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Beauty and Justice

Nicholas Wolterstorff

In her book *On Beauty and Being Just* (Princeton 1999), Elaine Scarry notes that there has been a widespread banishing of beauty from the humanities in recent decades, and that this “has been carried out by a set of political complaints against” beauty (57). In Part Two of the book, she responds to these complaints. “Beauty,” she says, “is at the very least innocent of the charges against it, and it may even be the case that far from damaging our capacity to attend to problems of injustice, it instead intensifies the pressure we feel to repair existing injuries” (57).

As Scarry sees it,

[T]he political critique of beauty is composed of two distinct arguments. The first urges that beauty, by preoccupying our attention, distracts attention from wrong social arrangements. It makes us inattentive, and therefore eventually indifferent, to the project of bringing about arrangements that are just. The second argument holds that when we stare at something beautiful, make it an object of sustained regard, our act is destructive to the object. This argument is most often prompted when the gaze is directed toward a human face or form...” (58)

About these two arguments, she makes the acute observation that whatever merit each has in and of itself, “they are unlikely both to be true since they fundamentally contradict one another. The first assumes that if our ‘gaze’ could just be coaxed over in one direction and made to latch onto a specific object (an injustice in need of remedy or repair), that object would benefit from our generous attention. The second assumes that generous attention is inconceivable, and that any object receiving sustained attention will somehow suffer from the act of human regard” (58-9).

Scarry doesn’t say much about the second argument. Her attention is focused on the first; so mine will be as well. But before we get to that, let me say a word about the second argument.

I would state the argument rather differently from how Scarry states it. Her formulation of the argument is that when we stare at something beautiful, our act is destructive to the object. I think the argument is best understood as having two prongs: one prong pertaining to human beings and one to other things.

As it pertains to human beings, the argument is not, I think, that our gaze is *destructive* of the human being at whom the gaze is directed but that it *wrongs* him or her. And the examples that

most powerfully make the point are not those in which our gaze is directed at someone beautiful—though no doubt we do sometimes wrong a beautiful person by staring at him or her—but those in which, often with the aid of a photographer, we subject a human being who is not beautiful to an aestheticizing gaze. The photographs by Diane Arbus, of human beings malformed in various ways, are an example of the point. I think a serious case can be made that these people have been wronged by the combination of Arbus photographing them and you and I now gazing with aesthetic intent at them in the photographs. Speaking for myself, I would strongly dislike being the subject of an Arbus photograph!

The other prong of the argument pertains to those cases in which the aestheticizing gaze finds beauty in trash—photographs taken from a half mile up of a city dump, photographs taken from close-up of peeling paint on a door in a ghetto. Not infrequently, photographs of dumps taken from a distance or of a rotted door from close up are things of beauty. No more than in the first case is the aestheticizing gaze *destructive* of the object, but neither, in this case, does it wrong the object. What merits concern is rather that the aestheticizing gaze conceals from us the ugliness, conceals from us the fact that this dump is a besmirching of the earth by the human beings whose detritus this is, conceals from us the fact that the ghetto is a place of squalor.

In short, I think that Scarry mis-formulates the second argument, and thereby blunts its considerable force. That said, however, I want to focus on her response to the first argument, which says that attention to beauty distracts us from wrong social arrangements. Her claim is that beauty, rather than distracting us from justice, “assists us in our attention to justice” (86).

Her defense of this claim is threefold:

She argues that there is a deep analogy between the *nature* of beauty and the nature of justice. She argues that there is a deep similarity between our *response* to beauty and our response to justice. She argues that there is an *equivalence* between the concern that there shall be beauty in the world and the commitment to justice.

These analogies, similarities, and equivalences have the consequence, so she says that attention to beauty evokes in us attention to the need for justice.

Begin with the analogy between the nature of beauty and the nature of justice. Beauty, as Scarry understands it, is grounded in symmetry, or as she often calls it, equality; and justice, so she says, is likewise constituted of symmetry or equality. She regards the phrase, “a symmetry of everyone’s relation to one another” (95), as descriptive of both beauty and justice. In the course of discussing this analogy, Scarry claims the existence of two other analogies in the region. She insists that attention to one instance of beauty exerts on the beholder a pressure to treat other instances of beauty with equal regard, equal treatment being a feature of justice. Beautiful things, she says, “give rise to the notion of distribution” (95). And she holds that what she calls “the generous availability to sensory perception” of beauty (110) has an analogy in the equal distribution that constitutes justice. Putting these three analogies together, Scarry says that the “pressure” of beauty toward justice “comes from the object’s symmetry, from the corrective pressure it exerts against lateral disregard, and from its own generous availability to sensory perception” (110).

As to the similarity between our response to beauty and our response to justice, Scarry remarks that “at the moment we see something beautiful, we undergo a radical decentering” (111). “All the space formerly in the service of protecting, guarding, advancing the self (or its ‘prestige’) is now free to be in the service of something else” (113). Scarry doesn’t actually complete the argument by claiming that attention to justice and injustice is likewise decentering; but clearly that is what she has in mind.

And as to the equivalence between the concern that there shall be beauty in the world and the commitment to justice, Scarry observes, first, that the former concern is manifested both when one “acts to protect or perpetuate a fragment of beauty already in the world” and when one acts “instead to supplement it by bringing into being a new object” (114). And she then observes that these “two distinguishable forms of creating beauty—perpetuating beauty that already exists; originating beauty that does not yet exist—have equivalence within the realm of justice, as one can hear in John Rawls’s formulation of what, since the time of Socrates, has been known as the ‘duty to justice’ argument: we have a duty, says Rawls, ‘to support’ just arrangements where they already exist and to help bring them into being where they are ‘not yet established’” (115). (Scarry takes note of a second “feature shared by the kind of creation we undertake on behalf of beauty and the kind of creation we undertake on behalf of justice” (115). This second feature is somewhat more complex than the first; explaining it would not contribute significantly to the reader’s understanding of Scarry’s line of thought.)

So what shall we say about these lines of argument for the conclusion that “beauty, far from contributing to social injustice..., or even remaining neutral to injustice as an innocent bystander, actually assists us in the work of addressing injustice” (62)? Let me first observe that what we have here is yet one more re-statement of classic Romantic claims concerning the power of art. With due allowance for the fact that *Romanticism* is by no means a sharply defined category of classification, I think it can fairly be said that the Romantics were the first to sense that, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, there had emerged in Europe a quite new form of society and culture, call it *modernity*; and that they were also the first to claim that the essence of what was new was that modernity fractured old unities, this fracturing being driven mainly by the relentless and pervasive application of rationality. In his long poem *Lamia*, John Keats said of the new natural science that it “unweaves the rainbow.” The Romantics believed that modernity in general unweaves the rainbow.

Art is the exception; the Romantics regarded art as the great social other. The artist employs imagination rather than rationality, and the work of art is not a collection of fragments but an organic unity. This social otherness of art led the Romantics to ascribe salvific power to art; poetry, someone once remarked to me, “knits together the tattered fragments of our existence.” When it came to explaining how exactly this salvific power works, the Romantics were always hazy. Somehow or other, engagement with art will energize us to mend the world.

Nothing that Scarry says suggests that she sees herself as standing in the line of the Romantics. But the telltale signs are all there. Injustice is disunity, inequality, asymmetry; beauty is unity, equality, symmetry. Art is thus the social other. And attention to beauty will awake us to the injustice surrounding us and energize us to struggle against this injustice, until society resembles beauty in its unity, equality, and symmetry. Beauty will save us if we attend to it.

Later I will be saying something about the analogies, similarities, and equivalences that Scarry professes to find between beauty and justice. Here let me just observe that even if there are those resemblances, attending to beauty does not have the inherent power of energizing the beholder to struggle for justice. Beauty does not have the inherent salvific power that Scarry and her Romantic predecessors claim for it. We have all known people who were intensely attentive to beauty but cared not a fig for justice; we have all heard about horrible people who live in large elegant houses and work in elegant offices. Historians tell us that a good many of the Germans who supervised the concentration camps during the day attended concerts in the evening and expanded their art collections with paintings plundered from the occupied countries. And let us not forget that many of the artifacts whose beauty now mesmerizes us were created on the backs of indentured labor. Scarry nowhere takes note of this obvious objection to her thesis, that attending to beauty has the inherent salvific power of energizing us to pursue justice. I have no idea why she does not take note of it.

Just now I used the phrase “inherent salvific power” a couple of times. The claims made by Scarry and her Romantic predecessors concerning the salvific power of attending to beauty and art are claims concerning its *inherent* power. It is those claims that I contest, on the ground that they are patently false. Not for a moment do I deny that now and then, here and there, attention to art and beauty does energize us to seek justice. But to understand why this is, we have to get down into the trenches. We have to uncover what it is about particular works and particular types of works that gives them this potential and what it is about particular viewers and particular types of viewers that actualizes this potential. We will discover nothing if we remain at the ethereal level of discussing what is inherently the case.

Art and the Memory of Injustices

Let me now get down into those trenches for a while. Let me call attention to two roles art plays that sometimes energize the struggle for justice. And let me now re-configure the discussion, so that henceforth it is primarily about art and justice rather than about beauty and justice. My description of each of these roles will be brief—only enough for you to get the idea. Each could be elaborated in an essay, indeed, in a book.

No doubt some people struggle for justice out of a sense of duty; perhaps all of us do some of the time. And some people struggle for justice because this is what good and virtuous people do. But if my own experience is any indication, in most people these motivations tend to be weak unless undergirded and reinforced by a quite different motivator, namely, compassion. The Samaritan was moved by compassion when he saw the mugged man lying at the side of the road; that’s what led him to come to his aid.

And what evokes compassion? Perhaps compassion is evoked in some people by calm and dispassionate newspaper reports of someone’s plight; possibly this is true for most of us some of the time. But once again, if my own experience is any indication, what mainly evokes compassion for some person or group of persons is having that person in his predicament, or those persons in their predicament, brought vividly before one. This vivid presentation may take the form of their actually being present to one, so that one sees their faces and hears their voices.

Alternatively, it may take the form of seeing vivid photographs or films of them. Or it may take the form of their being made vivid to one by imaginative literature.

By the early 1970s I knew a good deal from newspaper reports about the plight under apartheid of the so-called blacks and coloreds in South Africa, but it was when I attended a conference in South Africa in 1976, and came face to face with blacks and coloreds, that I was moved by compassion to speak and work for their liberation. In the early 1970s I also knew a good deal from newspaper reports about the plight of the Palestinians, but it was when I came face to face with Palestinians at a conference in 1978 that I was moved by compassion to speak and work for their liberation.

In these two cases, it was compassion evoked by face-to-face meetings that energized me to work for justice. But the point I want to make here is that visual representations and imaginative literature also sometimes evoke compassion in us for those who are wronged and thereby energize us to struggle for justice.

Over the past several years I have made a point of asking people who teach nineteenth century American literature whether they ever include Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in their course. I have yet to meet anyone who did. The reason, I'm sure, is that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* doesn't measure up to our current aesthetic standards; it doesn't have enough of the beauty that Scarry talks about. Yet the novel was, so I am told by historians, extraordinarily influential in the abolitionist movement. It is easy to see why: it made the plight of the slaves vivid to the reader. I read *Uncle Tom's Cabin* on my own when I was a young teenager. To this day I remember how my heart bled for Uncle Tom and how angry I was at his tormenter, Simon Legree.

Let me move on to a second role art plays whereby it sometimes energizes us to struggle for justice. "Remember Sharpesville" was a cry that echoed for decades in the South African liberation movement. Why so? Well, "Sharpesville" was the name of a village in which the South African police mowed down a large number of blacks who were peacefully protesting against their oppression; the year, as I recall, was 1960. The reason the cry was kept alive is that fundamental to the success of a liberation movement is keeping alive outrage over the injustices being protested; and one way to do that, in turn, is to keep alive the memory of the most egregious examples of those injustices. I must add at once that cries to remember—cries such as "Remember the Battle of the Boyne," "Remember the Alamo," and "Remember Sharpesville"—can also serve to keep alive the memory of perceived injustice rather than real injustice, and to serve the cause of vengeance rather than the cause of justice.

To speak more generally: we human beings find it important to keep alive the memory of some person or event from the past—so as to honor that person or event, so as to keep outrage alive, and so forth. But we are forgetful. So we make things and do things as a memorial; we name the capital city "Washington" so as to honor and keep alive the memory of George Washington, we commission a Lincoln Memorial so as to honor and keep alive the memory of Abraham Lincoln, we paint nativity scenes so as to honor and keep alive the memory of the birth of Jesus, and so forth, on and on. And as my examples indicate, art is caught up in this activity of making and doing as a memorial. Many of the things that are made or done as a memorial are works of art, and conversely, many works of art are made or done as a memorial. They are memorial art. It is a

role of art that has been almost entirely neglected by the tradition of modern aesthetics, but just a bit of reflection will make clear that it is, in fact, one of the most important and pervasive of all the roles that art plays in our lives.

And now for the point: works of memorial art often serve to keep alive the memory of outrageous breaches of justice; often in doing so they energize the struggle against present and future injustice. A work that comes to mind immediately here is Picasso's famous painting, *Guernica*. Another that comes to my mind is the sequence of poems by the contemporary Irish poet, Micheal O'Siadhail, entitled *The Gossamer Wall: Poems in Witness to the Holocaust*.

Destruction turns all their presence into absence unless some testimony breaks their infinite silence. In remembrance resides the secret of our redemption. (112)

And here are just a few more lines:

Neat millions of pairs of abandoned shoes
Creased with mute presence of those whose Faces
both stare and vanish.... Friedländer, Berenstein Menasche, Blum. Each someone's fondled face.
A named few. Did they hold hands the moment they knew? (122)

Poetry about the Holocaust poses in extreme form the danger I discussed earlier, of aestheticizing the horror and thereby wronging the victims. O'Siadhail is acutely aware of the danger. To my mind, he succeeds admirably in overcoming it.

We could discuss other roles art plays that sometimes energize the struggle for justice and roles it plays that sometimes obstruct the struggle for justice. But enough has been said to make my point: attentiveness to art does not inherently energize the struggle for justice. It is rather particular roles art plays that sometimes, not always, energize the struggle for justice.

The Intrinsic Value of Art

Let me return to the topic of analogies, similarities, and equivalences—not now between *beauty* and justice, however, but between art and justice. I have argued that even if there is resemblance, the evidence is clear that attentiveness to art does not inherently enhance attentiveness to justice—and just as clear, let me add, that attentiveness to justice does not inherently enhance attentiveness to art. Nonetheless there is, in my view, a fundamental similarity between the two and taking note of it deepens our understanding. Let me begin with art and take up justice second.

In the spring of 2007, the distinguished American poet, Donald Hall, paid a visit to the University of Virginia. He read some of his own poetry to a large audience, and conducted a small closed seminar about writing poetry to which I was invited. In the seminar, he often illustrated the point he was making by referring to changes he had made in some of his own poems between first draft and final version. I remember one of those changes. In an earlier draft of one of his poems he had spoken of a dog *wagging* its tail; he changed that to the dog *swinging* its tail. A student asked why he made that change. He answered, "Because it made it a better poem." Those were his exact words.

Those words have the tone of a brush-off. But the remark came near the end of a two-hour session, and by then I had discerned enough of Hall's character to know with a surety that he was not giving the student a brush-off. He meant no more and no less than what he said. He changed the line because the change made it a better poem. He didn't explain why the change made it a better poem, and no one asked.

Upon returning home from Hall's seminar, I looked up a passage I had known for some time that was written in 1785 by the German author, Karl Philipp Moritz. My previous response to the passage had been a blend of annoyance and bafflement. The passage goes like this:

In the contemplation of the beautiful object... I contemplate... something which is *completed*, not in me, but *in its own self*, which therefore constitutes a whole in itself, and affords me pleasure *for its own sake*.

While the beautiful draws our attention exclusively to itself... we seem to lose ourselves in the beautiful object; and precisely this loss, this forgetfulness of self, is the highest degree of pure and disinterested pleasure that beauty grants us. In that moment we sacrifice our individual being to a kind of higher being.... Beauty in a work of art is not pure... until I contemplate it as something that has been brought forth entirely for its own sake, in order that it should be something complete in itself. (Abram 1986)

What had annoyed me in this passage was the suggestion that works of art belong to a higher kind of being than human beings. I don't accept that. What had baffled me was Moritz's obliviousness to the fact that while declaiming that a work of art is brought forth entirely for its own sake, he was assuming that works of art exist for the pleasure to be experienced in contemplating them.

In the light of Hall's comment, the passage now looked quite different. I was still annoyed with the suggestion that works of art are of greater worth than human beings. But now I wondered: was I perhaps wrong in thinking that Moritz was assuming that works of art are instrumental to the pleasure to be experienced in contemplating them? Was he perhaps saying that works of art have *intrinsic*, that is, *non-instrumental*, worth? Notice that Hall's answer to the student's question was not that he changed the line because he thought his audience would get greater pleasure from the revision. He changed it because the change made it a better poem.

The reason I found Hall's remark so striking is that it awoke me from a dogmatic slumber. Let me explain. Every articulate theory of the modern or contemporary period concerning the worth of works of art with which I am acquainted is an *instrumentalist* theory: the worth of works of art resides in some effect they have on us when we attend to them. There are brief passages, such as that from Moritz, that point in another direction. But every developed, articulated theory that I know of is an instrumentalist theory. Works of art do not have intrinsic worth. Their worth lies in causing something that is of intrinsic worth. The "something" that is of intrinsic worth is an experience of a certain kind, coupled, perhaps, with certain effects of that experience. The deepest disagreements among modern theories of artistic worth are disagreements over the nature of that experience.

The *emotivist* tradition, represented preeminently by Tolstoy and Collingwood, insists that the intrinsically valuable experience which imparts worth to works of art is an emotion of a certain sort, or perhaps a certain range of emotions. The *alethic* tradition (from the Greek for “truth,” “*aletheia*”), of which Hegel, Heidegger, Adorno, and Marcuse are prominent representatives, insists that the fundamental worth of works of art is located in their giving us knowledge of certain sorts. And the *aestheticist* tradition, represented by many writers, Kant and Monroe Beardsley prominent among them, holds that the worth-imparting experience is what has come to be called the *aesthetic* experience. These three traditions do not cover all the positions that have been set forth, but they are, I would say, the main traditions.

I now think they are all mistaken. Of course it is true that works of art often have instrumental worth. Just a few minutes ago I was arguing that works of art sometimes energize the struggle for justice, but I now think that in addition to such instrumental worth, often works of art also have intrinsic worth.

Let me develop the point by approaching it, as Hall did, from the side of the artist who makes the art rather than from the side of the public who engages the art. And for no very good reason, let me formulate what I have to say in terms of music rather than poetry. The application to the other arts of the points that I make will be obvious.

I am not a composer. When it comes to making art, I have done no more than dabble a bit in architecture. So I stand to be corrected in what I say by those who are composers, but it appears to me that at the heart of the activity of composing are three constituent activities: imagining sound patterns, evaluating the sound patterns imagined, and choosing from among the sound patterns imagined on the basis of those evaluations. Works of music, so I suggest, are traces of imagining, evaluating, and choosing. Or to use a different metaphor: works of music are imagination, evaluation, and choice *embedded* in sound.

Let me say just a word about the imagination that goes into musical composition. This is not wild and unfettered imagination; it is not whatever some wandering muse happens to whisper in the composer’s ear. It is both *schooled* and *guided*. In calling it *schooled* I mean that the composer’s imagining of sound-patterns is shaped by the sound-patterns he has previously heard, including especially the sound-patterns of works of music he has heard. Bach did not imagine sound-patterns rather like those in Stravinsky’s *Rite of Spring* but discard them on the ground that he was waiting for something better to come to mind. He never imagined such sound-patterns—or it is extremely unlikely that he did. In calling it *guided* I mean that the composer usually will not just sit down to compose music but will have requirements or parameters that he wants to satisfy. He wants to compose a piano sonata, he wants to compose a song to fit the words of some poem that moves him, and so forth. And in good measure, his imagination will follow this guidance. I find it both wonderful and mysterious that our human imagination can be guided in this way.

Let’s move on to evaluation and choice. Suppose the composer has resolved to write a piano sonata—that’s one of the principal requirements or parameters he has set for himself. Naturally he also wants it to be playable, so he will keep in mind the powers and limitations of the modern piano and the abilities of skilled performers. And he hopes that it will get performed, and that when it is performed, there will be an audience that finds it rewarding to listen to. But here’s my

question: does the composer make his evaluations and choices by reference to what he expects will give greater satisfaction to anticipated audiences? Does he say to himself that passage A is likely to give greater satisfaction to audiences than passage B, so I'll go with A?

I feel sure that he does very little of this—those of you who are composers will have to tell me if I am wrong—if for no other reason than that the pleasure of audiences is so fickle and unpredictable. I suggest that, for the most part, he evaluates and chooses as he does because he wants to compose a good sonata. He chooses this sound-pattern over that one because he thinks it makes for a better sonata. Sometimes he may be able to identify what it is about this sound-pattern that makes it better than that one, and often he will not be able to do so. He senses that it is better but isn't able to say why.

And now for the conclusion of the argument: when the composer evaluates sound-pattern A as making for a better sonata than sound-pattern B, and accordingly chooses A over B as part of his finished sonata, he is making a judgment of non-instrumental intrinsic worth. He is not making his evaluation and choice by reference to which of the two options will bring about more aesthetic pleasure. He's not making it by reference to anything at all that he expects it to bring about.

From this it follows that works of art have intrinsic worth. I'm not happy with calling that intrinsic worth *beauty*. The traditional understanding of beauty connects beauty with pleasure. In Aquinas's classic formulation, beauty is that which gives pleasure upon being perceived. The intrinsic worth of works of art has nothing directly to do with pleasure, but if some want to call it *beauty*, I won't object.

One last point here. If what I have said about works of music having intrinsic non-instrumental worth is correct, then the next question to ask is, how should we think of the relation between the worth of works of music and the activity of attentively listening to those works? If we reject the instrumentalist view of artistic worth, which holds, in the aestheticist version, that it is the worth of the pleasurable experience of attentive listening that gives worth to the work, then how should we think instead?

If the work of music itself has intrinsic worth, then the core value of attentive listening to the work does not consist in the *satisfaction* one experiences in such listening; it consists in the worth of becoming perceptually aware of something of intrinsic worth and of perceptually recognizing that in it which is of intrinsic worth. The worth of the activity of attentive listening is derived from the worth of the work. Of course, we are not innately capable of perceptually recognizing the intrinsic worth of works of art; we have to acquire what the eighteenth century writers called "taste."

Justice and the Intrinsic Worth of Human Beings

Now for the other member of the similarity-pair, justice. On this occasion, my presentation of what I understand justice to be will have to be dogmatic, I won't be able to defend my understanding. I do defend it at length in my recently published book, *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* (Princeton 2008).

I hold that justice is constituted of enjoying rights; a society is just insofar as its members enjoy what they have a right to. And I hold that rights, in turn, are normative social relationships; sociality is built into the essence of rights. A right is always a right with respect to someone. For the most part, those normative bonds of oneself to the other are not generated by any exercise of will on one's part. The bond is there already, antecedent to one's will, binding oneself and the other together. The other comes into my presence already standing in this normative bond to me.

Of course there are other sorts of normative bonds than rights. So what sort of normative bond is a right? Well, for the other to have to me the normative bond of a right is for her to have a legitimate claim on me as to how I treat her—a legitimate claim to my doing certain things to her and a legitimate claim to my refraining from doing other things. If I fail to do the former things, I violate the bond; if I do not refrain from doing the latter things, I likewise violate the bond. I do not *break* the normative bond; that still holds. She continues to have that legitimate claim on me as to how I treat her. I *violate* the bond.

The legitimate claim of the other on me as to how I treat her is a legitimate claim to the *good* of my treating her a certain way, this good of my treating her a certain way being, of course, a good in her life, a life-good, something that enhances her well-being. If a student writes a first-rate paper in a course that I am teaching, she has a right to the good of my giving her an A—that being a good in her life, a life-good, something that enhances her well-being. A common saying in present-day political liberalism is that “the right has priority over the good.” In the order of concepts it is the other way around: the good has priority over the right. A right is a legitimate claim to the life-good of being treated a certain way.

The converse does not hold: there are many ways of being treated by others that would be goods in one's life but to which one does not have a right. I think it would be a great good in my life if someone would offer me one of the classic Frank Lloyd Wright houses for my living quarters. Sad to say, I don't have a right to that good.

What accounts for the fact that someone has a *right* to the good of my treating her a certain way, rather than its just being a good thing for me to do? That's the big question that any theory of rights has to address. My own view is that what accounts for it is her worth, her dignity. Specifically, the rights of the other against me are actions and restraints from action on my part that due respect for her worth requires of me. To fail to treat her as she has a right to my treating her is to demean her, to treat her with disrespect, to treat her as if she had less worth than she does. To spy on her for prurient reasons, for example, or to insult her, to torture her, to bad-mouth her, to do any of these things to her is to treat her in a way that does not befit her worth.

And to treat her in a way that does not befit her worth is to wrong her. If I fail to treat her in the way that she has a right to my treating her, she is wronged. My moral condition is that of being guilty; her moral condition is that of being wronged. Just as guilt is the dark side of duty, so being wronged is the dark side of rights.

I'm sure you now see where this is going, so I can be brief. I don't accept most of the analogies that Scarry professes to see between beauty and justice. For example, symmetry is not necessary and sufficient for beauty, nor is justice to be identified with equality or symmetry. But on this

occasion I don't have time to argue these points. Let me instead simply observe that works of art have intrinsic worth and that human beings have intrinsic worth. When we engage in engrossed contemplation of some worthwhile work of art, we dwell on something of intrinsic worth and on that in it which is of intrinsic worth. When we treat some human being justly, treat her as she has a right to be treated, we treat her in a way that befits her worth. Engaging in the engrossed contemplation of some work of art and treating some human being justly are two modes of acknowledging worth, two modes of acknowledging excellence. By virtue of being two modes of acknowledging the worth of something other than oneself, both are inherently decentering. On this point, Scarry was correct.

I can now re-phrase one of the points made earlier, a sad feature of our human condition is that a person can be deeply committed to one of these two ways of acknowledging worth and indifferent to the other way.

Allow me to make one final point, this time not about the relation of art to justice but about the relation of beauty, or aesthetic excellence, to justice. It is easy for those involved in service organizations to fall into the trap of thinking that to be a human being is to be a food-eater, a clothes-wearer, and a house-dweller. After all, more often than not the people one is dealing with are people who don't have enough to eat, people who don't have adequate clothes, and people whose housing is squalid or non-existent. Food, clothing, and housing are urgent. Justice requires that we give them priority.

But when one stands back to reflect, it is clear that to be human is more, much more, than this. To be human is to be a creature who is treated with disrespect if he or she is deprived of education. To be human is to be a creature who is treated with disrespect if he or she is not allowed, to a considerable extent, to set her own course of life rather than having someone else set it for her. And to be human, so I suggest, is to be a creature who is treated with disrespect if he or she is forced to live in aesthetic squalor. When social arrangements force some of our fellow human beings to live in poverty, they are wronged, treated unjustly. It is just as true that when social arrangements force some of our fellow human beings to live in aesthetic squalor, they are wronged, treated unjustly. Living in aesthetic decency is not an optional luxury but a moral right. Justice requires it.

Nicholas Wolterstorff is the Noah Porter Professor of Philosophical Theology at Yale University.

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