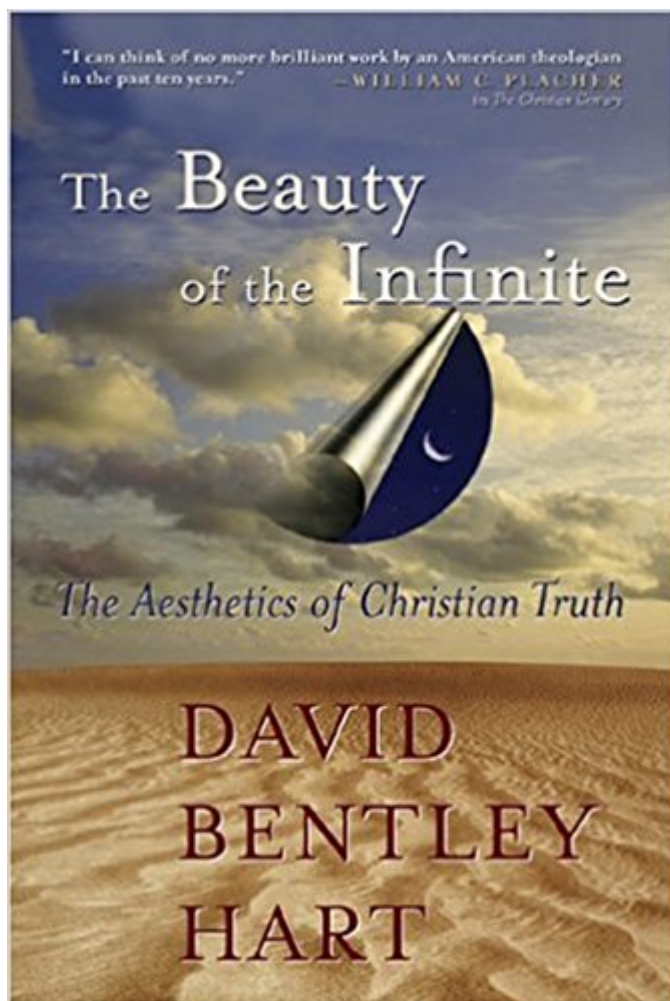


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The Beauty Of The Infinite: The Aesthetics Of Christian Truth



Synopsis

The Beauty of the Infinite is a splendid extended essay in "theological aesthetics." David Bentley Hart here meditates on the power of a Christian understanding of beauty and sublimity to rise above the violence -- both philosophical and literal -- characteristic of the postmodern world. The book begins by tracing the shifting use and nature of metaphysics in the thought of Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Lyotard, Derrida, Deleuze, Nancy, Levinas, and others. Hart pays special attention to Nietzsche's famous narrative of the "will to power" -- a narrative largely adopted by the world today -- and he offers an engaging revision (though not rejection) of the genealogy of nihilism, thereby highlighting the significant "interruption" that Christian thought introduced into the history of metaphysics. This discussion sets the stage for a retrieval of the classic Christian account of beauty and sublimity, and of the relation of both to the question of being. Written in the form of a *dogmatica minora*, this main section of the book offers a pointed reading of the Christian story in four moments, or parts: Trinity, creation, salvation, and eschaton. Through a combination of narrative and argument throughout, Hart ends up demonstrating the power of Christian metaphysics not only to withstand the critiques of modern and postmodern thought but also to move well beyond them. Strikingly original and deeply rewarding, *The Beauty of the Infinite* is both a constructively critical account of the history of metaphysics and a compelling contribution to it.

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Customer Reviews

National Review "David Bentley Hart has written one of the most thrilling works of Christian reflection to come along in years. . . This is theology as high adventure, and the excitement continues after

the last page is turned."William C. Placher in *The Christian Century*"I can think of no more brilliant work by an American theologian in the past ten years."R. R. Reno"An elegant, erudite treatment of basic themes in Christian theology, metaphysics, and contemporary cultural criticism. David Bentley Hart has written a book that is both radical and orthodox. *The Beauty of the Infinite* sets the standard for postmodern theology."Paul J. Griffiths"David Bentley Hart's book shows great patristic and philosophical learning. That is rare enough. Still more rare is the book's compellingly complete theology of beauty. Hart shows that the sublime aesthetic of the market -- this age's chief principality -- can be disrupted by (and perhaps only by) the gospel's radiant beauty. This book makes a major contribution to bringing that disruption about."Reinhard Härtter"Drawing from deep Eastern Orthodox wells, *The Beauty of the Infinite* achieves an extraordinary theological analysis and transformation of the postmodern condition. A work of breathtaking scope, David Bentley Hart's book combines an impressive mastery of the Christian theological tradition, East and West, with a subtle yet rigorous critique of the philosophical zeitgeist, culminating in a constructive systematic theology of stunning scope. By way of a trinitarian theology of beauty, Hart succeeds in composing a *dogmatica minora* that radically revises the metaphysical horizon of postmodernity. This book is Christian theology and metaphysics of a high order, an extremely rewarding tour de force."R. Trent Pomplun"David Bentley Hart -- like Soloviev and Florensky before him -- stands in the finest tradition of virile Eastern alternatives to modern Western philosophy and theology. A startling rejoinder to modernity and postmodernity alike, Hart's book will be judged by future historians as a fresh start for Orthodox theology done in the United States."Geoffrey Wainwright in *First Things*"A remarkable work. . . This magnificent and demanding volume should establish David Bentley Hart, around the world no less than in North America, as one of his generation's leading theologians."John Milbank"David Hart is already the best living American systematic theologian. *The Beauty of the Infinite* is his first major work."Janet Martin Soskice in *Times Literary Supplement*"A splendid book. . . Hart's prose is trenchant but often beautiful. There are penetrating, and frequently amusing, critiques of Foucault, Bultmann, and Deleuze, among others. . . *The Beauty of the Infinite* shows the vigor and power of theology, ancient and modern."Nova et Vetera"Despite the relative youth of its author, *The Beauty of the Infinite* merits consideration as one of the most ambitious and theologically insightful contributions to the field in the past decade. David Hart's fluid prose, sweeping grasp of theology and continental philosophy, and creativity enables him to ferry the reader from eastern patristic theology to French postmodernism, from Greek Attic tragedy to Nietzsche and Heidegger. His work deserves a careful reading by all serious students of theology."The Journal of Religion"On every page of *The Beauty of the Infinite* are provocative and

original readings. Hart debunks many unexamined pieties nascent in the postmodern idiom and, at the same time, displays his own genius for rhetorical invention. Hyperarticulate and a great phrasemaker, Hart will please the logophile as well as the philologist; his erudition . . . and his eloquence . .

"The Beauty of the Infinite" is a splendid extended essay in theological aesthetics. David Bentley Hart here meditates on the power of a Christian understanding of beauty and sublimity to rise above the violence -- both philosophical and literal -- characteristic of the postmodern world. The book begins by tracing the shifting use and nature of metaphysics in the thought of Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Lyotard, Derrida, Deleuze, Nancy, Levinas, and others. Hart pays special attention to Nietzsche's famous narrative of the will to power -- a narrative largely adopted by the world today -- and he offers an engaging revision (though not rejection) of the genealogy of nihilism, thereby highlighting the significant interruption that Christian thought introduced into the history of metaphysics. This discussion sets the stage for a retrieval of the classic Christian account of beauty and sublimity, and of the relation of both to the question of being. Written in the form of a "dogmatica minora," this main section of the book offers a pointed reading of the Christian story in four moments, or parts: Trinity, creation, salvation, and eschaton. Through a combination of narrative and argument throughout, Hart ends up demonstrating the power of Christian metaphysics not only to withstand the critiques of modern and postmodern thought but also to move well beyond them. Strikingly original and deeply rewarding, "The Beauty of the Infinite" is both a constructively critical account of the history of metaphysics and a compelling contribution to it.

This is a difficult read. I have struggled with the scholarly level of writing. However if there were ever a book worthy of the effort, this book merits serious consideration. The estimated time to read it is 14 hours. I think that's ambitious. Very comprehensive and insightful. Borderline masterpiece.

Brilliant

As Evagrius of Pontus said: If you are a theologian, you pray

truly; and if you pray truly, you are a theologian. (153 Chapters on Prayer (), Translation by Luke Dysinger, O.S.B.) If you have gotten this far, this may be a great book for you. It is, for starters, very good news. You will be heartened by David Bentley Hart's astoundingly lucid prose, even if you only comprehend every third word and every hundredth sentence. Start with the letter in the title, and take it one letter at a time. It will be worth it, in pure delight, and by the time you are ten pages in, you will have mastered the unwritten wisdom of the Kabbalists as well. I have been astonished for years that there are so few reviews of this book, but as I began to try to address that apparent injustice and write one myself, I realized why there are so few: there are not that many people who pray enough, these days. This was several years ago. At that point, I set myself to first jotting down a few notes, things along the lines of "If you have ever been blind-sided by Nietzsche, or gone down for the third time in the middle Heidegger, or hung in there, sensing something of the most imminent relevance in Derrida, and just waiting for him to finish his aerial acrobatics on this particular sentence and stick the landing, and you are waiting still . . . But you see, that is exactly the kind of thing that will simply not help this book gain the wider readership one would hope for it, as one would hope more people might listen to Bach with deep ecstatic ears, or Coltrane, or Ravi Shankar. But I digress. The point is, after all these years of jotting notes, and doing some supplemental reading (Augustine in Latin on the Trinity; Levinas, in French, with German footnotes; Maximus the Confessor in the original Greek, with a parallel modern Greek translation text; Leonard Cohen; Bach's secret journals, written in a mirror code of musical notes; Rumi's Dance Lessons for Infidels . . . But again, I digress.) . . . Where was I? The two-star reviews of this book are dead on. There are much easier books to read. (note from 2007.) I have dedicated myself to writing a worthy review of this book for quite some time. I have failed. Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea culpa maxima. I intend to get it right, or at least to continue re-incarnating until all sentient beings are saved. I will be the last sentient being saved, in that case, as I will still be doing the background reading required to understand the simplest sentence in chapter 2. But I digress. God bless David Bentley Hart. He is a true theologian, and this book is pure dizzying delight, a beautiful book on beauty, a divine book on God. He punches every tar baby of postmodernism along the way and comes out clean as a penny whistle and smelling like a rose. This is itself is enough to recommend the book. This is not quite a review yet. But I noticed that 68 people have read one of the better five-star reviews of this book, so somebody is already doing something right here, and I take comfort, in my endless labors on this review, in that. I also take comfort in the fact that Jacob himself posted two updates to his primo review, so ha, his is a work in

progress too. This is, at least, is the prolegomenon to some notes toward the beginning of a consideration of this book's utter and delightful loveliness. If you have read this far, this may be a great book for you. Begin with the letter 'B' in the title; pray as necessary to continue; rinse, lather, repeat.

Er-mazing. Have a dictionary on hand... also, know about Deleuze, Lyotard, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida, Hegel, Kant and the Greek Fathers.

This is a theological aesthetics of the highest order that is also thoroughly enjoyable. Hart displays a mastery of postmodern philosophy, patristic theology, and a general theological acuity that is truly mind-boggling. Yet you find yourself reading it with a quiet smile. While I have slogged my way through it from cover to cover twice, I find it much better read in small "morsels" so that one can savor his insight and rhetorical play in a manner which tantalizes the intellectual palate. It is beautiful, bewildering, inspiring, and intellectually exhausting - and all in a playful way! While at times his rhetoric does come across as somewhat excessive and his provocations brow-raising, one should not forget that the work displays in form what it suggests in content: that Being is itself the rhetorical display of the glorious excess of the Trinitarian life of God. I know that I will return to this work for years to come and will continue to enjoy it heartily, even in its verbosity and ostentatiousness. Consider it an intellectual cathedral which displays a playful grandeur that overwhelms and intices, puzzles and silences. Wander in, and do not hesitate to find yourself lost and enjoying every minute of it!

I have to use a dictionary, but the writings of David Hart are always worth the mental exercise. Everything we read is so played to the galleries, it's refreshing to have someone think out loud as deeply and intelligently as does Hart. All of his words bear re-reading.

Also recommend his book on God and =Doors of the Sea.=

A masterpiece: a profound thesis written by a man not only deeply conversant in both the western and eastern theological traditions, but also continental philosophy. Certainly not a quick read, but more than worth it. Rich insights on almost every page.

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