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DOI:  
[10.5871/bacad/9780197267257.003.0005](https://doi.org/10.5871/bacad/9780197267257.003.0005)

*Document Version*  
Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication record in King's Research Portal](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Murata, K. (2022). Beauty Stings: Plotinus and Rūzbihān Baqlī on Beauty . In S. Sperl, & Y. Dedes (Eds.), *Faces of the Infinite: Neoplatonism and Poetics at the Confluence of Africa, Asia and Europe* (pp. 148-168). OUP/British Academy. <https://doi.org/10.5871/bacad/9780197267257.003.0005>

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# Kazuyo Murata

## Beauty Stings: Plotinus and Rūzbihān Baqlī on Beauty

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### Abstract

Love of beauty has long been recognised as a major theme in Sufi literature. Among numerous Sufis who spoke on beauty, Rūzbihān Baqlī (d. 1209) stands out for the sheer amount and sophistication of his discussion on beauty, expressed in prose and verse, in Arabic and Persian. His analysis of beauty may appear reminiscent of Plotinus's thought, though it is virtually impossible to prove the latter's influence on Rūzbihān. Instead of attempting to prove or disprove 'influence', the present study compares Plotinus and Rūzbihān — with occasional reference to the Arabic Plotinus corpus — on key questions on beauty, including its origin, its role in cosmogony, why human beings find beauty to be attractive and pleasurable, proper attitude to bodily beauty, difference between beauty and goodness, and why beauty mattered to Rūzbihān and Plotinus. A three-directional comparison of Plotinus, Rūzbihān, and the Arabic Plotinus on questions on beauty reveals unexpected affinities and divergences of thought among them.

### Keywords

Beauty; goodness; love; Rūzbihān; Plotinus; the Arabic Plotinus; Sufism; cosmogony; aesthetic pleasure

Readers of Sufi literature often remark how 'Neoplatonic' 'Sufism' can appear, because of various similarities found in 'Neoplatonic' and 'Sufi' texts. The impression of 'Neoplatonic

influence' on 'Sufism' also seems reinforced by the fact that Plotinus's *Enneads* IV, V and VI have been available to Muslims in partial Arabic translation or paraphrase since the ninth century. Such impression may even become stronger if one looks at Sufi theorists of beauty like Rūzbihān Baqlī (d. 1209), whose understanding of beauty has some striking parallels to that of Plotinus (d. 270 CE).

Rūzbihān Baqlī was a major Sufi master active in twelfth-century Shiraz in southwest Persia, famous for his love of beauty, which he expressed in prose and verse in Arabic and Persian. Among the many Sufis who have spoken on beauty, Rūzbihān stands out for the sheer amount and sophistication of his discussion on beauty. His writings were widely circulated, particularly 'among a select group of readers in Iran, India, Central Asia, Ottoman Turkey, and Africa' (Ernst 1996: 10). He came to be known as an important Sufi exegete through the composition of a multi-volume Qur'an commentary in Arabic, *The Brides of Elucidation on the Realities of the Qur'an* ('*Arā'is al-Bayān fī Haqā'iq al-Qur'ān*), while his Persian masterpiece in defence of passionate love ('*ishq*), *The Jasmine of Passionate Lovers* ('*Abhar al-Āshiqān*), has established his standing as a major theoretician of love in Islam.

The present study compares Rūzbihān and Plotinus on several key questions on beauty, including: Where does beauty come from? Why are human beings attracted to beauty, and why do they take pleasure in it? Is bodily beauty an impediment to spiritual ascent and therefore to be shunned by human beings? What is the difference between the good and the beautiful? Finally, why did beauty matter to Plotinus and Rūzbihān?

It must be stated at the outset that it is not the purpose of the present study to compare 'Neoplatonism' and 'Sufism' on questions of beauty, as if these two are fixed, easily definable entities, which they are not.<sup>1</sup> In fact, both terms are inventions of Western historians in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Ernst 1997: 9; Gerson 2014). Instead of comparing abstract entities marked by 'isms', the present study focuses on and compares two specific individuals, namely Plotinus and Rūzbihān.

Further, the present study does not aim at tracing possible lines of knowledge transmission from Plotinus to Rūzbihān or showing how Rūzbihān's understanding of beauty in particular may have been informed by Plotinus's work, which is virtually impossible to prove. This is because, first, Rūzbihān was not a Muslim philosopher to make direct quotations of Greek

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<sup>1</sup> In this way the present study endeavours to avoid what Michael L. Satlow calls 'a historiographical model of static encounters between easily defined cultures' (2008: 40), which fails to recognise 'the inherent weakness of explanatory models that turn culture into static binary encounters, characterised by "conflict", "resistance", "influence", "assimilation", "acculturation", or "appropriation"' (2008: 38).

philosophical texts in Arabic translation or even of Muslim philosophical writings. Secondly, by Rūzbihān's time in the twelfth century, elements of Greek thought had been 'naturalised' in Muslim thought and elaborated upon by several generations of Muslim thinkers as part of their own intellectual tradition. Moreover, while Rūzbihān incorporated technical terms of Sufism and Muslim theology (*kalām*) in his writings, he came to develop a unique poetic language with limited presence of the technical terms of Muslim philosophy (*falsafa*). Whatever the reason may have been, his preference for non-philosophical language makes the task of tracing any transmission of ideas from Greek through Arabic to his writings extremely difficult.<sup>2</sup>

The main sources for analysis in this study are Rūzbihān's writings in Arabic and Persian, including one Persian poem serving as a central text for analysis, and Plotinus's *Enneads*. Since the focus of this study is a content comparison of the two thinkers' ideas, the *Enneads* I, II and III are included as sources for the following comparative analysis, even though these three *Enneads* were most probably not available to Muslims in Arabic during Rūzbihān's time. In addition, occasional reference will be made to the Arabic Plotinus corpus, that is, the Arabic paraphrases of the *Enneads* IV, V, and VI produced in the ninth century that are extant in the form of three Arabic texts: *The Theology of Aristotle (Uthūlūgiyā Aristāṭālīs)*, *[Sayings of] the Greek Sage ([Qawl] al-Shaykh al-Yūnānī)*, and *Epistle on the Divine Science (Risāla fī-l-'Ilm al-*

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<sup>2</sup> One text with substantial philosophical content that Rūzbihān is known to have been familiar with is *The Book of the Inclination of the Familiar Alif toward the Inclined Lām (Kitāb 'Atf al-Alif al-Ma'lūf 'alā al-Lām al-Ma'tūf)* by Abū al-Ḥasan al-Daylamī (fl. c. 950), the biographer and disciple of Ibn Khafīf (d. 982) — see Daylamī 1984 and 2005. This book is one of the earliest Arabic compendia on passionate love (*ishq*) containing a wide range of sayings on love by Muslim philosophers, theologians, Sufis, historians, litterateurs, Bedouin Arabs, and Greeks including Heraclitus, Empedocles, Hippocrates, Plato, Aristotle, and Galen (but not Plotinus). Al-Daylamī was an older contemporary of Ibn Sīnā (c. 980–1037), so the latter's ideas did not enter *The Book of the Inclination*, though al-Daylamī (2005: 159) mentions al-Kindī (d. 873) by name, among others. Al-Daylamī and Ibn Sīnā may have drunk from a similar pool of philosophical knowledge available in Arabic from the tenth to eleventh centuries. For a study on the Greek philosophical material al-Daylamī may have had access to, see Walzer (1962). Takeshita (1987: 128) has examined the extent to which Rūzbihān adapted al-Daylamī's work in composing *The Jasmine of Passionate Lovers* and argues, 'While Daylamī tries to blend Ḥallāj into philosophy and support his views with many quotations of *ḥadīth* and other authorities, Rūzbihān hides Ḥallājian thought with highly poetical and sometimes enigmatic prose and sophisticated terminology. According to Massignon, Daylamī probably received Ḥallājian theory of love, not from Ibn Khafīf, but from Abū Ḥayyān Tawḥīdī, who, in turn, received it from Abū Sulaymān Mantīqī Sijistānī. Therefore it can be said that Daylamī represents the philosophical Ḥallājism, which tries to interpret [*sic*] Ḥallājī's [*sic*] thought in terms of Hellenistic philosophy. On the other hand, in Rūzbihān, we see a representative of experiential Sufism. He is not interested in philosophy nor metaphysics; he is a "practising" Sufi full of mystical visions. However, in spite of these differences, we can still notice in them a continuation of the Ḥallājian tradition of love mysticism in Shiraz, the tradition which is distinct from that of Aḥmad Ghazzālī and that of Ibn 'Arabī.' Ascertaining the immediate source for elements of philosophy in Rūzbihān's thought — whether it is exclusively al-Daylamī or includes the works of later authors such as Ibn Sīnā and al-Ghazzālī (d. 1111) — is beyond the scope of the present study, as there is no definite indication in Rūzbihān's works that he utilised the latter two authors, for instance.

*Ilāhī*).<sup>3</sup> The Arabic Plotinus corpus is included as a source for the present study because a three-directional comparison of Plotinus, Rūzbihān, and the Arabic Plotinus reveals curious combinations of divergent opinions among the three. Naturally there are points on which all three agree, but there are also points where only two of them — which could be any combination of Plotinus and the Arabic Plotinus, the Arabic Plotinus and Rūzbihān, and most curiously, Plotinus and Rūzbihān — agree, while leaving one out. Their similarities and divergences offer much food for thought.

## 1. Cosmogony: Out of the Unknown into the Known and Beautiful

Islamic intellectual discourse on beauty begins with the idea of God as ‘beautiful’, *jamīl* and *ḥasan* in Arabic. These two terms have roots in the Qur’an and Hadith, the former representing the word of God and the latter being Muhammad’s sayings. There are various Qur’anic verses that describe God as beautiful (*ḥasan*), among which is ‘Blessed is God, the most beautiful (*aḥsan*) of creators’ (Q 23:14). The most important hadith on beauty is the one in which Muhammad proclaims, ‘Indeed, God is beautiful (*jamīl*), and He loves beauty (*jamāl*).’<sup>4</sup> While the Qur’an and the Hadith positively describe God as beautiful in this manner, God is at the same time considered ultimately unknowable, just as the Qur’an says, ‘There is nothing like Him’ (Q 42:11), which has led to the development of negative theology in Muslim intellectual discourse.

Rūzbihān engages in both positive and negative theology in his writings. The following Persian poem recorded in Rūzbihān’s hagiography written by his great-grandson, ‘Abd al-Laṭīf Shams b. Ṣadr al-Dīn Rūzbihān Thānī (d. 705/1305), is a good example of Rūzbihān’s exploration of the knowable and unknowable aspects of God while highlighting the significant role that beauty plays in this theological polarity. The present section is devoted to analysing this poem in detail in comparison with relevant aspects of Plotinus’s thought. This poem has been chosen as a central text for analysis in the present study because it encapsulates Rūzbihān’s understanding of divine beauty while touching on important subthemes that are evocative of Plotinus’s ideas.

The poem begins with Rūzbihān emphasising divine transcendence and human incapacity to comprehend God (‘Abd al-Laṭīf 1969: 340):

The recognisers at the house of the seven climes  
have all surrendered because of incapacity.

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<sup>3</sup> For textual and historical details on the Arabic Plotinus corpus, see Adamson (2002: 5–26). For the manuscript tradition of the Arabic Plotinus corpus, see Gutas (2007).

<sup>4</sup> This hadith is found in major Muslim collections such as those by Muslim and Ibn Ḥanbal.

In His path incapacity is perception.  
If you claim [to perceive Him], that would be associationism.  
His Essence is not encompassed by intellects.  
Witnessing It is not described as incarnationism.

The first hemistich of the third verse expresses a well-known dictum in Muslim theology: God as He is in Himself — or the divine essence — is unknowable to everything other than God. Rūzbihān continues on this theme of the unknowability of God's essence for another couple of verses:

Temporal origination hangs from Eternity,  
or rather it flees from eternal Severity.  
Though the universal intellect knows guidance,  
when it comes to His Essence, it falls short.

Thereafter the main theme of the poem shifts from the fact of God's ultimate unknowability to the resulting human reaction of perplexity and rapture:

Spirits are enraptured in this battlefield,  
perplexed at the threshold of Majesty.  
When they saw the glories of His Majesty,  
they cut off coveting the Essence Itself.<sup>5</sup>  
The secret of Eternity was never perceived by anyone,  
for Eternity is not described by nonexistence.  
The holiness of His Essence accepts no imagination.  
How could He who created the creatures die?  
Until you see His Essence through the spirit of the spirit,  
how will you recognise His signs through your secret core?  
The prophets are enraptured in Him.  
The saints are the dust of His road and His servants.

In Sufi literature, the theological dictum of the unknowability of God's essence is sometimes expressed more poetically as the 'hidden treasure' (*kanz makhfī*). This expression comes from a creation myth often discussed by Sufis. Some present it as a dialogue between God and the prophet David,<sup>6</sup> who asks God why He created the world. To this God replies, 'I was a hidden

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<sup>5</sup> This is Rūzbihān's oblique reference to Moses on the mount asking God, 'Show me so that I may look upon you', to which God replies, 'Thou shalt not see Me' (Q 7:143), which echoes the biblical verse, 'No one shall see me and live' (Exodus 33:20). Rūzbihān extensively discusses the manifold implications of Moses's encounter with God on the mount in various works, including his Qur'an commentary (Baqlī 2008).

<sup>6</sup> For example, Kubrawī Sufi, Najm al-Dīn Dāya al-Rāzī (d. 1256) ascribes this saying to David (Rāzī 1980: 26). Chittick (2013: 18) writes, 'Early authors do not suggest that it came from the Prophet's mouth, but attribute it rather to the corpus of stories handed down about the prophet David.' Chittick (2013: 439, n. 6) also notes that while an early attribution of this saying to 'one of God's prophets' can be found in the *Rasā'il* of Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' (fl. tenth century), he has 'not found an explicit attribution of this saying to the Prophet before Ibn al-'Arabī' (d. 1240).

treasure, so I loved to be recognised. So I created the creatures so that I may be recognised.’ Sufis including Rūzbihān take this saying to imply creation as God’s self-manifestation.

The myth of the hidden treasure and the aforementioned hadith, ‘God is beautiful and He loves beauty’, together form the basis for the common Sufi understanding that the driving force for creation is God’s love for His own beauty to be manifest and recognised by something other than Himself. In an Arabic prose work, *The Journey of the Spirits (Sayr al-Arwāḥ)*, Rūzbihān makes precisely this point:

In eternity [God] became the lover of His own beauty (*jamāl*). Inevitably love, lover, and beloved were one. Since they are attributes, they do not have the defect of temporal origination. When He became His own lover, He wanted to create a creation so that it would become the place of His love and gaze, without alienation or intimacy. In His eternity He created the spirits of the lovers and made their eyes see His beauty. He taught them that He was their lover before they came to be: ‘I was a Hidden Treasure, so I loved to be recognised.’<sup>7</sup> (Baqlī 1998b: 6)

If creation is God’s means of making His beauty known, the implication of this is that He would have remained forever hidden and unknown except to Himself, had He not created anything, for then there would have been nothing but God.

Let us now turn to Plotinus, as he makes a number of points similar to Rūzbihān’s. The origin of all in Plotinus’s system of thought is ‘the One’, which is ineffable like the divine essence presented in Rūzbihān’s poem. The One is the first of the three hypostases in Plotinus’s thought, from which emanates the second hypostasis, Intellect, from which in turn emanates the third hypostasis, Soul. Plotinus emphasises the ultimately inconceivable and ineffable nature of the One, as ‘it would be absurd to seek to comprehend that boundless nature’ (V 5 [32] 6, A: 173). Hence, no positive description of the One is possible, and all that can be said about the One is ‘not this’ (V 5 [32] 6, A: 173), according to Plotinus.

It is only through the emanation of the second hypostasis, *Nous* or Intellect, that any intelligibility in positive terms becomes possible. In other words, without this emanation from the One, everything would have remained hidden. Plotinus writes,

there must not be just one alone — for then all things would have been hidden, shapeless within that one, and not a single real being would have existed if that one had stayed still in itself, nor would there have been the multiplicity of these real beings which are generated from the One... (IV 8 [6] 6, A: 415).

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<sup>7</sup> For an extensive analysis of this passage, see Murata (2017: 76–7).

One key difference between Plotinus's discussion here and Rūzbihān's cosmogony is the lack of intention on the part of the One in Plotinus's account, as emanation is a logical, impersonal process,<sup>8</sup> whereas in Rūzbihān's account there is the divine intention of *wanting* to make Himself known. The mythic nature of Rūzbihān's language is typical of Sufi literature in general, as it follows the language of the Qur'an and Hadith.

It is a curious fact that an Arabic translation of the above passage (IV 8 [6] 6) found in chapter 7 of the *Theology of Aristotle* contains two additional words that were not part of the Greek original. These are the words 'beauty' (*ḥusn*) and 'splendour' (*bahā*): 'If the creator did not originate things and were simply alone, the things would have been hidden and their beauty and splendour would not have been manifest and clear' (Badawī 1955: 84–5).<sup>9</sup> With the addition of the words 'beauty' and 'splendour', the Arabic version of this passage puts an emphasis on the emergence of beauty through creation, which comes close to Rūzbihān's discussion above (Baqlī 1998b: 6).

Let us return to Rūzbihān's poem and examine its final four verses. There he first says that without the manifestation of God's beauty, there would not have been any love, for it is the manifestation of beauty that gives rise to love ('Abd al-Laṭīf 1969: 340):

Were there no unveiling of His Beauty,  
how could there be love in people's spirits?  
He made Himself recognised in the signs;  
then He gave out the descriptions of the attributes.

The word 'signs' (*āyāt*) in the latter verse is a classic reference to creation in Muslim literature, as creation is understood to reveal the Creator's existence and qualities as His sign. Underlying Rūzbihān's reference to the attributes (*ṣifāt*) in the same verse is the idea that while the essence of God cannot be directly known by creatures, God can be known indirectly by way of His attributes. If one were to link this discussion to the title of the present volume, one could say that it is the attributes that are the *faces* of the infinite. The very reason why the divine essence is unknowable is that it is limitless therefore unspecifiable. Attributes are the knowable faces or aspects of the unknowable, infinite being. Further, one can say that the infinite is

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<sup>8</sup> Adamson (2002: 164) argues that this is an aspect of Plotinus's thought that the ninth-century Arabic adaptor preserved faithfully in his translation of the *Enneads*, even though there are a number of changes that he has introduced to the text: 'The [Arabic] Adaptor ... agrees with Plotinus in rejecting all desire on the part of the One: "intellectual and sensible things desire to know Him, but He does not desire to know anything" (DS 166 [B 179]).'

<sup>9</sup> The English translation of the Arabic Plotinus corpus in this study generally follows that by Geoffrey Lewis in Plotinus (1977) with occasional modifications. Lewis's translation of this passage can be found in Plotinus (1977: 243).



therefore hidden — or the hidden treasure. The multitude of divine attributes and acts (i.e., all created beings) are the knowable faces or signs of that hidden treasure.

Rūzbiḥān ends his poem by pointing out how divine beauty makes the intellect *mad*, in the sense that it both incapacitates the intellect and makes it fall madly in love. He writes (‘Abd al-Laṭīf 1969: 341):

O far removed from understanding, estimation, and imagination,  
speaking in description of You is impossible.  
In Your Beauty the intellect is mad,  
in Your Majesty the spirit is a moth.

The ‘moth’ is an allusion to the famous imagery in Sufi literature, where the moth represents the human lover and the fire the divine beloved. Because the moth loves and seeks union with the fire, it eventually enters the fire, only to be consumed and annihilated by it, thereby achieving union.

The idea that beauty instils love in its perceiver is common to Rūzbiḥān and Plotinus. Plotinus writes: ‘If anyone sees [the highest beauty], what passion will he feel, what longing in his desire to be united with it, what a shock of delight!’ (I 6 [1] 7, A: 253). For both thinkers the story of existence begins with the single unnameable source of all, the unfolding of which reveals multiple qualities entailed by it, key among which is beauty.

## 2. Mechanism of Aesthetic Experience

There are several key questions on beauty that both Rūzbiḥān and Plotinus address. One is the origin of beauty, which they both find in that single source of all being, as seen in the previous section. Another important question concerns how human experience of beauty works. In particular, why are human beings attracted to beauty, and why do they find aesthetic experience to be pleasurable?

According to Rūzbiḥān, human attraction to beauty originates in a primordial encounter between God and humanity, which is a Qur’anic event often referred to as the Covenant of ‘Am I not’ (*Alast*). In the Qur’an 7:172, God asks the children of Adam, ‘Am I not your Lord?’, to which they reply, ‘Yea, we testify.’ A basic Muslim understanding of this Qur’anic event is that it was human beings’ covenant of servanthood to God. Rūzbiḥān points out that this event signifies much more than a covenant of servanthood: it was also the first occasion on which

God displayed His *beauty* to human beings, thereby turning them into His lovers.<sup>10</sup> He writes, ‘The Real unveiled His beauty (*jamāl*) to the spirits of the passionate lovers in His first appearance after introducing Himself to them by saying, “Am I not your Lord?”’ (Baqī 1974: 10). Hence, in his view this event also signified humanity’s covenant of love to God. The test of human life, therefore, lies in whether one can keep serving and loving that beautiful God throughout one’s life as one’s only Lord and only object of love.

Rūzbihān maintains that the primordial memory of that Lord is retained by the innate human nature (*fiṭra*) that lies within each person. He writes, ‘God captured within the nature of the souls a luminous, intellectual, and holy innate nature that testifies to its bringer-of-existence’ (Baqī 1998a: 174). The idea of the innate human nature comes from a well-known hadith, ‘Every child is born according to the innate human nature’. Rūzbihān points out that this innate nature itself is beautiful too, because the recognition of that beautiful Lord is ingrained in it, which idea Rūzbihān expresses by the phrase ‘the innate human nature of beauty’ (*fiṭrat al-ḥusn*) (Baqī 1974: 133). The innate human nature functions as an indelible link between the soul — or spirit (*rūḥ, jān*) in Rūzbihān’s terminology — leading an embodied life and its higher origin.<sup>11</sup> Thus the primordial encounter with the beautiful Lord has manifold implications for human life on earth.

The idea that human beings’ longing for beauty predates their bodily existence is also present in Plotinus’s thought. In the *Ennead* III 5 [50] 1, A: 167–9 — which is one of the first three *Enneads* and therefore did not form part of the Arabic Plotinus corpus — he writes, ‘And if someone assumed that the origin of love was the longing for beauty itself which was there before in men’s souls, and their recognition of it and kinship with it and unreasoned awareness that it is something of their own, he would hit, I think, on the truth about its cause.’

Moreover, Plotinus discusses the idea that the human soul, even after entry into the body, remains connected to its higher origin. He writes, ‘even our soul does not altogether come down, but there is always something of it in the intelligible’ (IV 8 [6] 8, A: 421). This passage exists in a slightly expanded Arabic paraphrase in chapter 7 of the *Theology of Aristotle* (Badawī 1955: 90; cf. Plotinus 1977: 249), though the main content remains unaltered:

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<sup>10</sup> It must be noted that Rūzbihān is not the only thinker to hold this view. For example, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt (d. 1131) writes, ‘Remember that day on which the beauty (*jamāl*) of “Am I not your Lord” was unveiled to you’ (Hamadānī 2001: 106).

<sup>11</sup> See section three of Stern-Gillet’s chapter in the present volume for a striking parallel to Rūzbihān’s ideas in Ficino’s discussion of ‘the treasure hidden in the deepest part of [the soul]’ that can be forgotten but can be rediscovered through a process of self-purification by turning inward.

the soul does not descend in its entirety to this lower, sensible world — nor does the universal soul nor our souls — but something of it remains in the intelligible world, not departing from it, since it is not possible that a thing should depart from its world completely except by its corruption or by deviation from its essence. So even if the soul descended to this world it would remain attached to its own world, for it is possible for it to be there without withdrawing from this world.

Thus Plotinus, Rūzbihān, and the Arabic Plotinus all maintain that the individual soul remains connected to its higher origin even while leading an embodied life.

So why are human beings attracted to beauty, and why do they find aesthetic experience to be pleasurable? In Rūzbihān's view, aesthetic experience is like *déjà vu*, an occasion for the remembrance (*dhikr*) of the primordial vision of the beautiful God. In the following passage, he discusses the divine 'address of eternity' — referring to 'Am I not your Lord?' (Q 7:172) — and explains how the spiritually advanced keep hearing this 'eternal speech' of God every time they encounter something beautiful in this world:

In every witness [of the Unseen], there remains the sweetness of the address of eternity. When [those who have reached the station of audition] hear any goodly (*ṭayyib*) sound, see and witness anything comely (*malīḥ*) and deemed beautiful (*mustahsan*), or smell any goodly fragrance in this world, they will hear it as an intermediary between the [divine] attribute and the [divine] essence through the quality of being prior to any act that emerges from the Real. It is as if one hears from the Real through the Real. Hence, every speck of engendered being has a specific tongue that speaks to him with the eternal speech. (Baqī 1974: 85)

What Rūzbihān describes here is certainly not the everyday experience of people in general but an advanced psychological state of those who travel on the path to God. For these people, an encounter with any beautiful thing or person constitutes a re-enactment of the primordial covenant. Those who actively remember what they saw on the day of the covenant can see and hear that beautiful Lord every time they perceive something beautiful in this world. Thus, every beautiful thing functions as a sign and reminder of that beautiful Lord.

If in Rūzbihān's language aesthetic pleasure comes from finding something *familiar* due to a primordial encounter, in Plotinus's language aesthetic pleasure comes from finding something *akin* to oneself, though ultimately there is no significant difference in meaning between these two formulations. In *Ennead* I 6 [1] 2, A: 237–9 — another part not included in the Arabic Plotinus corpus — Plotinus writes:

the primary beauty in bodies ... is something which we become aware of even at the first glance; the soul speaks of it as if it understood it, recognizes and welcomes it and as it were adapts itself to it. But when it encounters the ugly it shrinks back and rejects it and turns away from it and is out of tune and alienated from it. Our explanation of this is that the soul, since it is by nature

what it is and is related to the higher kind of reality in the realm of being, when it sees something akin to it or a trace of its kindred reality, is delighted and thrilled and returns to itself and remembers itself and its own possessions. What likeness, then, is there between beautiful things here and There? If there is a likeness, let us agree that they are alike.

The distinction that Plotinus makes between beauty as akin and ugliness as alien to oneself presupposes that one's nature is beautiful. This resonates with Rūzbihān's aforementioned notion of the beautiful innate human nature. Moreover, Plotinus maintains that the soul derives its aesthetic delight from finding something akin to itself, which in turn causes the soul to return to itself and remember its true nature. Kuisma (2003: 184) calls this experience 'anamnetic "déjà-vu"' and explains, 'Perceptible beauty may turn the subject's attention to intelligible Beauty, which is then experienced as an anamnetic return to one's true home' (2003: 190). This idea is congruent with Rūzbihān's view that an encounter with beautiful things prompts recollection of one's beautiful innate nature and origin — God.

Plotinus and Rūzbihān thus agree that every instance of beauty in the world is a pointer to its source that lies on a higher order of being, which is why they regard aesthetic experience to be an occasion for the recollection or remembrance of the source of all beauty. Moreover, both thinkers urge human beings to remember and return to it. They also agree that human beings are attracted to beauty and find its perception pleasurable because it resonates with their own nature that is beautiful. Longing to return to whence one came is another theme that figures prominently in the writings of Rūzbihān (along with other Sufis) and Plotinus, as the latter says by way of quoting from the *Iliad*, 'Let us fly to our dear country' (I 6 [1] 8, A: 257). How one might make one's way home is another question, which will be examined next.

### 3. Inward Journey

It is one thing to say that for Plotinus and Rūzbihān aesthetic experience is an occasion for recollecting the source of all beauty, but it is quite another whether this is the everyday experience of each human being. While both thinkers maintain that everyone has the same capacity to see reality as they do, they admit that most people have this power only in potentiality, not exercised in actuality. Plotinus exhorts: 'Shut your eyes, and change to and wake another way of seeing, which everyone has but few use' (I 6 [1] 8, A: 259). Both Plotinus and Rūzbihān maintain that such a mode of seeing needs to be awakened through conscious effort and training. Plotinus explains that this can be accomplished by turning inward, which will awaken an inner eye that sees the interior of a thing rather than its exterior:

How can one see the ‘inconceivable beauty’ which stays within the holy sanctuary and does not come out where the profane may see it? Let him who can, follow and come within, and leave outside the sight of his eyes and not turn back to the bodily splendours which he saw before. (I 6 [1] 8, A: 255–7)

In a crucial discussion on beauty in *Ennead* I 6 [1] 9, A: 259–61, Plotinus clarifies his method of awakening the inner sight:

And what does this inner sight see? When it is just awakened it is not at all able to look at the brilliance before it. So that the soul must be trained... How then can you see the sort of beauty a good soul has? Go back into yourself and look; and if you do not yet see yourself beautiful, then, just as someone making a statue which has to be beautiful cuts away here and polishes there ... so you too must cut away excess and straighten the crooked and clear the dark and make it bright, and never stop ‘working on your statue’ till the divine glory of virtue shines out on you, till you see ‘self-mastery enthroned upon its holy seat.’ If you have become this, and see it, and are at home with yourself in purity ... then you have become sight; you can trust yourself then; you have already ascended and need no one to show you; concentrate your gaze and see. This alone is the eye that sees the great beauty.<sup>12</sup>

For Plotinus, turning inward entails self-reflection and self-rediscovery. It is important to note that Plotinus regards this as a process of *purification*, rather than acquisition of new qualities. At the end of this process of purification — that is, elimination of all that is alien to the true nature of the soul such as vices and engrossment in the body — what remains and is rediscovered within oneself is beauty. As Plotinus writes, ‘his ugliness has come from an addition of alien matter, and his business, if he is to be beautiful again, is to wash and clean himself and so be again what he was before.’ (I 6 [1] 5, A: 249) This again parallels Rūzbihān’s notion of the beautiful innate human nature, which only needs unearthing.

Plotinus explains the beautiful nature of human beings in this manner:

For when we ourselves are beautiful, it is by belonging to ourselves, but we are ugly when we change to another nature: when we know ourselves we are beautiful, but ugly when we are ignorant of ourselves. Beauty therefore is in that higher world and comes from there. (V 8 [31] 13, A: 281)

Chapter 8 of the *Theology of Aristotle* provides a close paraphrase of this passage:

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<sup>12</sup> Corrigan explains how Plotinus turns around two passages from Plato’s *Phaedrus* (252 d 7 and 254 b 7, respectively) to give a new emphasis on the importance of self-improvement: ‘In the *Phaedrus*, it is the lover who works upon the soul of the beloved, making him “like a statue for himself as though the beloved were a god...” (252d). Plotinus has adapted the image to express the quality of one’s own self-relatedness’, by which Corrigan means ‘his or her concern for goodness, nobility, and justice’ (2005: 212).

Thus we are beautiful (*ḥisān*) and complete as long as we see and recognize ourselves and subsist in our nature (*ṭabīʿa*). If we did not see or recognize ourselves but were carried away to the nature of senses, we would become ugly (Badawī 1955: 120; cf. Plotinus 1977: 409).

Though the ninth-century Arabic translator used the word *ṭabīʿa* to refer to the nature (*phusis*) of the human being, Plotinus's implied sense here seems even closer to Rūzbihān's usage of *fiṭra* ('innate human nature')

Rūzbihān also has his own expressions to refer to an ability similar to what Plotinus calls the 'inner sight'. One is 'the eye of gathering' (*ʿayn al-jam*), about which Rūzbihān writes: 'the Real discloses Himself in beauty (*ḥusn*) and what is deemed beautiful<sup>13</sup> to those who seek to witness Him.... This is an allusion to the eye of gathering, which none knows but passionate lovers' (Baqī [no date A]: I.328, para. 138). It is called the eye of 'gathering' because it is a mode of perception that sees both the Creator and the created in a single vision as if gathering them together. An example of this mode of perception would be to see a beautiful flower and recognise its beautiful Creator through it simultaneously.

Such usage of 'gathering' is part of standard Sufi terminology, in which 'gathering' (*jam*) is contrasted with 'separation' (*tafriqa* or *farq*).<sup>14</sup> Naturally Rūzbihān adopts this contrast and posits 'the eye of separation' as the opposite mode of perception. If the eye of gathering is an 'intoxicated' mode of perception that only some attain after much spiritual exercise, the eye of separation represents the 'sober' mode of perception that people use on a daily basis, in which they draw a clear line between the Creator and the created while looking at the world, as if emphatically separating the two. An example of this mode of perception would be to see a beautiful flower only as a flower, without immediate association with its Creator. Put differently, the eye of separation emphasises the distinction between the Creator and the created thereby highlighting the transcendence of God, whereas the eye of gathering focuses on the immanence of God. The eye of gathering can turn every aesthetic experience into recollection of God because it highlights the beautiful God's presence — rather than absence — in each of His creations.

Another expression that Rūzbihān uses is 'the eye of contentment' (*ʿayn al-riḍā*). He writes, 'When the eye of contentment is opened ... one will see the quiddity of being and the beauty (*ḥusn*) of God's artisanry (*iṣṭināʿ*) that becomes manifest from [that quiddity] in every atom ...

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<sup>13</sup> 'What is deemed beautiful' (*mustaḥsan*) is a technical term in Rūzbihān's writings that refers to beautiful objects in the world — which can also be deemed ugly (*mustaqbah*) depending on one's perspective, as they belong to the realm of relative or possible being — in contrast to *ḥusn*, which is beauty itself or absolute beauty, belonging to God. For a detailed discussion of *mustaḥsan*, see Murata (2017: 37–40, 43–4).

<sup>14</sup> See for instance Qushayrī's contrast of *jam* with *farq* (2007: 87–8).

and will deem all things decreed by the Unseen as beautiful' (Baqlī 1974: 72–3). Elsewhere he explains the eye of contentment by quoting some lines of poetry (Baqlī 2008: II, 29):

The eye of contentment sees the ugly as beautiful (*ḥasan*) among all, just as it was said:  
The eye of contentment is dim toward every shortcoming  
but the eye of evil makes appear evil traits.

It was said:

The eye of enmity is responsible for evil traits  
while the eye of contentment is dim toward shortcomings.

The eye of contentment allows the human being to find beauty everywhere by foregoing the distinction between the beautiful and the ugly among objects of perception and by letting one focus on the mere fact of their existing. This is to see all things equally as good-and-beautiful (*ḥasan*) insofar as they exist (cf. Murata 2017: 42–3, 119), without regard for their relative perfection or imperfection. In this way one becomes *content* with and comes to appreciate all that exists, which is an ideal human state that the prophets have attained and the rest of humanity should strive to achieve, according to Rūzbihān.

There seems to be another parallel between Rūzbihān and Plotinus in connection to 'the eye of evil' in the above poem, which Rūzbihān has contrasted with the eye of contentment. Plotinus (I 6 [1] 9, A: 261) writes,

But if anyone comes to the sight blear-eyed with wickedness, and unpurified, or weak and by his cowardice unable to look at what is very bright, he sees nothing, even if someone shows him what is there and possible to see. For one must come to the sight with a seeing power made akin and like to what is seen. No eye ever saw the sun without becoming sun-like, nor can a soul see beauty without becoming beautiful. You must become first all godlike and all beautiful if you intend to see God and beauty.

Here Plotinus shows how those who are 'blear-eyed with wickedness' fail to see beauty, just as Rūzbihān's 'eye of evil makes appear evil traits' (Baqlī 2008: II, 29). An important point that Plotinus makes in the above passage is that in order to see anything, one needs to make oneself akin to it. This implies that if one is ugly inside, one sees ugliness outside; if one is beautiful inside, one sees beauty outside. This is a point on which again Plotinus and Rūzbihān seem to agree.

Earlier in this section we saw Plotinus urging human beings to polish their inner self and 'never stop "working on your statue" till the divine glory of virtue shines out on you' (I 6 [1] 9, A: 259). Muslims refer to a similar process of inner purification-cum-perfection as 'assuming the character traits of God' (*takhalluq bi-akhlāq Allāh*), a state of human perfection that people should endeavour to attain. Rūzbihān describes this state in various ways, for example:

When all the [divine] names, qualities, and attributes are attributed to the recogniser (*'ārif*) while he is unified with the lights of the [divine] essence, has become God's bride in the beauty (*jamāl*) of intimacy, and has become holy in God's holiness, the Real names him with His most tremendous name just as He named Himself with His most tremendous name (Baqī 1974: 232).

In fact, in Rūzbihān's major Arabic prose work that outlines the 1001 stations that human spirits traverse in their journey to God, he presents the above state, namely the embodiment of all the divine names and attributes, as the last and highest, 1001<sup>st</sup> station (Baqī 1974: 317). Like Plotinus, Rūzbihān argues that reaching this station requires a process of purification and self-discovery rather than acquisition of new qualities that one never had. The basis for his argument is the Qur'anic verse, 'He taught Adam the names, all of them' (Q 2:31), which he understands as God bestowing all of the divine names and attributes upon the human being (Baqī 1974: 156; cf. Murata 2017: 102–4).

#### 4. Attitude to Beauty in Bodies

One of the remaining questions concerns the attitude of Plotinus and Rūzbihān toward beauty in bodies. If they emphasise the importance of the inner eye over the outer, physical eye, does that mean that they consider bodily beauty only as a hindrance to one's spiritual ascent that needs to be avoided by human beings? On this question, there seem to be some important differences among Rūzbihān, Plotinus, and the Arabic Plotinus.

Let us examine Rūzbihān first. In his Hadith commentary, he discusses Muhammad's saying, 'Gazing at a beautiful (*ḥasan*) face increases sight', which can be taken as prophetic endorsement of sensory pursuit and appreciation of beauty. Rūzbihān's interpretation does not contradict this, but he emphasises the point that pursuit of beauty or 'seeking intimacy' with beautiful things is rather an inevitable consequence of one's inborn love for the beautiful God. He writes,

Whoever seeks intimacy with the beauty (*jamāl*) of the Beginninglessness seeks intimacy with the beauty of the forms of temporal origination by yearning for the quarry of holiness, because no one knows the degrees of intimacy with the Real except those who recognise the saying of the master of humanity: 'Gazing at a beautiful face increases sight.' (Baqī [no date B]: 57, para. 112; cf. Baqī 1974: 133)

In fact, Rūzbihān considers 'seeking intimacy with beautiful things' (*isti'nās bi-l-mustaḥsanāt*) as an important and commendable practice. Of course, he is aware of its potential danger in leading its practitioner to become absorbed in the physicality of beautiful things. However, Rūzbihān seems to trust his audience — which he does not always explicitly identify but are



usually those in the Sufi path rather than the general public — as capable of seeing bodily beauty as a ladder leading to the source of beauty rather than as an end in itself, a trap to fall into, or a hindrance in the path to God.<sup>15</sup>

In contrast, Plotinus seems to be more cautious about, as well as explicit in, warning people against the danger of being stuck in the physicality of beautiful things. He writes, ‘When he sees the beauty in bodies he must not run after them; we must know that they are images, traces, shadows, and hurry away to that which they image’ (I 6 [1] 8, A: 257). To Plotinus, the power of beauty is so strong and obvious that in his treatise *Against the Gnostics* he disparages those who fail even to have a sense of wonder:

But if someone who sees beauty excellently represented in a face is carried to that higher world, will anyone be so sluggish in mind and so immovable that, when he sees all the beauties in the world of sense, all its good proportion and the mighty excellence of its order, and the splendour of form which is manifested in the stars, for all their remoteness, he will not thereupon think, seized with reverence, ‘What wonders, and from what a source?’ If he did not, he would neither have understood this world here nor seen that higher world. (II 9 [33] 16, A: 291)

Plotinus also rebukes those who fail to differentiate between beauty and ugliness, and goes so far as to say they have no contemplation and therefore no God:

They do not look any differently at ugly or beautiful ways of life, or beautiful subjects of study; they have no contemplation, then, and hence no God. For the beauties here exist because of the first beauties. If, then, these here do not exist, neither do those; so these are beautiful in their order after those. But when they say they despise the beauty here, they would do well if they despised the beauty in boys and women, to avoid being overcome by it to the point of abandoned wickedness. But one should notice that they would not give themselves airs if they despised something ugly. (*Ennead* II 9 [33] 17, A: 293)

If lack of discernment between beauty and ugliness is despicable yet despising beauty in bodies is not ideal, what does Plotinus consider to be the correct attitude to beauty and ugliness in bodies? He explains that the correct attitude is not to cling to beauty in this world but to admire its maker ‘without insulting these beauties here’ (II 9 [33] 17, A: 295). Plotinus’s critical stance on the gnostic denial of the material world including what is beautiful, which in his view is likely to create a problematic sense of ascetic superiority, is clear here. Kuisma (2003: 79) summarises his view thus: ‘Indifference to beauty would be acceptable in restraining human sexuality, but as a general attitude it would lead to barbarism and atheism.’ Appreciation of the

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<sup>15</sup> In fact, Rūzbihān repeatedly defends the appreciation of beauty in creatures, particularly in people (cf. Baqlī 2001: 42; Murata 2017: 93).

relative value of beauty in contrast to ugliness even in the material world seems crucial to Plotinus.

There is one passage where the Arabic Plotinus seems to depart slightly from Plotinus in discussing bodily beauty. The Arabic paraphrase of *Ennead* V 8 [31] 2 found in chapter 4 of the *Theology of Aristotle* reads:

The beauty of nature (*ḥusn al-ṭabī'a*) is hidden from us because we are not capable of seeing with eyesight the interior of a thing nor do we seek that. However, we see with eyesight the outside and exterior of a thing and are amazed by its beauty. If we coveted seeing the interior of a thing, we would abandon (*rafaḍa*) and despise (*iḥtaqara*) the outer beauty and would not be amazed by it. (Badawī 1955: 60; cf. Plotinus 1977: 379–81)

Such harsh tone in rejecting outer beauty, in particular the recommendation for *despising* it, is not found in the original *Ennead* V 8 [31] 2, A: 243–5:

But certainly nature which produces such beautiful works is far before them in beauty, but we, because we are not accustomed to see any of the things within and do not know them, pursue the external and do not know that it is that within which moves us: as if someone looking at his image and not knowing where it came from should pursue it. But the beauty also in studies and ways of life and generally in souls makes clear that what is pursued is something else and that beauty does not lie in magnitude: it is truly a greater beauty than that when you see moral sense in someone and delight in it, not looking at his face — which might be ugly — but putting aside all shape and pursuing his inner beauty.

Plotinus's point here that in order to focus on inner beauty, one should, if necessary, *ignore* the *ugliness* of its possessor's face, turns into the idea that in order to see inner beauty, one should *despise* outer *beauty* in the Arabic version.<sup>16</sup> It is a curious fact that as far as this discussion is concerned, Rūzbihān and Plotinus agree in commending the appreciation of beauty in bodies, while the Arabic Plotinus diverges from them both by being more disparaging of bodily beauty. Could it be that the Arabic adaptor was more dismissive of the material world than Plotinus and Rūzbihān were? Adamson (2002: 173) suggests the possibility that the Arabic adaptor failed to grasp one important aspect of Plotinus's thought, namely that

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<sup>16</sup> This is not to say that Plotinus entirely dismisses the idea of 'despising' outer beauty, as seen earlier in *Ennead* II 9 [33] 17, A: 293. However, Miles raises a question about the word 'despise'. In connection to *Ennead* I 6 [1] 6, A: 251 — 'Again, greatness of soul is despising the things here: and wisdom is an intellectual activity which turns away from the things below and leads the soul to those above' — Miles (1999: 41) writes, 'Indeed, the translation distorts: Plotinus's word for "despise" is literally "look over" — a differently toned word than "despise". To "look over" objects of sense is conceptually to see their essential form.' The word used by the Arabic adaptor above, *iḥtaqara*, is a strong word clearly denoting despite and disdain, certainly not the gentle 'looking over' of Plotinus.

Plotinus himself rejected the gnostic conception of the sensible world as evil, even though he counseled us to raise our attention from material to immaterial things. This comes out most clearly in *Enn.* II.9 against the gnostics, a treatise the Adaptor may not have read. But whatever his knowledge of Plotinus's stance on this issue, the Adaptor chose to exaggerate the *Enneads'* negative statements about the physical world, as well as the peril that this world presents to our souls.... The ethical dimension of the Adaptor's thought, then, is decidedly scornful regarding things of the lower world.

## 5. Good versus Beauty

The final point for contrast is how Rūzbihān and Plotinus differentiate between goodness and beauty. Arabic has two main terms denoting 'beauty'. One is *jamāl*, which is ascribed to God in the Hadith literature, and the other is *ḥusn*, which is used in the Qur'an to describe God, as seen in section one. While many Muslim writers use *jamāl* and *ḥusn* indistinguishably to denote beauty, Rūzbihān notes that from one perspective it is possible to differentiate the two in the following manner: *ḥusn* is a wider concept than *jamāl* in that it simultaneously denotes beauty and goodness, while encompassing *jamāl* along with its conceptual counterpart, *jalāl* (majesty).

Put in the language of Muslim theology, Rūzbihān considers *ḥusn* to be an attribute of God's essence, which by definition has no counterpart (i.e., a complementary quality of contrasting nature), while he regards *jamāl* as an attribute of God's act — i.e., an attribute that describes God's dynamic interaction with creation accompanied by a counterpart, which would be *jalāl* in the case of *jamāl*. Furthermore, it is important to note that the totality of the divine names<sup>17</sup> (i.e., both the names of the essence and those of the act) is referred to in the Qur'an as 'the most beautiful names' (*al-asmā' al-ḥusnā*) (Q 7:180; 17:110; 20:8; 59:24). The fact that this Qur'anic expression uses the superlative of *ḥasan* ('good-and-beautiful') to describe the totality of the divine names again points to the all-embracing nature of *ḥusnā/ḥusn* over *jamāl* (cf. Murata 2017: 72, 146, n. 6).

Rūzbihān argues that because *jamāl* is accompanied by *jalāl*, it is a kind of beauty that can cause awe and fear. In contrast, *ḥusn*, being a stand-alone concept connoting all-encompassing goodness and beauty, is presented as gentle and not fear-inducing:

The difference between *ḥusn* and *jamāl* is [only] in words, and there is no difference in the realities of the meanings of the[se] attributes. However ... *jamāl* makes emerge in the passionate lover passionate love along with fear and recognising majesty, while His *ḥusn* makes hope and expansiveness emerge. (Baqī 1974: 133)

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<sup>17</sup> Grammatically speaking, divine 'names' are the adjectival forms of divine attributes. For example, 'the Merciful' is a divine name, while 'mercy' is a divine attribute.

As Rūzbihān himself points out, such distinction between *ḥusn* and *jamāl* is only implicit and not emphasised in the rest of his writings. However, the fact that he uses *nīkūī* — which has a combined sense of ‘goodness’ and ‘beauty’ — as a Persian equivalent of *ḥusn* (Baqī 2001: 42; cf. Murata 2017: 30, 92–3, 136, n. 9) does highlight the connotation of overall goodness in his usage of *ḥusn*.

In contrast, the distinction between the good and the beautiful is more pronounced in Plotinus’s thought, due to the clear demarcation of the first hypostasis, the One (or the Good), from the second hypostasis, Intellect, which is referred to ‘the beautiful’, as it represents intelligible beauty, being the totality of the Forms.<sup>18</sup> Plotinus writes,

That which is beyond this [i.e., Intellect] we call the nature of the Good, which holds beauty as a screen before it. So in a loose and general way of speaking the Good is the primary beauty; but if one distinguishes the intelligibles [from the Good] one will say that the place of the Forms is the intelligible beauty, but the Good is That which is beyond, the ‘spring and origin’ of beauty; or one will place the Good and the primal beauty on the same level. (I 6 [1] 9, A: 261–3)

Just as the unknowable divine essence can come to be known by human beings indirectly through the intermediary of the knowable divine attributes, Plotinus’s indescribable One holds intelligible beauty ‘as a screen before it’.

The ontological priority of the Good over beauty is therefore clear:

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<sup>18</sup> Scholars still point out the vagueness that remains in Plotinus’s presentation of beauty in relation to the Good. While it is clear that ‘the beautiful’ may only refer to Intellect but not to the One, they wonder if the One may be called ‘beauty’. Inge (1918: 126) writes, ‘Plotinus insists that the Absolute [i.e., the One] cannot be “the Beautiful”, but Beauty, or the source of the Beautiful.’ Rist (1967: 54–5) writes, ‘The distinction of the Good and the Beautiful is clear, and Plotinus makes the inferiority of the Beautiful still clearer in 11. 32–3 [*sic.*; [V 5] 12. 32–3] when he declares that ‘yonder’ in the supra-sensible world the Good has no need of the Beautiful but the Beautiful stands in need of the Good. Yet this sentence in fact also complicates matters, for Plotinus has, in the first part of it, remarked that both the Good and the Beautiful participate in the One which is prior to them. This seems to confuse the previous arguments, which are based on the idea of the Good as the ground of Being for all things and thus as identified with the One.’ It is also worth noting that Plotinus’s presentation of intelligible beauty differs from Plato’s. Corrigan (2005: 217) notes, ‘For Plotinus, by contrast [to Plato], there is no individual ‘Form of the Beautiful’ in V, 8. The whole of intellect is beauty. Why should this be so? Plato, of course, distinguishes the beautiful from the good, at least in terms of individual things, though the line between *kalon* and *agathon*, beautiful and good, as we saw above, is not easy to draw (cf. *Republic* 506 a; *Symposium* 201 b 10–c 2). The ‘Form of the Good’ is the highest form beyond being and intellect in the *Republic*. The ‘Form of the Beautiful’ is the highest form in the *Symposium*, though the question of the good is very much a part of Socrates-Diotima’s speech (see 204 e ff.). Plotinus seems to hold a rather nuanced view of all this.’ All this vagueness in Plotinus’s language with regard to the One only seems to highlight its ineffable, unspecifiable nature, which defies all naming, as Plotinus repeatedly points out.

The Good itself does not need beauty, though beauty needs it. The Good is gentle and kindly and gracious, and present to anyone when he wishes. Beauty brings wonder and shock and pleasure mingled with pain. (V 5 [32] 12, A: 193)

An Arabic paraphrase of this passage is found only in a truncated form in the *Epistle on the Divine Science*, with the last two sentences missing:

The Good (*al-khayr*) is prior to the beautiful (*al-ḥasan*), prior not in time but in truth and reality. In the Good is all power. The power of the Good originated the power of the beautiful, being the cause of all things. (Badawī 1955: 182; cf. Plotinus 1977: 357)

Thus the Arabic version reveals a divergence in terminology between Plotinus, the Arabic Plotinus, and Rūzbihān. Plotinus's contrast between the Good (*agathon*) and the beautiful (*kalon*) is presented by the Arabic Plotinus as a contrast between *khayr* (good) and *ḥasan* (good-and-beautiful), while Rūzbihān's contrast presented above is between *ḥasan* and *jamīl* (beautiful).<sup>19</sup>

While there are certain commonalities between Plotinus and Rūzbihān in their contrast of *agathon* and *kalon* on the one hand and *ḥasan* and *jamīl* on the other, ultimately these seem to constitute two different discussions. Plotinus's contrast between *agathon* and *kalon* seems to be primarily about the distinction between the two hypostases, the One and Intellect, the Good and the beautiful, or the indescribable and the intelligible. This particular contrast by Plotinus seems analogous to the distinction made between the unknowable essence of God and the knowable attributes of God in Muslim theological discourse. As for Rūzbihān's contrast between *ḥusn* and *jamāl*, both terms pertain to the intelligible realm, that is, the divine

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<sup>19</sup> *Khayr* has been the most common translation for *agathon* in Arabic philosophical texts (cf. Endress, Arnzen & Arzhanov 2018, s.v. *agathon*). As for *kalon*, the two equally common translations for it have been *ḥasan* and *jamīl* (Endress, Arnzen & Arzhanov 2018, s.v. *kalon*, *kallos*, *kalos*). In Muslim philosophical texts in Arabic, *al-khayr al-mahḍ* ('the sheer good') is often used in reference to God, while non-philosophers rarely use this expression as it is an imported term originating in the translation movement from Greek into Arabic. The Qur'an does not call God *al-khayr* (cf. Gimaret 1988: 395), while it presents God to be the source of all goodness, e.g., 'In Your hand is the good (*al-khayr*)' (Q 3:26). In fact, the Qur'anic usage of *khayr* is more often in reference to a good deed of human beings or fortune befalling them, which is contrasted with *sharr* ('evil'), which can refer to an evil human deed or misfortune (cf. Izutsu 2002: 217–21). The fact that *kalon* signifies both moral and aesthetic beauty seems to indicate its greater proximity to *ḥusn* than to *khayr*. As Kuisma (2003: 44) points out, 'Depending on context, *to kalon* (and *kalos*) in Greek could denote divine or human beauty as well as ethical or aesthetic beauty .... Modern readers should consider carefully which of these senses, or of their possible combinations, is at issue in particular classical texts. In particular, the ethical sense of *to kalon* is more fundamental than the aesthetic sense since ethical beauty (i.e., moral virtue) is good simpliciter, while aesthetic beauty is good on the condition that it is not against moral value.' If the three Arabic words, *khayr*, *ḥusn*, and *jamāl*, were to be put on scales of the strongest to the weakest connotations of goodness and beauty, they would appear in the same order of *khayr*, *ḥusn*, and *jamāl*, with the word on the far left having the strongest connotation of goodness specifically and the word on the far right having the strongest connotation of beauty specifically, with the word in the middle having both connotations equally.

attributes — which may be compared to the intelligible Forms of Plotinus — rather than to the unknowable realm, namely the divine essence. *Ḥusn* and *jamāl*, however, belong to two different levels of divine attributes: *ḥusn* is an attribute of God's essence, while *jamāl* is an attribute of His act, as discussed earlier.

If beauty is secondary to and derivative of the ultimate source of all, why did Plotinus and Rūzbihān spend so much time discussing beauty, urging people to turn their attention to it? Indeed, as Rist (1967: 64) points out, 'to choose Beauty over Goodness would thus be to choose something lacking the universality of Goodness and thus, relatively speaking, to choose the bad.' The key to this conundrum seems to lie in Plotinus's recognition of the different psychological effect that the Good and the beautiful have on human beings. He writes,

But the Good, since it was there long before to arouse an innate desire, is present even to those asleep and does not astonish those who at any time see it, because it is always there and there is never recollection of it; but people do not see it, because it is present to them in their sleep. But the passionate love of beauty, when it comes, causes pain, because one must have seen it to desire it. (V 5 [32] 12, A: 191)

Corrigan in his study of this passage uses the expression 'the quiet presence of the Good' (2005: 30) to highlight the unperturbed nature of the Good, due to which it may remain 'unperceived' by human beings, in contrast to beauty, which is unmissable due to the astonishment and pain it causes to its perceiver.

Thus, Plotinus notices unique power of beauty. It is the very specificity of beauty compared to the all-pervasiveness of the Good that gives beauty the special ability to wake people up and pull them towards itself. Plotinus seems to be pointing out that everyone knows that goodness is good, but it is beauty that makes people take an action because it wakes them up by attracting them, causing in them passionate love, desire, pleasure and pain, unlike the gentle goodness, which often requires the full exercise of rationality for human beings to find it more appealing than beauty. Moreover, it must be noted that while goodness is primarily intelligible, beauty can be both sensory and moral (therefore intelligible), which implies its wider appeal.<sup>20</sup> Goodness quietly invites those with awakened intelligence to itself without perturbation, whereas beauty — while giving pleasure to its onlooker — *stings*, just like the rose. Rūzbihān

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<sup>20</sup> See Kuisma (2003: 162–3), who notes, 'In Plato's *Phaedrus* (246a–256d) beauty's unique position is praised in poetically exalted words, partly because its powerful influence can be captured through perception, i.e., through the sense of sight. Beauty can instantly arouse passionate love in human beings, whereas truth and goodness do not have a comparable magical power to affect people in their everyday lives. Human beings react to perceptible beauty and ugliness without volitional effort, but in the case of truth and goodness the situation seems to be different.'

too recognises the power of beauty (*jamāl*) in causing awe and fear along with passionate love, as we have seen already. There seems to be a ‘sting’ accompanying pleasure where there is beauty.

Perhaps it is the recognition of this power in beauty to bring both pleasure and pain to its perceivers that has led both Rūzbihān and Plotinus to talk so much about beauty — despite its ontological inferiority to goodness — in the hope that beauty will sting and awaken as many souls as possible to help initiate their movement, even just towards beauty in bodies, because both thinkers believed that if human beings truly sought beauty, they would eventually turn their gaze upwards.

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