

## Where Beauty and Terror Lie: The Poetics of Everyday Life

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In his War Requiem, Benjamin Britten sets Wilfred Owen's World War I poems against texts of the Mass for the Dead. At the point of the offertory, the music retells the story of Abram and Issac. "So Abram arose, and clave the wood, and went,/And took [Issac] with him, and a knife." The boy observes the preparations for the sacrifice and asks where the lamb for this offering is. "Then Abram bound the youth with belts and straps,/And builded parapets and trenches there, /And stretched forth the knife to slay his son." A musical shift interposes the voice of a divine messenger who bids Abram: "Lay not thy hand upon the lad, Neither do anything to him. Behold, A ram...Offer the Ram of Pride instead of him." The baritone and tenor soloists are joined by a children's choir.

The children begin to sing the ancient Offertorium text from the Latin Mass (*Hostias et preces tibi/Domine laudis offerimus:...*) [Sacrifices and prayers we offer, Lord, to you with praise...bring them from death to life]. Unlike the biblical ending of the story, there follows a terrifying text, sung by the two soloists: "But the old man would not so, and slew his son,--And half the seed of Europe, one by one. In Britten's musical intensification of the unspeakable, the phrase, "one by one," is repeated by both soloists in broken musical lines over the children's prayers. How is it that listeners are drawn to the exquisitely rendered terrible scene--echoing in our memory long after the musical ends?

Having heard the War Requiem performed recently brought back to me why I choose to juxtapose the words "terror" and "beauty" in this lecture. These words point to the extremities of the world, and our dwelling in it. In this case, Britten's art sounds a layered beholding: the texts of terror are musically articulated in ways that go beyond what language can hold toward a silence: silence acknowledging the unspeakable in a manner that both denies and permits access to the elemental facts of war's terror. Moreover, I am drawn to hear such a musical work again--knowing that time will deepen such disturbing art, or as novelist William Maxwell might say, "time will darken it."

Some works of human imagination do this. Poetry about human extremities always approaches this paradox of expressing what is on the edge of unspeakability. One thinks of the Holocaust-permeated poetry of Paul Celan, drinking the "black milk" of crematorium smoke. Or, Nelly Sachs' O The Chimneys in which the reader is confronted with mourning those who did not survive and those who did:

We, the rescued,  
Beg you:  
Show us your sun, but gradually.  
Lead us from star to star, step by step,  
Be gentle when you teach us to live again.  
Lest the song of a bird,  
Or a pail being filled at the well,  
Let our badly sealed pain burst borth again  
And carry us away--  
We beg you:

Do not show us an angry dog, not yet--  
It could be, it could be  
That we will dissolve into dust--  
Dissolve into dust before your eyes.<sup>1</sup>

Rilke's line from the First Duino Elegy haunts our project: "For beauty is nothing but the beginning of terror...."<sup>2</sup> Perhaps we might add, that the terrifying and its aftermath of grief may lead to reappropriation of nearly unbearable beauty. Labyrinthine pathways lead off from here into aesthetic theory, theology and the limits of language. For now, at the outset, I simply mark the necessity of the intercourse of what is signified by these terms, at least for some works of the human imagination.

But not only in the domain of art; I propose that everyday life also knows something and undergoes (shall we say "suffers"?) these very contrasts, no matter how disguised or undervalued by theories about reality. The terror and the beauty lie unacknowledged for most of us, until the conditions of perception come round: characteristically when pain and terror strike by chance, or when we are enraptured by the splendor of something Other. I shall argue that, *without* the "everydayness" of our ordinary human embodied patterns of knowing, feeling, and acting that intense experiences of terror or beauty by themselves could be deceptive, could "lie" (not tell the whole truth) about how and what the world is.

Three interrelated sets of questions follow: first, how do we come to see relations between the beautiful and the terrifying? We shift from nouns to adjectives here--for we have knowledge in and through our being affected, in and through *eros* for what is true, what is good, what is beautiful. Secondly, how might we speak of the intelligence of human emotions stretched between the extremities of human pathos by which we gain a "sense of the world"? Deep human emotions such as awe, wonder, grief, compassion, fear, and grateful receptivity are ingredient in a way of being and knowing and intending the world. How do we reason *in and through* our emotions and not merely "about" them analytically or in self-reflection? Confronting the beautiful and the terrifying are test cases. The third questions asks: can we speak of a poetics of everyday life in which the imaginative powers lead us beyond the tyranny of the "literally given"? Are there ritual practices that open us to beauty and terror, yet hold these in a deepening emotional intelligence?

The deepest things we know are found in the form of defining affections and passions. We could call this a determinate attunement to the world. A person or a society is better known through what is feared, loved, grieved over, and hoped for than through its factually stated ideas and thoughts. I am convinced that there is available to human societies and to particular communities of moral and religious discourse, a "poetics" necessary for forms of human flourishing. A sense of transcendence in and through the finitude of the world will appear, if at all, precisely amidst the contrasts and connections between terror and beauty. Such a *poesis* is found especially in certain religious rituals.

Philosophers and religious thinkers used to speak with confidence about human nature and perhaps the "human condition." But we "post moderns" have been taught to think that every thing we say or think or gesture is "situated." Human discourse is a function of more than we consciously intend--there are hidden presumptions, secret, and not so secret, imperialisms that speak and act through us. So we are aware of the

forces and powers that emerge in any human discourse. Alongside all this we here gathered teach and write amidst the devaluing of language itself. We swim in the corruption of human speech--political, moral, media-dominated aesthetic, religious--in a popular culture of hype and disaffection. Proper caution about "totalizing" is in order. Yet when it comes to certain matters of extremity, the older discourses of "common humanity" re-emerge, as in the case of new regard for firemen, the police, and construction workers at the sites of the terror and destruction.

I speak out of particular religious and moral traditions that have shaped my lines of reasoning, the sense and sensibility of these words, knowing that not all gathered here share these, especially my theological interests. Nevertheless I offer the following reflections trusting in analogies, resonances, and convergent traces among us in the life and work of Emory University.

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### **Evoking the conditions for seeing the contrasts**

Some of us may now be tiring of the rhetoric of terror, especially as it has been translated into the political rhetoric about "terrorism" and our plan to manage it. Yet no one here can quite take in yet the sense of psychic bodily trauma of the towers falling to dust. Even with the endless replication of images of the planes the towers, and the enormous human reclamation, we still recoil at the thought. That is, our thoughts are not, nor could they be, merely rational. We recoil because we have appraised these events as a deep violation of our humanity.

Everyday mail can shock in its appeal: "Soldiers shot Tamba's father. Then, as his father lay dying, they trained their guns on the tearful boy and forced him to clap and cheer. Later, soldiers killed Tamba's mother. Tamba is one of thousands of children who have incurred unspeakable trauma--in the war-wracked West African nation of Sierra Leone." Dare we say in Jerusalem, the West Bank, and hundred other places? The term "Holocaust" so dominates our perception of the century just past, carries with it enormous import for what we must think, how we must now live. To say that the world is not a place of such daily terror is to be deceived.

Public historical events such as my litany and the nightly news recites are not the only terrors, of course. There are profound personal experiences of being strung between beauty and terror. I think of Gerard Manley Hopkins' "Terrible Sonnets," wherein in the poet who can sing ecstatically of God's grandeur has become his own self-tormentor because of both external and inner psychic perception. The ordinariness of the starting point in "To seem the stranger" seems obvious--ill, away from family, a sense of exile:

To seem the stranger lies my lot, my life  
Among strangers. Father and mother dear,  
Brothers and sisters are in Christ not near  
And he my peace/my parting, sword and strife.

England, whose honour O all my heart woos, wife  
To my creating thought, would neither hear  
Me, were I pleading, plead nor do I: I wear--

Y of idle a being but by where wars are rife.

...Only what word

Wisest my heart breeds dark heaven's baffling ban  
Bars or hell's spell thwarts. This to hoard unheard,  
Heard unheeded, leaves me a lonely began.<sup>3</sup>

This deepens into a self-contemplation of bitterness, evoking the idea of death as escape, and the terrifying resistance against self-destruction. Thus we overhear:

I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day,  
What hours, O what black hours we have spent  
This night! What sights you, heart, saw; ways you went!  
And more must, in yet longer light's delay....

I am gall, I am heartburn. God's most deep decree  
Bitter would have me taste: my taste was me;  
Bones built in me, flesh filled, blood brimmed the curse.  
Selfyeast of spirit a dull dough sours. I see  
The lost are like this, and their scourge to be  
As I am mine, their sweating selves; but worse.

Here the terror is internalized to self: and the emotions are articulated in physical and bodily images which show the tortured thoughts:

O the mind, mind has mountains; cliffs of fall  
Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed. Hold them cheap  
May who ne'er hung there. Nor does long our small  
Durance deal with that steep or deep. Here! Creep,  
Wretch, under a comfort serves in a whirlwind: all  
Life death does end and each day dies with sleep.<sup>4</sup>

In such poetry we "feel" and hence "think" into the personal terrors that can indeed accompany and compose everyday life. In Hopkins' case, religious sensibility intensifies the human plight. Not comforted, yet strung out by that thought of a "carrion comfort, Despair...." The poetry itself becomes a matter of willed resistance, even against experience. What strikes terror in the human heart depends upon what is valued as precious. Hopkins' lines actually hold the terror in the beauty of his linguistic art--at least in a certain way. The poetic utterance is a kind of ritual in language, marking a difference between simply being overwhelmed and inarticulate, and striving to witness to the extremity.

We live in a world of immensely beautiful and wondrous things. But this same world is also a terrifying world. Side-by-side with senseless loss and despair lays the mystery and beauty of being. There is sheer delight and deep pleasures in the order of

nature, the wondrously finite world of human persons, and the lure of significant form in the human arts. The concept of beauty is notoriously contested. Still, I propose that human beings go on being drawn to things we call "beautiful." For instance, what is it about a single jonquil in a simple glass vase, a melody by Mozart, the dance of a child, a painting that causes us to see something forever differently, a passage from Mahler, or the voice of your child singing, in imitation of the mother's lullaby...what is it about these things that arrest us? Is it simply subjective approval that prompts the exclamation, "How beautiful?" Or even the stunned silence that follows a first encounter with Van Gogh's "Starry Night?" --what is perceived? We know that not all art requires the evaluative term, "beautiful." The passage in Britten is not, in any ordinary sense of the term, "beautiful." We need a wide range of discriminations here.

In her dense but illuminating book, Beauty Restored, Mary Mothersill argues that beauty is a necessary concept in human life. It is more than a disputed term belonging to the philosophy of art. What is perceived and said to be "beautiful" may, of course, be inconsequential in some instances and settings, while possessing spiritual range and power in others. "Some things," Mothersill claims:

...like a pebble or a clear and cloudless sky, have simple souls. They please in virtue of their aesthetic properties, but those properties once noted and appreciated, do not invited prolonged critical analysis. Decorative formal designs,...may be elegant, intricate, admirable, And yet, once understood, easily forgotten. All persons and some works Of art--those to which we pay homage--have souls that are complex, multilayered, and partly hidden. They are not to be taken in at a glance, and long study leaves room for fresh discoveries. <sup>5</sup>

Perhaps a better way of making the point is with Emmanuel Levinas, who, in speaking of the sheer delight in something outside ourselves, expresses "non-nostalgic nature of desire, the plenitude and joy of the being who experiences it."<sup>6</sup> Wendy Farley's remarkable discussion of beauty in Eros and the Other makes this even clearer. "...the exteriority of beauty," she observes, "is emphasized by its infinity. The experience of beauty is never exhausted. The expression "I love you more each day" makes little quantitative sense, but it is a fumbling attempt to evoke the experience of unending freshness that accompanies friendship or romance or motherhood.... Beauty is the sort of thing that in and of itself delights the soul."<sup>7</sup> Thus, detachment from self-preoccupation is the source of genuine delight.

Terror and that which terrorizes; beauty which draws us toward its appearance--both challenge our notion of language. Both stubbornly refuse our intellectual theories, especially our causal explanations. But explaining something by way of causal theory is not the only way to understand something. It may in many cases not be a primary form of understanding at all of those features of human experience that bring as a "sense" of world, of society, of self.

The concept of beauty and the beautiful are notoriously difficult to grasp, yet so persistent in our utterances about what affects us and draws our desires in being a human being. The stunned silence before something that attracts powerfully, as well

as the silence following the horrible, the profoundly traumatic may be related in ways we do not ordinarily consider.

Something beyond words occurs when we are confronted with forces outside our control. The "unspeakable" can refer to the searingly traumatic, and also to stunning revelatory beauty.

Two conditions emerge for seeing terror and beauty. The first is what "befalls" us, the second is "attentiveness." When I think of the second condition, I think of what Simone Weil has taught us out of her own emotional complexities of affliction and beauty. Human attentiveness to what presences and absences are before us she likens to prayer. It is the crucial element in being and becoming human in the world. So the beauty of the world, precisely in the midst of affliction, is "like a mirror...[that] sends us back to our desire for goodness." As one of her biographers remarks, "With the exception of Saint Francis, whose life she looks on as 'perfect poetry in action,' she repeatedly castigates Christianity's lack of emphasis on nature's physical splendor. Our very longing for the beauty of the world, in her view, is God-inspired."<sup>8</sup> But if we are to be attentive to the world's beauty-- in nature, in art, in persons--then we must be prepared to be subject to physical suffering (*la douleur*) and to distress of spirit (*le malheur*) "affliction".

Whatever we make of her own self-tormenting thoughts and actions, I cannot help learning from her of the extremities. And these surface precisely in our bodiliness, not in our pure rationality. In fact these may diminish or even be repressed in our discursive attempt at theory.

Thus co-mingle those conditions which are pressed upon us by events in the world, and by the necessary condition of our coming to attentiveness about ourselves-in-the world. I have already alluded to how deep emotions may be ingredient in a sense of the world. To understand what we think about ourselves and the otherness of the world, involves our "being affected." Our knowing the world requires emotional capacities.

### **The intelligence of the emotions and a sense of the world**

Without particular dispositions or emotion capacities we would not "see" things about ourselves and the way the world is. Grief and gladness, gratitude and hope, sorrow and pity, jealousy, envy, compassion: these are the stuff of human beings, and indeed forces within societies.

How much is presupposed by deep grieving, or by intention and action which is born of compassion? The having of such capacities certainly involves "feelings" and bodily experience. What makes such emotions function in a sense of the world is precisely their taking the otherness of the world into us. So the grateful heart is both a disposition and a practice. Wittgenstein was right in observing that the world of the grateful is different from the world of the ungrateful. Not just subjectively--but in what one is prepared to see, to think, to intend, to resist.

Deep emotions are oriented toward certain element facts: we are mortal, our wills are corruptible, we are born and live in ignorance, in short we are embodied and finite. That is the glory and the travail of being human. All great literature and the range of human arts give us our existence-in-the otherness of the world known most deeply and

intimately through our emotions and passions. This is also the place of encounter with the substance of the moral life and with religious concern. The "untutored heart" has its story to tell. The heart schooled in the inhumanity of our age is racked with anguish, and traumatized into silence.

The philosophical traditions shaping our contemporary have characteristically drawn category contrasts between reason and passion, thought and feeling, judgment and emotion. Our habits of thought, and especially theories about mind and body, take natural contrasts and make them into what some have called a "great divide" Being rational excludes considerations of emotion. The intellect is to rule the passions. And our rational capacities have been conceived as needing to control our "lower nature". Emotions have typically been regarded as unruly, belonging to our bodily and sensible nature, linking humans to the animal world through the biological urges and drives of our physical bodies.

The idea that our loves and hates, fears and joys are basically disruptive forces in life is a dominant viewpoint--having come to us in popular psychology as well as in religious and moralist traditions. The stability and objectivity of reason is contrasted with the torrent and tempest of the passions. If it was difficult in the seventeenth century to think clearly about the passions, it is even more bewildering in the present. Many competing conceptions of emotion have emerged. Various fields who wish to speak of the "science" of human behavior, each with its popular counterpart, conceptualize emotions in particular ways.

Still a certain original sense of "passion" is present. Referring to those things in life which human beings suffer. In one of its root meanings, the term refers to the state of being which results from something acting vigorously upon us--change, vicissitude, accident.... We seem then passive in the face of the passions. Some may be happy--such as certain forms of love, hope and joy, while others are painful, even destructive, such as fear, grief, pain and anger. Underlying this way of regarding human emotional life is the assumption that we cannot help being overcome by our emotions, since they are subjective responses to forces outside (and inside us: Freud's early "force language" heightened sense of causal connections).

When we attend only to how we "feel" or experience our emotions, we miss the crucial point. If your sorrow or outrage over injustice, or your joy in the company of the beloved are only your private feelings, then it would seem that we could only learn by introspection. Knowledge of emotions would, on this view, only come from "inside" the person. However common sense this may seem, this view is misleading. Putting all emotional features of life in opposition to the intellectual powers of a person leads to untruth. One of the reasons we do not recognize another's grief or anger or joy is that we do not have their thoughts, or share their appraisals of the world. Sharing something of the same regard or appraisal of things is necessary to share in the same emotions. We cannot divorce such appraisals or beliefs or thoughts from the social histories in which we are always embedded.

The matter of grieving is particularly instructive, though grief is an especially complex case. Anger, jealousy, regret--all these too may be part of a particular instance. But deep grieving over the loss of a parent, or of a child...or deep grieving over the terror perpetrated on the innocence...these involve a powerful set of thoughts, appraisals,

value-laden descriptions of the person, of the circumstances, and the consequences. That's what makes the grieving deep.

All this ought to alert us to the difference between immediacy of feeling and depth of emotion over time. Likewise we need to see that emotions are also narratives of sort, those have an "onset" and durability. Thus we can discern the difference between "feeling angry" or jealous and being characteristically angry or jealous, or compassionate or hopeful. One of the most common ways of learning and expressing emotions is in and through how we describe things outside us. That is how poetry and literature work. It is no accident that much of religious sacred texts contains poetry or at least the powers of heightened speech to describe persons, events, and the ascribe attributes of the deity. Human emotions can be "schooled", corrected, altered, and matured when we assent to truthful and persuasive re-descriptions of the world.

Emotions, like thoughts and judgements about the world, can be either vague or precise, adequate or inadequate, yes, even "true" or "false" to how things are. The more deeply an emotion in this sense is "lived into" the more it involves understanding specific things toward which the emotion is directed, and grasping the social context which prompts, sustains or alters the emotional regard. So poetry, literature, sacred scripture arouses, sustains and articulates deep emotions, not so much by "causing" subjective feeling states, but by offering evaluative images and descriptions of reality. Because metaphor, image and symbols are involved, we speak of the power of the imagination in such discourse. To live with and to understand something by a deep metaphor or image of the self in the world requires a range of intelligence that goes beyond rationality as such.

It is the intelligence of the emotions which give us a sense and orientation to the world and our questions of how to live that is at stake here. And these, I suggest, are suspended between the terror and the beauty. The main point is, that in the moral and religious domain, we are more accountable for what we are than for what we immediately feel. Thus I wish to preserve something of the older notion of emotions and affections as "motions of the soul." What we are in our intentions and actions, and in our cultivation of a sense of the world, is more adequately revealed by address the human heart. To say that a person has a deep sense of gratitude, or that a community is magnanimous or hospitable (or full of vengeance and enmity!) is to remark about their character over time. To understand such emotions in their depth, we must see what is true over time. The evidences of our fear, our hope, our enmity, our compassion will be found in our intentions, and the way we perceive the daily world. Part of human maturity is to learn the difference between shallow and deep emotional life. But this, I contend, requires the cultivation of thought. More importantly, less this maturity become the province only of the intellectually superior, we now turn to address how human practices, especially certain ritual practices are a key element in negotiating life amidst the terror and the beauty, the affliction and the joy. Thus, as Martha Nussbaum contends, "in an ethical and social/political creature, emotions themselves are ethical and social/political, parts of an answer to the questions, "What is worth caring about? "How should I/we live?"<sup>9</sup>

## **The Poetics of Everyday Life: Transformative Rituals**

Deep human emotions are ingredient in the “poetics” of everyday life. Both the vulnerability to and the assessment of our lived world (personal, social political, cosmic) are at stake in the cultivation of certain human practices. For seeing the world and human life as something other than what is literally given is crucial to having a “sense of life”. We are both active and passive toward our lived world. Desire for the beautiful, a passion for truth, for justice, for healing, orients a whole life. But we are vulnerable in these passions. Both contingency and agency are required. So we are lead to ponder the poetics of everyday life.

There is, as Martha Nussbaum has eloquently argued, a strong element in western philosophy and religious thinking towards the “repudiation of the everyday.” Her picture of ascent toward the elevated and ideal humanity is wonderfully subverted by concluding her discussion of human striving for the transcendent and the good by an exposition of James Joyce's Ulysses. Here we see the return of the bodily repressed, and Joyce's sense that everydayness is also condition of thought and evaluation. Molly Bloom, Leopold, Poldy--the entire range of both scatological and eschatological vision is there. In, with, and through the portrayal of the earthiness and the particularity of these characters, Joyce shows us the deception of considering human life only under the ideality of ascent toward the “higher”, the purer, the intellectually superior. Nussbaum argues that Leopold shows a profound sense the struggles of moral ideals exactly in and through his ordinariness.

Permit me a personal story. In a small rural church I once served, a death of one of the respected, but tumultuous, members of the community died a sudden death. After the church funeral was held, we all gather back at the farm house where his kinfolk and friends had gathered. Food and drink had been lavishly brought to the place. There a large, polyglot crowd assembled. We ate and drank the gifts of the communal food. Stories began about the deceased. Laughter and tears, quiet solemnity and utter hilarity came and went. Talk about fear of death, talk about what it meant to have him as a friend, what it now means for the family to go on...all this in everyday language, drawing upon friendships as well as rivalries, with all the gestures that accompany such a “re-construction” of a life in a new kind of memory. So it was I came to my realization of what a sacramental meal really means, what “to remember” begins to signify, and how that ritual occasion itself was the embrace of the terror and the beauty. I can't help hoping that more of our actual funeral rites were as fully adequate,

That funeral meal in which joy, sorrow, laughter and the tears of lament co-mingled is one of the practices requiring both everydayness and the intelligence of emotion. We need such rites that will not shrink from our humanity at full stretch. Here then is the connection with religious ritual which depends both upon a tradition of practice and real humanity brought to the gestures, the language, the interaction, the shared sense of life.

This is why in the ritual of Passover Seder, or the Christian Eucharist (and other religious traditions practices in the face of suffering and death) carry this at their heart.

These practices--even when *against* experience, against the evidence that there is something to hope in, to hope for, or to bless in gratitude--are central to sustaining our humanity.

Miguel de Unamuno speaks in Tragic Sense of Life, of the inner connection between the language of human emotion and religious belief in God:

Those who say that they believe in God and yet neither love nor fear {God}, do not in fact believe in Him, but in those who have taught them that God exists...Those who believe that they believe in God, but without any passion in their heart, without anguish of mind, without uncertainty, without doubt, without an element of despair even in their consolation, believe only in the God-Idea, not in God." (trns. J. E. Crawford Fritch (New York: Dover Publications, 1954) 193.

We should not, I think, regard such human ritual practices of memory and meal as mere "coping mechanisms" or as vestigial projections of infantilism, or as false dependencies on imagined deities. Of course such human practices can indeed be interpreted this way, and perhaps usefully so when religious practices degenerate into cliché and empty form.

Perhaps the meal of memory which comprehends the terror and the beauty is itself one of the few revelatory things we do. The shaping of certain dispositions toward life and our world where grief and the hope are found together can be a place of re-configuring, or liberation back to our full humanity. These are practices in the midst of our bodily everydayness: where memory is more than language, more than mere recalling of past event; where the co-mingling of the boundaries of our speech about the terrors of annihilation and the deepest gratuities for life converge. Acknowledging that the same capacity that allows the apprehension of exquisite beauty (however embedded in its cultural specificity) is that which opens the abyss of the terrifying is itself a human achievement, but it is also a gift and a grace.

"Humanity at full stretch." This is not merely the province of the intellectual life, nor is merely co-natural with being born. It requires a form of life and communities that practice the emotions so essential to seeing the world in more than its literal surfaces. It can of course go either way: toward the world as a prison, as a charnel house, as a "war of all against all"; or, as a created order in which the terror and the beauty co-exist. Where human moral maturity and a sense of the transcendent in and through and the finite world becomes part of wisdom about existence.

Everydayness is a dangerous thing to which to appeal. For we know so well the inattentiveness, the ego-centricity, the dwelling in illusion and delusion that is part of the inheritance of habit. It is the place of presumptive beliefs, of intentions and actions seeking to avoid the disruptions of emotion *and* thought! And yet, we who are tempted to think our way into transcendence, or into the ideas of terror and beauty can be equally deceived. For we too are flesh and blood, our thoughts and convictions are themselves also born by our emotional regard of the world. And reason is always intermingled with what attracts us most. Yes, reason is eros.

But the denial of our finite, bodily life is also a distinctive repudiation of forms of thought--about the elemental facts of human being: we are mortal, born in ignorance, with malleable wills and the corruptibility of flesh and soul. It is only in the stretch of seeing the world in its fullness, in critical awareness of our situatedness between the terrifying and the glorious, between the unspeakable and the most desirable, that we come to moral and religious maturity. We do then have some access, though through a glass darkly, to truth and to what constitutes the good for human existence in a world not of our devising. This is in part the work of theology. To continually awaken and sustain the kinds of intelligence required to attend to the beauty and the terror. To explore and hold forth both the discourses and the necessary silences before God. attend to the formation of those capacities to explore, and to continually re-embed us in the rituals that deepen, sustain and nourish those capacities, those dispositions that awaken and reveal a world beyond cause and effect, beyond the literally given.

What is it to be drawn back to our humanity at full stretch before God and in this world of enemies and neighbors, of the hurtful and incomprehensible suffering, of the ecstatic sense of being alive. Here we come finally to see how a passion for truth, for justice, for the good of the other and for all requires all our reason and more. Beauty can deceive. Terror can destruct and drive us to self-torture. But where our lives time and space are actively receptive to mystery and suffering, we come to respect the knowing and the unknowing, the glory and the fragility of humanity in the whole created order of things. Doxology without lament can be a snare and a delusion. Yet practices that form us in a sense of the world that takes into itself suffering and joy are more fitting to our humanity than is a sense of the world that ignores the suffering, or that takes easy pleasure in the pleasant or the beautiful. There is more than the cold assesment of brute facts. Our humanity is the place of convergence of beauty and terror. To this continuing paradoxical tension we turn again and again, in learning, in art, in life.

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<sup>11</sup> Nelly Sachs, "Chorus of the Rescued," *O The Chimneys*, trans. Michael Hamburger, et. al. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1967) 25.

<sup>2</sup> Rainer Maria Rilke, *Duino Elegies*, trans. Stephen Mitchell (New York: Random House, 1980), 9.

<sup>3</sup> Gerard Manley Hopkins, *Collected Poems*, ed. G. H. Gardner (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1948) 107.

<sup>4</sup> Gerard Manley Hopkins, *Collected Poems*, 109.

<sup>5</sup> Mary Mothersill, *Beauty Restored* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1984) 423.

<sup>6</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987) 57.

<sup>7</sup> Wendy Farley, *Eros and the Other: Retaining Truth in a Pluralistic World* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996) 81-83.

<sup>8</sup> Francine Du Plessix Gary, *Simone Weil* (New York: Viking/Penguin, 2001), 221.

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<sup>9</sup> Martha C. Nussbaum, Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 149.