On the Indeterminacy of the Concept of Beauty and the Reasons for its Use

Andrej Démuth – Slávka Démuthová

The study explores the etymological and semantic challenges associated with the term beauty. The authors highlight that beauty is among the most vague and multifaceted concepts. As a result, its users often grasp completely different aspects/dimensions of it. After addressing etymological differences and conducting a conceptual analysis of its synonyms, the authors present empirical findings and a model outlining the semantic space of the term beauty. In the second part of the study, the authors shed light on the reasons behind the use of this ambiguous term, particularly focusing on its evolutionary and existential significance. The conclusion of the study draws attention to the fact that, despite the vagueness of the concept, beauty continues to play a key role in our lives, reflecting our need to share it, and portraying the human being as *homo aestheticus*. | *Keywords: Beauty, Etymology, Semantic Differential, Semantic Dimensions, Meaning*

1. Introduction to the problem

Beauty belongs amongst the key subjects of human thought. Whether we like it or not, it influences our choice of partner (Buss and Shackelford, 2008; Lewis et al., 2015; Perrett, 2012), our selection of living places (Isik and Vessel, 2021; Brielmann, Nuzzo and Pelli, 2021), captures our attention and prompts us to seek its presence. Not only do we surround ourselves with it, but we also use it to adorn our surroundings. According to several thinkers, beauty has often led us to a more detailed examination of individual objects (Vopěnka, 2000, p. 52), and sometimes even to a preference for which scientific theories or explanations we consider to be true and which we do not (Stewart, 2007; Démuth, Démuthová and Slavkovský, 2019, p. 18; Schwarz, 2018).

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Even though beauty, along with truth and goodness, belongs amongst the most influential ideas that shape both the personal and social settings of people – their values, desires, and attitudes – it seems that we still lack a comprehensive and universally accepted definition for it. This also applies to truth, which philosophers have strived to define through various paths and methods. However, thanks to science, precision of knowledge and analytical conceptual approaches to the question of what is true and what is false, there is still some agreement and possible consensus on what holds true and what does not. Scientists successfully eliminate theses and hypotheses that have not been substantiated or have been logically or empirically refuted. Similarly, although to a lesser extent, there is a certain consensus on what is good and what is evil, what is beneficial and why, and what is not. While we may not be able to find a universally accepted definition of good and evil in ethics either (and unlike the scientific consensus on which ethical framework should be applied and why, such unity in ethics does not exist), the majority of people generally agree on what they want, what they do not want, what behaviour is acceptable, and what is not.

On the question of beauty, such a strong consensus does not exist. This not only testifies to the absence of a generally accepted definition of beauty but also the relatively small degree of consensus among art-educated theorists regarding the content of the concept of beauty (Hosoya et al. 2017, p. 22), in comparison to other more specific aesthetic concepts such as elegance, charm, or sexual attractiveness (Menninghaus et al., 2019). Finally, it reflects the generally benevolent and ambiguous use of the term by the general public. On the contrary, we hear that taste is an individual and subjective matter (*de gustibus non est disputandum* – Merriam-Webster, 2023), and that beauty lies in the eye of the beholder (Shakespeare, 1597/2012, II, I. v. 499; Hungerford, 1878/2015), and even that unified beauty does not really exist, and there are countless diverse beauties (Levinson, 2014, pp. 190–207) that depend on the number of objects or the number of viewers assessing them. This is so despite the fact that aesthetic judgment, in principle, does not solely focus on a designation of our subjective feelings that are evoked by an object (that is, I like something), but rather claims a universal and necessary binding judgement among all rational evaluators (Kant, 1790/2000, 5:212). When I say that an object is beautiful, I do not express that it pleases me and may not please someone else, but rather, I expect that all other evaluators will also consider that the particular object is beautiful and agree with my judgment.

One of the reasons for the problematic nature and imperfect consensus among producers and evaluators of aesthetic judgments is that when using words such as beauty or beautiful, it is not always clear what we are talking about, what the concept, the attribute denotes. And this is not only in terms of whether we are talking about the qualities of a physical object, the qualities of an object as a sensory perception, or whether the focus of our considerations is the perception itself and its reflection.

2. Study objectives

In the first part of this paper, we will attempt to focus on several reasons for the ambiguity of the concept of beauty and the terms we use to denote it, as well as the various ways that we can explore the concept of beauty (compare Démuth and Števček, 2021). This section provides a brief overview of the results of our research that has already been published, in the context of recent studies by various linguists, psychologists, neuroaestheticians, philosophers, and aesthetic theorists, drawing on the theoretical foundations of Fechnerian empirical aesthetics.[1]

In the second part of the paper we will attempt, from the perspective of evolutionary psychology and existential philosophy, to reflect on why the concept of beauty (or what it signifies) is important to us despite not being entirely clear or well definable.

3. Etymological Divergence

If we examine the etymological peculiarities of the concept of beauty in various languages, we find that this overarching concept, which encompasses different aspects and attributes, is derived from quite distinct conceptual and linguistic fundamentals in different languages. While it is true that comparing different languages within the scope of an etymological analysis is quite impossible, as it takes away from the context or cultural and societal linguistic techniques and practices, and individual examples do not cover the entire spectrum of the contexts of those languages, we will attempt to illustrate the semantic diversity of the concept of beauty and the terms that denote it in various languages through selected examples. In English, for example, the concept of beauty is associated with the term "beauty," which has its roots in Old French and Latin. The original term for beauty in French, from which the English term "beauty" derives, is "bel," and it is connected to the Latin term "bellus," meaning "physical attractiveness" (Harper, 2020). *The Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary* describes this concept as "the quality of pleasure, especially when seen, or something or someone that gives great pleasure, especially when seen" (Hornby, 2011, p. 119). Therefore, the main significance of this term is associated with its designation of pleasant sensory stimuli. This is also the case in other Latin-based languages (Romance languages such as Spanish and Italian). Interestingly, but not surprisingly, references to this use can also be found in other, fundamentally different, languages. The Swedish or Proto-Germanic word "vacker" or "wakraz" refers to the sweet pleasure that arises from the perception of an object (Kluge, 1891). A similar dimension of pleasure can be found in the Turkish term "güzel," meaning "pleasant form" (Nisanyan, 2011, p. 308). The German term "die Schönheit" (Swedish "skönhet") refers to "visibility" (in Old High German, "Scōni 'ansehnlich' – Pfeifer, 1993) and "appearance" (schauen). However, in Latin, there are also other designations for beauty, namely "pulchritudo,"

[1] By this means, we would like to express our gratitude to both reviewers for their valuable comments and remarks on certain generalizations or simplifications in the original text. Similarly, we would like to acknowledge Winfried Menninghaus and Anjan Chatterjee for their inspirational insights and previous consultations on the methodology of our research.

“formositas,” and “venustas,” which have different roots (forma, Venus). “Pulchritudo” is derived from “polcher,” with the spelling “-ch-” being Hellenizing, so we can assume the root *polkro- or *pelkro-. Walde (Walde, 1939) and Pokorny (Pokorny, 1959) suggest that it belongs to the Proto-Indo-European *perkr, meaning “variegated” or “colourful.” Therefore, beautiful is that which is variegated or colourful.

Another, albeit semantically similar, etymological “logic” can be found in the Old Slavic designation of beauty associated with the colour red (краса / красота / *krasьnъ). The Proto-Slavic *krasa was connected to red (hence in Russian красный-красивый, meaning “red-beautiful”), thus it was associated with the shine, redness, and colour of fire, as well as with the Proto-Slavic *kresati (Derksen, 2008, p. 246).

Another aspect of the concept of beauty can be found in the Polish term “piękny”. It is etymologically identical to the Czech term “pěkný” and the Slovak term “pekný”, deriving from the Proto-Slavic “pěkrъ” (a similar root as the Latin pulcher) or from the Old Slavic пѣгъ. *The Concise Etymological Dictionary of Slovak* (Králik, 2015, p. 297) suggests that it may be derived from *pej(e) (to be fat, to abound in something, to overflow, comparable to the Old Indic páyate, to be swollen, to overflow), but also with an Avestan expression (to have milk in the breasts). However, the peculiarity lies in the fact that while in Czech and Slovak, “pekný” refers to a lower degree of attractiveness, the Polish term is already the second degree of irregular comparison. Therefore, the semantically identical equivalent of this word in Polish should rather be the term “ładny” (derived from the Proto-Slavic ladъ – Żmigrodzki et al., 2018). It refers to visual attractiveness, but in a different context, it also implies composure and harmony – tuning and the resulting pleasantness – pleasant on the eye as an expression of non-violence, appropriateness, orderliness, and arrangement, which in Biblical Hebrew is referred to as “Yapheh”.

The Chinese term “Měilì”, which may be translated as “beautiful”, depending on the context, can refer to physical attractiveness (“měirén” – beautiful woman), gustatory pleasure (“měishí” – deliciousness), as well as improvement (“měiróng”), goodness, pleasure, and desire (Chen, Qi and Hao, 2018). Similarly, in Serbo-Croatian and other languages, the concept of beauty is associated with goodness – “lijep” from *lěpъ, as well as with good or higher levels of quality (better).[2]

The most famous example of etymological diversity in terms of beauty is the work of Crispin Sartwell. In his book, *Six Names of Beauty* (Sartwell, 2004), Sartwell highlights the different roots and meanings of the concept of beauty in the English language (Beauty as an object of longing), Hebrew (“Yapha” as glow, bloom), Sanskrit (“Sundara” – holiness), Greek (“kalon" – ideal), Japanese (“Wabi-sabi” – perfection in imperfection), or the Navajo language (“Hozho” – health, harmony). Therefore beauty (or the experience of beauty), is not only

[2] Finally, even the Latin term “bellus" is often associated with “bonus” (good) or even with “optimus” (best). “Bonus” and “optimus” are originally derived from the Old Latin version of the word “duonus”, which means “good” (Vaan, 2008, pp. 73–74).

an overarching concept but also a semantically incongruous term that encompasses several often significantly different dimensions of aesthetic judgment.

The etymological divergence of the roots of individual words that are used to denote the concept of beauty[3] demonstrates its multidimensionality and semantic ambiguity. In some languages, the terms used to refer to beauty highlight different aspects than those highlighted by other languages. This divergence – or ambiguity – may not pose a problem to users of the same or similar languages as they draw from a similar etymology for the same or similar terms. However, in different languages, or as the number, ambiguity and potential polysemy of terms that denote the concept of beauty increases for the language users, these distinct terms become embedded in new contexts. This may be the reason that we do not fully understand each other when discussing beauty, as we are not always referring to the same thing. Our concepts often aim to express different meanings. However, this does not mean that our understanding is completely determined or that we are trapped in specific untranslatable linguistic frameworks without the potential to transcend them. Instead, it implies that we are compelled to seek and map the semantic spaces denoted by the individual aesthetic concepts and to deduce what a particular language user has in mind.

4. Semantics of the Concept of Beauty

How can we explore the semantic dimensions of the concept of beauty when this concept encompasses several, often completely different, levels and dimensions?

The classical tool for studying the meaning of words is semantic analysis. By the term semantic analysis, we mainly refer to the analysis of the meaning of concepts in natural language by examining their relationships (semantic and extensional similarities and differences) to related (similar and opposite) concepts in the given language. Such analysis assumes the exploration of intersections, as well as the semantic differentiation of the examined concepts, their disambiguation, and the examination of their mutual relationships.

One possible approach is to analyse the concepts that can be partially subsumed under the concept of beauty, in a particular language. For this purpose, the conceptual analysis of synonymous terms can be employed.

4.1. Conceptual Analysis of Synonymous Terms

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary lists the following as synonyms of the word "beauty": beautifulness, attractiveness, elegance, loveliness, aesthetics, prettiness, looks, comeliness, gorgeousness, handsomeness, beauteousness, cuteness, attraction, fairness, esthetics, glamour, exquisiteness, charm, delightfulness, sightliness, allure, appeal, fascination, radiance, sublimity, sexiness, radiancy, gloriousness, lusciousness, resplendence, sublimeness, shapeliness, seductiveness, glamour, pulchritude, desirability, flawlessness,

[3] For a more detailed analysis of etymological differences in naming beauty, see: Démuth, Démuthová and Keceli (2023).

perfection, splendidness, desirableness, daintiness, nubility, resplendency, sex appeal, superbness, flamboyance, foxiness, glossiness, showiness, flashiness, splendiferousness, slickness, delicacy, splashiness (Merriam-Webster, 2023). Similarly, the *Dictionary of Slovak Synonyms* lists words such as krasota, peknota, nádhera (unusual beauty), veľkoleposť (magnificence), malebnosť (picturesqueness), roztomilosť (cuteness), ladnosť (gracefulness), pôvab (charm), príťažlivosť (attractiveness), úchvatnosť (captivating beauty), velebnosť (grandeur), šumnosť (charmingness), driečnosť (loveliness), vzhľadnosť (appearance), čarokrásnosť (enchanting beauty) (‘Krása’, 2004).

Through an analysis of the main axes that form the semantic space of these terms, we can observe that some of them denote concepts that express a certain inclination towards the object and thus an activity associated with the experience of beauty: allure, appeal, attractiveness, desirability, charm, seductiveness. This activity often varies in its intensity (ranging from strong and irresistible attraction to subtle allure), with different agents (within attractiveness the subject is more passive and all activity emanates from the object, while desire implies activity originating from the subject), however, it generally shares the same orientation “towards beauty”.

The second cluster of synonyms characterises the nature of the feeling itself. Terms such as adorableness, delicacy, delightfulness, loveliness, sightliness, and others demonstrate that the sensation we experience when we perceive a beautiful object is essentially pleasant and connected to something sensorially desirable. What we find pleasing, pleases us because it evokes sensations that we enjoy, both sensorially and intellectually. It is perhaps for this reason that Hideaki Kawabata and Semir Zeki (Kawabata and Zeki, 2004), in a research that aestheticians still considered to be controversial, were able to identify the area in the brain that is associated with beauty, which becomes active during the perception or evaluation of beauty (a subtle structure in the mOFC), thereby identifying the neural correlate of beauty with pleasant feelings and a part of the reward system. However, beauty does not necessarily have to be solely associated with something pleasant.[4]

Another dimension of beauty reveals its exceptional nature. Connotations such as gorgeousness, exquisiteness, sublimity, gloriousness, lusciousness, resplendence, splendidness and superbness allude to the extraordinary quality of the perceived object. Beauty is not an ordinary quality, although it can be concealed within mundane things. When something is beautiful and we recognise it as such, we perceive its uniqueness (the way in which it is not ordinary). Therefore, Hume contemplates beauty as something that is highly above average, something that transcends an ordinary experience – something extraordinary (Démuth and Démuthová, 2019). This also applies to ugliness, as the natural opposite of beauty. Ugliness is even connected to the second dimension mentioned – (un)pleasantness and the dopaminergic reward system. Zeki has even discovered neural correlates that are activated in the sensorimotor cortex for ugliness (Ishizu and Zeki, 2011). However, when both concepts (beauty and ugliness) were tested by using the semantic differential

[4] Compare Brielmann and Pelli (2019).

method (Démuth, Démuthová and Keceli, 2022), it turned out that they were not exact opposites. Both beauty and ugliness are capable of evoking smiles and joy, which are not typically associated with exact opposites. Both of them, therefore, exist at the opposite ends of rarity, where beauty represents excellence and ugliness also signifies the uniqueness of something. However, between them lies a plethora of more or less mundane terms.

The exceptional pole of beauty demonstrates its extraordinary nature, from the perspective of an intellectually oriented subject. After all, what else do terms like perfection, flawlessness, or even fascination refer to if not to the perception of a unique quality of elaboration or organisation that attracts attention and intellectual appreciation? Georg Hossoya and colleagues (Hosoya et al., 2017), therefore, reflect upon the intellectual dimension of beauty. This dimension is represented, for example, by elegance, which captures beauty through simple and purposeful means, through simplicity, as well as the thoughtful complexity of ornaments, Mandelbrot sets or fractals, and the originality of ideas or execution. Such beauty is associated with astonishment, surprise, as well as admiration or other aesthetic emotions.

The final aspect of such a conceptual analysis of the concept of beauty is represented by terms that refer to its transcendent or moral value.[5] Beauty is magnificence, nobility, the sublime, and is often implicitly associated with goodness, divinity and autonomous value. This leads us to a different kind of research on the concept of beauty rather than just the analysis of the dictionary definitions. It involves an investigation of how it is used in a natural language by its users. This not only includes the study of the connotations of the term in the corpus of a particular language but also by conducting empirical research into the associations that people raise when they think about beauty.

4.2. Empirical Analysis of Connotations of the Concept of Beauty

Another possible approach is the empirical examination of the beauty concept connotations among users of everyday language. Research into free associations related to the concept of beauty, their correlational analysis, clustering, sorting, as well as semantic differentials, will allow us to better understand the dimensions of this concept among ordinary language users. Questionnaire-based research into the connotations of the concept of beauty, conducted by Démuth, Démuthová, and Keceli (2022),[6] revealed that people most commonly associate this term with the source which elicits its use. In other words, the word "beauty" is evoked by what we consider to be beautiful. However, if the dimension "Sources—Domain Centred around an Object" is excluded, the second most common semantic dimension to describe beauty is: "Reflection of the Quality of Perception—the Domain of Pleasant-Unpleasant." In this dimension, respondents describe the quality of an experience – the quality of the feeling along the pleasant-neutral-

5 For a more detailed conceptual analysis of the concept of beauty on the ground plan of Gärdenfors' geometry of thinking, see Démuth (2017).

6 The research was conducted with Turkish speakers (n=115), and the results of the Slovak sample are being processed.

unpleasant continuum. The third semantic dimension was "The Domain of Activity and Passivity". In this dimension, the respondents described the degree of excitement and the vector of attraction or repulsion they experienced towards the beautiful object, depending on the instinctual desire to possess it, to be with it, or conversely, to passively contemplate it. The fourth dimension of the concept of beauty is reflected in "The Domain Focused on Exclusivity and Ordinariness". The fifth dimension focused on "The Structure of the Object—Simplicity and Complexity". This dimension is also related to what was originally proposed by Hosoya, the Intellectually Focused Domain. In this dimension, the logic of the object is observed – something new is discovered, and the internal organisation is unveiled – for example, its originality, it surprises, and so on. In this sense, the proverbial statement "beauty is in the eye of the beholder" can be understood. Not everyone is capable of seeing what lies beneath the layer of mundaneness, and not everyone perceives beauty. The subject of the seventh dimension was "The Domain of Morality—Beauty as Good". In this dimension, beauty was often associated with goodness, nobility, honesty, and sincerity, among others. It is perhaps for this reason that psychologists and cognitive scientists ponder over the stereotype that what is beautiful is good and its opposite – what is ugly is dangerous or bad, and look for correlations between the function of beauty and moral judgments (Démuth, 2019a, pp. 118–123). From there, it is only a small leap to the next dimension, which is explicitly "The Transcendentally Oriented Domain". In this dimension, beauty is a value par excellence, it has transcendent implications and reasons.

The presented model assumes that the semantic space of the concept of beauty is truly multidimensional and encompasses at least 9 (possibly more) dimensions, each of which can be described as a continuum of properties that stretches from one pole to the other (e.g., pleasant-unpleasant, exciting-calming…). Different semantic nuances of the concept of beauty or the aesthetic experience it denotes differ in how they scored in each of the individual dimensions. If we perceive two aesthetic experiences as distinct, they must differ, as a minimum, in the level of saturation of one or more dimensions. The weight or significance of individual dimensions may not always be equal.

The latest research on associations of aesthetic concepts (Christensen, Cardillo, and Chatterjee, 2023, p. 335), using a network psychometric approach, has identified similar English terms that are semantically similar based on the responses of the participants (899 participants; 124 terms). Christensen et al. applied hierarchical exploratory graph analysis to map the relationships between the terms, and the analyses identified 17 descriptive dimensions, which could be further reduced to 5, and 11 impact dimensions, which could be further reduced to 4.

Similar empirical research on the connotations of beauty and well-being has been published by Kenett, Ungar and Chatterjee (2021). In their study (100 participants, 45 terms), they examined how different groups of respondents perceive certain concepts depending on their age, gender, and other factors,

and found that the concept of beauty is most commonly associated with terms such as Elegance, Feminine, Gorgeous, Lovely, Sexy, and Stylish. As mentioned by Menninghaus et al. (2019), terms like elegance, grace, and sexy largely overlap with the concept of beauty but also differ from each other in terms of their unique meanings. Nevertheless, it is evident that respondents understand beauty similarly to wellness. They found that the semantic neighbourhoods of beauty and wellness are largely stable across different ages and sexes. However, they also identified unique differences within these comparisons and discovered generational cohort effects, showing how the nuanced associations of these concepts vary by age.

A similar conclusion was reached by the team around Ursula Beermann and Georg Hosoya. They examined beauty in a broader context within the framework of mapping the *Dimensions and Clusters of Aesthetic Emotions: A Semantic Profile Analysis* (Beerman et al., 2021). Their research built upon the original study by Hosoya et al. (2017) *Mapping the Conceptual Domain of Aesthetic Emotion Terms: A Pile-Sort Study*, conducted at the Freie Universität Berlin,[7] which classified beauty as one of the most basic aesthetic concepts, but at the same time also the vaguest, with the greatest degree of variability or the lowest level of internal semantic coherence. In this study, Beermann et al. concluded that to understand aesthetic emotions (not just feelings of beauty), it is necessary to map four basic dimensions and clusters of the semantic space covering valence, power, arousal, and novelty. The findings show considerable convergence with previous studies that addressed the same aesthetic emotion terms but used slightly different methodologies (Hosoya et al., 2017; Schindler et al., 2017).[8]

Regardless of the specific dimensions or final number of dimensions of the concept of beauty, it seems certain that the concept of beauty represents a general concept. Beauty is truly multidimensional, complex, and intricate notion of aesthetic thinking. It is an overarching concept, enriched by several aesthetic dimensions and terms with which it partially overlaps, but does not merge. For centuries, we have been convinced that it is a key concept without which aesthetic evaluation would be impossible. Similarly, we have regarded beauty as something that could not exist without a sense of pleasure, whether sensory or intellectual. However, it appears that beauty is not solely dependent on feelings of pleasure and can exist independently of it.[9] Similarly, as an aesthetic judgment, that recognises the quality of an object, can exist in a way that we may not find aesthetically pleasing, in a sensory way, but we

[7] Even though all the mentioned studies were conducted in different languages, it appears that the concept of beauty possesses a certain universality of content, although there are culturally and linguistically conditioned specifics (e.g., the greater religious dimension among Turks compared to Slovaks), as well as peculiarities associated with age, gender, and education (e.g., women, in comparison to men had more segregated and organized concepts of Beauty and Wellness – Kenett, Ungar and Chatterjee (2021).

[8] Instead of free associations related to the concept of beauty, it involved associations with preselected aesthetic terms, or sorting them into groups based on similarity.

[9] "In aesthetic judgement, pleasure is not felt because an object satisfies a need or fulfils an aim, or because an end is finally worthy. Second, aesthetic judgements are universally valid. Someone who judges that an item is beautiful takes the judgement to apply not just to herself, but to everyone (CJ, 5:212)" (Lopes, 2021, 2).

recognise its artistic or aesthetic value. Works of art can affect us in ways other than by just evoking a sense of beauty. Their creator's strategy is often to evoke emotion, surprise us, and transport us out of reality – to move us, as Menninghaus et al. (2015) suggest. So why is beauty such a crucial concept if we cannot precisely define it and we might not even need it to make an aesthetic evaluation?

5. Reasons to Use the Concept of Beauty

5.1. Evolutionary Reasons

Evolutionary aestheticians and psychologists argue that the phenomenon of beauty has played, and continues to play, an important role in both the lives of individuals and our species. On one hand, our minds have evolved in such a way that we have learned to distinguish and evaluate important information about our environment and potential partners in a semi-automatic manner, without the need for slow and demanding analytical operations (Kahneman's System 1 – Kahneman, 2011, pp. 21–24). The result of this calculation, with its hidden algorithm, is communicated to us through a sense that we like something or that it is beautiful. This sensitivity has attuned us to the proportions of male or female bodies, their facial features or other attributes that are important in the selection of a partner (as a genetic ally), as someone who will help to preserve our genes, or simply as a life partner. Similarly, we are rewarded by feelings of pleasure when we consume energetically rewarding food sources (e.g., the sweet taste of honey) or, conversely, punished for the consumption of dangerous and inappropriate food sources (alkaloids, pathogens, etc.). Denis Dutton (2009) expanded this neo-Darwinian perspective to include the contemplation of places – landscapes that are suitable for us to live in.[10] We find such landscapes pleasing and feel good in them. Similarly, he gave an evolutionary explanation for the origins of art as a demonstration of the author's competence and our appreciation of "uselessness" in aesthetic evaluations. Evolutionary epistemologists consider beauty and attractiveness from the perspective of health (Etcof, 1999), immune compatibility (Foo et al., 2020), fitness (Little et al., 2011), as well as through potential burdens in the form of the handicap principle (Zahavi, 1975), and so on. Anjan Chatterjee, in his book *The Aesthetic Brain* (2013, p. 66), distinguishes between hot beauty, which arises from evolutionary preferences and the tendency to want to preserve one's own genes and manifests as the desire and drive "towards" an object, and cool beauty. The changes in our environment, its cultivation, and the acquisition of many skills and technologies which give our genes the chance to survive despite the hostility

[10] Dutton, referring to the studies of Orians and Hervagen (1992), highlighted an aesthetic-evolutionary preference for savannahs with trees. "Beyond a liking for savannahs, there is a general preference for landscapes with water; a variety of open and wooded space (indicating places to hide and places for game to hide); trees that fork near the ground (provide escape possibilities) with fruiting potential a metre or two from the ground; vistas that recede in the distance, including a path or river that bends out of view but invites exploration; the direct presence or implication of game animals; and variegated cloud patterns. The savannah environment is, in fact, a singularly food-rich environment (calculated in terms of kilograms of protein per square kilometer) and highly desirable for a hunter-gatherer way of life. Not surprisingly, these are the very elements we see repeated endlessly in both calendar art and in the design of public parks worldwide" (Dutton 2003, p. 697). Similarly, see Davies (2014, pp. 87–101).

of the environment, the highly competitive surroundings, selection pressures, and perhaps the suboptimal choice of partner, place, etc., has led to a fundamental decline in the significance of the evolutionary factors sedimented in our genes and minds. Cold beauty has assumed a significantly greater role in our lives, allowing us to contemplate spiritual, cultural, scientific, and transcendental beauties, which may seem unnecessary from an evolutionary perspective. Regardless of the fact that even cold beauty is still an expression and result of (socio)evolutionary processes (Prum, 2017, pp. 320–342), it is evident that beauty continues to be important to us and plays a crucial role in our lives. We (also) select our partners based on it, often even the place we choose to live, our dwelling, the things we purchase to furnish it and, above all, beautify our surroundings. The concept of beauty in art or in everyday life has the same roots as the concept of beauty in evolutionary biology. Cold beauty is grafted onto hot beauty.[11] Everyday necessities are not chosen solely based on price, functionality, and availability, but, on the contrary, we often have crucial aesthetic requirements for them. Therefore, most objects, if they are to be sold, must bring some form of added value in addition to their functionality, they must meet aesthetic demands and criteria. The existence of fashion and various aesthetic trends is clear evidence of this. In fact, sometimes beauty is the primary factor that influences our behaviour. We seek it out in our leisure time, visit galleries, concerts, theatres, go to beautiful places, read beautiful literature, and consciously and purposefully seek beauty, even if we often pay a significant price for it, both financially and in terms of time and effort. What better demonstrates the importance of beauty in our lives than willingly and significantly paying for (with money, time, and effort) what may seem to be superfluous at first sight? On the other hand, it is evident that in many aspects of life, we succumb to beauty to a greater than appropriate degree (see, for example, the issue of lookism – Démuth and Démuthová, 2018) and an uncritical preference for beauty often greatly complicates life.

Beauty has become an evolutionarily significant idea that shapes our behaviour. But why is that so? In addition to scientific and evolutionarily oriented explanations, there is also a metaphysical-existential perspective.

5.2. Existential Reasons

An aesthetic approach to things (like all other attunements, in the sense of Heidegger's theory of moods (Heidegger 1927/2018, § 29) allows us to see what we consider to be 'beautiful' in things. For one person, it may be the form, for another, the elaboration, original idea, inner structure, unity of diversities, functional form, or anything else – as implied by the multidimensionality of the concept of beauty – that is not essential at the given moment. What is essential is that we consider beautiful things to be aesthetically valuable, that we find them pleasing (for some reason), and that we perceive their unique nature and value.[12] Therefore, we either desire to possess them (we long for

[11] The fact that we can perceive, for example, mathematical beauty lies in our very ability to perceive beauty.

[12] A barbarian does not see the beauty of things, and therefore does not even perceive their

them), or we contemplate them with awe and reverence. The experience of the perception of beauty itself is considered to be enriching. "As we experience beauty, it does not remain outside of us, but becomes part of our very being" (Pallasmaa, 2022, p. 22). This means that when we like an object or a phenomenon, not only do we understand them and are capable of perceiving their quality and uniqueness, composition or elaboration, but above all, in that moment, we also understand ourselves – our own being, as something that should have a certain quality. We reflect on our own perception. We yearn to experience the quality of our own being, to enrich and fulfil ourselves through beautiful experiences, to dwell in beauty. Thus, beauty reveals that the quality of being matters. That it is not indifferent, that something simply exists, but that it also matters how it is, what form it takes, that it is the way it is, if it can somehow inspire, enchant, or captivate us. Our perception and pursuit of beauty also demonstrates that we are not indifferent to the fact we could simply just exist. That being is also about form, quality, and value.[13] In this regard, the beauty of things opens a path for us to perceive the beauty and value of (our own) existence (Démuth, 2019b; Scruton 2018). That is precisely why we surround ourselves with beauty, precisely why we seek it, because we care about the quality and value of our own existence.[14]

We consider beautiful things to be valuable, but we often desire them simply because we believe that they can somehow enrich us, for example, by increasing our value in the eyes of another. This approach is not related to the object or our being, but is about the desire to have a possessive relationship with the beautiful object as a means to an end. We want to possess a beautiful or otherwise valuable thing, to have control over it, to be in its proximity, because we believe that by doing so, we increase the value of our own existence. However, a non-possessive mode of being is not about owning or having the thing, but rather about peaceful contemplation and, above all, the perception of the value of our own being through the value of the beautiful object. Therefore, when we experience something beautiful, it enriches us spiritually, especially in the sense that we realise that being in itself has value, that it is something in which quality and form matter. Perhaps that is why we cannot grasp all the dimensions of beauty that reveal the aesthetic value of an object or phenomenon – that is, why they are aesthetically valuable. However, their value is always viewed from the perspective of the perceiver (in the Kantian sense, they do not have value in itself, but rather in how they affect us, whether we are aware of their value, and how it affects us). And here it is evident that the perception of beauty is not only marked by evolutionary factors but also by social and cultural contexts, by our ability to perceive something as aesthetically valuable (for example, through trained taste).

value. This should prevent the thing from being destroyed, just as a rapist does not see the purpose in the thing itself or in the person he "only" rapes.

13 For a more detailed existential analysis of beauty, see Démuth (2019b).

14 Roger Scruton sees beauty as an essential part of the human experience, providing meaning, transcendence, and a connection to the deeper aspects of our existence. Beauty, in this context, is seen as a source of inspiration and a connection to being (Scruton, 2018).

5.3. Transcendental Idealism

Even the least educated or most inexperienced subject perceives beauty and can distinguish between what is beautiful and what is not. It is possible that we do not agree on what is beautiful, but we do not know anyone who is unable to differentiate between the beautiful and the non-beautiful. Certainly, there is a discussion about whether beauty is inherently connected to pleasure – whether anhedonia (when we view a beautiful object, we may not experience feelings of delight or pleasure – contrary to Brielmann and Pelli (2018; 2019)) completely hinders the perception of beauty[15] or whether this dimension of beauty can be entirely null. Similarly, one can consider other dimensions and whether they are necessary for the perception of beauty. However, it seems that there is no disorder that can be defined as complete blindness or insensitivity to beauty.[16] Quite the opposite. The architecture of our minds assumes the existence of beauty and compels us to classify objects in this way. We are inherently built (evolved) to perceive beauty and distinguish between what is and what is not beautiful. This testifies to the fact that the idea of beauty (similarly to the ideas of truth and goodness) is anthropologically crucial.

On the other hand, given the multidimensionality and abstract nature of the concept of beauty (similarly to the concepts of truth and goodness), it is clear that its total comprehension and definition is very problematic, if not impossible. The concept of beauty designates (according to Kant) a certain transcendental concept – in the sense of a rational concept that enables aesthetic judgments – an indeterminate rational idea of a maximum that each individual must (!) create for themselves. However, since this idea is empirically pure and we are only able to sketch its contents through the ideal that we try to derive from experience, its complete comprehension may not be entirely possible, or rather, the degree to which the content fulfils the ideal will vary from context to context. Finally, according to the second moment of the judgment of taste, beautiful is that which is presented without a concept. However, this is not essential.

The concept of beauty is only justifiable when it is communicable. Therefore, Kant assumes it exists in all rational beings and points out that aesthetic judgment is disinterested, meaning that we take pleasure in something because we judge it to be beautiful, rather than judging it to be beautiful because we find it pleasurable (contrary to Brielmann and Pelli (2019)). Secondly, Kant asserts that aesthetic judgments are universal and necessary, meaning that they claim to have a general and necessary validity, not based on the properties of the object itself, but rather on the structure of our perception. We perceive them to be purposeful, even without direct knowledge

15 We do not have to experience pleasant feelings when perceiving an object, although we are aware of its quality.

16 It turned out that even patients suffering from prosopagnosia (the inability to distinguish faces) can finally rate attractive faces as attractive, although less consistently and without the knowledge that they are human faces (Blind To Beauty, 2007). This also indicates that the assessment of attractiveness or beauty is provided by a different module of the brain than face recognition (Sadr, Duchaine, and Nakayama, 2004).

of their purpose.[17] The foundations of this pure rational concept may not be fully accessible to us, but it is precisely this concept that allows any meaningful communication about aesthetic judgments because communication is only possible for those things that we assume we have, at least partially, in common.

6. Conclusion

In this study, we have attempted to demonstrate that the concept of beauty belongs among the key concepts of the architecture of human thought. Despite its complexity and elusive nature, its significance lies in its communicability. It is highly likely that the roots of its formal structure are derived from our evolutionary past. However, its content fulfilment depends (also!) on the personal experience of the respondents and their cultural context. The purpose of beauty is to bring about an awareness of the value and exceptional nature of existence, both of the object and especially of the subject themselves. It serves to protect and maintain the subject, for example, in the search for partners and provides a degree of self-protection. The evolutionary driving force behind the pursuit of beauty has primarily been the pleasure that is derived from a pleasurable sensation as a form of reward. However, at least since the last century, we have been able to conceive of aesthetic value devoid of pleasure. Its foundation lies in the admiration of value, even without any pleasant feelings that it is liked. Thus, art can exist on principles other than the production of a sense of beauty. A work of art touches us, it is meant to move and shake us, and it can achieve this through various means that are distinct from beauty. Nevertheless, we believe that beauty remains a key concept in our lives. Perhaps we are no longer so fervently seeking its definition or precise delineation, but we still seek it and strive for it. This pursuit extends beyond academic spheres and is prevalent in everyday life. Thanks to the accessibility of diverse achievements and technologies, almost everyone can be beautiful, and almost everyone can acquire some form of beauty (including through DeepForger). Thus, the era of *homo aestheticus* has arrived.

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[17] See the fourth moment of the judgment of taste according to the modality of falling in love with an object and the assumption of the idea of common sense.

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Andrej Démuth
Comenius University
Šafárikovo námestie 6
810 00 Bratislava 1
Slovakia
andrej.demuth@uniba.sk

Slávka Démuthová
University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava
Námestie J. Herdu 577/2
917 01 Trnava
slavka.demuthova@ucm.sk

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