

THE NEED FOR BEAUTY

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THE NEED FOR BEAUTY

I must admit that when I decided to define Beauty as necessary, I thought to myself that many other authors would have already spoken about this before me. And so, naively, I logged onto Google: nobody, not one, not a single one! Nobody speaks of the necessity of Beauty.

How could we live without Beauty? Beauty is as necessary for human beings as the air we breathe. Without Beauty, this life would not be worth living.

But is Beauty within everyone's reach? Yes, indeed it is. In a thousand ways, of course, but it is. From our childhood onwards, at home and at school. Even the elderly, even as we approach the age of one hundred, we can join Goya in saying: "I am still learning".

This Manifesto is intended to underscore the importance of cultivating the Fine Arts in education, and their relationship with nurturing intelligence. Because Beauty is indissolubly linked to reason, to truth. The splendor of truth, was how Plato defined Beauty. And, for the moment, neither reason nor Truth nor Beauty are the exclusive preserve of the rich. They belong to everyone. Adam, who had nothing, was so taken by Eve's sublime Beauty that when she offered him the apple, he ate it without hesitation. Not for the apple, but for Eve, for her Beauty.

Is it so difficult to convince children and adolescents of the need for Beauty? I don't think so. And I think the best way is by putting compelling examples to them.

POETRY, MEMORY

Arouse the sleeping soul
revive the brain and wake up
contemplating how life passes
how death approaches, so quietly
how quickly pleasure leaves
it gives us pain/ how it seems to us
any past time was better.

It astonishes me to think how I can still, recite with such accuracy this beautiful couplet by Jorge Manrique, that I learnt when I was so very young.

Doubtless you can recall, as I do, being so impressed when we heard words that sounded so good because of what they told us was poetry. Can you remember the first poem you wrote as a child after listening in awe to Manrique's couplet? And the happy faces of the teacher and the other pupils when you recited it aloud in class? And the faces of your parents and your siblings when you recited it later that evening at home?

MUSIC

Can you remember the family gathering where everyone applauded when you played that well-known melody on the flute?

I can still recall a piano recital by José Cubiles in Cádiz. In the summer, during the Spanish Festivals, the concerts were held in the Faculty of Medicine, which was next to my house. I still remember Falla's *Night in the Gardens of Spain*, played by Cubiles. I didn't have much time to improvise my Cubiles concert with puppets over the next few days. I built the piano from my father's old black X-rays. The concert was a resounding success with critics and spectators.

As children, following the good example of our parents, my siblings and I would turn on the 'His Master's Voice' gramophone and we would play classical music to our heart's delight. Our dear aunt would always say: "There they are, the little lords and ladies, playing the music of the dead".

I WANT TO BE ONE OF THEM

In front of me, on my computer-screen, is the orchestra of the Hofkapelle Munchen with the Tölzer Knabenchor children's choir, directed by Christian Fliegner, in a very beautiful version of Bach's St. Matthew Passion.

And, thanks to the computer, I can see the faces of all those German children who make up this wonderful choir. When children sing, their faces are a real poem. You can see, you can tell that they are completely immersed in the music, that they are enjoying themselves as only children can. How I would like to be one of them, how I would like to be one of those children singing Bach with such precision and enthusiasm!

And when it comes to writing about the Fine Arts in teaching and nurturing intelligence, my answer would be, that those who read these lines, together with their children, should watch and enjoy this incredible video capable of convincing any child to become involved, and want to be one of them:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QrrdWYh9Hwc>

And the fact is that Music transmits Beauty. And even more so when it's courtesy of Bach.

DRAWING PAINTING

I still remember the thrill I felt when I showed my mother the first drawing I made myself after seeing Picasso's drawings. On returning from our visit to that exhibition, at such a young age, we thought that we could do it too. And we drew and took our drawings to our mother, who else? And she showered us with kisses. And we never stopped drawing for the rest of our lives.

I still remember that school tour to the Prado Museum. And how as we stood before Velázquez's *Las Lanzas*, our teacher asked us to count the straight, parallel, upright and tilted lances. I put up my hand and said: 25 upright and 4 tilted ones! Exactly, said the teacher. And a few days later, in class, he showed us some slides which, apart from the Velázquez painting, included one of the Battle of San Romano by Paolo Ucello from the Louvre Museum, and he asked us again how many upright spears and how many tilted ones. I quickly raised my hand again and said: 25 tilted and 4 upright! Exactly, said the teacher again. And he explained to us how Velázquez was doubtless familiar with Ucello's painting, painted 200 years earlier, trying, unlike Velázquez, to transfer the heat of battle to his painting. Because Velázquez, according to my teacher, was trying – and succeeded – in conveying quite the opposite, the peace and serenity of the surrender of Breda. I was never to forget it for the rest of my life. Ever since I have been a devotee of Velázquez. And it was then that I began to paint.

I have written many times that drawing is thinking with your hands. Not only for an architect, which is self-evident, but for everyone. In the Royal Academy of Fine Arts of San Fernando, there is only one Velázquez: a drawing of Cardinal Borja, one of the few drawings by Velázquez that have been preserved. It is a true marvel. Because Velázquez, before being an exceptional painter, was an exceptional draftsman.

And not long ago I donated all my drawings – all of them – to the library at my School of Architecture in Madrid, and the archives of all those scanned drawings, more than 12,000, to the School and to the Royal Academy of Fine Arts of San Fernando. And I am the first to be surprised by the result.

PHILOSOPHY

Surely you remember when, as children, you discovered philosophy and Socrates and said to yourselves "I only know that I know nothing"? Maybe it was when you heard that Beauty was the splendor of Truth, a concept suggested by Plato. And you thought, of course it is! It almost seems as if children are not capable of understanding philosophy, but, oh yes, they are!

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, addressing a meeting in Rimini (Italy) of the ecclesial movement Communion and Liberation on the theme "The Contemplation of Beauty", proposed a very inspiring message with clear Platonic echoes:

Whoever has perceived this beauty knows that truth, and not falsehood, is the real aspiration of the world. It is not the false that is 'true', but indeed, the Truth. It is, as it were, a new trick of what is false to present itself as "truth" and to say to us: over and above me there is basically nothing, stop seeking or even loving the truth; in doing so you are on the wrong track. The icon of the crucified Christ sets us free from this deception that is so widespread today. However it imposes a condition: that we let ourselves be wounded by him, and that we believe in the Love who can risk setting aside his external beauty to proclaim, in this way, the truth of the beautiful.

And in case this was not clear, he makes another authoritative argument:

Is there anyone who does not know Dostoyevsky's often quoted sentence: 'The Beautiful will save us'? However, people usually forget that Dostoyevsky is referring here to the redeeming Beauty of Christ. We must learn to see Him. If we know Him, not only in words, but if we are struck by the arrow of his paradoxical beauty, then we will truly know him, and know him not only because we have heard others speak about him. Then we will have found the beauty of Truth, of the Truth that redeems. Nothing can bring us into close contact with the beauty of Christ himself other than the world of beauty created by faith and light that shines out from the faces of the saints, through whom his own light becomes visible.

RELENTLESSLY

When I wrote my acceptance speech as an Academician at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts of San Fernando, I looked for a central theme: Beauty, of course! And to convince those present, I looked for a forceful term capable of awakening in them that desire for Beauty. And I gave it the title of *Relentlessly Seeking Beauty*.

Because I believe that this is what all we human beings do, with varying degrees of awareness. And I came up with a host of arguments that I believe convinced those present – as they already were – that our life has meaning within that search for happiness that is the relentless pursuit of Beauty. Children too.

EDUCATION, LIGHTING THE FIRE

Montaigne said: "Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire". And he was right. A teacher has to know how to ignite the soul and thoughts of his pupils with knowledge. He must know how to transmit to them the sacred fire of culture. And to keep that fire burning, the search for Beauty, the fine arts are indispensable, they are the best kindling for that fire.

Julián Marías pointed out that the three qualities a teacher must have are: knowing, knowing how to teach and wanting to teach. Very clear, very Ortega-like. I remember my best teachers, both as a child and at university, as extraordinarily learned people, who not only talked about their own specific subjects, but also about all aspects of culture. And that is what I tried to do when it was my turn to be a teacher.

And likewise, the three qualities of a pupil should be: knowing that you don't know, knowing how to learn and wanting to learn. So, I would tell my young pupils to be aware that they don't know anything, but that it can be easily resolved. That they should learn to learn, which means paying full attention to what they are doing. And that they should want to learn, which means devoting all the time they need. And if drawing and music and poetry and philosophy and dance and gymnastics are also included, so much the better.

Intelligence is cultivated, just like plants are. And the fine arts are fertile soil for the best growth. I remember a short story by Gloria Fuertes about a little boy who, in order to grow, had to read. He only grew when he read books. If this child not only read books

but also enjoyed Music and Drawing and Poetry and Philosophy and Dance and Gymnastics, he would have grown up remarkably well. There is a story about a boy who didn't grow because he didn't read. One day, his aunt gave him a present of a story about witches, with lots of drawings. The boy sat down to read and began to grow. After all, children are very, very clever.

LIGHT AND BEAUTY. THE ROSY-FINGERED DAWN

How could an architect speak of Beauty without speaking of light? How could a child not understand that light, the continuously moving light of the sun, is an ingredient of Beauty?

The window of my room in Madrid is illegal and large. And with great views of all the roofs and rooftops and stainless steel chimneys that reach all the way to the tallest buildings in the Plaza de España. As it faces west, every day at sunset it receives direct sunlight that provides very welcome warmth during the winter, and rather less welcome heat in the summer. But in the mornings, at a certain time, the chimneys that adorn this landscape of Madrid rooftops, almost all of which are made of shiny stainless steel, are tinged with the pinkish light of the rising sun in Madrid. And because of the movement of the sunlight, this marvel only lasts for a short time. And my mind and my heart are touched by the appearance of the *rosy-fingered dawn* which Homer evokes so well, and so often, in his *Odyssey*. I can assure you that the spectacle is truly beautiful. And that is why I mention it here, because the movement of light makes Beauty visible, it accounts for the passage of time, and it confirms my oft repeated assertion that light constructs time. And Beauty. From dawn to dusk.

CONCLUSION. I AM STILL LEARNING

As I finish writing this text in defense of including the fine arts in education, with their rightful value, I feel that, once again, I am still learning. Something that Goya sums up so well in that small engraving that appeared in his last exhibition at the Prado Museum. "I am still learning" are the words he wrote on the engraving of the old man, with his white hair and white beard, leaning on two walking sticks. So, with these memory-filled personal musings, I have returned, at my age, to learning, and learning a lot.

Of course, Goya himself, who was highly intelligent, also recorded and wrote "The dream of reason produces monsters" and then added: 'Fantasy, abandoned by reason, produces impossible monsters; united with it, she is the mother of the arts and the origin of marvels'. This is something that children understand perfectly well.

If I were a father and had a child of that age, the first thing I would do would be to have him or her ask me to enroll them, wherever I could, in Music, Drawing and Poetry and Philosophy. My child would be happy and I would be even happier, if such a thing were possible. And both of us, together, would be freer.

NOTA BENE

Baltasar Gracián nicely sums up everything I would like to say about the Fine Arts and Culture and Education:

Every human being is born a barbarian, and only culture redeems them from the bestial. Culture therefore makes the man; the more a man, the higher. Thanks to it, Greece could call the rest of the world barbarians. Ignorance is very raw; nothing contributes so much to culture as knowledge.

And, I would venture to add that there is nothing that produces greater happiness than Beauty.