith (or at least, the right kind of faith: what he calls "formed" faith) is voluntary. (For the distinction between formed and unformed faith, see *Summa Theologiae* 2a2ae 4.3.) And accordingly, belief in the articles of faith, such as the life of the resurrection, is



voluntary, rather than the product of a compelling argument of some sort. So the person who orders their life around the realization of those hybrid goods that will be possible if there is a beatific vision is to that extent motivated by hope, rather than by simple belief as conventionally understood. After all, belief as ordinarily understood (for instance, my belief that there is a computer before me now or that Brisbane is the capital of Queensland) cannot be produced at will. So, on this picture, we should say that the Christian—with the aid, of course, of God's grace—chooses to commit themselves to the truth of the doctrine of the beatific vision in a spirit of hope. And accordingly their pursuit of those hybrid goods that will be realizable should the doctrine prove to be true is also grounded in theological hope.

Here, then, is another way of understanding the relationship between hope, the experience of beauty, and spiritual well-being. In brief, for Aquinas, the Christian accepts the idea of the beatific vision and the other elements of the Christian story in a spirit of hope. And this commitment in turn grounds their pursuit of those hybrid goods that will be realizable should the Christian story hold true. And these goods, I have been suggesting (here extending Aquinas's own account), include, in principle, not only behavioral and attitudinal but also perceptual and aesthetic goods, which arise in so far as the appearance of the everyday world is congruent with the relevant theological narrative. In the case of conversion experience, we can bring these themes together by supposing that when the believer takes the sensory world to be transparent to the divine beauty, they commit themselves thereby, in a spirit of hope, to the truth of the idea of divine glory.

We have been examining three methodologically diverse accounts of the relationship between hope, the experience of beauty, and spiritual well-being. In conclusion, let us consider more closely how these approaches compare with one another and what the contribution of each might be.

### **Comparing Empirical and Theological Perspectives on Hope, the Experience of Beauty, and Spiritual Well-Being**

Let us begin by considering the nature of spiritual well-being, starting with the perspective of William James. In the *Varieties* as more generally, James is writing most fundamentally as a psychologist. And the values and disvalues which he discusses in the *Varieties* can all be identified, I suggest, in psychological terms. The sick man suffers from a state of practical disorientation and

an impoverishment of his perceptual world. And, conversely, the person who enjoys a state of well-being is practically oriented and experiences the world as colored rather than gray and contoured rather than flat. These accounts of well-being or lack of well-being do not depend on any metaphysical story: a psychological vocabulary and reference to what is manifest directly in experience will suffice to pick out the relevant goods and bads.

Of course, James does allow that the holding of a religious worldview can make a difference to well-being, but for him the role of a worldview seems to be simply to provide a way of framing our relationship to the world, which in turn will enable our practical and perceptual engagement with our sensory environment: on this view, therefore, religious states of affairs do not feature as constituents of well-being. Instead beliefs about such states of affairs can serve as enablers of well-being, and those beliefs can play this role whether or not they are true. So while he is concerned with the contribution of religious commitment to spiritual well-being, James's approach is to this extent psychological: his interest is in the connection between a person's framing beliefs and the way the world appears to them, and for this purpose it is of no consequence whether or not those beliefs are true.

By contrast, on the Thomistic view of spiritual well-being, we cannot specify the relevant goods—what I have been calling hybrid goods—independently of reference to the appropriate theological narrative. Why not? Because here the goods consist in the alignment between the person's world-directed thoughts, activity, and (to take the case that has been of particular concern to us) perception of the everyday world, on the one side, and a given theological narrative, on the other. So, on this account, it matters that the relevant theological narrative should be true. For example, in our account of the ways in which perceptual states may in part constitute hybrid goods, we have appealed to theological claims such as these: the world is created; from the divine perspective, creatures carry a clearly differentiated significance; and the divine nature is glorious. And hybrid goods will arise in so far as a person's world-directed thought, activity, and so on are congruent with the states of affairs recorded in these and other doctrinal claims. And in turn, therefore, these goods cannot be identified, at least not in terms of their fundamental nature, independently of reference to theological context.

For some perceptual hybrid goods, the person's experience need not extend to any item picked out in the relevant theological narrative. Suppose, for instance, that a person's experience of the world is contoured rather than flat. Even if that experience has no religious content, then it will to that extent

realize a hybrid good since it will then conform to the divine assessment of the significance of creatures for the reasons we have discussed. The kind of experience described by, among others, Jonathan Edwards is rather different in this respect: here, it seems to the subject of the experience that the divine wisdom is presented to them in perceptual terms. So in this case, it is not just that the appearance of the world is theologically appropriate: in addition, the congruence between the world's appearance and the relevant theological truth is revealed directly to the person in experience. (Here I simply presuppose that the presentation of a theological truth in experience is reason enough for thinking of the experience as congruent with that truth.)

In sum, the practical and perceptual benefits that provide the focus for James's account of spiritual well-being may perhaps be induced by adopting a religious worldview, but they can obtain independently of the truth of any such worldview and can be identified independently of reference to any such worldview. By contrast, on Aquinas's view, spiritual well-being involves in large part hybrid goods. So on this approach, spiritual well-being requires, to this extent, the truth of the relevant theological narratives and cannot be identified independently of such narratives. Naturally, Diessner's understanding of well-being shares the psychological focus of James's account. As we have seen from his discussion of hope, he thinks of well-being as including "academic success, athletic achievement, various forms of social development, as well as the development of optimism and general happiness." Diessner does not include religious commitments in this list but, from his perspective, they could presumably play a Jamesian kind of role in contributing to well-being so understood.

So, in general terms, our discussion points to a basic distinction between empirical and theological approaches to the nature of well-being. As described here, both are concerned with well-being that is realized here and now in our relations to the everyday world, but, by contrast with empirical approaches, the theological perspective that we have been sketching is committed to the transcendent dimension of some of the relevant goods. It is worth emphasizing that these accounts are not in competition with one another to the extent that one and the same state of affairs may realize both kinds of good. On the Thomistic view that we have been considering here, the goods that are the province of psychology can be conceptualized in broadly Aristotelian terms, and hybrid goods do not disrupt those Aristotelian goods since they are concerned with a further kind of significance that can attach to our everyday activities, in addition to Aristotelian kinds of significance.

Hence, for example, a brightened perceptual field can count as good both as a psychological state and because of its contribution to a hybrid good. To put the point in the form of a general principle—here borrowing a remark from Aquinas (ST 1a 1.8 ad 2)—we may say that on this approach “grace does not destroy nature but perfects it.”

So far, we have been considering empirical and theological perspectives on the nature of well-being. To conclude, let us note how these different kinds of source understand the relationship between the two constituents of well-being with which we have been concerned here, namely, hope and aesthetic experience.

As we have seen, Diessner’s paper investigates the possibility that beauty experience and hope are correlated. Since this is an empirical study, the underlying assumption seems to be that any connection between the two will not turn out to be simply analytic. I have suggested that there is some reason to think that the connection that emerges in the study reflects at least in part an analytic connection between the tendency to engage with moral beauty, as understood here, and hope, but, bracketing that point, Diessner’s kind of enquiry invites us to proceed on the assumption that while hope and beauty experience may be correlated, and one may be the cause of the other, each can be understood without reference to the other. By contrast, on James’s view, as we have developed it here, there is a tighter connection between hope and the appearance of the everyday world. If I am to have the kind of practical hope that James describes, then I must have some sense of the differentiated significance of the objects in my environment, where this sense is realized in the perceptual field in so far as it is structured and colored. In the absence of such hope, there will be no such differentiation. So, on this view, hope of a certain kind seems to be a prerequisite for the world appearing as other than flat and gray, and hope is therefore a prerequisite for beauty experience, even if it is not of itself sufficient for beauty experience.

On the Thomistic account that we have been developing, there is again a broadly conceptual connection between some kinds of beauty experience and hope. Some hybrid goods can be realized even if the person does not recognize as much: for instance, if the perceptual field is contoured rather than flat, then it will to that extent realize a hybrid good—it will to that extent be theologically appropriate—whether or not the subject of the experience subscribes to or even has any knowledge of the relevant theological narrative. However, as we have seen, the conversion experiences that are cited by James seem to have a different character. Here, key elements of the relevant

theological narrative are presented to the person in their experience of the world: for instance, it may seem to the person that the divine glory is made manifest in their experience of the world. If we adopt a Thomistic reading of these cases, then we should say that a theological narrative is the object of the person's hope and at the same time presented to them in the world's appearance. And as we have seen, in such cases, the aesthetic dimension of the person's experience has inherently a theological structure: the experience is one of the divine wisdom or glory shining through the appearance of the everyday world. Given this Thomistic approach, we could say that in such cases, the person's hope in the truth of the relevant theological narrative takes perceptual form in an experience of the beauty of the world. That is, the person's hopeful commitment to the truth of the relevant theological narrative is realized not only in a purely mental attitude of assent to the narrative, but also in their taking their experience of the world to be a manifestation of the divine glory, divine wisdom, or some other divine attribute.

So our three accounts furnish three perspectives on the nature of the connection between hope and beauty experience. Diessner's social psychological account invites us to think of beauty experience and hope as extrinsically related. On this approach, it is for empirical study to uncover any association between the two. James's account suggests that beauty experience, in so far as it depends on our finding the world perceptually engaging, is rooted in the state of being practically hopeful in our relationship with the world, where that state is realized, at least in part, in the color and structure of the perceptual field. Here, the relationship between hopefulness and beauty experience is, we might say, existential: to find the world practically or existentially meaningful is to take the objects in our environment to bear a differentiated significance, where that sense of variation in significance is inscribed in the perceptual field, which in turn makes it possible for the world to stand as an object of aesthetic appreciation. Last, on the Thomistic approach we have been considering, the connection between beauty experience and hope will sometimes reflect their common object: here, the theological narrative that is the object of the person's hope is presented in experience so that hope takes on a perceptual form. In this case, the connection between hope and beauty experience is tighter still than in James's account: beauty experience is now a mode of hopeful engagement with the world.

Finally, it is notable that these three perspectives also carry different therapeutic implications. Diessner takes his study to support the idea of "beauty intervention" as a way of building up a person's hope. James's account appears

to run in the other direction: it is only the person of hope who can experience the world as practically and perceptually meaningful and who is open therefore to encountering it as an object of aesthetic appreciation. On this view, therapeutic intervention might most naturally begin with the question of how to shape the framing assumptions that a person brings to experience. Finally, on a Thomistic perspective, it is less clear that there is any kind of priority. For instance, it may be that the convert's newly hopeful attitude toward the world and newly hopeful attitude toward the relevant theological narrative are realized, at least in part, in their new experience of the world as beautiful. But equally on this approach, there may be some sense in following James in trying to cultivate the relevant kinds of hope or in following Diessner and seeking to develop the requisite kinds of perceptual sensitivity.

In sum, what we might term the social-psychological, existential-psychological, and theological perspectives can each speak to the question of the nature of spiritual well-being and the question of how the constituent elements of well-being—such as hope and openness to beauty—may be related to one another. These various accounts need not be in competition with one another. In particular, we might reasonably regard the Jamesian and Thomistic perspectives as proposing a deepening of the kinds of insight that are available in social psychological studies by moving beyond the idea that the relationship between the constituent elements of spiritual well-being is simply extrinsic and showing how that connection can be grounded in existential and theological kinds of significance. And, in the same way, we might think of the Thomistic perspective as offering, in conceptual terms, a deepening of the Jamesian approach in so far as it represents beauty experience of the relevant kind as a case of hopeful engagement with the world rather than seeing hopeful engagement as simply one of the background conditions for beauty experience.

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