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BEAUTIFUL JUSTICE AND JUST BEAUTY? EXPLORING JUSTICE AND BEAUTY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE WRONGED

ABSTRACT

This article will attempt to draw from the deep wells of Nicholas Wolterstorff's understanding of justice and beauty, respectively, so as to find possible linkages between the two that might be helpful in our quest to understanding this important theme. In order to do this successfully, this article, first, invites readers into Wolterstorff's understanding of justice based on inherent worth. Hereafter, in a similar fashion, the article explores, as a second theme, Wolterstorff's understanding of beauty as related to the so-called grand narrative of art. Regarding both themes, I follow a basic structure: outlining the problem; offering critiquing, and exploring possible alternatives. It is hoped that this article will finally, and by way of conclusion, resolve some of this tension between justice and beauty, by examining three specific ways in which Wolterstorff has attempted to link these two themes.

1. INTRODUCTION

On a visit to Potchefstroom in 1975, Nicholas Wolterstorff was, for the first time, confronted by the faces of those suffering under the apartheid system. A visit that he would later describe as being "more intense than anything [he] had ever experienced" (Wolterstorff 2013:4). This became a so-called "awakening experience"

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that influenced much of his thinking about justice and rights for years to come. What Wolterstorff heard at the time from people suffering under the apartheid regime was not so much fierce anger as it was a "cry for justice" (Wolterstorff 2013:4). Since that day, it is no secret that Wolterstorff has devoted much of his thinking, teaching and writing to this theme. It is interesting to note, however, that Wolterstorff experienced an irreparable fracture shortly after that visit. Wolterstorff (2013:221) explains that, at the time, it felt like his love for art, philosophy, liturgy, and now justice were fractured loves, leaving him to wonder if there was anything uniting these loves. It was not only Wolterstorff's understanding of justice that was questioned that day, but also how that related to the arts. Our two themes, at least in a broad sense, are now right before us: justice and beauty. In short, this article is perhaps best described as an attempt to deal with this original fracture that Wolterstorff, and perhaps many of us at present, often experience. As such, our most basic question is whether these two themes remain fractured or whether they can be united in any way?

Throughout this article, I will come back to the idea that Wolterstorff operates, in my own reading, with a hermeneutic of starting from the wronged, the oppressed, as a direct result of his experience in South Africa. This is especially clear when he writes about justice, but seems to be operative in the background with regard to beauty. Viewed in this way, "starting from the perspective of the wronged" will be a helpful key that will unlock the link between justice and beauty to be presented at the end of this article. Although Wolterstorff reflects very often on his experience in South Africa, Allan Boesak,[1] now lifelong friend of Wolterstorff, captures more or less the same experiences during more or less the same time in vivid detail in his now published thesis *Farewell to innocence: A social-ethical study of black theology and black power* (1976). This might be a helpful example in trying to understand Wolterstorff's fractured experience and why it was so important to start from the perspective of the wronged. In analysing South African society with its prominent nationalist leaders at the time, Boesak was surprised to note that some would defend that ugly system by explaining that the proponents of that system were justifying their actions by explaining that they were not involved in world-escaping piety and that, instead, they were concerned with prosperity, happiness, and development. Boesak then goes on to explain that it is hard to see how they could believe all of this. In fact, it was so brutally ugly, exactly

1 In the first chapter of his *Journey toward justice*, Wolterstorff (2013:5) writes: "I returned to South Africa a number of times and became friends with many opponents of the old regime … of these, it was Allan Boesak who became one of my dearest friends and who, over the years, has remained that through thick and thin".

because it had no regard for great human suffering, it lacked empathy and it operated out of “fearful isolationism” and “an almost neurotic fear for change”. Put differently, what made it ugly was that it was “not applied to the real situation or to the living experiences of people, but to a vague ideal”. It is worthwhile to quote Boesak (1976:116) at length:

> Christian Nationalism is an ideology alien to the Christian ethic. It is cruel and inhuman for it lives in terms of myths, “principles”, grandiloquent ideals and programs instead of in terms of human reality and therefore has no room for (or does not understand) human suffering … it tries to cover up the real relations to others and the world and to falsify the facts of human existence by deifying, romanticizing or idealizing them.

Notice the two contrasting realities in the above critique. On the one hand, Boesak highlights that the cruelty and inhumanity – the “ugliness” if I may – of the apartheid regime is its (in)ability to abstract goodness (or prosperity, happiness, and development) from “myths”, “principles”, “grandiloquent ideals” and “programs” instead of seeing human reality and suffering for what it is. Furthermore, this was dependent on “deifying”, “romanticizing” and “idealizing” real relations, in order to achieve its ends. On the other hand, we need to seek an understanding of both justice and beauty that will take seriously these realities and that do not work with these abstractions. Put differently, analysing these two themes by starting from the wronged makes all the difference in as much as it is actively opposed to any idealising of either justice or beauty. The reasons for this will become clear as we go along.

With this short introduction in mind, we can narrow our search by posing two questions to both justice and beauty. Regarding justice, we may ask: To what extent does Wolterstorff’s understanding of justice based on inherent worth serve as a valuable alternative to this idealised understanding of justice? Regarding beauty, we may ask: Can Wolterstorff’s understanding of beauty contribute to moving from the abstract to these more concrete human realities? I like the wordplay if these questions were to be rephrased by asking: What makes justice beautiful? and What constitutes just beauty? To be sure, that is only one side of the coin. Hereafter, we will need to ask whether and how these two themes relate to one another and whether that relation might be helpful in the way we understand and execute those understandings of either justice or beauty.

2. BEAUTIFUL JUSTICE?

We now turn to our first question: What makes justice beautiful? In order to get to the root of this question, at least when dealing with Wolterstorff, it is important to try and understand what might circumscribe justice as being ugly. Of course, the line between what I call "ugly justice" and injustice is very thin, and I often find myself moving between the two. Nevertheless, "ugly justice" seems to be an appropriate term for our project in as much as it is very often "honest attempts" at justice that pave the road to grave injustices.

When starting from the wronged, Wolterstorff was surprised to find that much of what is written about justice in the West is concerned with "right order justice". A case in point that Wolterstorff often uses when dealing with this issue is John Rawls'[2] *Theory of justice*. Though this article does not allow for a detailed discussion of Rawl's argument, it is important to define it briefly. In attempting to differentiate right order justice from justice based on inherent worth, Wolterstorff (2013a:22) distinguishes between "reactive rights" and "primary rights". Wolterstorff argues that many in the West, such as Rawls, have the former in mind when they speak and think about justice. This kind of justice has to do with the punishment of wrongdoers for a certain injustice committed against someone. Of course, Wolterstorff argues that there is no doubt that this kind of justice is required and necessary. Indeed, when someone wrongs another person, there are to be repercussions.

Nevertheless, Wolterstorff critiques such theories of justice in as much as it is concerned with "principles" that will help bring to fruition a "well-ordered society". Moreover, it is based on the understanding that a well-ordered society will work when everyone in that society agrees on these principles. In turn, social institutions have the responsibility to demand adherence to these principles. It is right to adhere to the duties, obligations or burdens in such a society. The problem, however, is that actual societies do not function in this way, simply because – even if everyone acknowledges the need for such rights, duties, obligations, and burdens – people have "serious disagreements" concerning these principles and, even more obvious,

> citizens do not all act justly and do not all do their part in upholding just institutions, far from it (Wolterstorff 2013a:25).

2 In this opposition, Wolterstorff takes particular interest in the rights theory as it was developed by John Rawls and his counterparts from the time of Plato. Wolterstorff (2013:28) notes: "In the Republic Plato developed a theory of justice for an ideal society; Rawls followed in Plato's path. Starting from the wronged meant that I would have to tread a different path".

In this sense, when trying to uphold these duties and obligations – especially when they are created and upheld by the elite and the powerful – we might easily miss the real injustices of real people; indeed, we might miss the world as it is from the perspective of the wronged. To be sure, it is possible to adhere to all the laws and rules of a certain regime and still perpetuate – if not consciously develop and expand – injustice. Therefore, Wolterstorff argues that such an ideal is almost impossible to reach, at least not in our *real* history and with *real* people in *real* societies. It is mistaken in as much as it neither accounts for justice within interpersonal relationships nor takes seriously the fact that actual societies are not as trustworthy in as much as people are often greedy, devious, self-centred, and so on.

Wolterstorff repeatedly emphasises, as Boesak also emphasised, that the apartheid system in South Africa was a good example of this understanding of right order justice. In apartheid South Africa, legislation and governing was concerned with creating a "good order". The problem with that system was that it achieved order at the cost of many people's human dignity and at the cost of freedom. Even though the order and the ideal principles were being upheld, people suffered terribly as their *dignity, their inherent worth,* was negated. It was possible, as many of our elders will claim, to be a good church-going person who adheres to benevolence on his/her own terms but ignores the "massive human suffering" and the negations of the livelihood of many that linger in the background of all of this.

With this understanding of reactive rights and right order justice in mind, we may now turn to Wolterstorff's alternative: "primary rights" or "rights grounded on inherent worth". Bear in mind that we are still in the process of trying to understand what beautiful justice might be like, by peeling off the many layers of misunderstandings often associated with justice.

It is interesting to note that Wolterstorff's quest for a different understating of justice started when he heard "cry for justice" during his visit in South Africa. It is noteworthy that he experienced this cry as not, first, being concerned with reactive justice, but as a cry for doing *primary* and undoing *primary* injustice.[3] To better comprehend Wolterstorff's understanding of this kind of justice, a short definition might suffice:

3 This might sound strange in the contemporary South African context: Does Wolterstorff propose that concerns such as retribution, redistribution or restitution are part of "reactive justice"? In this way, any reaction against reactive justice becomes dangerous and can even be drawn up in world-escaping idealisms that propose abstract justice or pietistic "dignity" at the cost of the very real needs of those suffering at the hand of injustice – the kind against which Boesak and many

> The inherent rights conception says that there is something about each human being, and something about her relationship to her fellows, that gives her rights; there doesn't have to be, in addition, some external standard bestowing rights on her. There is something about you, and something about our relationship to each other, that gives you a right … the inherent rights theorist, then, holds that justice is present in a society insofar as people are treated as they have a right to be treated (Wolterstorff 2013:32).

What Wolterstorff has in mind is that justice is not, first, based on ideals and principles, for those often negate real human experiences. Instead, human beings have an inherent worth, simply because they are human. The overlap between beauty and justice can hardly be ignored. In acknowledging a person's worth, we accept that person as being worthy of receiving just treatment.

When explicating his theory of justice based on inherent rights, Wolterstorff admits that one obvious question should be answered: What or whom constitutes this right that we as human beings have? Indeed, it is not imposed rights or theorised rights.[4] Nor, as he clearly states through many of his writings, is it rights that we earn by our own merit or that are dependent on some kind of external beauty, worth, or status. What then renders dignity and inherent worth, and consequently, a right to being treated justly and the imperative of undoing injustice? Put differently: What is the "thing" inside of every human person that constitutes right treatment and why should anyone care about that "thing"? At this point, our discussion takes a theological turn. To answer this age-old question, Wolterstorff turns to the connection between Christian piety and justice. His question concerning what constitutes justice is – at its core – a question of Christian piety and whether justice belongs to Christian piety, or rather, whether Christian piety *requires* justice.

In his article, "Why care about justice", now published in *Hearing the call: Liturgy, justice, church, and world*, Wolterstorff (2011:96) tries to answer this question by exploring the connection between God's love for justice and inherent worth. From Christian Scripture, he argues, it is stated "over and over" again that God loves justice. Not only does God love justice, but God also actively partakes in justice. God *does* justice.

others have warned. To the contrary, Wolterstorff's understanding of "primary rights" counters any such understandings. For Wolterstorff, starting from the perspective of the wronged made all the difference.

4 Elsewhere, Wolterstorff also contends that rights should not be – as is often popular in rights theories – constituted by autonomy in as much as someone who has no autonomy (that is, those who are imprisoned or who are physically impaired) still should be able to enjoy rights.

But, why does God love justice? According to Wolterstorff (2011b:96), one possible answer to this question – and one that is supported by a large strand of "prominent Christian theology" – is to see God's love for justice as grounded in God's anger with those who disobey God's commands. To this, Wolterstorff argues convincingly that the Old Testament, especially those passages that speak so poetically of God's love for justice, is not concerned only with this kind of retributive justice. Instead, Wolterstorff argues that "God's love for justice … is grounded in his special concern for the hundredth one". This, once again, requires starting from the position of those who are wronged in a society. According to Wolterstorff (2011:97), a just society is not measured by the well-being of the elite. In fact,

> [t]he test is not whether the economically powerful have enough to eat – they almost always do; but whether the economically powerless have enough.

In this sense, justice is society's "charter of protection" for the outcasts, the hundredth one. Wolterstorff asks: How can justice be linked to God's love for the outsider? To answer this, Wolterstorff (2011:99) asserts that justice and injustice are sacramental realities in that

> God's love for the victims of our world is his suffering love. It is in that love that his love of justice is grounded. The tears of God are the soil in which his love of justice is rooted.

In this sense, God suffers when all are not treated as they have a right to be treated. Put differently, God demands justice so that everyone – especially those who are often neglected – enjoy God's all-encompassing shalom. Wolterstorff captured this in the earlier version of this same article: "[t]he contours of shalom can be discerned from the contours of the laments to which God gives ear" (Wolterstorff, 1986:11).

How much different, how much more beautiful, would our world have looked if the contours of what we regard as a just society be determined by the contours of those suffering under the boot of the oppressor?

This is perhaps what Wolterstorff has in mind when he continues by observing that the abovementioned is only half of the story. The biblical writers are not only concerned with God's love and *God's* participation in justice, but also with the active call for *all people* to act justly.[5] Why is that? According to Wolterstorff, one option is to locate this calling in our desire to answer the lament of God and relieve divine suffering. In this sense, we

5 Wolterstorff uses a plethora of biblical texts to support these claims. In this instance, he specifically focuses on calls in Deuteronomium 16, Amos 5, and Micah 6.

acknowledge and actively participate in the sacramental reality of justice. God's cry over the injustice, the ugliness in the world, should activate our crying and our active relief of that suffering. This is a valuable observation. One can recall how Desmond Tutu addressed the 25th Chapter of the World Economic Forum, explaining to the delegates from around the world that "God is weeping" when God looks at how people are treating one another. At the same time, the Archbishop Emeritus reminded the crowd that "God is smiling" when God sees their efforts of justice. Though this is important, Wolterstorff is convinced that this is not enough.

Rather, he underscores that our participation in justice is part and parcel of our call to *imitate* God. Or, put differently, our participation in justice is inseparable from our participation in God. Wolterstorff (2011:101) beautifully writes:

> as God is just, so are we to be just … as God has heard our laments and satisfied our longings, so we are to hear the laments of the poor among us, the weak and oppressed.[6]

To summarise, God's love for justice is grounded in God's love for the hundredth one in society. In turn, according to Wolterstorff, our acts of justice or the undoing of injustice are grounded in our calling to imitate the God who gives ear to those who suffer.

At the end of this section, we should once again ask: What makes justice beautiful? The argument regarding Wolterstorff's understanding of inherent rights tried to give one possible answer to this question. What was implicit all along should now be stated clearly. In analysing Wolterstorff's understanding of justice based on inherent rights, it seems fair to suggest that any understanding of justice, especially those understandings of right order justice mentioned earlier, that does not start from the wrong, might be "ugly" in as much as it does not seek or envision a life of beauty or shalom for all people. In turn, if we want a good society, a beautiful society, one might add, we need to think about inherent justice. In this sense, a *beautiful* society is a society wherein everyone is drawn into the community and *enjoys* the benefits of that community. Where each person is rendered what is due to him/her and where the little ones in the society, the orphan, the widow, the stranger and the poor are at the heart of that society. We might add, it is to get down in the trenches and face real humanity in their suffering, it is from there – starting from the wronged – that our thinking and acting should develop. Indeed, this is, it would seem, what Boesak called for.

6 Wolterstorff goes even further still by locating this call in the call to holy, but that point will be taken up toward the end of this article. Furthermore, this will lead us to shift our focus to the New Testament, as the discussion thus far only focused on the Old Testament.

3. JUST BEAUTY?

In his recent *In this world of wonders: Memoirs of a life in learning* (2019), it is clear to see that beauty and the arts has always been a major part of Wolterstorff's life. He vividly remembers his father's love for, and profession as a woodworker and how his mother "revealed the beauty in old rags" (Wolterstorff 2019:428). Throughout his career, Wolterstorff thought and taught extensively on this theme. Some of his works on this topic might even be regarded as an attempt to mend the fracture that he experienced after his visit to South Africa. This is already clear in his now famous *Art in action: Toward a Christian aesthetic* (1980). More recently, however, Wolterstorff took up this theme with a new focus and even diverged from some of his findings in that seminal work.[7] We now turn to some of his thoughts from this more recent publication, *Art rethought: The social practices of art* (2015a), as this will help us answer the question, What constitutes just beauty? and, ultimately, attempt to reunite justice and beauty.

In a similar fashion as with the question on justice, it will be important to analyse Wolterstorff's understanding of beauty,[8] in order to peel away some of the layers of misunderstanding surrounding this theme, so that we can eventually work with a specific interpretation of beauty when exploring the possible link between justice and beauty. Interestingly, when we approach Wolterstorff's understanding of beauty, it is almost as if the same hermeneutic that was at work in his analysis of justice is at play. It seems clear that one major thread running through his discussions on both justice and beauty is an attempt to move from the abstract and the ideal to the more concrete and human. Put differently, we might argue that his thoughts on beauty are also an attempt to start from the perspective of those who are being wronged.

7 According to his own interpretation, Wolterstorff (2014) mentions that he diverged from those observations in at least four ways: (i) he began to see art rather as social practices and less as individual actions; (ii) the "meaning" of art became a very important theme in his later works, not accounted for at first; (iii) relating to his understanding of "the grand narrative", he became convinced that philosophers of art (including himself) never mentioned anything outside of this framework, and (iv) even though in *Art in action* he pleaded for an engagement with art forms that did not fit this framework, he was not convinced that he engaged these himself. In *Art rethought: The social practices of art*, all of these elements are explored in greater depth.

8 I use the word "beauty" very hesitantly in this instance, as this is the theme of our publication. It is very important to take note, however, that Wolterstorff is very critical of the phraseology surrounding "beauty" as will soon become clear toward the end of this discussion.

In his analysis of the world of art, most of Wolterstorff's thoughts are set up against, what he calls, the "the grand narrative of art".[9] According to him, the grand narrative presupposes a standard story of art, wherein the arts in early modern Western Europe underwent significant changes. This included the bourgeoisie having more time for recreation and art, resulting in renewed interest in works of art. In turn, art became exclusive and accessible to only a few. Art became a symbol, so to speak, that contributed toward shaping a so-called "cultured" identity in that society. According to Wolterstorff (2015a:56), the grand narrative simply

> ascribes to those changes the art-historical significance of art coming into its own and the sociological thesis of art becoming socially other and transcendent.

In order to better understand the grand narrative of art, which, according to Wolterstorff, shaped our deepest understanding of art (and, I would argue, of beauty), it is worthwhile to briefly turn to these two phenomena.

With regard to the art-historical significance, Wolterstorff's main concern is that art became objects of "disinterested aesthetic attention"[10] – that is, ways of engaging art for its own sake. Contemplating an artwork, in this sense, is to do so because it is viewed as an end-in-itself. When these changes took place, people did not simply engage artwork for some other goal (such as veneration in churches), but rather for its own sake (Wolterstorff 2015a:12-13).

In this sense, an artwork is created, presented and engaged for the end goal of disinterested aesthetic attention. In turn, art was removed from its original context and placed in museums or in the residences of the upper class to be viewed not as representing that context, but rather as representing itself. Wolterstorff (2015a:12-13), quoting Eagleton, ties this idea to the growing consensus that "modernity represents liberation". In this sense, neither the art nor the artist should be bound to create for

9 I do not propose, in this instance, that *art* and *beauty* are inseparable. In fact, like Wolterstorff, this article moves toward critiquing that viewpoint. Nevertheless, when exploring Wolterstorff's understanding of the arts, it helps us grasp the theme of beauty and how that relates to justice. In this sense, the focus on the arts is a practical one that aids our theme, although, toward the end, I will deviate once more to return to beauty.

10 Note that Wolterstorff builds on the 18th-century idea of so-called "disinterested contemplation". The language is, however, misleading in our current use of both those words. "Disinterested", in this sense, has nothing to do with being un-interested, according to Wolterstorff (2015a:13). Rather, it has more to do with engaging the object for its own sake, although it might be very passionate and engaged. "Contemplation", is too passive a word for Wolterstorff, to which he suggests "attention" (2015a:12).

service such as when a monk creates an icon to deepen piety. Rather, art and the artist ought to be *freed* from such obligations.

With this in mind, we may also turn to the second phenomenon of the grand narrative, namely the sociological thesis of art becoming socially other and transcendent. In this instance, Wolterstorff (2015a:44-45) notes that the world of art has become, even in its search for a more secular identity, a religion onto itself. Herein, he says, the artworks are sometimes viewed as "God-surrogates" in that they are contemplated in a religious manner. Quoting from Wackenroder and Malraux, respectively, Wolterstorff notes that art museums and galleries became "temples" or "shrines"[11] and functioned with the same framework that Augustine applied to theology.[12] To the contrary, others such as Clive Bell saw works of art as revelatory of divinity.[13] The art evokes in the "qualified participant" (or the so-called "cultured individual") such feelings of joy or ecstasy that we can be led to believe that art "might prove the world's salvation" (Wolterstorff 2015a:44-45). In his analysis of Bell, Wolterstorff (2015a:47) explains that this experience "puts us in touch with a 'world' that transcends the ordinary practical concerns of human beings". In this sense, "art competes with religion in the business of salvation" (Wolterstorff 2015a:49).

These ideas are specifically developed by, ironically says Wolterstorff, the Marxist writer Marcuse. Marcuse argues that art should liberate human beings in general from "every form of natural constraint". But, at the same time, art also helps in "altering our consciousness" in such a way that it drives people to change the world (Wolterstorff 2015a:52). Interestingly, Wolterstorff (2015a:52) contends that this view acknowledges that, even when reality cannot change, art functions as a way of reconciling reality

11 This reminds one of J.K.A. Smith in his book, *You are what you love*, as he explores the idea that we are all simply partaking in the liturgies of cultural empires, and that inevitably shapes who we become. In this instance, he uses the example of how a shopping mall becomes our temple as we partake in the liturgies and rituals of that temple: "This temple – like countless others now emerging around the world – offers a rich, embodied visual mode of evangelism that attracts us. This is a gospel whose power is beauty, which speaks to our deepest desires. It compels us to come, not through dire moralism, but rather with a winsome invitation to share in this envisioned good life" (Smith 2016:43).

12 That is: "Augustine, says Abrams, 'details the loving contemplation of God's supreme beauty and excellence in terms familiar to us: He enjoyed as His own end, and *non propter aliud*, for his own sake [*propter se ipsam*], simply for His inherent excellence and, in Augustine's repeated term, gratis – that is, gratuitously, independently of our personal interests or of any possible rewards'" (Wolterstorff 2015a:44).

13 Wolterstorff is aware that this is a very prominent feature of art and that it has, indeed, played and still plays a major role in the philosophy of art. It is, however, Bell's overextension of this idea into disinterested contemplation that interests Wolterstorff.

as it is with reality as it should be. By way of conclusion, Wolterstorff (2015a:53) notes that all of the abovementioned has such a high regard for the essence of the art itself that it ignores

> the many ways in which the religions of human beings actually engage the arts [and] the many ways in which artists engage actual religions.

Perhaps this can be better understood when viewed from the perspective of modern-day examples. Recently, director Eike Schmidt of the Uffizi gallery in Florence made this point, stating that one of this gallery's most famous artworks, the Rucellai Madonna by Duccio, should return to its original home, the church. *The Art Newspaper*'s Anna Cocks (2020) reports on these comments:

> This idea is part of the Uffizi's reaction to the coronavirus (Covid-19) crisis, in which it is thinking about diversification and the distribution of its works of art, in order to create a "wider" museum beyond the immediate premises of the gallery.

She then quotes Schmidt as saying that

> devotional art was not born as a work of art but for a religious purpose, usually in a religious setting.

The article continues by highlighting mixed emotions surrounding Schmidt's comments. Most noteworthy is that of the head of Florence's diocesan museum, Monsignor Timothy Verdon, who explains that this is an interesting proposal but that it would be unrealistic "for reason[s] that everyone will understand". Perhaps the problem is exactly this assumption, believing that art comes into its own right when placed among other pieces for disinterested attention. On a more serious note, specifically relating to the colonial history in Africa, we can simply consider the discussion surrounding the so-called Benin bronzes that was taken by colonial force and is now displayed in different galleries around Europe and most notably in the British Museum (holding 900 pieces and 73,000 more objects from sub-Saharan Africa) and the Ethnological Museum in Berlin (with 530 pieces). The return of these pieces has been hit by diverse criticism. On the one hand, the cry for justice by the Nigerian people is clear and concise. In her newspaper article, "Art of the steal: European museums wrestle with returning African art", Kristen Chick (2019) reports Ikhuehi Omonkhua, the chief exhibition officer of the National Museum in Benin City, as saying that these pieces represent more than simply art, "keeping them abroad is like holding our ancestors hostage". On the other hand, others such as Didier Rykner, managing director of *La Tribune de l'Art*, embarrassingly

went on French television explaining that art should not be returned to Africa, because “Europeans said it’s art … it’s not from Africa, it was not art. It was meant to disappear”. Finally, one more example should be mentioned, namely the famous graffiti artist Banksy who remote-control shredded one of his most famous artworks, “Girl with balloon”, just after it sold for US$1.4 million. Banksy is famous for criticising the abstraction of art for commercial purposes and this was simply another trick to prove this point. In fact, Banksy is finding it difficult to keep his artworks on the streets where he intended them to be.

Back to Wolterstorff’s understanding of the art-historical significance of art “coming into its own”. It is clear to what extent our narrative about art is still informed by the so-called “grand narrative”, with its focus on disinterested aesthetic attention.

To summarise, Wolterstorff presented two theses, the art-historical and the sociological, that shaped, what he calls, the grand narrative. The art-historical thesis led to a way of engaging art for disinterested aesthetic attention where the artwork is an end in itself. This was supported by the sociological thesis, which explains how art became salvific in its own way, transporting someone to what is a higher ideal or, perhaps one can add, a good order.

What does all of this have to do with our current conversation and what does this say about our understanding of justice and beauty? In order to get to that, we need to now turn to Wolterstorff’s critique of the grand narrative.

The first and more obvious critique that Wolterstorff mentions is that this narrative is simply untenable, because it says nothing of the variety of artworks available at present. In this instance, he considers artists such as Andy Warhol and Marcel Duchamp who actively distanced themselves from this way of looking at art.

Beyond this, however, Wolterstorff (2015a:67-82) is adamant to prove that the grand narrative was *never* tenable, for at least three reasons. First, Wolterstorff (2015a:69) claims that it is by no means a given that works of art need to be engaged by way of disinterested attention. There are, in his view, works of art with which people engage for other reasons than for disinterested attention. A singer sings a beautiful song, not simply to appreciate the song for its own sake, but very often simply for enjoyment. In fact, when singing in this way, the artist does not even regard, argues Wolterstorff, the joy experienced from singing as a causal consequence, but rather as an adverbial modifier (in other words, “one sings joyfully”).

Secondly, Wolterstorff (2015a:73) deems the grand narrative as "moot", simply because art does not represent progression in a general sense such as, for example, physics. Therefore, art does not simply come into its own at one specific point in history and left untouched thereafter. Rather, the old remains active. He argues that this is clear, for example, in the way in which Catholics still bend the knee to the Virgin Mary. In the same way, Wolterstorff claims, there are no identifiable *telos*. Even if art did have a clear and general progression, it would seem premature to claim that it reached a stasis. Simply because, if it had to reach a stasis, it would imply a "dead end" or "awaiting its next creative genius". Both of which are obviously not true of the arts at present.

Finally, Wolterstorff explains that the grand narrative is faulty in as much as other forms of engaging works of art are also done in freedom and not in need of doing so for the sake of a cause. In this sense, he claims,

> [t]here are many ways of engaging works of the arts, and many modes of artistic creation, that are socially other and transcendent (Wolterstorff 2015a:77).

When examining Wolterstorff's critique, we are led to see the grand narrative of art for what it is. This, in turn, begs the question: How can we, apart from the grand narrative, think and speak about beauty? If we were indeed so deeply influenced with this one understanding that is indeed very exclusive and not all-embracing, what alternatives do we have? And how does all of this relate to what we said earlier about justice based on inherent worth? Before we can really get to the heart of our project in trying to relate justice and beauty, we need to briefly turn to Wolterstorff's understanding of beauty when viewed from beyond the general restraints of the grand narrative.

In *Art rethought: The social practices of art*, he devotes an entire chapter to the question: "What happened to beauty?" His concern is specifically related to the relationship between beauty and art. To summarise, Wolterstorff states that the relationship between art and beauty is one that developed in the wake of the grand narrative of art. He argues that Aquinas' understanding of beauty as a

> species of excellence in objects which gives one enjoyment upon seeing or hearing the object and taking note of its excellence

was a dominant way of thinking (Pythagorian-Platonic, as he calls it) right into the 18th century. Coupling with the grand narrative, beauty made an object intrinsically worthwhile. Wolterstorff (2015a:312) mentions that this understanding was further obscured when, in the 19th century, the

language of "beauty" was confused with what is "pleasing" or "easy". In this way, as history would have it, two things merited a good work of art: the *sublime* (the awesome) and the *beautiful* (the pleasant). In turn, however, Wolterstorff (2015a:305) is adamant that evaluations of works are inherent in the social practices of art, and beauty is, in fact, a small consideration in these evaluations. In this sense, Wolterstorff (2015a:315) proposes that works of art are rather composed or created by making so-called "evaluative judgements", that is

> judgements as to which works are good and which are bad, which are better, and which are worse, and judgements as to which ways of making those works are good and which are bad, which are better, and which are worse. Nobody engages in the practice without making such judgements.

When Wolterstorff tries to answer the question: "What makes a work of the arts or an artwork good?", he proposes that the answer will not necessarily be beauty, but that it will rather be highly relative and contextual to the different ways of making art. In turn, he suggests that, in order to understand what makes an artwork good, we need to "hang out with artists and performers and listen to what they say" (Wolterstorff, 2015a:316). This, Wolterstorff suggests, will give one a "feel" for why some lines in poems, for example, are better than others. Therefore, to understand what merits works of the arts, we can immerse ourselves in the social practice of art criticism. According to Wolterstorff's understanding, these criticisms are filled with evaluative judgements, and engaging these gives us a sense of what merits one or the other work. These judgements should, however, not lead us to make generalisation such as abstracting criterion such as what happened to "beauty". To the contrary, we will be immersed in how "diverse and detailed these judgements are and how they differ from case to case" (Wolterstorff 2015a:317). In this sense, these evaluative judgements are relative and contextual, but not to such an extent that they are only concerned with "taste" (that is, beauty is in the eye of the beholder). Rather, we will be "immersed in disputes" and it is there that we develop our senses.

To summarise, I argued in the preceding section that, for Wolterstorff, the way in which we evaluate beauty is determined by the deep-seated influence of, what he calls, the grand narrative of art in as much as this narrative gives language to how art is viewed as objects of disinterested attention and to how works of the arts are viewed as being socially other and transcendent. He critiqued this narrative, by indicating that it was never tenable and simply does not speak to the many different contemporary forms of art. When regarding all of this, it became clear that

our understanding of beauty was greatly influenced by this narrative in as much as beauty was confused with the pleasant and the sublime. In what follows, I will attempt to take our finding in the section on justice and our findings with regard to beauty to find out whether it is indeed possible to link these two themes when understood in this way.

4. JUSTICE "AND" BEAUTY?

When starting from the wronged, we are bound to rid ourselves from an idealised understanding of both justice (in the form of right order justice) and beauty (in the form of a grand narrative), so as to see both justice and beauty as being operative in favour of the hundredth one in society. Put differently, both justice and beauty, when understood in this way, contribute to the flourishing of all. Indeed, not only so that people may survive, but so that they *enjoy* living before God and *enjoy* living with fellow human beings. The contrary is also true. Our understanding of justice and beauty as being idealised operates against the well-being and flourishing of all and serves the needs of only a few powerful elites.

With this declaration in mind, we are left with a world of possibilities when trying to unite justice and beauty. Indeed, in this sense, both justice and beauty operate from the perspective of the wronged and act as life-giving components in the lives of all who partake in it. When analysing Wolterstorff in this way, at least three creative possibilities for uniting justice and beauty come to the fore. The first two serve as mere preliminary suggestions, while the third is poised as being a comprehensive suggestion for our theme. I offer these as open-ended conclusions, in the hope that more creative alternatives might exist as we continue to explore the value of justice based on inherent worth and beauty as viewed from the perspective of the wronged.

It is surprising that Wolterstorff ends *Art rethought: The social practices of art* with a chapter on justice, titled "*The pursuit of justice and the social practices of art*". In fact, introducing this chapter, he claims that "this entire article is a call for justice" (Wolterstorff 2015a323). This is done, according to him, by putting an end to the grand narrative assertion that those other forms of art[14] (in other words, not "fine art") are of lesser importance. He claims that

> social practices do not exist autonomously. Social practices are the practices *of* human beings … to put down some social practice is

14 Even though we could not go into detail, in this instance, Wolterstorff uses as concrete examples memorial art, art for veneration, social protest art and "art that enhances" such as work songs.

> to put down the human beings who engage in that social practice (Wolterstorff 2015a:323).

In this sense, many "evaluative judgements" go into making, for example, memorial art. These already raise questions: Who are honoured? Who may be excluded? Whose story is being told and to what end? Nowhere was this clearer than in the recent history of the University of the Free State's main campus in its struggle to deal with the history of the M.T. Steyn statue posed in the focal point of campus. The same discourse was also in the frontlines of media when students at the University of Cape Town campus fought to remove the statue of Cecil John Rhodes and others who protested by burning the artworks of one of the campus' galleries. Indeed, all of these memorials represented a racist colonial heritage in South Africa that does not speak to, at best, or violently offends the victims of that legacy. Moreover, works of art also pay honour to someone; therefore, according to Wolterstorff, it is just to treat that artwork in a way that befits that person's worth. Singing while working, especially in oppressive circumstances, brings dignity to those who sing and might even be a form of protest in opposition to their oppressors.

In this sense, the people singing, for example, "are not just laborers; cotton pickers; stone splitters", and so on. Rather, they "give voice to their dignity" (Wolterstorff 2015a:325). To be sure, this differs from the "fine" distinguishable grand narrative of art that made its way into the artworld to such an extent that everything that is not "fine" is not beauty, and, in turn, not worthy. Justice is interlinked with beauty in as much as it honours, represents and gives voice to the dignity and the inherent worth of human beings.

A second suggestion to link justice and beauty can be found in Wolterstorff's many writings about the Christian liturgy[15] and how it relates to holiness. In his article "Liturgy, justice, and holiness", now published in *Hearing the call*, Wolterstorff (2011:60) starts by examining major classical liturgies. He observes that "the acknowledgement and hymning of holiness is a preoccupation of the Christian liturgy" (2011:62). Perhaps, if we had to understand these hymns as being objects of disinterested attention, or the art used in these liturgies as having its own telos, it would be difficult to perceive how holiness is related to such "earthly concerns" as justice and beauty. When viewed in this way, liturgy would rather have the goal of bringing us closer to heaven, so to speak. In contrast to this

15 Note that Wolterstorff does at times focus on liturgy as a form of "art for veneration". Although that is extremely important, the focus, in this instance, falls on what happens in the liturgy and its content rather than only its artfulness.

view, Wolterstorff wants to make it clear that this is a malformed way of speaking about holiness and justice (and perhaps beauty), because “when we deal with justice, we are dealing with the sacred”. He continues by adding

> the preoccupation of the liturgy with holiness does not separate liturgy from justice. To the contrary, holiness binds liturgy and justice together (Wolterstorff 2011:63).

But how is this possible? In what way does holiness bind together liturgy (including beauty) and justice? In order to do this, Wolterstorff proposes that we look at holiness anew. In his analysis – following that of British anthropologist Mary Douglas – holiness, in the Old Testament, is about wholeness and completeness and not only about “set apartness”, as many will argue. Indeed, according to Wolterstorff (2011:69), set apartness is its root, but that does not tell us much. Wolterstorff rather suggests that holiness is about being *whole* and complete in both a physical and a social sense. Israel is to avoid the broken things of their society, in order to pursue wholeness. Holiness is to reflect God’s wholeness. When this is said, it becomes possible to see how justice is part of holiness in that

> the unjust society is a society in which wholeness and integrity are lacking. It is a society in which people exist on the margins, on the periphery, hanging on rather than being incorporated into the life and flourishing of the community. Such a society fails to mirror the wholeness of God. And when we as Christians recall that this God whose holiness we are called to reflect in our lives and societies is himself a trinitarian community, then it is obvious that the unjust society in an unholy society. It does not mirror God’s communitarian wholeness (Wolterstorff 2013:73).

Wolterstorff (2011:74) argues that this point is made even stronger in the New Testament, in that the New Testament presents this radical understanding of holiness wherein

> the holiness of a community resides centrally in how it treats human beings, both those who are members of the community and those outside, even those outside who are ‘enemies’ … the holy community is the merciful community, the just community.

Now Wolterstorff’s intentions become clear. When we acknowledge that the liturgy is for making us holy, we are inevitably led back to justice. When singing the ancient hymns and looking at the artworks presented in the liturgy, it makes us holy; that is, making us whole. I deduce from this that engaging in the beauty of the liturgy inevitably leads us back to justice.

We do that when we include those in the margin, struggle for justice, and befriend our enemy – or, as Wolterstorff (2011:79) says it beautifully:

> Holiness joins liturgy and justice. In the liturgy we hymn God's holiness. In the lives of justice and mercy we reflect God's holiness. In the liturgy we voice our acknowledgement of God's holiness. In the struggle for justice we embody that acknowledgement.

When looking at this link, we can summarise by stating that the engagement with beauty in the liturgy shapes us to view things differently, from the perspective of the wronged.

One last suggestion, and perhaps the most directly related to our theme, is that shalom binds together justice and beauty. Wolterstorff takes his view of society from the Old Testament understanding of Shalom[16] and its Septuagint and New Testament derivative, eirēnē. Indeed, according to Wolterstorff (2013:114), shalom – as is commonly understood – has to do with peace. In fact, shalom requires peace in as much as there is peace when the wolf dwells with the lamb and the leopard lies down with the kid (Isa. 11:6-9). Nevertheless, Wolterstorff (2013:114) explains that shalom is also much more than mere peace:

> Shalom is not just peace, but flourishing, flourishing in all dimensions of our existence – in our relation to God, in our relation to our fellow human beings, in our relation to ourselves, in our relation to creation in general.

Elsewhere, Wolterstorff (2011:110) ties flourishing with enjoyment to make the same point:

> Shalom at its highest is enjoyment in one's relationship … To dwell in shalom is to *enjoy* living before God, to *enjoy* living in one's physical surroundings, to *enjoy* living with one's fellows, to *enjoy* life with oneself.

For Wolterstorff, the biblical understanding of shalom has a distinctive relational quality about it. Indeed, according to Wolterstorff, shalom is absent whenever people are wronged, whenever there is injustice, and when every person tries to make his/her own way in the world. In fact, Wolterstorff goes as far as to state that, even when those who are being wronged – as in apartheid South Africa – are fooled into believing, though they were not, that they are content with their present predicament, even then shalom is absent, because

16 See Wolterstorff (2013a).

> genuine flourishing is not just feeling good. Genuine flourishing is only present when we no longer oppress people … shalom goes beyond justice but shalom is never less than justice (Wolterstorff 2011:116).

In this sense, it is because of this relational dimension of shalom that Wolterstorff understands justice to be inherently linked to shalom. In turn, because shalom is about flourishing in all dimensions of life, it also encapsulates the need for beauty. This can be noted in Wolterstorff's (2013:221) understanding that shalom ties together those fractured elements of his own life, as mentioned in the introduction. In this instance, we find how Wolterstorff brings beauty into this relational equation of shalom. For Wolterstorff, it is in shalom that "understanding has replaced bewilderment, worship of God has replaced enmity, aesthetic delight has replaced revulsion, justice has replaced injustice". Because of this understanding, Wolterstorff is adamant to show that beauty is, therefore, not simply linked to flourishing, in that those who seek shalom for their fellows also seek sensory delight for them. Instead, Wolterstorff (2013:224, 226) wants to make it clear that whenever people's inherent right to beauty is stripped from them, it constitutes injustice:

> My question is not whether the love that seeks shalom for one's fellow human beings will seek for them surroundings in which they can find sensory delight. Of course, it will. My question is whether we are violating the dignity of our fellow human beings when we force them to live in aesthetically squalid surroundings, or even we rest content with letting them live in such surroundings … the opportunity to live in surroundings of aesthetic decency is not an optional luxury. Justice requires it.

In this sense, justice requires beauty and beauty requires justice. When viewed from the perspective of those who are being wronged, flourishing requires both justice and beauty.

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