The Experience of Beauty: Hugh and Richard of St. Victor on Natural Theology

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Abstract: In this paper, I will argue that the Twelfth Century spiritually-oriented texts present an important, but often neglected instance of natural theology. My analysis will show that in the texts of Hugh of St. Victor (d. 1141) and his student Richard of St. Victor (d. 1173) we find a Christian Neo-Platonist variant of natural theology. The elements of natural theology form a central part of their larger spiritual programmes, which in turn are meant to guide the human being in her ascent into divine realities and thereby offer immediate experience of the presence of God. I will give special attention to Hugh's treatise *De Tribus Diebus*, as it explores both the manifestations of the Trinity in the created world as well as the beauty of all created objects. Hugh's account will be supplemented by an exposition of Richard's idea of experience as a vital means for all knowing.

Introduction

Natural theology offers arguments about the existence of God and his attributes that are based on either reason or the everyday experience of nature. This elementary definition of natural theology rules out the arguments based on revealed truths, like religious doctrines or sacred scriptures. Its basic claim is that it is possible to find evidence of the existence of God, his attributes and operation in the visible world on the basis of sensation, reason, human nature or science.[1] The authors of the Middle Ages, however, did not exploit such a sharp distinction between the natural theology/philosophy and revealed theology, maintaining that although the natural world represents the divine creative essence, the parameters for natural theology are still outlined by the sacred writings. Thus they frequently used arguments from both nature and revelation as part of their theological and philosophical discussions and composed thorough theoretical constructions that united elements from both theological and philosophical spheres. The great scholastics, Thomas Aquinas in particular, were able to hold that although theological and philosophical discussions have their own distinctive ways of arguing, they were ultimately speaking and referring to the one and the same truth.[2] Aquinas puts this in his *Summa contra Gentiles* as follows:

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[1] For recent discussions about the historical and contemporary perspectives on natural theology, see (Manning 2013) and (Craig & Moreland 2012). It is possible to recognize a renaissance in the field of natural theology in contemporary philosophy. For this, see (Taliaferro 2012, 1–23).

[2] For aspects of natural theology in Aquinas's thinking, see, e.g., (Elders 1990).

"There is a twofold mode of truth in what we profess about God. Some truths about God exceed all the ability of human reason. Such is the truth that God is triune. But there are some truths which the natural reason also is able to reach. Such are the truth that God exists, that he is one, and the like. In fact, such truths about God have been proved demonstratively by the philosophers, guided by the light of natural reason." (Summa contra gentiles I, 3, n.2)[3]

My intention in this article is to examine writings produced in the monastery of St. Victor by assessing their ideas of philosophy and theology and their interface. Although Victorine thinking does not exclusively contain natural theology, I will argue that elements of natural theology form a central part of their writings and theory of contemplation.

Victorine texts were written at the dawn of the rise of Parisian university theology and its well-known attempt to exploit the philosophy of Aristotle to explicate and re-formulate a number of specifically Christian ideas. Contemporary natural theology has usually been interested in scholastic writings that were deeply inspired by Aristotle's philosophy, such as Aquinas's works. But instead of emphasizing this well-known Aristotelian strand of natural theology, my analysis will focus on natural theology built on a theory of contemplation and Christian Neo-Platonic thought.[4]

First, I will offer some introductory remarks about twelfth-century pre-Scholasticism in general, after which I will introduce the monastery of St. Victor, and present the two best-known Victorines, Hugh and Richard. Subsequently I will take a closer look at one of Hugh's works, *De Tribus Diebus* (*On Three Days*) and examine his thoughts about the created world and its objects as well as their beauty. The last part of the article supplements Hugh's account by assessing Richard of St. Victor's notion of experience. The analyses of beauty and experience also contribute to recent discussion about aesthetics and its possible relation to natural theology.[5]

The Background

In general, the twelfth century represents an interesting starting point for the study of Platonist natural theology. This century is well-known for its economic growth, translations of ancient texts and the assimilation of their ideas, as well as the formation of new institutions and schools. It is also notable for its curiosity about the study of nature's phenomena and new Arabic philosophy, although many major philosophical texts remained unavailable to most Western authors

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[3] (Aquinas 1955–57)

[4] It is important to remember, however, that great scholastics did not abandon Platonist thought altogether in order to replace it with Aristotelian thinking. Such Christian Neo-Platonist writers as Augustine, Boethius, and Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite also remained extremely influential during the high middle ages. For a succinct summary of the varieties of medieval Platonism, listen to Peter Adamson's interview with Stephen Gersh at
http://www.historyofphilosophy.net/medieval-platonism-gersh.

[5] For a recent discussion about the possible evidence of God in the experience of beauty and order of nature, see (Brown 2013, 523–538).

during this period.[6] Some of Aristotle's logical works circulated during the twelfth century, but most of his central philosophical texts, such as *On the Soul*, *Physics*, *Metaphysics*, and *Nicomachean Ethics* were still unknown. While only a few of Plato's texts had been translated, like the partial translation of *Timaeus*, Platonist philosophy was prevailing through the texts of Augustine and other Christian theologians who were heirs of Neo-Platonist thought.[7] Distinctively academic theology emerged from this context. Such authors as Peter Abelard, Anselm of Canterbury, Anselm of Laon, and Hugh of St. Victor started to deal with theological issues with new conceptual tools and methods, moving from the direct biblical commentaries to seeing theology as a science with its own method. Sophisticated attempts were made to legitimize the use of reason for speculating upon matters based on faith. In addition, Neo-Platonist natural theology in particular and the theories of contemplation started to emerge in Cistercian circles in the school of Chartres and the monastery of St. Victor.[8]

Founded in 1108 by William Champeaux, the Victorine community of canons regular was located near the city walls of Paris, the growing intellectual center of the time. Researchers have acknowledged St. Victor's unusual combination of daily spiritual life and advanced intellectual study, as well as its considerable interest in teaching.[9]

Hugh and Richard were the two most prominent Victorines in the twelfth century. Hugh probably came from Saxony, started to teach in the school of St. Victor around 1120, acted as its Master beginning in 1127, and was appointed the head of the school ca. 1133. Hugh died 1141. Hugh was a theologian and a philosopher, writing one of the most important summaries of Christian theology before Thomas Aquinas, called *De Sacramentis Christiane Fidei* (*The Sacraments of Christian Faith*). He also wrote several treatises on mystical theology, commented on Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, composed a manual for studying liberal arts entitled *Didascalicon*, and wrote biblical commentaries.[10] Richard, one of Hugh's best students, was born in Scotland. It is likely that soon after his arrival around 1140 he was teaching at the external school of St. Victor. In 1159, he became sub-prior of the monastery, and was elected prior in 1162. He died in March 1173. Richard is known for his spiritual theology, which combines philosophical and theological components. His Trinitarian speculations, which seek necessary reasons for the Trinity, have attracted much attention.[11]

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[6] For a standard study, see (Haskins 1928/1968). The Twelfth-Century affinity with natural philosophy and its Neo-Platonist framework has been studied particularly by Chenu (1957).

[7] Aristotle's logical works (*Categories*, *De interpretatione*, *Topics*, *Sophisti Elenchi*, and *Prior Analytics*) were translated and commented on by Boethius (d. 524), and came into active use gradually, some of them in the twelfth-century. For medieval Latin translations of Aristotle, see (Dod 1982, 45–79).

[8] See (Leclerq 1982, 68–87); (Grant 2001, 58–59); (Chenu 1957, 49–98; 300–309).

[9] The historical, political and ideological aspects of the foundation and growth of the monastery of St. Victor have been discussed by Fassler (2011, esp. 187–240). See also a collection of articles in (Poirel 2010).

[10] For a recent general introduction to Hugh, see (Rorem 2009); for his visual exegesis, consult (Sicard 1993). Hugh's ideas of the Trinity have been thoroughly considered by Poirel (2002). In recent years, the research has been increasingly interested in Victorine works; their texts have been studiously examined by a group of Victorine scholars in the Brepols publisher's series Bibliotheca Victorina, volumes I–XXIII and translated in the series *Victorine Texts in Translation*.

[11] For studies on Richard, see, e.g., (Zinn 1979); (Châtillon 1988). For his theological method, see (Coulter 2006); for his psychological theory, see (Palmén 2014). Consult also introductions and

Victorine thinking often underlines the study of the visible, created world, highlighting the importance of human experience.[12] Both Hugh and Richard discussed how both philosophical and scientific knowledge can be useful in contemplation and the spiritual life in general, giving a positive place for 'pagan' literature in Christian curriculum as well. The experience of both sensible objects as well as human nature were seen as an important means of knowledge of the divine reality. They also explored the notion of beauty and the manifestations of beauty as a marker of the transcendental Creator, giving the feeling of admiration of beauty a distinctly cognitive function in their psychological theories.

The Victorine emphasis on the insights of the sensory world and experience forms an independent, philosophically interesting discussion of its own. Examining the Victorine monastic ideas dealing with knowledge of the sensible world, the reliance on human experience and sensory faculties demonstrates natural theology which depends on specifically Platonist premises.

Theology, philosophy, and spirituality in the Victorine context

Like much twelfth-century theology, Victorine writings build on Neo-Platonic dualism, which divides the hierarchy of being into two major levels, material and spiritual. These two levels are hierarchically structured to form an organized ascending pattern from the lowest to the highest levels of being. This hierarchy is revealed in various respects in the division between visible and invisible reality and in the individual himself and his soul. In a typically Neo-Platonist way, Victorines often attempt to find the appropriate way to bridge the gap between the visible and invisible spheres, or divine and created objects. This conception of reality has important effects on Hugh's and Richard's psychology, spirituality, theory of language and signification, as well as their theological method in general.

For Victorines, the primary aim for the human soul is to rise to see and understand the divine realities. Hugh describes the ascent of the soul towards God as a tripartite movement in which the soul is purified and moves toward immediate vision. This can also be seen as the mystic's way of describing an epistemological process which approaches conceptual abstractions from sense perception. According to both Hugh's and Richard's accounts, one can examine various objects in three different ways: by cogitating (*cogitatio*), meditating (*meditatio*), or contemplating (*contemplatio*). In cogitation, the mind is touched in passing by the notions of things when the thing itself is presented as an image to the soul. Meditation, next, is diligent reconsideration of thoughts (*cogitationes*). Meditation tries to reveal complicated things and scrutinize obscurities. Lastly, contemplation is loosely defined by Hugh as the soul's free and clear-sighted gaze (*contuitus*), which spreads out everywhere in perceiving things (In Salomonis, PL 175, 116C–117A).[13] Richard writes: "Contemplation is the free and clear sight of the mind concerning the manifestations of wisdom, suspended by admiration"

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commentaries for translations of Richard's texts in the Brepols' series *Victorine Texts in Translation*.

[12] For an introduction to Victorine spirituality, see (Evans 2014, 29–73).

[13] (Hugh 1849–1855).

(Benjamin Major I, IV).[14] He also points out that contemplation pierces the objects so that they can be comprehensively grasped. Since contemplation reviews all kinds of objects, there is nothing which is worthless as an object of analysis by contemplation (Benjamin Major I, III).[15]

Contemplation is also a process which includes different stages. This process usually follows the uniform pattern: First, the individual explores the visible objects, using his senses and reason. Then, he turns to scrutinize the depths of his own soul, its faculties and their functioning. After this he may move to understand other invisible things, like angels, and lastly rise to understanding of specific theological truths like the Trinity. The final stages of contemplation often include elements of spiritual ecstasy. These highest experiences, like the alienation of the mind in ecstasy are rare even among the most advanced contemplatives. All human cognitive faculties, that is, imagination, reason and understanding may work in contemplation. Importantly, the contemplation may also use and benefit from the philosophical knowledge of the world. *Didascalicon* (I, IV, p. 11.12–14, 745A) promotes learning of everything, reminding the reader that the discipline of philosophy comprehensively investigates the reasons for all things, human and divine (Hugh 1939). Hugh reworks this theme in his *In Hierarchiam Coelestem*, in which he relates three kinds of theoretical science and the idea of contemplation from visible to invisible. He writes that mathematics speculates on the visible forms of the visible things, physics seeks the invisible causes of visible things, and via these invisible causes, the soul ascends to the invisible substances of things in theology (In Hierarchiam PL 175, 927D–928A).

De Tribus Diebus

I will next consider Hugh's little work called *De Tribus Diebus* (i.e. *The Three Days*).[16] This treatise reflects the dynamics of philosophy and theology, having a typically Victorine twist of spirituality. *The Three Days* displays Hugh's pedagogical concerns and has usually been appended to his *Didascalicon*, that much studied work on reading and liberal arts, as its seventh book. *The Three Days* demonstrates the basic features of Victorine ideas, but also shows Hugh's creative thinking on some special questions. As is often the case with Victorine texts, the literary genre of the work is not easy to define. However, it contains elements of Hexaemeron literature (i.e. an analysis of the six days of creation and cosmological issues), spirituality, and theological anthropology.

At the beginning of his work, Hugh wishes to inform his readers that his general method is to proceed from the visible things to investigate the invisible

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[14] (Richard 1996, 9.25–26): "Contemplatio est libera mentis perspicacia in sapientiae spectacula cum admiratione suspensa".

[15] (Richard 1996, 9.2–4,17–19). For an analysis of Hugh's notion of contemplation and the list of references in which the concept of *contemplatio* occurs, see (Baron 1957, 192–193). In my account, contemplation is understood in its general sense.

[16] I will refer to Poirel's edition of Hugh's *De Tribus* (2002), indicating the chapter and lines. Feiss (2011) is a translation with an introduction and notes. The originality of *De Tribus* and its distinctly aesthetic interest has been noted by de Bruyne (1946, ii: 203–50), and Tatarkiewicks (2005, 192–195, 197–198). For a general introduction to Hugh's idea of beauty, see (Karfikova 1998). For an overall context of *De tribus diebus* among Hugh's works, see (Zemler-Ciszewski 1987). For the later influence of *De tribus*, consult (Poirel 2002, 169–198).

things. This idea is firmly founded on biblical authority. Hugh refers to the Romans 1:20, stating that the Creator himself may be perceived when the world is contemplated. The Word cannot be seen, but He can be seen though what He has made. After this Hugh cites Romans 1:20 directly, writing that "*From the creation of the world the invisible realities of God are beheld through what is understood of the things which are made*" (De tribus 1, 1–6).[17] This dictum is of major importance for Victorine theology and spirituality. It motivates the general method in their thinking and is one of the most-cited biblical passages in their works. This passage can be found as a biblical justification for natural theology from the Patristic Era to the High Middle Ages. The argument essentially builds on the idea of causation, but not in the Aristotelian vein. It supposes that on the basis of some features of the created things, it is possible to infer some characteristics of their efficient cause, their Creator. Thus, nature itself bestows evidence for both God's existence and his various attributes.

Although Hugh proceeds from visible things to the invisible, he still first wishes to give an initial demonstration of his conclusions by discussing the invisible things of his investigation. The ultimate invisible things refer to God. Hugh asserts that the three invisible things of God are his power, wisdom, and kindness and then aims to show how these can be perceived in the created world. Being ultimately one and not separated in their operation, all these invisible things can still be said to have their own functions; power creates, wisdom governs, and kindness conserves (De tribus 1, 6–9).[18] In this division, the reader can easily perceive the basic trinitarian structure. [19]

As will be shown in Hugh's treatise, the visible things manifest the aforesaid invisible things. This manifestation of the Trinity is also triune: the immensity of creatures (i.e. their multitude and magnitude) demonstrates the invisible power, the beauty of visible things manifests the wisdom, and the utility of created things reveals the kindness of the Creator (De tribus 1, 33–37).[20] In the following analysis, I will pay special attention to those elements which are relevant in discussion of natural theology. Thus, the examination focuses on the visible world and its characteristics as well as some universal human characteristics, which serve as a common point of departure for arguing something about God.[21]

The analysis of the visible world

After announcing his general method *per visibilia ad invisibilia*, Hugh discusses the visible world and its objects. This examination has a philosophical character. It

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[17] (Hugh 2002, 3)

[18] (Hugh 2002, 4)

[19] From the point of view of history of philosophy it is interesting that Peter Abelard adopted this trinitarian structure from Hugh in his *Theologia Summi boni*. In his condemnation in Soissons 1121 and later in Sens 1140, Abelard was accused of implying subordination in the Trinity. For the study of twelfth-century trinitarian discussion and the triad *potentia-sapientia-benignitas* in Abelard and Hugh's works, see (Poirel 2002, 283–420).

[20] (Hugh 2002, 4–5)

[21] Like all Victorine writings, *De tribus diebus* also includes some discussion about the biblical interpretation and analysis of the highest levels of contemplation, which are beyond human capacities.

borrows concepts and basic ideas from the natural philosophy of the time. Hugh incorporates elements from secular sciences alongside specifically theological issues. In his analysis of the visible world, Hugh draws his ideas from the encyclopedic tradition, like Pliny's *Natural History* and Isidore Seville's *Etymologies*, but also adapts heterodox cosmological texts. His discussion about the human body testifies to his familiarity with a current medical tradition, like *Pantegni* and Nemesius Emesius's work.[22]

To repeat, the examination of the visible or corporeal objects is threefold, because three aspects of visible creation reflect the invisible, divine Trinity. First, Hugh reflects the immensity of visible objects by exploring two aspects: their multitude and magnitude. He advises considering the countless visible things as well as their great size (the masses of mountains, the channels of rivers, etc.). This reflection of quantities enables one to understand that the power needed for the creation of even the smallest of these visible creations is beyond human capacities. Thus the meditating on the immensity of creatures manifests the power of God and serves as the beginning of the process of contemplation (De tribus II, 39–76).[23]

Next Hugh turns to consider the beauty (*pulchritudo*, *decor*) of the visible things. It is clear that this subject interests him most, since he examines it more than any other aspect of the created world. The reason for the emphasis on beauty lies in the prominence of sight in Hugh's anthropology. Through sight one is able to see visible objects and through visible objects one attains knowledge of invisible objects.

At this stage, different characteristics and properties of objects should not only be understood, but also admired. This admiration brings along distinctive aesthetic and affective components for contemplation. The discussion of beauty and its admiration is not just a decorative element in spiritual life. In his *De meditatione* Hugh explains that admiration is a kind of disposition that generates questioning, which in turn leads to the investigation of things (1969, 44, lines 8–10). Thus admiration seems to entail some cognitive component, as a kind of stimulus and incentive to investigate things (which in this case are the visible objects of the world).[24]

Hugh explains memorably that the sensible world is a kind of book written by the finger of God. Each created thing is like a figure that manifests the invisible wisdom of God. As shown above, beauty is the manifestation of the wisdom of God, usually attached to the second person of the Trinity. All people find God's works wonderful, but stupid people admire only their appearance, being unable to understand their reasons. Wise people, however, discover the profound deliberation of the divine wisdom through that which is seen externally. Hugh gives an analogy that there are some people who see colors and shapes in the book,

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[22] For Hugh's sources in general, see (Taylor 1961, 19–28). For ancient and medieval sources in *De tribus diebus*, see (Poirel 2002, 155–169). For an evaluation of Hugh's medical vocabulary and its sources, see (Ricklin 1998, 63–75).

[23] (Hugh 2002, 6–8)

[24] Cf. (Richard 1996, 133.29–31): "And so attention increases on account of wonder, and knowing increases on account of attention. The mind that, on account of the wonder of vision, gradually advances to an increase of knowledge and rises up like a dawn." The idea of admiration and its importance in medieval psychological theories has been mostly neglected by the research. See, however, (Bynum 2001, 37–75).

but are ignorant of the letters, whereas other people can also understand the meaning and signification of these letters (De tribus IV, 94–109).[25]

Hugh points out several aspects of beauty that can be found in created reality, ending by construing a detailed taxonomy of various admirable characteristics of the visible things. The result is a somewhat incomplete but original description of the miscellaneous features of the visible world.

To begin with, the beauty of all visible objects consists of four things: their structure, motion, species, and quality. Next, Hugh considers all these aspects in detail. The exploration of the structure includes two aspects, the analysis of the composition and its order. The consideration of composition in turn embraces two features, aptitude and firmness. First, aptitude can be seen in the fact that the world is like a machine, as it is possible to wonder at the machine of the universe and see that everything is perfect. Such diverse elements as water and fire have been mixed in natural things in a way that they form a kind of bond of association, which also provides life for all growing things. The concord of many dissimilar things and their unity fashions one harmonious whole. All this manifests the beauty of aptitude. Second, firmness refers to the solid wholeness formed by heaven, earth, water, and other natural phenomena. Likewise, the human body is composed of different members protecting one another. Hugh construes an idea of some kind of firm tension between different elements of the body, like skin, bones and muscles. Every created thing supports its own nature and being with effort. Still they cannot be loosed from the concord of their mutual association (De tribus IV, 142–168).[26] This discussion is clearly related to twelfth-century natural philosophy and shows Hugh's interest in the physical functioning of the human body.[27]

After the consideration and admiration of the composition of visible objects, Hugh turns to examine their order. This reflection provides important knowledge, since it discloses the working of Divine providence and how it distributes the causes for each place, time and part. First, heaven and earth have their proper places; the stars and luminaries are ordered. Waters and winds are set in their own proper order as well. The world is filled with different animals. The order of things is also seen in the way different regions vary in arrangement. In a very ecotheological fashion Hugh claims that all regions possess something original and special compared to other regions. He also mentions that different regions have their characteristic natural resources, and they can complement each other, forming a balanced concord. Interestingly, Hugh prefers to studying arts as one of the distinct natural resources (De tribus V, 192–216).[28] One may speculate that Hugh thought that Paris had this special kind of natural resource. In addition to the ordering of places, Divine providence distinguishes the courses of times rationally. Times of day vary, as well as seasons of the year according to their immutable laws (De tribus VI, 218–220).[29] Lastly, as opposed to the extrinsic ordering of place and time, Hugh deals with intrinsic order of things, which refers

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[25] (Hugh 2002, 9–10). Cf. later influential developments of this theme in Bonventure's *Breviloquium* (1891, 199–291).

[26] (Hugh 2002, 12–13)

[27] Van Zwieten (1995, 184–5) traces some of Hugh's ideas back to Macrobius's *In Somnium Scipionis*. 2.10.10–22.

[28] (Hugh 2002, 15–16)

[29] (Hugh 2002, 16)

to the disposition of parts. The joining of the parts can never give rise to a conflict of qualities. To explain this point, the author takes, again, the human body as an example, arguing that the divine wisdom shines forth in its ordered composition. In this relation, Hugh gives a lengthy account of the body's parts and discusses the nature of sensing and the senses. (De tribus VII, 241–247).[30] In this context, his ideas remain elementary, but in his other writings, as in the small tract explaining the unity of the soul and body, *De unione corporis et spiritus*, Hugh demonstrates his exact knowledge of the medical theories of his time.[31]

Following this reflection on the beauty of structure and order, Hugh presents the second criterion for beauty: the movement of things. At first glance, Hugh's ideas might sound especially inappropriate to the modern reader here. As he sees it, there are four different kinds of movement: local, natural, animal, and rational. Local movement concerns various natural phenomena, like regular movements of the stars. Natural movement is the growth of plants and animals. Animal movement means the movements in the senses and appetites. God rules what and how an animal should desire. Rational movement occurs in deeds and deliberations. Reason itself is said to move into the understanding of things (De tribus VIII, 300–326; XVI, 591).[32]

Hugh is first quite taciturn about the beauty of movement, but later he aims to prove God's existence by the analysis of various movements. His idea is very different from the Aristotelian cosmological argument, which builds on the notion of movement and causation. Hugh argues that the beauty of movement has a prominent place among the visible things. This is because those things that are able to move are closer to life than immovable things are (De tribus XVI, 583–585).[33] Movement indicates life.

In the following argument, Hugh shows how it is possible to find evidence of God's existence from experience of one's own nature, as well as from providence, growth and the inherent laws of the visible world. He starts with an analysis of rational movement, which is the various functions of the human soul. Hugh thinks it obvious that the soul is aware of its existence as an invisible entity. Because the soul is able to understand that it exists, but cannot remember that it has always existed, it recognizes that it has a beginning. It is impossible for understanding to be unless it is actively understanding. The conclusion is that the soul began to be at some time. This invisible side of us cannot originate from something material; it is from nothing. Whatever had a beginning received its being from a self-subsisting other. If there was a time when a thing was not, that thing cannot be the origin of things. Therefore our nature testifies that we have an eternal self-subsisting Creator. What is from itself cannot not be. For self-subsisting thing "to be" (*esse*) and "that which is" (*id quod est*)[34] are identical. Therefore Creator, the only eternal thing, have neither beginning nor end (De tribus XVII, 625–648).[35]

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[30] (Hugh 2002, 17)

[31] (Hugh 1980)

[32] (Hugh 2002, 21–22, 36)

[33] (Hugh 2002, 35)

[34] Hugh explains in his *Didascalicon* I, VI (Hugh 1939, p.13.3) that "to be" and "that which is" are identical in self-subsisting thing, in which cause and effect cannot be separated. Self-subsisting thing draws its subsistence from itself, not from some principle distinct from itself. This terminology derives from Boethius's *De Hebdomadibus*, see Taylor (1961, 185n.36).

[35] (Hugh 2002, 37–38)

Other kinds of movement also confirm that God exists. Animal movement includes sensation and appetite. There is no ordered affection that cannot achieve its goal. For example, when the animal is hungry, it can find what it may eat. Evidently, providence provides support for those in need. The one who establishes appetites provides the objects of those appetites. Natural movement, in turn, refers to increase. It proves that God exists, since nothing can increase itself and there needs to be something that provides the increase. That something is the same thing that caused their existence (i.e. their Creator). Lastly, local motion also demonstrates that God exists. Some things (planets, etc.) have some distinct regular times of moving, and others have other times, but the order of things is never upset. This fact shows that it is self-evident that there is an invisible ruler and a provident being who by internal disposition moderates all things by a certain law (De tribus XVII, 659–692).[36] In summary, Hugh discusses human rationality, animal behavior, vegetative functions and certain physical laws of heavenly bodies (i.e. some of the standard components of natural theology), and uses this material in his spiritually-oriented work to prove God's existence.

Thus far Hugh has been considering the created, visible world by explaining the general laws and cohesion of the visible world. Next he turns to a closer examination of particular objects, taking their outer appearance, that is, their *species* (trans. image, appearance, outer form) into consideration. The analysis of species interests him specially. In contrast to traditional approaches, the author also considers the peculiarities of the visible world and finds some important indications of the reasons why such things were created at all.

According to Hugh's definition, species (appearance) is the visible form containing two things: figures (*figurae*) and colors (*colores*). This is a customary characterization of an object's outer appearance in Victorine tradition.[37] Hugh gives a definition of a figure's beauty: it is decorous in a distinctly special way and appropriately fitted together so that its disposition suggests that the Creator has great devotion to it (De tribus XI, 369–372).[38]

However, standard cases of beauty do not seem to interest him much. Hugh proceeds straightforwardly to consider those cases in which there is something extraordinary or odd in an object's figure/shape. He mentions that an object's figure is admirable when it exceeds the usual quantity by being smaller or greater than the average representative of its kind. Hugh puts a rhetorical question: what we should admire more, the teeth of a wild boar or a moth. We are astonished when we see a giant among human beings or a whale among fish. Small things draw our attention. We marvel at how small the body parts of the smallest animals, such as the eyes of insects, are (De tribus IX, 336–358).[39]

It is no great leap for Hugh to consider next those visible things that are rare. The rarer something is, the more beautiful it is. Things are rare when there are only a few individuals of its kind or they live in remote places. Hugh explains some reasons that we consider rare things beautiful: people are injured when in close contact with rare, but harmful creatures; human greed is tested by their

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[36] (Hugh 2002, 39–40)
[37] For this vocabulary in Hugh and Richard, see (Palmén 2014, 160–161) and below.
[38] (Hugh 2002, 23)
[39] (Hugh 2002, 22–23)

preciousness; and the human heart learns to wonder at the great and rare novelty (loftiness) of some visible things (De tribus X, 354–367).[40]

In addition to rare things, Hugh estimates that we admire or wonder at the beauty of monstrous and ridiculous things too. If the form (*plasmatio*) of some creature is alien to human reason, it compels the mind to admire God. Giving examples of monstrous creatures, Hugh mentions the crocodile, salamander, hedgehog and spider, whose odd figures testify to the wisdom of God. One may ask why the crocodile does not move its lower jaw when eating or how ants know that the winter is coming and fill their granary with grains. The divine wisdom is also proved by the fact that everything, even the monstrous things, procreates offspring like itself (De tribus XI, 373–382).[41]

As stated, the figure and the color together form the object's outer appearance. Speaking of colors, Hugh mentions the colors of the sky, sun and the stars, flowers and stones. Green is the most beautiful color, since it symbolizes the new life in nature, and correspondingly, the future resurrection. Even artificial beauty, produced by human industry, imitates the works of God (De tribus XII, 407–418; 426–432).[42]

In the admiration of the beauty of objects, the last thing to be considered is their quality. The Creator endowed things with many qualities so that the human senses would delight in them. Every sense has its own quality to enjoy: sight perceives one thing, taste another, etc. The variety of some quality increases the delight of the particular sense. For instance, Hugh mentions several different delights of the ear: the pleasant sound of speech, whispers, the melody of birds etc.[43] To sum up, the beauty of an object—its structure, composition, order, outer appearance, motion, specific beauty, rarity, monstrosity and qualities—all manifest the wisdom of God.

The utility of visible things is the third manifestation of the invisible things of God. Hugh holds that utility illuminates God's kindness (i.e. love or the Holy Spirit). He sees utility as containing four degrees, which together build a kind of hierarchy of needs. These degrees of utility are necessary, beneficial, fitting, and pleasing (*necessaris*, *commoda*, *congrua*, *grata,* respectively). The necessary is that which a thing must have in order to exist. The beneficial is not necessary, but is pleasant for sustaining life. The fitting does not benefit its user, but is fittingly used. The pleasing is not suitable for use, but delightful to look at. For example, it is necessary for the human being to have food and clothes. It is beneficial to have a glass of wine or eat meat, or wear cotton and silk, although one could survive without them. Fitting things are colored dyes and exquisite stones and such, which are pleasing to see, but not very suitable for use. The lowest level of utility is something which is delightful to look at, but not suitable to use. Certain plants, birds and fish fit into this class of utility (De tribus XIV, 465–479).[44]

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[40] (Hugh 2002, 23)

[41] (Hugh 2002, 24)

[42] (Hugh 2002, 26–27). For Hugh's love of green, see Feiss (2011,98n.45).

[43] Elsewhere, Victorines divide qualities into the inner and exterior ones, the interior qualities referring to the nature of an object, which is perceivable only with other senses than sight. The exterior quality includes the figure and form of a thing and can be sensed only through sight. See Hugh's *De sacramentis* 1. prolog 5, (PL 176, 185) and *De scripturis et scriptoribus sacris* (PL 175, 21BC).

[44] (Hugh 2002, 29–30)

At the end of the examination of the visible objects, Hugh acknowledges how much he has been discussing the importance of the visible world and is afraid that perhaps someone thinks that he has been too verbose in his account. By way of explanation, Hugh repeats that it is necessary to seek the knowledge of invisible things through visible ones. Visible things are said to be representations of invisible things and every created thing declares its Creator in its own distinctive way (De tribus XV, 529–543).[45]

As general advice, Hugh instructs his readers to start their contemplation of created things by considering their beauty. Beauty is a more obvious representation of invisible things than the immensity or utility of things is, since it pertains to form. Although all five senses are important, Victorines emphasize the sense of sight. For this reason, Hugh argues that the representation of beauty precedes both immensity and utility in cognition, since its manifestation is more obvious. This is the first step in contemplation, guiding us to follow the next steps. The representation of wisdom thus has a beautiful starting point, since through it the divine Wisdom, the Wisdom through which everything was created, manifests itself (De tribus XVI, 570–580).[46]

The human being as a middle point of creation

The analysis of the visible world and its objects encompasses most of Hugh's treatise, but is still just a first step in his overall scheme. As pointed out at the beginning of the article, the close examination of the soul itself, its functions and psychological aspects, is equally or even more important in Victorine tradition. So, after the initial stage, Hugh turns to his ideas on theological anthropology which, as in many medieval Christian texts, has its foundation in the very creation of humankind, the idea that the human being is the image (*imago*) and likeness (*similitudo*) of God.

Hugh claims that the human is the middle point of creation, placed between the angelic invisible realities and the visible reality, in both of which he participates (De tribus XIV, 488–490).[47] The most important representation of uncreated wisdom is created wisdom: the rational creature, the human being himself. This creature is both visible and invisible, offering primary access to the contemplation of invisible things.

Although Hugh's theological anthropology has its foundation in Genesis, his argument builds on our direct experience of ourselves rather than on sacred texts or doctrines. Through self-reflection one is able to understand important things about oneself. This reflection on oneself gives Victorine psychology an 'empirical tendency.' Evidently, the human being sees that he exists. All individuals are also inherently aware that they have both mind and body, which are fundamentally different. As Hugh puts it, the human soul is aware of itself as alien (*ita se alienum sentit*) from the origin of the flesh (i.e. pre-existing matter). This awareness gives

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[45] (Hugh 2002, 33)
[46] (Hugh 2002, 35)
[47] (Hugh 2002, 31); (Kleinz 1944, 67). See also (Chenu 1957, 24–37).

us certain knowledge of ourselves as an invisible things and assures us that there are other invisible things as well (De tribus XVII, 604–619).[48]

    After acknowledging the crucial role of the human soul in contemplation, the next step in Victorine spirituality is usually to proceed to detailed epistemological questions about the various faculties and functions of the soul. Unlike some of Hugh's other works, *The Three Days* does not include meticulous psychological theory. However, by using some general facts about human nature, Hugh attempts to prove that the Creator is one, diffused throughout the creation, and triune. These trinitarian reflections, particularly the ideas of emanation and return, disclose a clear Neo-Platonist undercurrent in Hugh's thinking. First, the oneness of our reason reflects the oneness and simplicity of its Creator (De tribus XIX, 715–716).[49] Second, as reason demonstrates, our soul is a single essence, but still diffuses and animates every part of the body. Sensation proves this since all sensation of pain in any part of the body returns to the same oneness. In a distantly similar fashion, the Creator of everything diffuses and vivifies everything in his creation (De tribus XIX, 756–765, p. 44).[50] Third, in an Augustinian manner Hugh demonstrates that the human soul has a trinitarian structure: (1) the human rational mind is one, (2) the mind generates one understanding, (3) love follows from the mind and understanding together. However, reason suggests that this is something far different than the Triune God, in which wisdom has always been, and is always born, eternally. Still, we have to accept that according to true reasoning, both a Trinity of persons as well as a unity of substance resides in the Godhead. However, as Hugh reminds us, in all these cases the dissimilarity between the created rational being and the Creator exceeds their similarity (De tribus XXI, 914–920; 946–948).[51]

    In the last part of the work, Hugh develops his thinking on more theological and spiritual issues somewhat further, giving some elementary ideas of the highest level of his scheme. Dealing with intratrinitarian questions, he writes that it is necessary that each of the persons of the Trinity love himself and others reciprocally (De tribus XXIII, 994–1021).[52] Richard of St. Victor would later take this same idea as the basic thread in his *De Trinitate*.[53] The contemplation of invisible uncreated realities, like the Trinity, represents the highest peak of contemplation in the spiritual rehearsal, which is not yet over, however. This is because the vicissitude of the soul prevents it from remaining in the contemplation of the interior realities of God. Thus, the last phase, which completes the soul's journey, is the return, which proceeds from the wisdom of God back to rational creation and then through rational creation to corporeal creation (De tribus XXV, 1099–1106).[54]

    As Hugh puts this, the order of cognition comes first, after which follows the order of creation (*conditionis*). We first know visible, corporeal creation, then incorporeal creation, and finally the Creator of both the corporeal and incorporeal

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[48] (Hugh 2002, 36–37)
[49] (Hugh 2002, 42)
[50] For a somewhat unclear vocabulary, see (Feiss 2011, 100n.67).
[51] (Hugh 2002, 52–54)
[52] (Hugh 2002, 56–57)
[53] This idea appears most distinctly in the third book of Richard's *De Trinitate*, esp. chapters 2, 3, 11, 19–20. (Richard 1958).
[54] (Hugh 2002, 62)

things. The order of creation starts after this. This means that after the supreme height of divine experience, the soul, following the path of the Creator, descends to created reality and turns the spiritual experiences of contemplation to the service of others, the community (De tribus XXV, 1072–XXVI, 1110).[55] This demonstrates that contemplation is not an isolated individual's endeavor to understand divine realities, but has a shared communal end.

As shown, Hugh's composition entails Christian Neo-Platonic cosmology and theological anthropology. It is possible to claim that in *The Three Days*, Hugh attempts to explain the value of the visible world and its contemplation in religious life in terms of natural theology and aesthetic experience. However, this perspective is also anthropocentric, because Hugh considers the visible world and its symbolic value to be important only as far they are able to guide the human beings to love and praise the Creator of the universe.

Richard's ideas about contemplation and experience

The last part of this article relates some of Hugh's ideas about the visible world and contemplation to Richard of St. Victor's thinking. Richard gives an illuminating example of Victorine appreciation of the sensible and knowledge of the self and stresses direct experience of things as an important factor for knowledge. In his works, Richard elaborates an idea of the contemplation of the visible world as the path for understanding the invisible world in a very similar fashion to Hugh. However, Richard is keener for psychological analysis of the human soul, which shows in his discussion of psychological faculties such as sense perception, imagination and reason, and how he integrates this discussion as part of his theory of different grades of contemplation. His theory of contemplation is all-inclusive in a sense that it embraces consideration as well as admiration of all kinds of objects.

The prominence of psychological faculties and the adherence to the visible world as a manifestation of the invisible world are two elements that prompt Richard to discuss the meaning of experience in cognitive processes. Although the human being is basically a rational creature, Richard concedes that people make judgments more on the basis of experience than by simple reasoning. 'Experiential' knowledge is seen as an essential initiator of intellectual and theological reflections. Richard adapts Hugh's ideas about the importance of the visible world, but adds that every rational process has its origin in the experience (*experientia*) of visible things through which the individual may gather information about invisible things (De Trin. I, X; I, VII).[56]

In the first pages of his *De Trinitate*, Richard argues that experience is one of the three elementary ways by which people attain knowledge, the others being reason and faith (De Trin. I, I, p. 86.5–p. 87.10). Richard claims that for most people experience of things is a persuasive way to prove things and is more cogent in its way than something gained only by reasoning (De Trin. IV, VIII).[57] Since one

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[55] (Hugh 2002, 60–62)

[56] (Richard 1958, 95.12–17; 92.4–7). Cf. Hugh of St. Victor's *Commentaria in hierarchiam coelestem* (PL 175, 1061B).

[57] Richard (1958, 170.14–15). The emphasis on experience (*experientia*) was an important part of twelfth-century spiritual writings. Researchers have paid special attention to Bernard of

cannot doubt one's daily experiences, they are the most certain way to prove (*probare*) things. It is difficult for the individual to believe things that cannot be confirmed by experience (De iudiciaria X).[58]

Experience relates to the necessity of self-reflection in spiritual life, since what we experience suggests what we should seek in the divine reality. Based on this information, the individual is able to start to build a ladder in order to ascend to see things that cannot be seen by sight (De Trin. V, VI).[59] In Richard's thinking, experience may refer to both inner and outer experiences. Through outer experience one is able to discern visible, created objects and various natural operations (Benjamin Major II, XVII).[60] Richard's idea that the individual knows the invisible things of his own soul by inner experience, resembles Hugh's idea that human nature is aware of certain essential things, such as its existence and invisibility.[61] Experience is something that gives an individual a unique first-person perspective on reality. The immediate experience of God's presence in inner life is essential for spiritual progress. The experience of one's own inner state is also needed for full knowledge of one's limitations and for moral self-examination.[62] Experience is important even at the highest stages of spiritual life because the person who has experienced ecstasy of the mind enjoys a particular authority in spiritual matters (Benjamin Major V, XIX).[63] The experience of love interests Richard particularly: he claims that manifold experience teaches us that nothing is more pleasant in human life than love (*caritas*) (De Trin. III, III).[64] In *De Trinitate*, he uses examples of the experience of love as a foundation for seeking reasons for the trinitarian relations, and *De IV gradibus violentae caritatis* compares the aspects of profane love to the love of God.

Richard's emphasis on experience is seen in Richard's Christological speculation as well. Arguing on behalf of literal interpretation of the Bible in his *De Emmanuele*, he notes that according to the Apostle, Christ progressed truly in wisdom as in age. Although Christ is omniscient, he made real progression in experimental knowledge from the moment of his incarnation until His death. Through experience, Christ came to know what it is to be a human being in the flesh (De Emmanuele, 650D–651A, 653A).[65]

Richard's confidence in experience and reasoning from it highlight the natural theological tendency in Victorine thinking. These elements also motivate the Victorine attraction to sensible reality and appear in the Victorine conviction that all natural things possess significations beyond their simple reality and that the individual should find the symbolic dimension of that reality.[66] The created universe is thoroughly symbolic in character, but it also has a sacramental nature. Sensible matter offers a helping hand (*manuductio materialis*) that leads the

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Clairvaux's use of experience in his *Sermons on the Song of Songs*. On Bernard, see (McDonnell 1997, 3–18).

[58] (Richard 1967, 152). Cf. *De Trinitate* IV, II (Richard 1958, 163.2–3).

[59] (Richard 1958, 201.4–11)

[60] (Richard 1996, 41.16–18)

[61] See *Benjamin Major* I, VI (Richard 1996, 13.25); *Benjamin Major* III, XIV (Richard 1996, 71.26–31). See also *De Trinitate* (Richard 1958, 144.16–17).

[62] See the references in (Feiss 2012, 38).

[63] (Richard 1996, 148.29–31)

[64] (Richard 1958, 138.8–13)

[65] *De Emmanuele* (PL 196, 601–666).

[66] (Chenu 1957, 102). See also (Dronke 1974).

individual to seek the rational principles and the natural laws which dominate the world and eventually help him to grasp the invisible things of the world and its Creator.[67]

Conclusion

In this article, I have argued that the importance of visible reality as a basis for understanding invisible reality in the writings of Hugh and Richard demonstrates a clear natural theological inclination in their thinking. This preference manifests itself in several aspects of their thought. First, both Hugh and Richard endorse a genuine scientific temperament and interest in the knowledge of liberal arts. Victorines promote encyclopaedic knowledge in their works and give secular sciences an important theologically justified position in the religious life. They associate the natural sciences of the time with their spiritual program, arguing that the questions which are related to the knowledge of the visible world or the lowest levels of contemplation are in fact the same as those which many philosophers have worked on before.[68] Hence, the idea of philosophy as the handmaid of theology can be found in many Victorine ideas. Second, both Hugh and Richard discuss the admiration of beauty of various kinds of objects thoroughly. They seem to argue that human beings have specifically aesthetic experiences that offer some unique knowledge of the transcendent reality. Third, Victorine cognitive theories give surprisingly great attention to senses, imagination and the affections. These faculties are essential at the initial stages of contemplation, which start in the admiration and consideration of sensible objects. They also emphasize direct experience of objects as an important source of knowledge and consider the experience of one's own nature as an essential means for grasping some characteristics of transcendental truths.

These aspects together form the distinctive Victorine natural theology, which is founded on the traditional Christian Neo-Platonist worldview, but integrates contemporary discussions and new twelfth-century trends inventively. Thus Victorines offer an original synthesis of theology, philosophy and science, which differs in many respects from a later scholastic amalgamation of Aristotelian philosophy and Christian thinking.

The Victorine ideas of the external world, experience and sensory faculties created various reflections, many of which had important but controversial effects on later developments in medieval philosophy and theology. Some of the monastic material was still much used and appreciated in the psychological discussions of thirteenth-century scholasticism. However, during the twelfth century, new translations of the ancient writings began to spread rapidly. The translations of Aristotle's works in particular had a powerful influence on the philosophical and theological discussions, eventually dominating the theories of the Middle Ages. The 'empirical' tendency of monastic psychology was replaced by the stronger peripatetic trend, which was able to offer philosophically stimulating ideas about

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[67] The term in question is quoted by Richard and Hugh from Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite's *Celestial Hierarchies*, 1038D–1039A. See *Commentaria in hierarchiam coelestem* (PL 175, 984A) and Richard's *In Apocalypsim Joannis* (PL 196, 688AB).

[68] Occasionally, however, both Richard and Hugh warn their students against the vanity (*vanitas*) of mundane savants. See, e.g*., Benjamin Major* II, X (Richard 1996, 32.13–16).

human cognition and the structures of the soul. However, Victorine ideas lived on in later mystical theology exerting great influence on such thinkers as Bonaventure, Walter Hilton, Tauler, John of the Cross, and Theresa of Avila. Victorine themes have also inspired later phenomenologically oriented philosophy of religion, and can be seen in works such as those by Edith Stein and Erich Przywara.

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