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Wolfgang Huemer and Ingrid Vendrell Ferran (eds.), Beauty: New Essays in Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art, *München: Philosophia, 2019, 434 pp.*

Discussing the many complexities of beauty and demands that aesthetic theory of beauty should address, the great Roger Scruton wrote:

> We discern beauty in concrete objects and abstract ideas, in works of nature and works of art, in things, animals and people, in objects, qualities and actions. As the list expands to take in just about every ontological category (there are beautiful propositions as well as beautiful worlds, beautiful proofs as well as beautiful snails, even beautiful diseases and beautiful deaths), it becomes obvious that we are not describing a property like shape, size, or color, uncontroversialy present to all who can find their way around the physical world. For one thing: how could there be a single property exhibited by so many disparate types of things?[1]

Beauty, edited by Wolfgang Huemer and Ingrid Vendrell Ferran, addresses precisely the issues Scruton emphasizes as the most perplexing in relation to beauty. It provides new paths for philosophical explorations of beauty, extracting it from the traditional aesthetic theories and offering new perspectives on how it invades our lives when and where we least expect it. This is not to say that the (history of) aesthetics and aesthetic thinking about beauty are ignored. Quite the contrary, the introduction (and several chapters) offers a succinct but illuminative account of the development of philosophical understanding of beauty and the role beauty had in philosophical theories on (the value of) art. The focus here is on the shift that took place over the past century, in which beauty was dethroned from the aesthetic hierarchy. As the editors argue, "it is likely that we still lack the necessary historical distance to analyze [the reasons for such a change]" (8). That may well be the case, but *Beauty* certainly brings us a mile closer to appreciating how beauty is coming back into our philosophical exploration.

To be sure, beauty always was, and continues to be, "an anthropological constant of our human condition" (14), but within aesthetics, this focus came at the price of losing sight of other values, aesthetic and artistic alike. The reduction of art to beauty (and art theory to beauty theory) invoked a strong reaction not only among the philosophers, but among the artists alike. As the editors explain, within aesthetics, Jerome Stonitz's focus on aesthetic attitude was confronted by George Dickie who argued that aesthetic appreciation is not a matter of assuming a particular kind of attitude. In a similar vein, artists themselves broke free of the art for art's sake agenda. As evident by Dadaism, or abstract paintings, art was no longer at the service of creating beauty, but was dedicated to expressing moral, political and social ideas. The abandonment of beauty was further evident in development of institutional theories of art, and in creation of artworks which rejected harmony and symmetry.

Over the last couple of years several prominent books on beauty were published, bringing beauty slowly back to the philosophical and aesthetic spotlight. This is a valuable theoretical move, claim Huemer and Vendrell Ferran, but a care must be taken to avoid the "old trap of reductionism"

[1] Scruton, Roger, *Beauty*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009:1.

(13). Instead, our contemporary theories should focus on the manner in which exploration of beauty is inseparable from the exploration of our cognitive, emotional and other psychological properties on the one hand, and, on the other, on other values that we acknowledge in our artistic engagements, such as works' cognitive, ethical or political value. In light with that, the editors intend their book to re-explore and re-evaluate the nature of beauty, so as to enable us to come up with a more profound understanding of the manner in which it impacts our lives and our artistic practices. It is my impression that they achieved this goal, and with flying colors.

Due to the lack of space, in what follows, I will provide only a rough sketch of the book, focusing more on broader theoretical concerns than on the details of argumentation developed in individual chapters.

Contributions by Sonia Sedivy, Hanne Appelqvist, Elisabeth Schellekens, Maria Elisabeth Reicher, Maria Jose Alcaraz Leon, Catrin Misselhorn and Otto Neumaier will be primarily relevant to those interested in the core aesthetic concerns, such as aesthetic judgments of beauty and taste, aesthetic properties, aesthetic emotions and the connection between beauty and emotions, the question of sensory as opposed to intelligible beauty, the domain of aesthetics and its relation to beauty, and the like. Prominent here are discussions of some of the leading aesthetic figures, such as Kant, Wittgenstein, Bell, Beardsley, Isenberg, Mothersill and Sibley, and the issues revolve around objectivity and subjectivity of aesthetic judgments, of passivity and activity of aesthetic experiences, of the parallels between aesthetic and perceptual judgments and the limits of aesthetics as a field of study. Elisabeth Schellekens points to the limits of the perceptual model of understanding aesthetics, most notably, its inability to account for intelligible beauty. She discusses three challenges to the notion of intelligible beauty, focusing her discussion on the relation between beauty and understanding. Analyzing how the sense of beauty is related to cognitive gains, she proposes that "aesthetic pleasure can occur … in cognitive process albeit not strictly in its resolution". This account of aesthetic pleasure captures "our intuitions about aesthetic delight as linked to the way in which it may generate new ideas and connections" (87).

Alcaraz Leon also voices a criticism of the analogy between aesthetic experience and perception. She expands the discussion of aesthetic judgments, suggesting they should be understood more broadly than allowed for by analogy between aesthetic experience and perception, making our aesthetic reactions passive and reactionary. Instead, we should recognize the "agential dimension of aesthetic judgments" and focus on "the idea that aesthetic judgment is a practical matter: something that we do!" (126). More to the point, Alcarez Leon emphasizes the fact that "there is a connection between aesthetic judgment and being a particular person, between our taste and our personality" (130); a connection which is extremely important in our lives, but lost, if we conceive of aesthetic judgments as solely a capacity to respond to certain aspects of our world.

Another traditional topic, the beauty of landscape, is addressed by Allen Carlson, who defends a position he calls cognitive landscape composition. On this view, the proper appreciation of landscape is available to appreciators who "must focus thoughtful contemplation on the cognitive resources

relevant to the composition of the landscape in question, which is knowledge about the particular origin and nature of the land from which it is composed" (343). In that sense, landscape is a "creation of human thought and imagination by which certain aspects of land are deemed salient and thereby given order, unity and coherence, and, by this mean, also given beauty" (347). A particularly interesting aspect of Carlson's essay is the account of the cultural landscape, i.e. heritage landscapes, the appreciation of which requires knowledge of anthropology, history, sociology, economics, architecture and history.

Contributions by Noël Carroll, Richard Eldridge, Davide Dal Sasso and Peter Lamarque discuss beauty in relation to art—the idea that beauty is central to art, its relation to conceptual, modern art, and poetry. Carroll first challenges the primacy of beauty in art, drawing on the historical examples spanning medieval to avant-garde periods, of artworks not designed to elicit the sense of beauty. What primarily interests him here is the role of beauty in criticism, given that "it makes no sense to bring it to bear upon a work of art that is legitimately intended (…) to oppose the pursuit of beauty for the sake of some conflicting intellectual and/or emotional purposes." (176). Central in this respect is his discussion (and modification) of Danto's theory, starting with Danto's emphasis on indiscernibles.

Danto is also lurking behind John Gibson's essay, dedicated to an exploration of the particular way in which some works of art function as a metaphor for life, whereby life is "transfigured" in the experience of the work. Though beauty is not Gibson's primary concern, the essay is illuminative in showing how our artistic experiences contribute to the sense of having understood the world better via artistic engagements. Grounded in aesthetic cognitivism (the view, roughly, that art gives us knowledge), and drawing on theories of metaphor, Gibson offers an account of how "art opens up a particular kind of window on the real, by providing a frame that transfers features of a work onto the aspects of the world that it casts as its subject." (302)

Lamarque brings the issue of beauty into discussions on poetry, with the aim of exploring the nature and role of aesthetic experience in response to a poem. As he explains, the central element of such an experience is appreciation, which is not reducible to the textual features of the poem. Rather, it is a trained response, which incorporates a "kind of attention to understanding" how the textual features are used to achieve certain artistic and aesthetic ends, and is concerned with the "pleasures of reading" (312).

Lisa Katharin Schmalzried focuses on the beauty of human beings. She analyses two conceptions: the characterological, on which one's beauty depends on one's physical appearance and on one's expressive features, i.e. "expressions of a person's character and mind" (353), and the dualist, according to which one's outer and inner beauty are mutually independent. This conception is Schmalzried's primary interest and she focuses on analyzing character traits and cognitive abilities underlying inner beauty. Relevant here is Plato-inspired virtue analysis, on which one is inwardly beautiful if one is virtuous, where the notion of being virtuous is grounded in Kant's account of moral duty and further modified in consequence to the analysis of Schiller's linking of one's virtuousness and inner beauty. In ad-

dition, taking inspiration from Aristotle, Schmalzried analyses the eudaimonist conception of inner beauty, which depends on one's intellectual and ethical virtues. The model she ends up defending equates inner beauty with relational virtuousness, grounded in Burke and Reid's accounts of inner beauty, which center on virtues that inspire love, affection and attraction.

A wider, social context within which issues of beauty arise is discussed by Stephen Davies, whose contribution focuses on the history and beautifying function of cosmetics in the context of sexual politics, social expectations, personal preferences and evolution. Informative on the cultural variations in the kinds of cosmetics and the manners of its production and use, the essay brings together two things we are "obsessed as species (…), adornment and decoration of ourselves, our possessions, our environment" (407). A wonderful achievement of Davies is revealing just how much influence these obsessions exert over our lives, in manners most often unthought-of and with consequences rarely considered.

To conclude. Informative, challenging and thought-provoking, *Beauty* is bound to expand philosophical discussion of beauty in directions rarely explored before in such depth and with such insightfulness. It will change our understanding of beauty and the value we attach to it, not only with respect to how beauty relates to other aesthetic categories we praise and cherish, but also with respect to emphasizing just how profoundly beauty, in its numerous instantiations, impacts all the aspects of our lives, society and environment. Rarely has beauty been discussed in relation to our ethical and epistemic agency within analytic philosophy, and rarely have these discussions managed to show the centrality of our aesthetic endeavors for who we are. Insights offered in individual chapters give more than 'a promise of happiness', as Nehamas might put it, in that they can be put to the service of making us more appreciative in our artistic endeavors, as both creators and appreciators, in helping us become better aesthetic agents, more responsive to the beauty around us and better equipped to use it for our sense of happiness and wellbeing. The book is a must-read for everyone interested in aesthetics and art, for everyone amazed by beauty and determined to keep it in sight.[2]

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