

## International Congress of Aesthetics 2007 “Aesthetics Bridging Cultures”

### The Concept of Beauty

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What is aesthetics? In general aesthetics is defined as a theory of beauty, but is it true? I think we cannot limit aesthetics only as a theory of beauty. It is believed that beauty is the key component of aesthetics. What is beauty? What is the role of it in aesthetics? The concept of beauty has two dimensions: the first dimension is that external beauty and the second is that internal beauty. I think these two kinds of beauty constitute aesthetic beauty. There is a problem in aesthetics about beauty whether it is a mind-dependent or mind-independent property? But I think the real problem is that whether it is a property or not. In this study, I will try to explain the place of the concept of beauty in aesthetics and Francis Hutcheson's views about it. Hutcheson is one of the most important philosophers in the eighteenth century and it is claimed that his views about aesthetics is the source of modern aesthetics.

Beauty and ugliness are uncontroversial concepts. Therefore, if we want to understand what beauty is, it is necessary to know what ugliness is. These two concepts are similar to the concepts of good and evil in morality. What is beauty? It is a difficult question, because beauty is a subjective experience. The meaning of the beauty can change from person to person. For example, when we look at a building, we can say that 'it is a beautiful building'. But is the building really beautiful? Where is the beauty of the building? Does the beauty of the building belong to it? I do not think so. The beauty of the building is in my mind. Perhaps, it seems to me as if beautiful, but someone else can say that it is not beautiful, it is ugly. I perceive the building as if beautiful because of its shape, size and color. Therefore, we can claim that beauty is not a property of an object. It depends on other properties in the object.

“It is during the British Enlightenment that we find first articulated regularly a view which identifies beauty with a subjective reaction of the observer rather than a quality actually possessed by an object, and consequently we see at this time considerable emphasis placed on understanding what later becomes known as the ‘aesthetic experience’”<sup>1</sup>.

“There are terminological similarities in Hutcheson and Hume. The Hutchesonian internal *senses* become internal *sentiments* or feelings in Hume's treatment. Hume's internal sentiment is a perception, specifically a calm passion”<sup>2</sup>. Before mentioning Hutcheson's view, I want to mention Hume's view briefly.

Beauty and deformity are responses of taste. People have different sentiments of beauty and deformity, so their sentiments of aesthetics are also different. In his aesthetics, Hume

tries to find a standard of taste. But does the standard of taste function as a definition of the beautiful? Hume answers this question as "no". The problem is not just about the beauty; rather it is related to aesthetic judgments.

There is a diversity of sentiments. The mind feels a sentiment of delight or uneasiness from the qualities of objects. "This sentiment must depend upon the particular fabric or structure of the mind...and produces a sympathy or conformity between the mind and its objects"<sup>3</sup>. We can conclude that objects have no desirable things in themselves; the desirability of objects depends on the structure of human passion. According to Hume, beautiful is a relative quality. The sense of beauty does not exist in the objects; it exists in the mind. It is impossible to find a real beauty or deformity, since "beauty is no quality in things themselves; and each mind perceives a different beauty". However, if it can be found a considerable uniformity of sentiments among people, it can be derived an idea of real or perfect beauty. "In moral decisions, all the circumstances and relations must be previously known; and the mind, from the contemplation of the whole, feels some new impression of affection or disgust, esteem or contempt, approbation or blame"<sup>4</sup>. Hume claims that judgments are based upon approbation. "No views of utility or of future beneficial consequences enter into this sentiment of approbation; yet is it of a kind similar to that other sentiment, which arises from views of a public or private utility. The same social sympathy gives rise to both"<sup>5</sup>. We approve someone, because of his acquaintance. Someone's acquaintance effects on us, and this leads to us the sentiment of approbation. "This principle enters into all the judgments which we form concerning manners and characters"<sup>6</sup>. I think this principle also enters into aesthetic judgments; we approve a work of art, because of its features.

Wherever an object has a tendency to produce pleasure in the possessor, or in other words, is the proper *cause* of pleasure, it is sure to please the spectator, by a delicate sympathy with the possessor. Most of the works of art are esteemed beautiful, in proportion to their fitness for the use of man, and even many of the productions of nature derive their beauty from that source.<sup>7</sup>

Different men have different inclinations. There is a difference between one man's conduct and another. According to Hume, "there is nothing, in itself, valuable or despicable, desirable or hateful, beautiful or deformed; but that these attributes arise from the particular constitution and fabric of human sentiment and affection"<sup>8</sup>. The same object produces the feeling of delight in one person, while it may produce uneasiness in another, because people have different bodily senses.

Tastes and colors, and all other sensible qualities, lie merely in the senses. Hume believes that "the case is the same with beauty and deformity, virtue and vice. There is a sufficient uniformity in the senses and feelings of mankind, to make all these qualities the objects of art and reasoning, and to have the greatest influence on life and manners"<sup>9</sup>.

Hutcheson also claims that there are two senses; external sense and internal sense. Beauty is perceived by this internal sense. Therefore, beauty is not a property of an object; it depends on the spectator's feeling for him.

Hutcheson's aesthetic theory moves from beauty to the experience of spectator. He divides pleasures and pains into simple and complex, although he does not use the concept of complex. He prefers to call these kinds of perceptions as 'perceptions of an internal sense'. According to him, these pleasures "arise only upon some *previous Idea*, or *Assemblage*, or *Comparison of Ideas*".<sup>10</sup> He also makes a classification of senses; he claims that there are five classes of our senses. These are; external senses, internal sense, publick sense, moral sense and sense of honour<sup>11</sup>.

Hutcheson's views of ethics and aesthetics are related to "internal sense". He believes that moral and aesthetic judgments are perceptual; he does not accept the rationality of these kinds of judgments. "Hutcheson is saying that sense perception in general, and aesthetic perception in particular, are *always* immediate whereas rational perception is sometimes immediate and sometimes not; and for this reason aesthetic perception cannot be rational but must be *sensate*"<sup>12</sup>. He makes some aesthetic categories. In the *Short Introduction to Moral Philosophy*, he mentions eight aesthetic categories. These categories are stated in this following quotation;

The external senses of Sight and Hearing we have in common with the Brutes: but there's superadded to the Human Eye and Ear a wonderful and ingenious Relish or Sense, by which we receive subtler pleasures; in material forms *gracefulness, beauty and proportion*; in sounds *concord and harmony*; and are highly delighted with observing exact *imitation* in the works of the more ingenious arts, Painting, Statuary and Sculpture, and in motion and Action; all which afford us far more manly pleasures than the external senses...And the very *grandeur* and *novelty* of objects excite some grateful perceptions not unlike the former, which are naturally connected with and subservient to our desires of knowledge.<sup>13</sup>

External things or objects such as houses, cars, and gardens are accepted as beautiful because of the sense of beauty. Hutcheson believes that custom, education and example have an influence on the sense of beauty. According to him, beauty is not understood any quality supposed to be in the object. Beauty denotes the perception of some Mind.<sup>14</sup> He claims that there must be a relation between beauty and the sense of some mind. We can conclude that beauty is not a property in the objects in the philosophy of Hutcheson as in the case of philosophy of Hume. It can be found in the perceiver's mind.

Hutcheson believes that beauty is not a complex idea; it gives rise to a pleasure. "The inner sense of beauty is a disposition in human nature to respond with pleasure to certain qualities apprehended by the familiar external senses"<sup>15</sup>. According to him, beauty is pleasure. "The Word Beauty is taken for the Idea raised in us, and a Sense of Beauty for our Power of receiving this idea"<sup>16</sup>. The sense of beauty is not an innate idea for Hutcheson, so it can be concluded that people have no innate aesthetic distinctions. Hutcheson believes that the sense of beauty is both immediate and innate. According to him, "the idea of beauty is caused to arise in us by the effect of what he calls *uniformity amidst variety* upon our sense of beauty"<sup>17</sup>. He believes that "the variety increases the Beauty in equal Uniformity. The greater Uniformity increases the Beauty amidst equal Variety". This is also called *compound ratio theory*. He says,

But in all these instances of Beauty let it be observed, that the Pleasure is communicated to those who never reflected on this general Foundation; and that all here alleged is this, ' That the pleasant Sensation arises only from Objects, in which there is Uniformity amidst Variety;;' We may have the Sensation without knowing what is the Occasion of it; as a Man's taste may suggest Ideas of Sweets, Acids, Bitters, tho he be ignorant of the Forms of the small Bodys, or their motions, which excite these Perceptions in him.<sup>18</sup>

Hutcheson conceives of sense perception as: (i) Independent of the will, (ii) innate, (iii) independent of knowledge, and (iv) immediate. These four marks distinguish it from reason"<sup>19</sup>. The sense of beauty gives rise to pleasure, so pleasure is the object of the sense of beauty. Kivy (2003) claims that at least there are six internal senses in the philosophy of Hutcheson such as the senses of beauty, grandeur, imitation, novelty, fitness and humor. These six internal senses are also called aesthetic senses.<sup>20</sup>

Hutcheson claims that there are two kinds of pleasure; sensible and rational. Sensible pleasures are felt by external sense, such as the taste of chocolate. According to Hutcheson, sense perception has a nonvolitional character. He also claims that there are two kinds of beauty: relative beauty and absolute beauty. Natural objects provide examples of absolute beauty, while the works of art provide examples of relative beauty. "We therefore by Absolute Beauty understand only that Beauty, which we perceive in Objects without comparison to any thing external, of which the Object is supposed an Imitation, or Picture; such as that Beauty perceived from the Works of Nature, artificial Forms, Figures, Theorems."<sup>21</sup> He claims that we perceive comparative or relative beauty in objects and this kind of beauty is commonly considered as imitations of something else. "All beauty is relative to the sense of some mind perceiving it; but what we call relative is that which is apprehended in any object, commonly considered as an imitation of some original: and this beauty is founded on a Conformity, or a kind of unity between the original and the copy"<sup>22</sup>. All beauty of nature falls under the comparative or relative beauty. "Any object of perception, whether nature or artifact, may have original beauty if its composition- its shape, design, arrangement, or structure- exhibits a balance of uniformity and variety, of order and complexity"<sup>23</sup>. Hutcheson's this distinction between relative and absolute beauty can be found in Kant's distinction between free and dependent beauty. According to Kant, "the dependent beauty of a thing is the beauty that it has as a thing with certain function. By contrast, the free beauty of a thing is independent of its function"<sup>24</sup>.

The beauty of an aesthetic object depends on its representational properties. For example, if there is a harmony in colors we can say 'it is beautiful'. These properties may also be called aesthetic properties. Levinson (2005) claims that there are five properties; these are representational, art-historical, physical, sensory, appearance properties. These properties are important to determine the aesthetic properties. People who call something 'beautiful' are concerned with some properties of those things.

Briefly, Hutcheson's general account of beauty is that beauty is an internal sense. The ideas of beauty are simple ideas, but the objects of the sense of beauty are complex ideas. He also claims that there are two kinds of beauty; relative and absolute beauty. "There

are, in the case of beauty, two ideas; the complex idea, which causes the simple idea of beauty and simple idea, perceived by the sense of beauty, without which nothing in the world would be 'beautiful'".<sup>25</sup>

Hutcheson introduces internal sense. "Hutcheson's explanation goes something like this: There are two cases to be considered in ascertaining what the objective component of the aesthetic situation is: (1) that in which the uniformity of objects is equal, and the beauty depends on the variety, and (2) that in which the variety is equal, and the beauty depends on the uniformity"<sup>26</sup>. If there is no property, there will not be any beauty. Therefore, the beauty of art is a relative beauty like the distinction of Hutcheson. It can be claimed that physical, sensory properties constitute aesthetic properties such as beauty.

Beauty is also related to aesthetic judgments. It can be claimed that our aesthetic judgments determine whether a work of art is beautiful or not. Our aesthetic judgments depend on our taste. Therefore it can be claimed that there is a close relation between taste and beauty. These two concepts play a crucial role to determine aesthetic judgments. In general, when we like a thing, we say 'it is beautiful'. Why? The criterion of aesthetic beauty is the quantity of pleasurable feeling aroused in the spectators. "The ability to evoke pleasurable feelings in persons of good taste is substituted for the ability to evoke the greatest quantity of pleasurable feelings on the whole as the standard of beauty".<sup>27</sup>

Beauty is a property neither of an aesthetic object nor of perceiving mind. It is a property of the relation between aesthetic object and perceiving mind. It is believed that if there is a relation between aesthetic object and aesthetic subject, beauty comes into existence. When there is no aesthetic object and aesthetic subject, we cannot mention about any aesthetic beauty. Beauty is perceived by our inner sense. Therefore, we can conclude that the word of beauty denotes a personal attribute and not a quality of art or nature.

We can claim that in order to get an aesthetic pleasure from an aesthetic object, it is necessary to have a third eye. We have two eyes; we can see external things by means of them. However, it is not important what we see, rather it is important what we feel in aesthetics.

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<sup>1</sup> Korsmeyer, C. "The Two Beauties: A Perspective on Hutcheson's Aesthetics", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, (vol. 38, 1979, pp. 145-151) p. 145; hereafter cited as *Two Beauties* followed by page number.

<sup>2</sup> Halberstadt, W. H. "A Problem in Hume's Aesthetics", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, (vol. 30, 1971, pp. 209-214) p. 211; hereafter cited as *Problem* followed by page number.

<sup>3</sup> Hume, David. *The Standard of Taste and Other Essays*, (USA: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1965) p. 124; hereafter cited as *Essays* followed by page number.

<sup>4</sup> Hume, D. *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge and P. H. Nidditch, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 290; hereafter cited as *Enquiry* followed by page number.

<sup>5</sup> *Enquiry*, p. 260

<sup>6</sup> *Enquiry*, p. 267.

<sup>7</sup> Hume, D. *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p. 577; hereafter cited as *Treatise* followed by page number.

<sup>8</sup> *Essays*, p. 121.

<sup>9</sup> *Essays*, footnote p. 125.

<sup>10</sup> Hutcheson, F. *An Essay On the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections, with Illustrations on the Moral Sense*, ed. Aaron Garrett, (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2002) p. 16; hereafter cited as *NCPA* followed by page number.

<sup>11</sup> This classification comes from *NCPA* pp. 17-18.

<sup>12</sup> Kivy, P. *The Seventh Sense*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003) p. 41; hereafter cited as *Seventh Sense* followed by page number.

<sup>13</sup> *Seventh Sense*, p. 35.

<sup>14</sup> Hutcheson, F. *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, (USA: Liberty Fund, 2004) p. 27; hereafter cited as *Inquiry* followed by page number.

<sup>15</sup> *Two Beauties*, p. 146.

<sup>16</sup> *Inquiry*, p. 23.

<sup>17</sup> Kivy, P. "Hutcheson's Idea of Beauty: Simple or Complex", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, (vol. 50, 1992, pp. 243-245) p. 243; hereafter cited as *HIB* followed by page number.

<sup>18</sup> *Inquiry*, p. 35.

<sup>19</sup> *Seventh Sense*, p. 38.

<sup>20</sup> These come from *Seventh Sense* p. 44.

<sup>21</sup> *Inquiry*, p. 27.

<sup>22</sup> *Inquiry*, p. 42.

<sup>23</sup> *Two Beauties*, p. 146.

<sup>24</sup> Levinson, J. *Aesthetics*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) p. 332; hereafter cited as *Aesthetics* followed by page number.

<sup>25</sup> Kivy, P. The 'Sense' of Beauty and the Sense of 'Art': Hutcheson's Place in the History and Practice of Aesthetics, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, (vol. 53, 1995, pp. 349-357) p. 352; hereafter cited as *SBA* followed by page number.

<sup>26</sup> *Problem*, p. 210.

<sup>27</sup> Vivas, E. *The Problems of Aesthetics*, USA: 1953, p. 466; hereafter cited as *PA* followed by page number.