John M. Rist
What is Truth? From the Academy to the Vatican.
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2008.
375 pages
US$81.00 (cloth ISBN 978-0-521-88901-8)
US$34.99 (paper ISBN 978-0-521-71775-5)

The relationship between faith and reason, always elusive, has emerged as a particularly poignant issue in the last several decades due to evolving notions of truth. The Heisenberg uncertainty principle, the inadequacy of Cartesian dualism, and conflicting opinions about scriptural inerrancy have provoked scientists, philosophers, and theologians respectively to compare notes and reexamine their notions of truth. Rist believes that progress can be made only by retrieving a notion of 'catholic' truth, which is wider than 'saving' truth understood as the truth strictly necessary for salvation. This broader notion of catholic truth allowed Christianity to enrich worldly realities and to be enriched by them.

Rist intends this book for two audiences: Christians seeking to make their tradition bear more effectively upon a secularized world, and non-Christians willing to take seriously the radical anthropology proposed by Christianity. The book is divided into six parts, five of which address the issues of how both men and women can be considered created in the image and likeness of God; how divine justice, grace, and human freedom can be reconciled; how the See of Rome became the doctrinal center of the Catholicism; how the Church navigated between the extremes of 'Caesaropapism' (absorption of the church by the state) and theocracy (absorption of the state by the church); and how the it should approach modern and post-modern culture today. Of particular interest, however, is the third part in which Rist discusses aesthetics in a way accessible and relevant to several philosophical schools. Tracing the connections between divine beauty, artistic beauty, and ethical beauty, Rist argues that created beauty is only intelligibly beautiful insofar as it refers to the glory and goodness of God. The argument unfolds roughly in the following way.

Early Christians incorporated the Platonic tradition insofar as it deals not only with the pleasure caused by beauty but with the inspirational character of beauty as well. Whereas the Judeo-Christian tradition had never philosophically or systematically developed biblical terms such as *kabod* and *doxa*, the Platonists employed beauty in a philosophically theological way insofar as they understood sensible beauty (*to kalon)* to be an inspirational object of erotic desire that leads a person to the Good. This is precisely why the Platonists took the first principles of ethics to be identical with those of aesthetics. At the same time, the Platonic approach was not without major difficulties. First, as related to the Good, beauty is also related to the One, even though it is experienced through the dualities of harmony, proportion, and symmetry. Second, since the Forms are the highest objects of human desire, the movement of love proceeds from

bodies to souls to impersonal objects, leaving the 'person' relatively low in the hierarchy. This, of course, presents a major problem for Christians, for whom interpersonal relations are at the core of the doctrine of the Trinity and the very marrow of human love.

Rist fleshes out the first problem through a historical comparison of the Stoics, who considered beauty as a symmetry of parts, with Plotinus, for whom the One was the origin of beauty. The Stoics and Plotinus represent two different ways of dealing with the Platonic doctrine that beauty in the sensible world depends on some 'real' beauty in the intelligible and immaterial world. Plato evaluated physical beauty by its approximation to immaterial beauty and its capacity to lead the soul beyond itself. He thus connects it to love, for love cannot arise without a beautiful object. Rist explains that Plotinus, while agreeing with the Stoics, also wondered how non-composite things, which are incapable of displaying symmetry or proportion, can also be beautiful. Plotinus was convinced that symmetry, though necessary, is not a sufficient condition. He therefore proposed that the essence of beauty actually consists in the splendor of life-giving light, and thus designates the One as a special kind of beauty: a Beauty (*kallos*) *above* beauty, or beauty in another mode. The One shows itself as splendor (*aglaia*) in such a way that the One is the source and maker of Beauty.

This still leaves the relationship between unity and beauty unclear, leading Rist to perform a historical analysis of the second difficulty. He shows that the only way out of the dilemma was to 'personalize' the beautiful and the good. This is precisely what Christianity accomplished by proposing Christ as incarnate, divine, and personal Beauty. Rist considers this an inestimable breakthrough for Christianity's engagement with the world and especially with the world of art, insofar as it allowed beauty, including seductive beauty, to be inspirational, even asserting that without beauty there can be no true inspiration. Finally, without a proper formation in the inspiration of beauty, a human being will not only lack an appreciation of what is truly beautiful, but will fail to delight in doing what is truly good.

Rist's argument for Christianity's indispensable role in the development of beauty is representative of his reading of history in general. The argument is unquestionably strong, but it is an argument meant to be evaluated at the level of reason. In fact, Rist constructs a case for the dynamic relationship between faith and reason not so much on the basis of a theology of revelation, but on Christianity as a historical fact and the subsequent cultural and philosophical developments that accompanied it along the way. To follow the argument, one need only subscribe to some notion of truth, whatever its origin and goal. In fact, I would dare say that members of the second, not specifically Christian audience may find the argument easier to follow and more persuasive than members of the specifically Christian first.

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