

ONTO-THEOLOGICAL DETERMINANTS OF AESTHETICS ACCORDING TO ALEXEI LOSEV

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1. INTRODUCTION

Aesthetic issues were a lifelong interest of Alexei Losev (1893-1988), as well as other Russian philosophers of the Silver Age. Here one can mention Losev's first, youthful essays dedicated to philosophy of music (*Two Perceptions of the World* and *On the Musical Perception of Love and Nature*, both from 1916), *The Dialectics of Artistic Form* (1927), and finally his *opus vitae* written between the 60s and the 80s of the 20th century: *The History of Classical Aesthetics* (which occupies a distinctive place not only in Russian but also in world philosophical literature), supplemented by the publications *Hellenistic-Roman Aesthetics*, *The Aesthetics of the Renaissance*, and *The Historical Sense of Renaissance Aesthetics*. In the 1970s he prepared works concerning issues of style (published after his death).

Losev also commenced his educational activity with lectures on aesthetics. The first lecture (*Richard Wagner's Artistic Way*), delivered in 1919 at the University of Nizhny Novgorod, was devoted to music. In the 1920s Losev conducted classes at the State Academy of Artistic Sciences, where a special committee investigated the phenomenon of artistic form. He also delivered lectures (illustrated with musical passages performed by the other lecturers) at the Moscow Conservatory and State Institute of Musical Science, subsequently transformed into the State Academy of Artistic Sciences. The lectures delivered in 1922-1925 were incorporated in the book *Music as the Object of Logic*, 1927, considered to be the first fundamental work in Russian philosophy of music.¹

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¹ See Yu.N. Kholopov, *Russkaja filosofija muzyki i trudy A.F. Loseva*, *Voprosy klassicheskoj filologii*, XI (Moscow, 1996), p. 240; Yu.N. Kholopov, 'Muzyka filosofii A.F. Loseva i

It should be added that, within the scope of the arts, Losev was not only a theoretician but also a practitioner. In his youth he was an admirable violin player while in the 1920s he was a bell-ringer and the choir regent in one of Moscow's Orthodox churches. Losev's work on aesthetics concerned the subject of the icon and its realism.

Numerous publications treat Losev's aesthetic ideas.² In the following paper I would like to compare his views on aesthetics, and on beauty in particular, with the thought of Plotinus (expressed predominantly in the *Enneads* I, 6 – *Beauty* and V, 8 – *On Intellectual Beauty*), to which the Russian philosopher often made reference.

2. LOSEV'S DESCRIPTION OF AESTHETICS

First, let us examine Losev's definition of aesthetics. Classical aesthetics is customarily understood as the philosophy of beauty, meant as philosophical deliberations on the nature and concrete manifestations of beauty and art. It is believed that aesthetics as a separate branch of philosophy appeared relatively late – not until the 18th century, when Alexander G. Baumgarten published his book entitled *Aesthetica* (1750-1758), where he wrote: 'The end of aesthetics is the perfection of sensitive cognition as such. But this perfection is beauty.'³

nasha sovremennost', *Logos*, 3 (1999), p. 216; Yu.N. Kholopov, 'A.F. Losev i sovetskaja muzykalnaja nauka', in *A.F. Losev i kultura XX veka. Losevskije chtenija*, eds. A.A. Takho-Godi et al. (Moscow, 1991), pp. 96, 100; D.O. Chekhovich, *A.F. Losev i russkaja mysl o muzyke (po materialam 20-kh godov)*, *Voprosy klassicheskoj filologii*, XI (Moscow, 1996), pp. 259-266.

² The texts that deserve close attention are above all the works of Victor Bychkov. See his 'Pervoosnovy estetiki po Losevu', *Simvol*, 24 (1990), pp. 183-203; 'Vyrzhenije kak glavnyj princip estetiki A.F. Loseva', in *A.F. Losev i kultura XX veka. Losevskije chtenija*, pp. 29-37; 'Vyrzhenije nevyrazimogo, ili irracional'noe v svete ratio', in A.F. Losev, *Forma. Stil. Vyrzhenije* (Moscow, 1995), pp. 888-906; 'Esteticheskaja teorija A.F. Loseva', in *Aleksej Fëdorovič Losev*, eds. A.A. Takho-Godi, E.A. Takho-Godi (Moskva, 2009), pp. 31-61; *Russkaja teurgičeskaja estetika* (Moscow, 2007). In this essay I have used fragments of my book: T. Obolovitch, *Od onomatodoksji do estetyki. Aleksego Łosiewa koncepcja symbolu. Studium historyczno-filozoficzne* (Kraków, 2011), pp. 385-387, 389-392, 394-395, 399-404, 414, 419-420, 422-423.

³ A.G. Baumgarten, *Aesthetica*, no. 14: 'Aesthetices finis est perfectio cognitionis sensitivae, qua talis. Haec autem est pulchritudo.' Quoted from R. Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics. God in Imagination, Beauty, and Art* (New York, Oxford, 1999), p. 6.

Losev did not agree with either of the above-mentioned statements. First of all, he maintained that aesthetics did not merely concern beauty. Second, he believed that the fact that for over two thousand years 'aesthetics was not an independent discipline should by no means hinder development of the history of aesthetics'⁴ in Antiquity. Thus, let us analyse both these views of the Russian thinker.

Losev was convinced that aesthetics deals with an expression or symbol and thus the manifestation of what is internal (an idea – understood objectively as rooted in the Absolute, or subjectively as born in the human mind) in what is external, material. It is obvious that such an understanding of aesthetics and its subject was influenced by the theory of the Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce (1866-1952), who at the beginning of the 20th century defined aesthetics exactly as the science of expression.⁵ According to Losev, the fundamental category of aesthetics is simply what is aesthetically pleasing (*esteticheskoje*).⁶ As aesthetic (that is, expressional, symbolic) categories, Losev classified not only beauty and elegance (when there is harmony between the idea and its expression, between the internal and the external side of an object). However, he also included ugliness, repulsiveness (*bezobraznoje*), and what is base (*nizmennoje*, when the image expresses more than the idea

⁴ A.F. Losev, *Dve neobkhodimye predposylki dlia postroyeniya istoriji estetiki do vozniknoveniya estetiki v kachestve samostoyatelnoj discipliny*, *Estetika i zhizn'*, 6 (Moscow, 1979), p. 221; A.F. Losev, *Istorija antichnoj estetiki*, vol. 8, Book 1 (Moscow / Khar'kov, 2000), p. 389; A.F. Losev, 'Estetika Vozrozhdenija', in Losev, *Estetika Vozrozhdenija. Istoricheskij smysl estetiki Vozrozhdenija* (Moscow, 1998), p. 155.

⁵ See B. Croce, *Aesthetic as science of expression and General Linguistic*, trans. D. Ainslie (New York, 1992).

⁶ See A.F. Losev, 'Estetika', in *Filosofskaja enciklopedija*, vol. 5, eds. F.V. Konstantinov et al. (Moscow, 1970), pp. 570, 575-576; cf. J.P. Scanlan, 'The New Soviet "Philosophical Encyclopedia." III: The Coming of Age of Soviet Aesthetics: An Examination of the Articles on Aesthetics in the New Soviet "Filosofskaja Enciklopedija"', *Studies in Soviet Thought*, 13 (1973), 3/4, p. 327-332. On particular aesthetic categories, see various publications by A.F. Losev: 'Katharsis', in *Filosofskaja enciklopedija*, vol. 2, eds. F.V. Konstantinov et al. (Moscow, 1962), pp. 469-470; 'Mera', in *Filosofskaja enciklopedija*, vol. 3, eds. F.V. Konstantinov et al. (Moscow, 1964), pp. 389-394; 'Mimesis', in *Filosofskaja enciklopedija*, vol. 3, p. 445; 'Tragicheskoe', in *Filosofskaja enciklopedija*, vol. 5, pp. 251-253; 'Tragicheskoe', in *Filosofskij enciklopedicheskij slovar'*, eds. L.F. Il'icëv et al. (Moscow, 1989), pp. 690-692; A.F. Losev, B. Shragin, 'Garmonija', in *Filosofskaja enciklopedija*, vol. 1, eds. F.V. Konstantinov et al. (Moscow, 1960), pp. 323-324; A.F. Losev, V.P. Shestakov, *Istorija esticheskikh kategorij* (Moscow, 1965).

assumes: the image of a worm overemphasizes the smallness, meagreness); loftiness and pathos (when, in turn, the expression does not equal the idea, e.g. the view of the starlit sky does not render the magnitude of the universe); the comic or the ridiculous (the realisation of the category of what is base, when the expression or result is inadequate to the expected intention, e.g. the running of a clown even though there is no urgency); or the tragic character (a derivative of the category of loftiness, when we regret that such a great idea has not been fully realised: noble Oedipus turns out to be a murderer). Furthermore, he also included 'moderation,' 'harmony' (which denoted the proper state of affairs, the ideal); 'irony' (the expression that is contradictory to the expressed idea: 'yes' meaning 'no' and *vice versa*); the 'grotesque' (that is, the expression with a fantastic character); and others. Various categories are different aspects of what is aesthetic, that is, of the 'expression' or 'aesthetic expression.' At the same time they have an ontological dimension since they constitute one or another variety of the relationship between *eidos*-idea and its expression (appearance) – either as their equilibrium, or as the disturbance of that equilibrium.

For further description of an 'aesthetic expression' we have to examine one of the antinomies incorporated in Losev's book *The Dialectics of Artistic Form*, namely, the adequacy antinomy. It states that the artistic form on one hand assumes the pre-image which exists *before* it and independently from it (thesis), while on the other hand it *creates* that pre-image (antithesis). The artist realises a certain objectively existing idea; however we would not know anything about this existence if the author had not incorporated it in the particular work of art. Thus, the artistic form present in art, music, literature etc. is at the same time given and set as a task (the synthesis of adequacy antinomy). The adequacy antinomies correlate with the antinomy of necessity and creativity (that is, freedom) distinguished by Losev in another place, while artistic form is the synthesis of these two moments, the 'laying bare or unfolding of its prototype.'⁷

From this point there is only one step to stating that art derives from the Absolute (the One). 'At the basis of all aesthetic states, hence all arts as well, there is the primordial being, which is characterised by (1) continuous

⁷ A.F. Losev, *The Dialectic of Artistic Form*, trans. O. Bychkov (München, Berlin, Washington, 2013), p. 223.

creative flow and (2) the pure cognitively unformed quality, that is, sense.⁸ The One, the primordial Being, or rather the Supreme Being is the foundation of all things, including works of art. Moreover, it is the source of inspiration, of the creative work of an artist who endows the *eidei* that are contained in the Absolute with the material, corporeal form, appropriate to the art disciplines that the artist is occupied with (e.g. sculpture, painting, theatre performance, dance, literary text or musical notation). Hence, that matter gains religious meaning in art, it becomes transfigured, deified, so that it can be said ‘the genuine aesthetics is the aesthetics of religious materialism.’⁹ In turn the One – which Plotinus pointed out, for instance – reflects Itself in the universe which thus should be treated as the subject of aesthetics. In the universe, what is finite manifests itself in what is infinite; hence, every thing reflects the whole universe and is its expression, symbol. (This idea was modified and developed in Christian patristics.)

In the understanding of classical thinkers, the universe and nature followed the absolute archetype and were in turn the object, the pattern to be followed (*μίμησις*) by artists who acted as the ‘prophets of the muses’ and conveyed to the people what had been revealed to them by the supreme power (*δαιδόνιον*):

‘This second cosmos at every point copies the archetype: It has life and being in copy, and has beauty as springing from that diviner world. In its character of image it holds, too, that divine perpetuity without which it would only at times be truly representative and sometimes fail like a construction of art; for every image whose existence lies in the nature of things must stand during the entire existence of the archetype’.¹⁰

As a result, for Plotinus ‘no significant difference between art and nature exists.’¹¹ Classical aesthetics is thus characterised by a certain objectivism.

⁸ A.F. Losev, ‘Strojenije khudozhestvennogo mirooshchushchenija’, in Losev, *Forma. Stil. Vyrashhenije*, p. 300.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Plotinus, *Enneads*, V, 8, 12, <http://classics.mit.edu/Plotinus/enneads.5.fifth.html>.

¹¹ Cf. A.F. Losev, *Istorija antichnoj estetiki*, vol. 6 (Moscow, 2000), p. 667; A.F. Losev, *Istorija antichnoj estetiki*, vol. 8, Book 2 (Moscow, 2000), pp. 83-84, 350-351. See Plotinus, *Enneads*, V, 8, 1: ‘Still the arts are not to be slighted on the ground that they create by imitation of natural objects; for, to begin with, these natural objects are themselves

'Fantasy' was not only an invention of an artist but the emanation, expression of the universal Logos; hence, it was transcendental in character¹² and the artist 'fed on the contemplation of the divine beauty, celestial *sofia*.'¹³ At the same time Losev reminds us that it was precisely Plotinus who wrote that art, as the expression of creative Eros, the first step on the road to achieving the intelligible world,¹⁴ deserves respect and admiration. For we can read in *Enneads*: 'Now it must be seen that the stone thus brought under the artist's hand to the beauty of form is beautiful not as stone – for so the crude block would be as pleasant – but in virtue of the form or idea introduced by the art.'¹⁵

The artist deciphers or captures the ideal archetype, expresses it by employing material means, and simultaneously interprets it. Art has a metaphysical dimension¹⁶ and the genuine artist is at the same time a re-constructor (in the most positive sense) and a constructor; he takes the passive and the active standpoint. The process of creation is thus a theurgic, divine-human process. 'A work of art obviously belongs to the sphere of natural phenomena which are best characterised by necessity. However, around a genuine work of art a certain air of freedom is to be felt. It immerses us in the atmosphere of serene and idyllic ease.'¹⁷

The archetype – even within the scope of one and the same art discipline, e.g., painting – can be expressed in multiple ways: 'art makes the being

imitations; then, we must recognize that they give no bare reproduction of the thing seen but go back to the ideas from which nature itself derives, and, furthermore, that much of their work is all their own; they are holders of beauty and add where nature is lacking.'

¹² See A.F. Losev, 'Teorija tvorcheskoj fantazii v antichnoj estetike', in *Literatura i iskusstvo v sisteme kulturny*, ed. B.B. Piotrovskij (Moscow, 1988), pp. 17-23; Losev, *Istorija antichnoj estetiki*, vol. 8, Book 2, pp. 379-381. Losev finds the only classical fragment treating fantasy as a purely human activity in Pseudo-Longinus, *On the Sublime*, XV (see also M. Edwards, *Culture and philosophy in the Age of Plotinus* (London, 2006), pp. 101-102).

¹³ Losev, *Istorija antichnoj estetiki*, vol. 6, p. 679.

¹⁴ Cf. Plotinus, *Enneads*, I, 3, 1-2, <http://classics.mit.edu/Plotinus/enneads.3.third.html>; Losev, *Istorija antichnoj estetiki*, vol. 6, pp. 683-685.

¹⁵ Plotinus, *Enneads*, V, 8, 1, <http://classics.mit.edu/Plotinus/enneads.5.fifth.html>.

¹⁶ One of those who wrote on this subject is Max Scheler, 'Metaphysics and Art', trans. M.S. Frings, in *Max Scheler (1974-1928). Centennial Essays*, ed. M.S. Frings (The Hague, 1974), pp. 101-120.

¹⁷ A.F. Losev, 'Dialektika tvorcheskogo akta', in *Kontekst-81. Literaturno-teoreticheskiye issledovanija*, eds. A.S. Mjasnikov et al. (Moscow, 1982), p. 68.

perceived by it as primal [Logos – T.O.], more complex, and modifies it, wishing to shape and transform it.¹⁸

Hence, art not so much duplicates reality as – using the words of Losev’s colleague, Fr. Pavel Florensky – ‘it permeates its architectonics, its matter, searches for its sense.’¹⁹ It is not a ‘photographic’ view of reality (and even photography itself as art is not merely copying), but a pictorial view: it renders not as much the ‘face’ (*lico*) as the countenance (*lik*). Such understanding of art dates back to the times of the Church Fathers, for instance to the famous disputes over the cult of icons associated with Theodore the Studite or Nicephorus, and, earlier, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, who all invoked the teachings on the ‘inner *eidos*’ (τὸ ἐνδον εἶδος) by Plotinus. (It is interesting that Losev emphasized that the notion εἶδος itself should be translated as ‘countenance,’ *lik*²⁰). In the *Enneads* we read:

‘But what accordance is there between the material and that which antedates all matter? On what principle does the architect, when he finds the house standing before him correspondent with his *inner ideal* of a house, pronounce it beautiful? Is it not that the house before him, the stones apart, is the inner idea stamped on the mass of exterior matter, the indivisible exhibited in diversity?’²¹

Aesthetic realism by no means contradicts art’s conventionality and the cognitive, or even ‘exploratory,’ heuristic meaning of the latter does not contradict the ultimate apophatism of the depicted object (as a result – the Absolute). ‘The mystery of art consists precisely in this coincidence of what cannot be expressed and expression, of the meaningful and the sensory, of the “ideal” and the “real”.’²² A work of art assumes the effort both of discovering its archetypes and of constructing the potential meanings; ‘art is both image and prototype at the same time.’²³ We can state after Pavel Florensky that the work of art is *ergon* (ἔργον, a piece of work, something already realised)

¹⁸ Losev, ‘Strojenije khudozhestvennogo mirooshchushchenija’, p. 301.

¹⁹ Cf. P. Florenskij, ‘Obratnaja perspektiva’, in Idem, *Imena* (Moscow, 2006), p. 36.

²⁰ See A.F. Losev, ‘Antichnyj kosmos i sovremennaja nauka’, in Idem, *Bytije. Imja. Kosmos* (Moscow, 1993), p. 341.

²¹ Plotinus, *Enneads*, I, 6, 3, <http://classics.mit.edu/Plotinus/enneads.1.first.html> (Italics T.O.)

²² Losev, *The Dialectic of Artistic Form*, p. 318-319.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

and at the same time *energeia* (ἐνέργεια, action), that is creation, production, human activity.²⁴

3. THE ONTOLOGICAL CHARACTER OF AESTHETICS

Deliberating on the pre-image which is expressed in the work of art, Losev thereby emphasises the ontological character of aesthetics, especially ancient aesthetics. 'Classical aesthetics, generally speaking, is nothing other than classical philosophy,'²⁵ including ontology as well, since 'Here, aesthetics does not yet differ from the general science of being, that is, ontology. Nevertheless, it is not merely ontology but its closing element.'²⁶

This concerns above all Plotinus, whose aesthetics has the character of symbolism, that is, expressing the *eidōs* in sensory, empirical things:

'We hold that all the loveliness of this world comes by communion in ideal-form. All shapelessness whose kind admits of pattern and form, as long as it remains outside of reason and idea, is ugly by that very isolation from the divine-thought. (...) This, then, is how the material thing becomes beautiful – by communicating in the thought that flows from the divine.'²⁷

It is worth emphasizing that Plotinus – after Plato – taught of the relationship between being and beauty. Let us quote one of the characteristic statements:

'The power in that other world has merely being and beauty of being. Beauty without being could not be, nor being voided of beauty. Abandoned of beauty, being loses something of its essence. Being is desirable because it is identical with beauty; and beauty is loved because it is being.'²⁸

As Losev emphasised, the Neo-Platonic thesis about the ontological determining of aesthetics was developed in medieval thought in the theory of

²⁴ Cf. P. Florenskij, 'Čtenija o kulte', in Idem, *Filosofija kulta* (Moscow, 2006), p. 56.

²⁵ Losev, *Istorija antichnoj estetiki*, vol. 8, Book 1, p. 509; cf. Losev, *Istorija antichnoj estetiki*, vol. 6, pp. 231, 371.

²⁶ Losev, *Dve neobkhodimye predposylki*, p. 228; cf. Losev, *Istorija antichnoj estetiki*, vol. 6, p. 733.

²⁷ Plotinus, *Enneads*, I, 6, 2, <http://classics.mit.edu/Plotinus/enneads.1.first.html>.

²⁸ Plotinus, *Enneads*, V, 8, 9, <http://classics.mit.edu/Plotinus/enneads.5.fifth.html>.

transcendentalists, according to which 'Beauty is a transcendental quality because it is identical with the good; it is not another attribute of being distinct from its lovability.'²⁹ We can find this view as early as in *Divine Names* by Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, who discusses Being and Beauty as interchangeable Divine names (that is, ideals, perfections), and later for instance in St. Bonaventure, St. Albert, St. Thomas, Ulrich of Strasburg, or Nicholas Cusanus who made reference to the Areopagite.³⁰ Losev himself also pointed to the relation of being and beauty.

The statement about the ontological dimension of aesthetics also means that the most significant and elaborate metaphysical categories have at the same time aesthetic dimension. Losev classifies those categories in the form of a triad. According to him, they can have the meaning of (1) what is being expressed, (2) what expresses, or (3) the expression itself as the result of the correlation of the two mentioned moments. The subject of expression (symbolizing) are the so-called general aesthetic categories, determined by the relation: 'what is general – what is detailed.' Losev counts among them, above all, the Neo-Platonic One, but also number, continuum, *Nous*, soul, matter, and body. The object of expression (expressing the moment) is set around the relation 'the whole – part,' moulding the structures, that is the so-called differential-aesthetic categories, consisting in the gradual increase (as in the case of a differential) of the expressing elements constituting the whole. Among them, the philosopher lists the mathematical category of harmony as well as its modifications: 'coming-to-be' – striving toward realisation of the rule of harmony in the 'other-being,' that is, beyond its limits, conveyed by the categories of *mimesis* and *catharsis* (sometimes called the pre-aesthetic categories³¹) – and 'fact' – the subsequent step in the dialectic transformation of harmony, which consists of the so-called fundamental-constructional categories of order, place, measure, and shape in the broad sense (countenance, type, *eidōs*, and idea) and the compositional-constructional categories of proportion, symmetry and rhythm. However, the result of the relationship of expressing to the expression itself as such refers to the

²⁹ Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics*, p. 127.

³⁰ See Losev, 'Estetika Vozrozhdenija', pp. 151-165.

³¹ Cf. A. Gulyga, *Principy estetiki* (Moscow, 1987), pp. 11-161; A. Gulyga, *Estetika v svete aksiologii. Pjat' desjat let na Volkhonke* (St-Petersburg, 2000), pp. 47-72.

so-called integral-aesthetic categories, that is, those where balance – the identity of the expressed and the expressing moment – is to be found. What kind of categories are these? They are the modes of wisdom-*sofia*³² as the paradigm of realisation, entelechy, but also the category of beauty and its modification (ugliness, irony, what is comical or tragic, etc.), and the aesthetic-ethic category of *kalokagathia*³³ (beauty-and-goodness). Losev claimed that the upper boundary here is the Neo-Platonic One, in which ‘what is being expressed and what expresses itself not only converge but they converge in one indistinguishable point that constitutes the absolute concentration of all the differences, their absolute amalgamation until their absolute indifferenciability.’³⁴ The lower boundary, on the other hand, is determined by matter (ύλη), understood as the capability of any kind of shaping, and thus also of expressing, which Aristotle pointed out, and after him Plotinus, who enunciated the thesis about the disclosure of the being, understood one way or another, i.e., its symbolic character: ‘When he perceives those shapes of grace that show in body, let him not pursue: He must know them for *copies, vestiges, shadows*, and hasten away towards that they tell of.’³⁵

³² See Plotinus, *Enneads*, V, 8, 5, <http://classics.mit.edu/Plotinus/enneads.5.fifth.html>: ‘All that comes to be, work of nature or of craft, some wisdom has made: Everywhere a wisdom presides at a making. (...) The true wisdom, then [found to be identical with the intellectual-principle] is real being; and real being is wisdom; it is wisdom that gives value to real being; and being is real in virtue of its origin in wisdom. It follows that all forms of existence not possessing wisdom are, indeed, beings in right of the wisdom which went to their forming but, as not in themselves possessing it, are not real beings.’ Cf. Losev, *Istorija antichnoj estetiki*, vol. 8, Book 2, pp. 289-293; Losev, Shestakov, *Istorija estetičeskikh kategorij*, p. 165.

³³ See Plotinus, *Enneads*, I, 6, 6, <http://classics.mit.edu/Plotinus/enneads.1.first.html>: ‘We may even say that beauty is the authentic-existents and ugliness is the principle contrary to existence: And the ugly is also the primal evil; therefore its contrary is at once good and beautiful, or is good and beauty: And hence the one method will discover to us the beauty-good and the ugliness-evil. And beauty, this beauty which is also the good, must be posed as the first.’ Cf. Losev, *Istorija antichnoj estetiki*, vol. 8, Book 2, pp. 491-557; A.F. Losev, ‘Klassičeskaja kalokagatija i jeje tipy’, *Voprosy estetiki*, 3 (1960), pp. 411-473; A.F. Losev, ‘Kalokagatija’, in *Filosofskaja enciklopedija*, vol. 2, pp. 413-414; A.F. Losev, ‘Kalokagatija’, in *Estetika. Slovar*, eds. A.V. Belajev et al. (Moscow, 1989), p. 135; Losev, Shestakov, *Istorija estetičeskikh kategorij*, pp. 100-110.

³⁴ Losev, *Istorija antichnoj estetiki*, vol. 8, Book 2, p. 213; cf. Losev, *Istorija antichnoj estetiki*, vol. 6, p. 266.

³⁵ Plotinus, *Enneads*, I, 6, 8, <http://classics.mit.edu/Plotinus/enneads.1.first.html> (Italics T.O.).

4. AESTHETICS OF MUSIC

Finally, the Neo-Platonic thread appears in Losev in his deliberations on music, which he also discussed as a symbol, an expression (even with double meaning: both an the objective expression of the Absolute and an expression of varied, often contradictory human feelings). Thus, music both expresses, i.e., makes people acquainted with the sphere of *sacrum*, and renders its apophatic, mysterious, inexpressible nature. ‘Music immerses in the Darkness of Being, where beginnings and ends are concealed, everything that gives birth and nourishes, maternal bosom, and the nature of the Universe. (...) The Absolute Being of music is both the being of the one and of God. (...) In music there is nothing that is not divine.’³⁶

There is a reason why the classical and medieval thinkers wrote about the music of the spheres understood as the divine harmony permeating the whole universe. In the 20th century, Losev’s contemporary, Hans Urs von Balthazar, wrote about the divine nature of music in his work *Development of the Musical Idea. Attempt at a Synthesis of Music*.

According to Losev, musical being – like any work of art – derives from the Neo-Platonic One³⁷ (in religious terms – God). Even more, music ‘is closest to original artistry,’ since it ‘is realisation, not of the images of becoming, but of becoming itself as such,’³⁸ that is, it reflects the dynamics, the being-active of the Absolute in lively, flowing melody. ‘Music is the impression of that divine self-creation, feeling oneself as creating out of oneself (...)

³⁶ A.F. Losev, ‘Muzyka kak predmet logiki’, in Losev, *Forma. Stil. Vyrazhenije*, pp. 478-479; see K. Zenkin, R. Bird, ‘On the religious foundations of A.F. Losev’s philosophy of music’, *Studies in East European Thought*, 56 (2004), 2-3, pp. 161-172. Cf. also: ‘Many artists have acknowledged divine influence in their profession. For example, the composer, Johannes Brahms, who stated: “Straightaway the ideas flow in upon me, directly from God.” (...) Others, while not admitting divine blessing, do admit to something beyond themselves, as does composer Aaron Copeland: “Inspiration may be a form of super-consciousness, or perhaps of subconsciousness – I wouldn’t know. But I am sure it is the antithesis of self-consciousness”’. Quoted from J.A. Davidson, *Toward a Theology of Beauty. A Biblical Perspective* (Lanham, 2008), p. 35.

³⁷ Cf. Plotinus, *Enneads*, V, 8, 1, <http://classics.mit.edu/Plotinus/enneads.5.fifth.html>: ‘The musical does not derive from an unmusical source but from music; and so the art exhibited in the material work derives from an art yet higher.’

³⁸ Losev, *The Dialectic of Artistic Form*, p. 282.

characteristic of the Absolute.³⁹ Therefore, the Russian thinker considered music to be the most refined of all the arts, since in his hierarchy only prayer is placed higher than music.⁴⁰ Music, being rooted in the Absolute, is in a certain way capable of overcoming the distance between God and the world. Plotinus wrote about it in a suggestive way:

‘This natural tendency must be made the starting-point to such a man; he must be drawn by the tone, rhythm and design in things of sense: He must learn to distinguish the material forms from the authentic-existent which is the source of all these correspondences and of the entire reasoned scheme in the work of art: He must be led to the beauty that manifests itself through these forms; he must be shown that what ravished him was no other than the harmony of the intellectual world and the beauty in that sphere, not some one shape of beauty but the all-beauty, the absolute beauty; and the truths of philosophy must be implanted in him to lead him to faith in that which, unknowing it, he possesses within himself.’⁴¹

Losev in turn wrote about it: ‘In the pure musical being, the depth separating the two worlds immerses. To feel in the musical manner means not to know God’s detachment from the world. To feel in the musical manner denotes praising every blade and every grain of dust (...). To live in the musical way means praying to everything.’⁴² In other words, for Losev, music as a unique form of ecstasy, delight, or elation is in certain a sense a secular equivalent of prayer, establishing contact with the Absolute, and is the most refined of all the arts.

To sum up, one can definitely state that for both Plotinus and Losev aesthetics (almost equivalent to ontology) has a transcendental, sacred dimension, since all the aesthetic, and thus expressional, symbolic categories, especially the category of beauty, are rooted in the Absolute and are its modifications.

³⁹ A.F. Losev, ‘Trio Čajkovskogo’, in Idem, *Ja soslan v XX vek...*, vol. 1 (Moscow, 2002), p. 120.

⁴⁰ Cf. A.F. Losev, ‘Zhenshchina-myslitel’, *Moskva*, 5 (1993), pp. 90-91. See M.M. Gama-junov, ‘Sojuz muzyki, filosofii, ljubvi i monastyrja’, in Losev, *Forma. Stil. Vyrzhenije*, p. 908.

⁴¹ Plotinus, *Enneads*, I, 3, 1, <http://classics.mit.edu/Plotinus/enneads.1.first.html>.

⁴² A.F. Losev, ‘Muzyka kak predmet logiki’, in Idem, *Forma. Stil. Vyrzhenije*, p. 479. See N.N. Miklina, ‘Mir A.F. Loseva kak mir “chistogo muzykalnogo bytija”’, *Filosofskije nauki*, 10 (2008), pp. 135-136.

In the case of Losev – a Christian thinker – aesthetics can also be perceived as ‘the theology of beauty’ which ‘reflects on the nature of the beautiful in relationship to God.’⁴³

Abstract

Both Losev and Plotinus analysed the metaphysical (and consequently, theological) foundation of aesthetics. They taught about the Absolute (or the One, *resp.* God) which is a source of art in general and the various aesthetical categories, such as beauty, harmony etc. According to Losev, aesthetics is a discipline which considers an expression of inner meaning (i.e. idea) in the external, material form. It allowed us to treat aesthetics (especially ancient) as a concluding element of ontology. As a result, music, being rooted in the Absolute, has an onto-theological character and overcomes the distance between God and the world.

⁴³ Cf. Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics*, p. 24.