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**BEAUTY**  
**IN THE UNIVERSAL ENCYCLOPEDIA OF**  
**PHILOSOPHY** \*

Beauty (Greek: καλός, Latin: *pulchritudo*, *pulchrum*) is an analogically understood property of reality, of human products (including art), and of the human mode of conduct, and expressed in the tradition of Western culture under the form of harmony, perfection, or splendor, which as beheld and for beholding arouses complacency or pleasure.

At present, beauty is most often associated with art, with sensory knowledge, and with emotions. The reflections of the ancient Greeks on beauty did not put works of art in the first place, but instead put reality (the cosmos) and morality (καλοκάγαθία) there. The first theories of beauty were not univocal but were intended to consider the analogical dimension of beauty, and even the transcendental dimension of beauty.

### Classical Theories of Beauty

The first theory of beauty was developed by the Pythagoreans. They regarded number as the main principle of being. Number was mani-

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fested under the form of harmony that permeated the world on the macroscopic and microscopic level. Music was the chief manifestation of harmony. The Pythagorean Theon of Smyrna wrote:

[M]usic is the warp thread of agreement between things in nature and the universe of the best administration. Harmony as a rule takes the form of harmony in the universe, legitimacy in the state, and a prudent way of life in the home. This is because harmony joins and unites. They say that action and the application of knowledge [musical knowledge] are manifested in four human domains: in the soul, in the body, in the home, and in the state. This is because those four things require harmonization and unification.<sup>1</sup>

Beauty as music and harmony refers to the universe, to nature, to the state, to domestic life, and to man in his bodily and spiritual aspect.

The second theory holds that beauty is form. It was formulated by Plato who thought that an immaterial world to which ideas belonged existed above the material world. Among the ideas there is the idea of beauty whereby, by participation (the theory of participation), material beings are also beautiful—“[T]hat I asked about beauty itself, that which gives the property of being beautiful to everything, to which it is added—to stone and wood, and man, and god, and every action and every branch of learning?”<sup>2</sup> Man should strive after beauty as thus understood as the purpose of his life—“[A] man finds it truly worth while to live, as he contemplates essential beauty.”<sup>3</sup>

A somewhat different conception of beauty is found in the *Ti-maeus*: there beauty is not determined by participation in the idea of

<sup>1</sup> *Mathematica*, I, cit. after Władysław Tatarkiewicz, *Historia estetyki [History of Aesthetics]*, vol. 1 (Wrocław 1960), 105.

<sup>2</sup> *Greater Hippias*, 292 D, in Plato, *Dialogues*, vol. 1, trans. Benjamin Jowett (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), 579.

<sup>3</sup> *Symposium*, 211 D, in *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, vol. 9, trans. Harold N. Fowler (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1925). Available at: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/collections>.

beauty, but by the degree to which things produced by the Demiurge are in agreement with their immaterial primordial models—"But when the artificer of any object, in forming its shape and quality, keeps his gaze fixed on that which is uniform, using a model of this kind, that object, executed in this way, must of necessity be beautiful."<sup>4</sup>

Plotinus criticized the theory of harmony. He remarked that since harmony is unity in plurality, then beauty could not be something simple, e.g., light or color. Meanwhile, it is that which is simple (a model, idea, or form) that is beautiful, and what is composite is beautiful by participation in an idea.

Almost everyone declares that the symmetry of parts towards each other and towards a whole, with, besides, a certain charm of colour, constitutes the beauty recognized by the eye, that in visible things, as indeed in all else, universally, the beautiful thing is essentially symmetrical, patterned. But think what this means. Only a compound can be beautiful, never anything devoid of parts; and only a whole; the several parts will have beauty, not in themselves, but only as working together to give a comely total. Yet beauty in an aggregate demands beauty in details; it cannot be constructed out of ugliness; its law must run throughout. All the loveliness of colour and even the light of the sun, being devoid of parts and so not beautiful by symmetry, must be ruled out of the realm of beauty.<sup>5</sup>

Plotinus was inclined to accept light-form as the source of beauty, both in a material sense and in a spiritual sense. His conception found continuators in the Middle Ages. Pseudo-Dionysius gave it a more metaphysical form and remarked that supra-entitative beauty is the source of beauty.

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<sup>4</sup> *Timaeus*, 28 A–B, in *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, vol. 9, trans. W. R. M. Lamb (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1925). Available at: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/collections>.

<sup>5</sup> *The Enneads*, I, 6, 1, trans. Stephen MacKenna (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), 46.

But, the superessential Beautiful is called Beauty, on account of the beauty communicated from Itself to all beautiful things, in a manner appropriate to each, and as Cause of the good harmony and brightness of all things which flashes like light to all the beautifying distributions of its fontal ray . . .<sup>6</sup>

Robbert Grosseteste and Witelo, under the influence of new discoveries in optics, thought that light was also the cause of beauty, and that light was what allowed us to see beauty—“Lux est maxime pulchrificativa et pulchritudinis manifestiva.”<sup>7</sup> Ulrich of Strasburg said that there were two kinds of light, physical light and immaterial light, which respectively are the reason for material beauty and spiritual beauty—“[S]icut lux corporalis est formaliter et causaliter pulchritudo omnium visibilium, sic lux intellectualis est formalis causa pulchritudinis omnis formae substantialis etiam materialis formae.”<sup>8</sup>

In the Aristotelian schools, beauty was associated with form. Form was understood either as an internal principle of being or only as an accidental form that organizes matter or human action. Albert the Great held such a position—“Pulchrum [dicit] splendorem formae substantialis vel actualis supra partes materiae proportionatas. . . . Ratio pulchri in universali consistit in resplendentia formae super partes materiae proportionatas, vel super diversas vires vel actiones.”<sup>9</sup>

Thomas Aquinas also thought that form was the reason for beauty—“[B]eauty properly belongs to the nature of a formal cause.”<sup>10</sup> He

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<sup>6</sup> *De divinis nominibus*, IV, 7, in *The Collected Works of Dionysius the Areopagite*, trans. John Parker (Woodstock, Ontario: Solace Games, 2015), 20.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Grosseteste, *Commentarii in De divinis nominibus*, IV. Cf. also, Witelo, *Optica*, IV, 148.

<sup>8</sup> *Liber de summo bono*, II, 3, 5.

<sup>9</sup> *Opusculum de pulchro et bono*, V, 420–421.

<sup>10</sup> *S.Th.*, I, q. 5, art. 4, ad 1: “[P]ulchrum proprie pertinet ad rationem causae formalis.” Retrieved from: St. Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Benziger Bros. edition, 1947). Available at: <https://dhspriority.org/thomas/summa/>.

combined previous elements of reflections on beauty and presented a definition of beauty (called the objective definition) in which he emphasized three elements: perfection, proportion, and brilliance—“For beauty includes three conditions, *integrity* or *perfection*, since those things which are impaired are by the very fact ugly; due *proportion* or *harmony*; and lastly, *brightness* or *clarity*, whence things are called beautiful which have a bright color.”<sup>11</sup>

While the two theories of beauty above had objective value, the third, which had appeared among the Stoics, considered the role of the subject without falling into subjectivism. Basil the Great was the author of the theory. Basil thought that beauty was the proper relation (or proportion) between an object that is beheld and the subject who sees it; that relation makes the joy of beholding appear in the subject—“Would not the symmetry in light be less shown in its parts than in the pleasure and delight at the sight of it? Such is also the beauty of gold, which it owes not to the happy mingling of its parts, but only to its beautiful color which has a charm attractive to the eyes.”<sup>12</sup> Thomas Aquinas presented this idea saying: “beautiful things are those which please when seen” and of which “the *beautiful* is something pleasant to apprehend.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *S.Th.*, I, q. 39, art. 8, resp.: “Nam ad pulchritudinem tria requiruntur. Primo quidem, integritas sive perfectio, quae enim diminuta sunt, hoc ipso turpia sunt. Et debita proportio sive consonantia. Et iterum claritas: unde quae habent colorem nitidum, pulchra esse dicuntur.”

<sup>12</sup> *Homilia in Hexaëmeron*, II, 7, trans. Blomfield Jackson, in *From Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, vol. 8, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1895). Available at: <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/32012.htm>.

<sup>13</sup> *S.Th.*, I, q. 5, art. 4, ad 1: “[P]ulchra enim dicuntur quae visa placent;” and *ibid.*, I-II, q. 27, art. 1, ad 3: “[P]ulchrum autem dicatur id cuius ipsa apprehensio placet.”

## **Beauty in the Metaphysical Conception**

Metaphysics as it was classically understood investigates being as being and the properties of being that are called the transcendentals. The transcendentals, aside from being, are as follows: thing, one, separateness, truth, and good. The status of beauty has been a matter of discussion. Some authors think that beauty cannot be considered one of the transcendentals because it does not refer to every being, since some things are ugly (Marc de Munnynck, Marie-Dominique Philippe), or not all are harmonious (Maurice de Wulf), or because beauty does not refer to every element of being but only to form (Philippe), or because it is only a species of the good (Joseph Kleutgen, Joseph Gredt), or a synthesis of the recognized transcendentals, especially truth and the good (Antoni B. Stępień). Most authors, however, hold that beauty is a separate transcendental property of being, although it is a synthesis of truth and the good (Alejandro Lobato, Matteo Liberatore, Antonin D. Sertillange, Étienne Gilson, Mieczysław A. Krąpiec), or of being, truth, and the good (Gerald B. Phelan), or even a synthesis of all the transcendentals (Jacques Maritain). Beauty is most often mentioned at the end, but it has been mentioned at the beginning when someone considers not philosophical reflection on the transcendentals but considers the character of man's personal life, which is integrally activated both in the cognitive sphere and in the emotional-volitional sphere (Krąpiec).

Beauty as a transcendental property of being is one of the relational transcendentals that show the relation of being to the subject—in a constitutive sense to the Absolute, and secondarily to man. Although formally beauty is a synthesis of truth and the good, from the metaphysical point of view, it expresses an integral relation of being to the person, and not only to the intellect (the truth), or only to the will (the good).

## Beauty in Aesthetics

In ancient and medieval theories of beauty, the transcendental and the categorical conceptions of beauty were not presented as being opposed, all the more since aesthetics as a separate science did not appear until the mid-eighteenth century. Aesthetic theories of beauty are burdened by the same philosophical assumptions from which aesthetics arose. Those assumptions concern the theory of being, nature, and man. Aesthetics arose in the Cartesian-Leibnizian current because of Alexander Baumgarten (1750), a student of Christian Wolff. Beauty was connected with art and defined as the perfection of sensory knowledge. The beauty of reality (i.e., the beauty of being and the beauty of nature) was abandoned, as did moral beauty, which was so typical of the Greeks. The expression “fine arts” was introduced by Charles Batteux (1748). In aesthetics, beauty was initially regarded as the chief concept, but by the end of the nineteenth century, beauty lost its position to aesthetic categories (Karl Groos, Victor Basch) and then to (1) aesthetic values, such as sublimity, appropriateness, or charm and grace, which were already known to ancient writers, or (2) new categories, such as the small, the immature, and even the ugly and the atrocious (Roman Ingarden).

Because of the shaky status and conception of beauty in aesthetics, there were even proposals (especially in analytic philosophy) to remove beauty from aesthetics (Jerome Stolnitz, Herbert Read, and John Passmore). A further step was anti-aesthetics and anti-kallism where negative aesthetic values including ugliness took the superior position.<sup>14</sup> The crisis of beauty in aesthetics is affected by the context of the crisis in philosophy and Western culture. Aesthetics is not an autonomous domain of philosophy because it is cultivated within certain

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<sup>14</sup> Henryk Kiereś, *Człowiek i sztuka [Man and Art]* (Lublin: PTTA, 2006), 41–58.

movements of philosophy whose aims, object, and methods can either open or close aesthetics to reality and the legacy of culture. Anti-kallism falls into the context of late ancient oriental movements, such as Manicheanism and Gnosticism, that penetrated into Western culture and promoted the negation of both matter and the cosmos under the form of evil and ugliness.

### **The Separation of Beauty from Reality**

The process of the separation of beauty from reality appeared in the context of the conception of being, nature, and human knowledge. If a philosophical position says that being is unknowable, by the same token no properties, and all the more beauty, can be predicated of being. Modern and contemporary theories of beauty were strongly influenced by Cartesian agnosticism in which ideas, and not reality transcendent to ideas, were regarded as the direct object of human consciousness. Descartes was influenced by Francisco Suárez and identified ideas with “subjective concepts” (*conceptus subiectivus*); the subjective concept no longer performed a transparent cognitive function (as a *medium quo*). As a result, man’s entire personal (cognitive, volitional, and emotional) life was locked within human awareness. The real world ceased to be the object of philosophy, and beauty could appear only as one of the immanent correlates of our acts; as a result, the subjectivization of the understanding of beauty had to follow.

The conception of being either opens or closes the way to beauty. If being is understood in an analogical and transcendental way, beauty can be a property of being. On the other hand, if the concept of being arises by way of abstraction, then being is either something completely undetermined in itself, a pure possibility, and non-contradiction (John Duns Scotus), or it is identified with nothingness and as such is regard-



ed as internally contradictory (Georg W. F. Hegel). In the second approach, there is no room for the beauty of being.

The connection of beauty with nature depends on the conception of nature. If nature is a purely systemic concept entirely dependent on the structure of a philosophical system and independent of reality, then the position of beauty will depend on the system. For Schelling, the beauty of art is higher than the beauty of nature because the Absolute is the paradigm for understanding reality; the evolution of the Absolute first goes through the phase of nature, then through the phase of art, which is a higher phase than the previous one because in the phase of art finitude is united with infinity that is still absent in nature. In this conception, the beauty of nature is accidental and the beauty of art is essential. Hegel precluded the beauty of nature and thought that only art can be beautiful. This was because nature in the process of the dialectical development of the Absolute is the negation of the Spirit, and beauty is born from the spirit and reborn for the sake of the spirit. In both cases, both beauty and nature are interpreted exclusively in the categories of the philosophical system.

Nature can be treated as a correlate of the particular sciences, such as physics, chemistry, or biology. Then the treatment of nature in realistic and common-sense categories is regarded as an expression of naivety and subjectivism. The beauty of nature is only an effect of our subjective impressions under which lies a “cold” and “indifferent” world of the components of matter invisible to the naked eye.

Nature can also be regarded as a necessary, but in itself worthless, basis for aesthetic objects that appear due to art. In fact, what is beautiful is an aesthetic object that results from activities of an artist whose work is appropriately interpreted by the recipient (Ingarden).

The aesthetic conceptions of beauty refer to acts of knowledge, to emotional states, or to the aesthetic object constituted on the basis of a work of art. According to the founder of aesthetics—Baumgarten,

beauty is a perfection of sensory knowledge,<sup>15</sup> which in the system built on the principles of G. W. Leibniz meant a vague representation of perfection. Baumgarten was followed by Georg F. Meier, Moses Mendelssohn, Johann A. Eberhard, and Johann G. Sulzer who emphasized representation more than knowledge. The British philosophers, aside from knowledge (mainly sensory knowledge), expounded on the role of emotions. Joseph Addison held that beauty evokes in us a secret joy and appeals directly to the imagination. In turn, Francis Hutcheson connected beauty with pleasure, that is, with that which comes from knowledge of complex ideas. David Hume returned to the classical theory of harmony; following in the tracks of Plotinus, Edmund Burke criticized that theory. Henry Home limited beauty to the sense of sight, even eliminating hearing.

The Kantian theory of beauty rose above the line of thought of Baumgarten and of British aesthetics and was an integral part of transcendental philosophy. Beauty is delight that flows from the free play of the imagination with the intellect, and also from form, but not from the matter of the object; that delight is indifferent to existence (disinterested joy)—that is purposefulness without a purpose or end (unreflected knowledge). Kant's conception, especially his category of play, was referred to by Herbert Spencer, Grant Allen, Karl Groos, and Jean-Marie Guyau.

Under the influence of Hegel, the conception of beauty as expression was developed, especially as the expression of the artist who expresses himself in art. According to abstract idealism, beauty is mainly a property of ideas, and only in addition is it a property of matter (Karl C. F. Krause, Karl W. F. Solger, Christian H. Weisse, Hermann Lotze), but according to concrete idealism, a connection with matter is necessary (Friedrich E. D. Schleiermacher, Martin Deutinger, Friedrich

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<sup>15</sup> *Aesthetica* (Hildesheim 1986), I, 14: “[P]erfectio cognitionis sensitivae, qua talis.”

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T. Vischer, Eduard von Hartmann). Beauty is described as a perfectly expressed ideal (Louis A. Reid), as an expression of aesthetic feelings (Samuel Alexander), or as an expression of the artist's internal life (Henry Osborne). Beauty is a signifying form expressed by the senses (Susanne Langer, Ernst Cassirer).

Benedetto Croce's theory was also inspired by Hegelianism. Croce held that beauty was the most primary form of intuition or expression that flows through human life; it is a synthesis of feelings and knowledge, especially the imagination; it is indifferent to reality and is part of the aesthetic synthesis that precedes logical synthesis and practical synthesis. In such a source-related and primary experience, the French phenomenologist, Mikel Dufrenne, also looked for beauty.<sup>16</sup>

A typical feature of the theories of beauty proposed in aesthetics is that beauty is separated from reality and from man's higher personal acts; beauty is treated mainly as a correlate or property of sensory-emotional acts that have a pre-intellectual and pre-reflective character.<sup>17</sup>

### **The Problem of Ugliness**

Ugliness must be considered both in the context of the conception of beauty, since it is its negation, and in the conception of being. At the level of objective definition, ugliness can be the negation of harmony as disharmony, the negation of light as darkness, the negation of perfection as imperfection. From the metaphysical point of view (the analogical conception of being), ugliness is a lack that ultimately presupposes the positively understood basis (subject) in which it appears. There is neither positively nor absolutely understood ugliness. Being as such is beautiful in the transcendental sense, because as such it presup-

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<sup>16</sup> *Esthétique et philosophie*, vol. 1 (Paris: Klincksieck, 1967), 139–160.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Piotr Jaroszyński, *Beauty and Being* (Toronto: PIMS, 2011), 57–155.

poses a commensurate subordination to the Absolute's love and knowledge.

In the univocal conception of being, ugliness cannot be treated as a privation of being, but as something in itself that is called ugliness because it does not possess a feature essential to beauty (the good).

In neo-Platonism, diffusion is a feature of the good (emanationism), while evil is a property of matter; matter is the final stage of emanation and thereby it no longer imparts itself and must be ugly (Plotinus).

At the level of the relationist definition, ugliness means either cognitive vagueness or the evocation of negative emotions (disgust, revulsion). Being as such exists only due to actual ordering to the Absolute's love and knowledge, and thereby in a metaphysical sense, being cannot be ugly.

In the case of a being's relation to human love and knowledge, we can speak only of its potential subordination, which means its openness both in the aspect of intelligibility and loveability, which do not need to be realized in actuality.

The problem of ugliness in the aesthetic sense concerns above all ugliness as the topic of works of art where the artist's intention is to show something that is disharmonious, deformed, dark, and which arouses negative emotions. In that case, the measure of perfection must include the relation of the work of art to the artistic conception that is the exemplary idea and the measure of perfection, and not in relation to the world that is represented. The second aspect concerns the manner of representation, which can be perfect with respect to the author's talent. Then a phenomenon appears of which Thomas Aquinas spoke: we call an image beautiful when it perfectly represents a thing, although the thing is ugly in itself. Perfect representation includes artistic skill, which makes pleasing to us that which in relation to reality may have shortcomings and may arouse negative emotions, but a feeling of satis-

faction rules over those emotions because the work of art revolves directly in the realm of the world that is represented (art as an intentional being).

The philosophical analysis of beauty, that considers beauty as a property of being, allows us to investigate and separate beauty as a cultural and historical phenomenon. It explains why there is no room for transcendental beauty in some kinds of metaphysics (ontology), why the crisis of beauty arises in ethics (by the breaking of contact with reality), and what vision of being is presupposed in cultural currents that promote anti-kallism.

Just as beauty from the objective side highlights the harmony and order of reality, so from the side of the human subject, especially personal life, which encompasses what we call culture, and what contains within it human knowledge (including science), moral conduct, productivity, and religion, beauty is the keystone that in the dynamic of our development brings order and opens us to ultimate fulfillment, which in the supernatural perspective takes the form of the *visio beatifica* (the vision of God, which causes happiness), which engages all man's spiritual faculties in their entirety in the highest degree. On this account, beauty is a crucial category for culture in general because it integrates various lines of our personal life, and it cannot in any case be reduced merely to aesthetics (art) or lost from the field of vision of human life as integrally and transcendently understood.



### ***BEAUTY IN THE UNIVERSAL ENCYCLOPEDIA OF PHILOSOPHY***

#### **SUMMARY**

The author considers the problem of beauty. He identifies beauty as an analogically understood property of reality, of human products (including art), and of the human

mode of conduct, and as that which, in the tradition of Western culture, is expressed under the form of harmony, perfection, or splendor, which as beheld and for beholding arouses complacency or pleasure. The article discusses the following topics: classical theories of beauty, beauty in the metaphysical conception, beauty in aesthetics, the separation of beauty from reality, and the problem of ugliness.

#### KEYWORDS

beauty, reality, morality, art, human being, Western culture, harmony, perfection, splendor, complacency, pleasure, metaphysics, aesthetics, ugliness, *Universal Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

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