Truth and goodness, mirrors and masks — part I: a sociology of beauty and the face

What is the face? The face, as unique, physical, malleable and public is the prime symbol of the self. It is unique, for no two faces are identical, and it is in the face that we recognize each other, and identify ourselves. Our faces are pictured in our passports and identification papers. The face is physical, and therefore personal and intimate, yet the face is also ‘made up’, ‘put on’ and subject to fashion. It is public, but also intensely private and intimate. And, malleable, with its eighty mimetic muscles, the face is capable of over 7,000 expressions.

Furthermore, the face indicates the age, gender and race of the self with varying degrees of accuracy, also our health and socio-economic status, our moods and emotions, even perhaps our character and personality. The face is also the site of four of our five senses: sight, taste, smell and hearing, and the site for our intakes of food, drink and air. It is also the source of verbal communication, and an important source for non-verbal communication. Gloria Swanson once said: ‘We didn’t need dialogue. We had faces.’ Moreover the face is also the principal determinant in the perception of our individual beauty or ugliness, and all that these perceptions imply for self-esteem and life-chances. The face indeed symbolizes the self, and signifies many different facets of the self. More than any other part of the body, we identify the face as me or you. Nothing indicates the significance of the face more than the failure to recognize faces and facial expressions. Dr Sacks has described one such person, a victim of Korsakov’s syndrome who, during the medical examination, apparently mistook his wife for a hat, and tried to, literally, pick her up to put on his head; not surprisingly, he could not recognize facial expressions either. Yet another patient, horrifyingly, could not recognize his own face in a mirror (1987: 11–13, 21).

The face, however, and indeed beauty and the physical body also, have been largely ignored by mainstream sociology, at least until relatively recently. Only Simmel (1901/1965) and Veblen (1899/
1953) among the early sociologists and later Mauss (1936/1973) and Mead (1949) concerned themselves seriously with this area which we now refer to as the sociology of the body (Douglas 1973; Polhemus 1978; Turner 1984; Berthelot et al. 1985; Synnott 1987).

In the last few years, however, beauty, attractiveness and the face have been researched by historians (Marwick 1988; Freedman 1986; Banner 1983; Steele 1985), feminists (Lakoff and Scherr 1984), journalists (Baker 1984), anthropologists (Boone 1986; Brain 1979; Ebin 1979), social psychologists (Berscheid and Walster 1979), sociologists (Patzer 1985; Chapkis 1988), photographers (Fischer 1984; Kirk 1981; Virel 1980), art historians (Thevoz 1981; Clark 1980) — just to mention books, not articles, and only those within the last ten years. Evidently these matters are increasingly being considered important, and from many perspectives.

Physically, psychologically and socially, the face is hard to ignore, and its significance in the acquisition of a self and in social interaction can hardly be overestimated. In this paper, however, we consider first the equations of beauty as goodness, and goodness as beauty. The beauty mystique, as I call this equation, dates back to Plato, and perhaps to Homer, and has had profound implications for the beautiful, as well as for the physically handicapped and the ugly, in Graeco-Roman cultures. We then consider the face, and particularly the belief that the face reflects the character of the individual; this ‘facism’, as I call it, ascribes a special quality to the face, and dates back to Aristotle and again perhaps to Homer. In practice, however, the beauty mystique and facism are conceptually linked, since beauty is perceived as residing principally in the face. These twin beliefs are then traced from the Greeks and the Romans, through Christianity to the Renaissance and up to modern times.

This chronological treatment of beauty and the face is followed by thematic analyses. The face as mask of the self, in contrast to the face as mirror of the soul; the face as art, including the sociology of cosmetics and cosmetic surgery; and, since the ideology of beauty is highly controversial, the face as battlefield.

The immense and increasing social significance of beauty in general and the face in particular can be seen in economic terms. In the USA sales of beauty aids have increased from $40 million in 1914, for a per capita expenditure of 40 cents per annum, to about $17 billion in 1985, for a per capita expenditure of about $70 per annum. The industry achieved a 10 per cent earnings gain over the previous year and the cosmetics stock price index rose 29 per cent in 1986, as compared with a 15 per cent gain for the market as a whole (Raines 1974; Standard and Poor 1988: H34–5). Comparable data for the UK are not available, but evidently beauty is big business, and getting bigger. The beauty mystique is growing stronger rather than weaker.
The first modern beauty contest, apart from the judgement of Paris in Greek mythology, was conducted by Phineas T. Barnum in the USA in 1854, with the people as judges. The Miss America contest was staged in 1921 and was followed by Miss World (1951) and Miss Universe (1952). Quite apart from the thousands of local competitions, in municipalities, universities, football teams, etc., the national pageants in the USA now include Miss Black America, Miss Teen USA, Little Miss America, Mrs America, Miss Wheelchair America, Miss Pork Queen (sponsored by the Pork Industry), Miss Nude World, the World's Most Beautiful Tattooed Lady and Miss Man Made (for transsexuals). There are relatively few competitions for men, but these include Mr Olympia, won by Arnold Schwarzenegger seven times, and Mr Gay America (Burwell and Bowles 1987: 3–14; Russell 1986: 20, 168; Banner 1983: 249–70). In the UK, the competitions include the ‘Face of the Eighties’, Miss Lovely Legs, Long is Lovely (for hair), English Rose and Miss Pears (soap). In 1983 Poland was the first Eastern block country to send a contestant to the Miss World competition. In 1985 the first beauty contests were held in Hungary and China. And in 1988, under the auspices of Glasnost, Moscow had its first beauty contest. Only Muslim countries do not hold such contests. Thus the beauty mystique is increasingly being institutionalized around the world.

The high value set on beauty is indicated by data from France, where the majority of the people believe it is better to be lucky than beautiful, but the majority also believe it is better to be beautiful than rich (Bourdieu 1984: 204). Beauty none the less remains controversial. In 1984 it was expected that one-third of the population of the USA would watch the Miss America beauty contest on television; but in that same year in the Old World, the BBC decided to stop televising beauty contests, deeming them ‘anachronistic and almost offensive’ (New York Times 11.9.84; 25.11.84).

The most conclusive evidence of the socio-economic significance of beauty and ugliness is presented by Kaczorowski (1989), in his study of the Canadian Quality of Life panel survey of 4,000 full-time workers conducted by York University in 1977, 1979 and 1981. Kaczorowski has shown that good looks and high incomes are highly correlated. Thus in 1977 the ‘good-looking’ (37 per cent of the sample) earned 75 per cent, i.e. about $6,000 more than the ‘ugly’, and the ‘ugly’, with average incomes of $8,000, only earned 57 per cent of the average incomes of the good-looking. This relationship holds even with such intervening variables held constant as age, years of education, unionization, number of years with company, and so on. Furthermore, Kaczorowski has shown that good looks determine wealth, rather than vice versa, as might have been expected. One explanation for the difference is the applicability of
the halo/horns effects: the good-looking were much more likely to be judged sincere in their responses by the trained interviewers; 81 per cent of the good-looking were said to be sincere compared to only 59 per cent of the ugly; conversely 41 per cent of the ugly were deemed to be insincere compared to only 18 per cent of the good-looking. Evidently looks do matter. Although there has been some research on the socio-economic and legal dimensions of such related areas as height (Keyes 1980; Miller 1987), obesity (Millman 1981; Baker 1982), and physical handicaps (Murphy 1987), this is the first national study on aesthetic inequality, and indicates the immense importance of beauty and the face.

Various caveats must be entered here. First, the face as physical is of course part of the body; for the purposes of this discussion, however, it is necessary to keep the two topics conceptually separate despite the obvious overlaps (Synnott 1988a). Second, the roles of the face in non-verbal communication and emotional expression have been so extensively researched and reviewed (Darwin 1955; Morris 1977; Knapp 1980; and others) that they are not presented here in detail. Also, the fashions of facial beauty, which have changed over the years, have to be omitted for reasons of space (see Brophy 1963; Liggett 1974; Freedman 1986; Banner 1983; Steele 1985). The most recent developments here have been the emergence of the protest faces of Skinheads, with safety pins or other objects through the cheeks, nose or earlobes, foreheads and lips tattooed, sometimes with obscenities, and the unconventional hairstyles of both the Skins and the Punks (Synnott 1987). The practical matter of the role of beauty in social mobility (‘My face is my fortune, sir, she said’) also has to be omitted; but the literature in empirical sociology is reviewed by Maruyama and Miller (1981), Berscheid and Gangestad (1982), Cash and Janda (1984), and Patzer (1985). The differential significance of physical appearance for men and women is also not considered here. Our principal concern here is the semiotics of beauty, especially facial beauty, however defined.

Beauty is defined by the Concise Oxford as ‘Combination of qualities, as shape, proportion, colour, in human face or form, or in other objects, that delights the sight’. This reflects the earlier definitions of beauty by Aristotle and Aquinas, as we shall see; but such definitions do not and cannot de-code the full significance of beauty and, by implication, the human face and body. Their significance is immense, psychological and sociological, economic and literary, philosophical and even theological; they are entwined with non-verbal communication, mood and character assessment, social mobility, helping behaviour of all sorts, sexuality and a wide range of personal and moral qualities; furthermore beauty may be seen as physical or spiritual, inner or outer, natural or artificial, subjective or objective, positive or even negative. Beauty is therefore
a rich and powerful phenomenon, with many meanings at different levels or in different dimensions at different frequencies. These themes and textures weave in and out of each other over time, appearing and re-appearing, perhaps with subtly different implications. I try, however, to tie these themes together in a sociology of the body in the conclusion.

THE GOOD: PLATO AND BEAUTY

The beauty mystique, in its simplest form, is the belief that the beautiful is good, and the ugly is evil; and conversely that the morally good is physically beautiful (or ‘good-looking’) and the evil is ugly. Thus the physical and the metaphysical, body and soul, appearance and reality, inner and outer, are one. Each mirrors the other. The belief is most ancient. In The Iliad, Homer equated evil and ugliness in his description of the loathed Therstis (Bk. 2; 1983: 45)

He was the ugliest man that had come to Illium. He had a game foot and was bandy-legged. His rounded shoulders almost met across his chest; and above them rose an egg-shaped head, which sprouted a few short hairs.

He looked like the villain he was, and not unlike a Fleming villain. Similarly in The Odyssey, the only villain, apart from Penelope’s suitors, was the one-eyed giant, Cyclops. Odysseus, on the other hand, was ‘radiant with comeliness and grace’ (1981: 108). These are the first indications of the identification of the good and the beautiful, the evil and the ugly.

Plato, however, established the beauty mystique on a metaphysical base which is now an intrinsic part of Western culture. In the Greater Hippias (1963: 206–304) he argues that beauty is good and the good is beautiful: the two are identical (1963: 1549–58; cf. Lysis: 216). But he made the point most clearly in the Symposium (211) where he provided the philosophical ground not only for Plotinus, Augustine and Aquinas, but also for the moderns. In this dialogue several of the literary celebrities of Athenian society make speeches in praise of love. Sexual, specifically homosexual love, is the topic; but in Socrates’ speech, Plato shifts ground to develop his theory of beauty as the object of love, and to describe the increasingly abstract or ideal types of beauty which ultimately culminate in pure or absolute beauty, transcending sex, sensuality and ‘mere’ physical beauty. Here Diotima instructs Socrates that there is a scale of perfection ranging from individual, physical beauty up the ‘heavenly ladder’ to Absolute beauty (1963: 562–3)

Starting from individual beauties, the quest for the universal
beauty must find [the candidate] ever mounting the heavenly ladder, stepping from rung to rung — that is from one to two, and from two to every lovely body, from bodily beauty to the beauty of institutions, from institutions to learning, and from learning in general to the special lore that pertains to nothing but the beautiful itself — until at last he comes to know what beauty is.

Now this vision of the beautiful subsists ‘by itself in an eternal oneness, while every lovely thing partakes of it in such sort that, however much the parts may wax and wane, it will be neither more nor less, but still the same inviolable whole’. This absolute beauty, she concludes, is Love, and Socrates adds that ‘all my life I shall pay the power and the might of Love such homage as I can’ (Symposium 211–2; 1963: 562–3).

Thus beauty, in Plato’s philosophy, is not an isolated quality — it is identical with good and it is the object of Love; it is also identical with happiness, for happiness is possessing the good and the contemplation of beauty (Symposium); it is connected also to wisdom, for ‘Wisdom is the most beautiful, and ignorance the most shameful of all things’ (Greater Hippias: 296; 1963: 1549). Wisdom, which is the pursuit of knowledge and truth, in turn leads to happiness (Meno 88c; 1963: 373); and is the characteristic of the guardians, the rulers of the city (Republic 4, 428; 1963: 670). Thus the soul rises on its wings to ‘the plain of Truth’, to ‘the region where the gods dwell’ or ‘by ugliness and evil, it is wasted and destroyed’ (Phaedrus 246–8; 1963: 493–5).

Beauty is therefore a central idea in the philosophy and politics of Plato. His equations can be expressed schematically as follows:

- beauty : ugliness
- goodness : evil
- wisdom : ignorance
- truth : lies
- love : hate
- happiness : unhappiness
- God : waste and destruction

This metaphysic of beauty has a corollary, however. The ranking of spiritual and moral beauty above physical implied, as Diotima warned, that ‘the beauty of the body is not, after all, of so great moment’; furthermore, ‘once you have seen [this vision of the very soul of beauty], you will never be seduced again by the charm of gold, of dress, of comely boys, or lads just ripening to manhood’ (Symposium 210–11; 1963: 562–3). This was, of course, a clear challenge to the Greek love of beauty, particularly physical beauty. That this challenge was not a coincidence is reinforced later in the evening by Alcibiades’ drunken confession that he had tried to
seduce Socrates, unsuccessfully, ‘because, you know, he doesn’t really care a row of pins about good looks — on the contrary, you can’t think how much he despises them — or money, or any of the honors that most people care about’ (Symposium 216; 1963: 568). Physical beauty and moral beauty, sex and the good, are clearly polarized.

Thus Plato distinguished between the ‘two Venuses’ or Aphrodites, goddess of love, the heavenly and the earthly; but the paradigms of heavenly love, and perfect beauty, were male, for the Greeks (Symposium 180–1); indeed it was not until the Renaissance that the female became the paradigm of beauty.

Plato’s ascetic attitude to beauty and the body was strongly influenced by the Orphic doctrine of soma — soma; body — tomb. In Phaedo (65c–67d), Socrates explains that the body is an ‘impediment’, an ‘imperfection’, ‘interrupting, disturbing, distracting and preventing us from getting a glimpse of the truth’; it is impure and infects, contaminates, enslaves and shackles us. Indeed it is a source of evil (1963: 48–50). Again, it is a prison (Phaedo 82; Phaedrus 250; 1963: 66, 497); an enemy (Timaeus 70e; 1963: 1194); and perhaps a tomb, as the Orphics believed (Cratylus 400c; Gorgias 493a; 1963: 437, 275). The range of metaphors is startling, but the dualism is clear. Body and soul are not only separate and unequal but opposed as inferior to superior.

This contrast is clearest when Socrates advises: ‘let us seek the true beauty, not asking whether a face is fair, or anything of that sort, for all such things appear to be in a flux’ (Cratylus 439d; 1963: 473). And praying to Pan, Socrates asks: ‘grant that I may become fair within’ (Phaedrus 279d; 1963: 525). Thus although physical beauty may lead to the absolute, the body, beautiful or otherwise, is not only inferior to the soul, but even an enemy, a tomb, a prison of the soul.

The Greeks loved beauty, as their architecture, statuary, pottery, coins and mosaics show; and they loved the beauty and power of the male body competing, nude, in the Olympic Games for a thousand years. Aristotle even said that beauty is ‘the gift of God’ (Laertius 1972: 461), which surely implies that ugliness is, or may be, a punishment from God.3 If the one is positive, the other is negative. This asceticism in the thought, and the life, of Socrates were therefore extremely unpopular in the hedonist climate of Greece; none the less Plato’s philosophy exerted enormous influence in Christianity, particularly through Plotinus and Saint Augustine.

Sappho perhaps reflected Plato’s metaphysics, but turned it into a synthesis of ethics and aesthetics: ‘What is beautiful is good, and who is good will soon be beautiful’. Yet many Greeks were sceptical about beauty. Theophrastus, who succeeded Aristotle at the Peripatetic school, described beauty as ‘a mute deception’; and Theocritus said it was ‘an evil in an ivory setting’ (Laertius 1972:
Euripides, often a critic of his society, spoke strongly against beauty in *Orestes* (408 B.C.), when Electra blames the beautiful Helen for all the deaths in the Trojan War (lines 126–7)

Oh, what a vileness human beauty is,
Corroding, corrupting everything it touches.

THE FACE AS MIRROR: ARISTOTLE AND PHYSIOGNOMICS

Aristotle did not develop Plato’s theory of beauty as goodness, indeed he distinguished between them, for goodness ‘implies conduct as its subject, while the beautiful is found also in motionless things’; but he did define beauty: ‘The chief forms of beauty are order and symmetry and definiteness’, or proportion in other translations (*Metaphysics* 1078; 1984: 1705). The idea of beauty as proportion inspired not only the Greek sculptors, notably Praxiteles, but also Vitruvius, Leonardo de Vinci, Durer and Corbusier. Francis Bacon, however, perhaps finding this definition a trifle mathematical, insisted that: ‘There is no excellent beauty that hath not some strangeness in the proportion’ (1985: 189).

Faces, rather than beauty, were what fascinated Aristotle; and his treatise *Physiognomics* established physiognomy as a science, although it was probably written by one of his followers at the Peripatetic school after his death. Aristotle argued that the face is a ‘particularly suitable’ part of the body to indicate ‘mental character’ (1984: 1250). One example will suffice (1984: 1246)

The face, when fleshy, indicates laziness, as in cattle: if gaunt, assiduity, and if bony, cowardice, on the analogy of asses and deer. A small face marks a small soul, as in the cat and the ape; a large face means lethargy, as in asses and cattle. So the face must be neither large nor little: an intermediate size is therefore best.

Where Aristotle had emphasized the structure of the face, Cicero emphasized its expressiveness: ‘everything is in the face, and the face in turn is totally dominated by the eyes . . . the face is the mirror of the soul . . . for this is the only part of the body capable of displaying as many expressions as there are emotions’ (Vol. 2, 1960: 176). This second dimension of facism reinforced Aristotelian physiognomics; and Aristotle’s teachings dominated European thought until Lavater’s texts in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Renaissance, however, saw the addition of two complementary themes: astrology and the Neo-Platonist doctrine of correspondences. The rise of astrology from the fourteenth century resulted in a new contribution to physiognomics as astrologers described faces according to the seven planetary types, and detailed the influence of the 12
constellations by the markings on the face. Not only was a new cosmic principle added to the 'science' of physiognomy, but physiognomy also became predictive rather than 'merely' descriptive (de Givry 1973; Thomas 1974).

Furthermore, despite the continued prominence of the face and face-reading, other parts of the body were increasingly considered significant as symbols of the self and as indicators of the past, present and future of the subject. Cheiromancy, or palm-reading, became increasingly popular; and indeed as systematic 'fortune-telling' it is now far more popular than physiognomies. Metaposcopy, or the readings of the lines and markings of the forehead enjoyed a brief vogue in the seventeenth century (de Givry 1973).

The 'doctrine of correspondences' emphasized the correspondence between matter and spirit, microcosm and macrocosm, Man and the Universe. As Macrobius expressed it: 'The world is man writ large and man is the world writ small'. It was believed that Man, the microcosm, mirrored the universe, the macrocosm; and that the face, the hand, the forehead in turn mirrored the Man. All corresponded. All is one. All is cosmic (Tillyard 1963).

This synthetic mentalité tended to blur the scholastic distinction between matter and spirit, corporeal and spiritual beauty, and thus to reinforce the art or science of physiognomy, and also facism and the beauty mystique. Both the face and beauty were now of cosmic significance. Plato and Aristotle were synthesized; and Plato’s interest in beauty and Aristotle’s fascination with the face were integrated in the orientation towards facial beauty. The body is therefore not only physical and moral, but also cosmic. This is clear, for instance, in Cymbeline (Act IV, Sc.ii), when Imogen recognizes the body of Cloten:

I know the shape of’s leg: this is his hand;
His foot Mercurial; his Martial thigh;
The brawns of Hercules: but his Jovial face —

Physiognomy, palmistry and metaposcopy flourished in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The decline of astrology and the rejection of the doctrine of correspondences in the late seventeenth century, with the rise of science, rationalism and mechanism did not destroy physiognomy, however, but merely transformed it from a predictive, cosmic mode back to the traditional Aristotelian descriptive mode. Indeed physiognomy as a 'science' remained very popular throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Johann Lavater’s classic work On Physiognomy which ran through 18 editions in many languages from its first publication in 1775 to 1885, was dedicated to the proposition: ‘If you would know men’s hearts look in their faces’. Lavater also formulated ‘A Hundred Rules of Physiognomy’.
The effectiveness of Lavater’s physiognomics is indicated by the reluctance of the Captain of HMS Beagle to allow Darwin on the expedition to South America. According to Darwin’s account, the Captain ‘was an ardent disciple of Lavater . . . and he doubted whether anyone with my nose could possess sufficient energy and determination for the voyage’ (1950: 36). Lavater’s influence is also evident in the corpus of nineteenth-century European literature (Tytler 1982). Later specialized works were published on noses (Warwick 1848), ears (Cherry 1900), and resemblances between men and animals (Redfield 1852) — ideas that had lasted 2,000 years.

Interest in physiognomics declined again in the second half of the nineteenth century, perhaps in part because of the vigorous attack against it by Hegel in *The Phenomenology of Mind* (1807/1967: 342–8), but also due to the rise of phrenology — dismissed by Hegel also: ‘Bumps and hollows, there is room for selection!’ (1967: 361). The rise and fall of phrenology was relatively rapid, but the ‘science’ persists in the occult world with the re-printing of old classics (Fowler and Fowler 1969; Wells 1971) and new work by a self-styled witch (Leek 1970).

Physiognomics enjoyed a brief renaissance in business circles in the early 1900s, under the leadership of one Dr Holmes Whittier Merton (Brandt 1980: 95–6); and re-appeared as ‘characterology’ in later decades (e.g., McCormick 1920). Indeed physiognomics is still popular in some circles, and trade books are numerous (Whiteside 1981; Baker and Bellack 1981), including works on Chinese physiognomics (Mar 1975; Young 1984). Studies on body language and face language promise to reveal the truths about moods and feelings, as well as character (Fast 1971; Hall 1973; Nierenberg and Calero 1973; Davis 1976). And extravagant and unsubstantiated claims may be made: ‘The face reveals facts not only about a person’s mood, but also about his character, health, personality, sex life, popularity, ability to make money, social status and life expectancy’ (Knapp 1980: 179). Perhaps the most presumptuous physiognomist of the century, however, is Kahlil Gibran: ‘Show me your mother’s face; I will tell you who you are’ (1962: n.p.).

Aristotle, and the science that he founded, are therefore alive and well in our culture. Yet, while the themes of beauty and the face can be distinguished conceptually in their origins in Plato and Aristotle respectively, in fact they blend and merge with each other in Christian and indeed in contemporary thought. Here we examine the convergence between the face and beauty as symbols of the self.
Beauty has been controversial in Judaeo-Christian thought. The Bible warns against beauty; according to Proverbs (31: 30) 'beauty is vain'. Isaiah (28: 1) said that 'beauty is a fading flower', and Jeremiah inveighed against beauty (4: 30), and the ascetics ignored the conventional beauty and dress norms, from Samson to John the Baptist. This philosophy is entirely compatible with the early Greek ascetic tradition expressed in Plato's Orphism.

On the other hand, the Biblical story of creation asserts the goodness of creation: 'And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good' (Gen. 1: 31). Furthermore in the Song of Solomon, the bride and the king praise each other's beauty and goodness in earthly and physical rather than metaphysical terms.

Christ did not impinge directly on this discussion of face and beauty, but he did further the debate between, for want of better words, the hedonists and the ascetics, on the body. On the one hand the body is important and good. Thus Christ taught his disciples to look after the physical as well as the spiritual needs of others. On the other hand Christ himself led an ascetic life of poverty, chastity and obedience, with fasting, prayers, watches and solitude and even death. Saint Paul likewise taught a balance. On the one hand the body is good and holy: 'Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? ... Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost? (I Cor. 6: 15, 19). On the other hand the body is also an enemy: 'I bruise my own body and make it know its master' (I Cor. 9: 27; cf. Synnott 1988).

Saint Paul's asceticism was probably no more typical of the Roman Empire than Plato's had been in Greece or the prophets' had been in Ancient Israel. Ovid (1957, 1968), whose numerous affairs were celebrated in somewhat libidinous poetry, and whose advice on hygiene, make-up and beauty was the first of its kind, was probably far more typical of the era. The Stoic philosophers, however, did also practice asceticism. In his essay 'On adornment', Epictetus advised a young man 'with his hair elaborately arranged', 'If you would be beautiful, make this the object of your effort, human virtue... For you are not flesh, nor hair, but a rational will; if you get this beautiful then you will be beautiful' (1968: 142, 145). The Christian love of beauty is evident in Christian creations: the Gothic cathedrals and the stained glass, the Gregorian chant, illuminated manuscripts, the religious statuary and the paintings. Yet always there is tension. On the one hand all creation and all beauty may be dismissed: 'All is vanity' (Eccles. 1: 14) or, in Saint Peter's words: 'All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass' (I Peter 1: 24). On the other hand, God saw his creation and found it 'very good'. Some Christians emphasized the
ascetic side, some the transcendent side; Plotinus emphasized body-negativism.

In his development of Plato’s ascetics and metaphysics, Plotinus retained Plato’s idea of the ladder of beauty (I: 6; 1956: 56–64); and Beauty, together with the One and the Good are the names of the Absolute: the One is ‘beauty above beauty’ (VI: 7, 32). He also maintained Plato’s dualism, polarizing Matter and Soul, evil and good, ugly and beautiful: ‘A Soul becomes ugly . . . by sinking itself into the alien, by a fall, a descent into body, into Matter’ (I: 6, 5; 1956: 60). He seems to have experienced this dualism personally, for Porphyry, his friend and biographer, records that he ‘seemed ashamed of being in the body’, and refused to sit for his portrait (1956: 1). Indeed, he dismissed beauties of the body as ‘copies, vestiges, shadows’ of Beauty, and not to be pursued. What should be pursued, he said, is beauty of the soul (V.8; 1956: 433)

We ourselves possess beauty when we are true to our own being; our ugliness is in going over to another order; our self-knowledge, that is to say, is our beauty; in self-ignorance we are ugly.

And he advised his readers: ‘let each become godlike and each beautiful who cares to see God and Beauty’ (I: 6; 1956: 64). This equation of God and Beauty is reiterated by Saint Augustine in his famous prayer. But for Augustine matter is not evil and ugly, nor is physical beauty a shadow; matter is good, and beauty reflects God, for God is Beauty, and Beauty is God (Confessions, Bk. 10, 27; 1961: 231–2)

I have learnt to love you late, Beauty at once so ancient and so new! I have learnt to love you late! You were within me, and I was in the world outside myself. I searched for you outside myself and, disfigured as I was, I fell upon the lovely things of your creation. . . . The beautiful things of this world kept me from you and yet, if they had not been in you, they would have had no being at all.

Saint Augustine was fascinated by beauty and, following Plato, used his love of beauty in its many aspects to help him love the beauty of God (cf. Confessions, Bk. 10,6; 1961: 211–12). As with Plato, the beautiful is the good, but the temporal is not the spiritual, and the two should not be confused (Confessions, Bk. 11.4; 1961: 256–7):

It was you, then, O Lord, who made [earth and the heavens], you who are beautiful, for they too are beautiful; you who are good, for they too are good; you who ARE, for they too are. But they are not beautiful and good as you are beautiful and good.

Saint Jerome (345–420), a contemporary of Saint Augustine’s, was less pre-occupied by beauty but observed the face; indeed his is a
classic statement of facism, echoing Cicero: 'The face is the mirror of the mind, and eyes without speaking confess the secrets of the heart' (Letter 54; 1975: 251).

Boethius (c.475–525), who was immensely popular throughout medieval Europe and whose ideas permeate the thought of Chaucer and Dante, continued the mainstream of thinking about beauty from Plato to Augustine. Indeed God is described as the 'height of beauty' (1969: 97). Yet Philosophy, in the person of a lady, warns Boethius against (physical) beauty (1969: 92):

The sleek looks of beauty are fleeting and transitory, more ephemeral than the blossom in spring. If, as Aristotle said, we . . . could see right through things, even the body of an Alcibiades, so fair on the surface, would look thoroughly ugly once we had seen the bowels inside. Your own nature doesn't make you beautiful. It is due to the weak eyesight of the people who see you.

This ascetic orientation in Christian thought emphasized the difference between Creator and Creation, and was expressed in practical terms in the asceticism of the Desert Fathers in the early church, and in the monastic movements of the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries. Concomitant with the new asceticism was a new militarism in the Crusades; and Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, who inspired the Second Crusade, echoed Plotinus when he said that 'Interior beauty is more comely than external ornament, more even than the pomp of kings'. Indeed he declared bluntly that (physical) beauty is 'dung' (Eco 1986: 9, 7)

We who have turned aside from society, relinquishing for Christ's sake all the precious and beautiful things in the world, its wondrous light and colour, its sweet sounds and odours, the pleasures of tastes and touch, for us all bodily delights are nothing but dung.

Physical beauties are 'dung' for Saint Bernard, as they are 'copies, vestiges, shadows' for Plotinus, and 'fleeting and ephemeral' for Boethius. Yet for Saint Augustine all things are beautiful for they are created by God who is Beauty and are in his image. Physical beauty has therefore been a matter of some controversy in Christian thought, depending on whether the body is evaluated positively or negatively. Yet elsewhere the same Saint Bernard argues that spiritual beauty shines in the body which in turn, as an image (mirror?) of the mind, becomes beautiful (Eco, 1986: 10)

When the brightness of beauty has replenished to overflowing the recesses of the heart, it is necessary that it should emerge into the open, just like the light hidden under a bushel: a light shining in the dark is not trying to conceal itself. The body is an image of the
mind, which, like an effulgent light scattering forth its rays, is diffused through its members and senses.

Gilbert of Hoyt expressed a similar view: 'have regard also for the bodily countenance whose grace can be seen in its abundant beauty; for the exterior face can refresh the spirit of those who look upon it, and nourish us with the grace of the interior to which it witnesses' (Eco 1986: 10). The body, in this view, may be inferior to the immortal soul, but the body and the face reflect light and grace and beauty. They mirror the soul.

Saint Thomas Aquinas, however, did not believe that 'inner' and 'outer' were connected, that physical beauty mirrored spiritual beauty. Indeed he distinguished clearly between them: 'Beauty of body consists in shapely limbs and features having a certain proper glow of colour. So also beauty of spirit consists in conversations and actions that are well-formed and suffused with intelligence' (Summa Theologiae 2–2: 145, 2; Vol. 35, 1981: 75). Furthermore we share the former with the 'lower order' of being, and the latter with angelic and infinite being (Hart 1959: 394).

Aquinas defined beauty as 'that which pleases', and insisted that 'the beautiful and the good are identical in reality; it is only the mind that makes a distinction between them' (Summa Theologiae 27, 1; Vol. 19, 1981: 77; cf. Summa Theologiae 1: 5, 4, 1). Furthermore 'beauty goes with (conveniat) every virtue' (Summa Theologiae 2–2: 141, 2; Vol. 43, 1981: 11). Indeed beauty is one of the transcendental attributes of being, which are unity, truth and goodness. Beauty is also one of the attributes of God, for God as Existence is Infinite Goodness and Infinite Beauty. Aquinas therefore not only reflects Plato's ancient philosophy of beauty, but also Augustine's prayer to Beauty (Hart 1959: 351, 386–93). Beauty is therefore of supreme value in Thomistic metaphysics; and he revived the Platonist equation of Beauty as Truth and Goodness.

Despite Aquinas' clear and clean separation of physical and spiritual, many others were not so inclined to admit the distinction, as we have seen. It was but a short step for the medievals to identify physical beauty with moral beauty, i.e., truth and goodness; and conversely to identify physical ugliness with moral ugliness, i.e., evil. Just as beauty had metaphysical significance, so had the face, for Aquinas, both from its location and from its intelligence functions. Aquinas observed (Summa Theologiae 1: 91, 3, 3; Vol. 13, 1981: 29):

other animals have their faces close to the ground, as if to look for food and provender; while man has his face on top, in order that his senses, and especially the sense of sight . . . may be free to become aware of sense objects in every direction, on the earth and in the heavens, so that from them all he may gather intelligible truth.
The face is close to God both literally and figuratively. These two additional dimensions to the face therefore reinforce the symbolic power of facial beauty; the face itself is widely perceived as both the mirror of the soul and the mirror of personality and character. During and after the Renaissance, however, both the face and beauty were increasingly secularized: the physical and the metaphysical were being pried apart.

**FACISM AND THE BEAUTY MYSTIQUE**

During the Renaissance both physical beauty and the face were of cosmic significance; beauty, because in Augustinian philosophy, it led to God and, by reversal, reflected God; and in Thomistic philosophy Beauty is one of the attributes of God. The face, because individual characters were inscribed there, and future fortunes could be read there by trained ‘diviners’. Also, the face was, and is, the prime focus of beauty.

All these themes permeate the *Divine Comedy* of Dante (1265–1321). The contrasts between beauty/ugliness, good/evil, love/hate, joy/horror, light/darkness, God/Satan, permeate the work; indeed it cannot be understood without a prior understanding of these synthetic equations. The ugliness, horror and evil of the three-headed Satan, weeping from his six eyes, devouring sinners, with ‘runnels of tears and slaver’ dripping from his triple chin is in sharp contrast with the former Lucifer, Light-bearer, ‘once as fair as now he’s foul’ (1955 Vol. 1, Canto 34). Yet Dante cannot describe the beauty of Beatrice, tranformed after their vision of the angelic circles (*op. cit.*, Vol. 3, Canto 30); it is the same when Saint Bernard bids Dante to gaze at the Virgin Mary, Mother of God (*op. cit.*, vol. 3, Canto 32):

‘Now to that face which most resembles Christ
Lift up thy gaze; its radiance alone
Can grant to thee the power to look on Christ.’

I looked, and on that countenance there shone
Such bliss...

That nothing I had looked on heretofore
Had held me breathless in such wonderment,
Or unto God so close a likeness bore.

For Dante, beauty is a reflection of the glory of God (1955: 67); and the face is the expression not only of the individual, but also of God. Even the structure of the face, the medievals believed, is witness to God. Dante remarked about ‘he who reads OMO in man’s countenance’ (Vol. 2, Canto 22, 1.32) — which refers to the
words ‘[H]OMO DEI’ = ‘man [is] of God’ inscribed on the face. The Figure I (below) shows the eyes, representing two Os, the lines of the eyebrows and nose forming the M; and the ears, nostrils and mouth forming the D, E and I (1955: 248, 251).

![Figure 1: 'HOMO DEI'](image)

Perhaps the finest exposition of the medieval idea of beauty, which closely followed Plato’s was offered by the courtier, Baldesar Castiglione (1478–1529; 1984: 330–2. Emphasis added.)

beauty is a sacred thing ... [it] springs from God and is like a circle, the centre of which is goodness. And so just as one cannot have a circle without a centre, so one cannot have beauty without goodness. In consequence, only rarely does an evil soul dwell in a beautiful body, and so outward beauty is a true sign of inner goodness. This loveliness, indeed, is impressed upon the body in varying degrees as a token by which the soul can be recognized for what it is, just as with trees the beauty of the blossom testifies to the goodness of the fruit.

Therefore for the most part the ugly are also evil, and the beautiful good. And it can be said that beauty is the pleasant, gay, charming and desirable face of the good, and that ugliness is the dark, disagreeable, unpleasant and sorry face of evil ... it can be said that in some manner the good and the beautiful are identical, especially in the human body. And the proximate cause of physical beauty is, in my opinion, the beauty of the soul.

This belief that physical beauty is caused by spiritual beauty is characteristic of the Renaissance; but Castiglione went on to suggest that the lover of physical beauty may grow to love intellectual and
spiritual beauty, may go from the love of particular beauties to the
love of universal beauty and ultimately God (1984: 340–1). Castiglione not only reflects Plato, Augustine and Aquinas but also
justifies secular and sensual delight in beauty: a superb synthesis of
‘biology’ and theology, the profane and the sacred, sex and God.

Castiglione’s concerns with the meanings and causes of physical
beauty followed the Platonist and Neo-Platonist traditions, but
another sixteenth-century Italian, Firenzuela, seems essentially
modern in his long description of ideal feminine beauty. He
described the hair, forehead, skin, eyebrows, eyes, ears, temples,
nose, mouth, teeth, chin, hands and so on in great detail (in
Burkhardt 1981: 209–11). Two points are instructive, however. First,
beauty is purely physical; there is no suggestion that beauty is a
symbol of virtue or leads up a ladder to God. Beauty is not
metaphysical. Secondly, Firenzuela marks a literary turning point in
that the feminine is the paradigm of beauty now, rather than the
male as in the Greek tradition; the turn is evident also in the
paintings of da Vinci, Botticelli, and Raphael.

None the less, despite these paradigmatic shifts, old ideas were not
completely displaced. Francis Bacon followed Castiglione and
Platonism in his aphorisms: ‘Virtue is nothing but inward beauty;
beauty nothing but outward virtue’ (1984: Vol. 9, 156). Conversely,
in his essay on deformity, he states: ‘Deformed persons are
commonly even with nature, for as nature hath done ill by them, so
do they by nature; being for the most part (as the Scripture saith)
void of natural affection; and so they have their revenge of nature’
(1985: 191–2; Bacon’s emphasis). The Lord Chancellor, and the
most distinguished essayist of the early seventeenth century not only
believed that beauty was a sign of virtue, but also that deformed,
(ugly) people are ‘void of natural affections’, do ill by nature, ‘have
their revenge of nature’, and have chips on their shoulders, even if
they sometimes prove excellent persons. The analysis is less mystical
than Castiglione’s but the conclusions are very similar.

Bacon’s contemporary in France, the essayist Montaigne (1553–
1592), was most interested in faces, but undecided on the value of
physiognomies. He advised that: ‘The face is a weak guarantee; yet
it deserves some consideration’ (1965: 811). He was also a strong
adherent of the beauty mystique, and a great admirer of beauty. He
found it ‘incongruous’ that Socrates, with the ‘beauty of his soul’ was
so ugly, as they said; for ‘there is nothing more likely than the
conformity and relation of the body to the spirit’. He added: ‘I
cannot say how much I consider beauty a powerful and advantage-
ous quality... I consider it as within two fingers’ breadth of
goodness’ (1965: 809–10).

The equation of beauty and goodness, the conformity of body and
soul, the value of the face – the central themes are sketched very
clearly. Miranda also subscribed to the beauty mystique. In *The Tempest* (1.ii) she identified physical and moral beauty on first seeing Ferdinand

I might call him
A thing divine, for nothing natural
I ever saw so noble...
There's nothing ill can dwell in such a temple.

For Miranda, the man is good-looking *therefore* 'a thing divine' and *therefore* good. Caliban, on the other hand, is both evil and ugly — a monster both literally and figuratively; Prospero calls him 'A devil, a born devil . . . and . . . with age his body uglier grows' (IV.ii). The conflict between good and evil is also a conflict between beautiful and ugly.

Miranda was not alone in her beliefs. Thomas Walkington (1607) was equally moved: 'When I doe gaze with a longing looke on the comelinesse of the feature without, I am more than halfe persuaded of the admirable decencie within' (in Camden 1941: 401). And Thomas Browne in *Religio Medici* (1642) asserted clearly that: 'there are mystically in our faces certaines characters which carry in them the motto of our Soules wherein he that cannot read A.B.C. may read our natures' (1964: 57).

Milton (1608–74) also subscribed to the beauty mystique. Adam and Eve are beautiful in Paradise before the Fall (*Paradise Lost, Bk. 4: 288ff*)

Two of far nobler shape, erect and tall,
God-like erect, with native honour clad
In naked majesty, seemed lords of all,
And worthy seemed; for in their looks divine
The image of their glorious Maker shone,
Truth, wisdom, sanctitude severe and pure —

Even Satan, newly expelled from heaven, is at first still glorious and majestic (Bk. 1: 59ff; Bk. 2: 302ff); but as his evil intent develops he appears 'squat like a toad' (Bk. 4: 800); and then 'mixed with bestial slime', a serpent (Bk. 9: 165). Finally, after the Fall, he and all the devils are punished by God and transformed permanently into 'a crowd of ugly serpents!' (Bk. 10: 538–9). Where Dante had written, till words failed, of the increasing beauty of goodness and love in his ascent into heaven, Milton stressed the increasing ugliness of sin. But the equations of the beauty mystique were identical for both.

The Romantic poets of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were captivated by beauty, natural beauty in particular, but human beauty also, and even the idea of beauty. Wordsworth
wrote about a little girl in ‘We are Seven’, and captures the essence of the beauty mystique: ‘Her eyes were fair, and very fair;/Her beauty made me glad’. William Blake in his satirical ‘Proverbs of Hell’ includes a classic facet proverb: ‘He whose face gives no light, shall never become a star’. Another proverb states that ‘Exuberance is Beauty’. Coleridge, like many others, was impressed by the beauty of Lord Byron: ‘so beautiful a countenance, I scarcely ever saw... his eyes the open portals of the sun — things of light and for light’ (Abrams et al. 1968: 1457). Certainly Coleridge did not consider the notorious rake virtuous, even if beautiful; yet he equated beauty with sun and light, both familiar analogues of God. Byron himself wrote a famous poem that begins: ‘She walks in beauty, like the night/ Of cloudless climes and starry skies’; and concludes in the by now familiar strains of the beauty mystique, equating beauty and goodness: ‘The smiles that win, the tints that glow,/ But tell of days in goodness spent,/ A mind at peace with all below./ A heart whose love is innocent’. Shelley composed ‘A Hymn to Intellectual Beauty’, in which he states: ‘I vowed that I would dedicate my powers/ To thee and thine — have I not kept the vow?’ (Socrates had made a similar promise to Love, as we have seen.) Yet it was John Keats, dead at 26, who summarized the Romantics’ views in ‘Endymion’

A thing of beauty is a joy forever:
Its loveliness increases; it will never
Pass into nothingness.

And he concluded his ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’ with the much-quoted lines

Beauty is truth, truth beauty — that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

The consensus within European cultural history has been impressive. Beauty is objective, related to goodness and to God, and moral and physical beauty are related; it is located primarily in the face which also reflects character and perhaps the future. And beauty as physically attractive not only reflects Divine beauty, and inner moral beauty, but also inspires physical desire, i.e. is sexy. None the less there were some who objected, and observed the relativity of beauty. Montaigne who, as we have seen, was both a moderate facet and an adherent of the beauty mystique, was also the first to offer an early anthropology of beauty (1965: 355–6)

We imagine its forms to suit our fancy... The Indies paint it black and dusky, with large swollen lips and a wide flat nose. And they load the cartilage between the nostrils with big gold rings, to make it hang down to the mouth... In Peru, the biggest ears are the fairest, and they stretch them artificially as much as they can... Elsewhere there are nations that blacken their teeth with
great care, and scorn to see white ones; elsewhere they stain them red.

Voltaire, likewise, was more impressed by the relativity than the objectivity of beauty; for him, beauty is in the culture of the beholder, not in the philosophy of Plato (1941: 53)

Ask a toad what beauty is, the to kalon? He will answer you that it is his toad wife with two great round eyes issuing from her little head, a wide, flat mouth, a yellow belly, a brown back.

The philosophical implications of such subjectivism were drawn by David Hume (1711–1776). In his essay ‘Of the Standard of Taste’, he remarks (1965: 6)

Beauty is no quality in things themselves: it exists merely in the mind which contemplates them; and each mind perceives a different beauty. One person may even perceive deformity, where another is sensible of beauty... To seek the real beauty, or real deformity, is as fruitless an inquiry, as to pretend to ascertain the real sweet or real bitter.

In sum, beauty is in the eye of the beholder (but the ‘eye’ is culturally determined, as Montaigne and Voltaire had shown). Hume therefore summarily rejected the aesthetic theories of Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas and Bacon. These conflicts between rationalism and empiricism, objectivism and subjectivism, were heightened, if not resolved by Hume. Tastes might vary, but they are not equal; nor are sentiments about an object equally sound. None the less, he insisted in ‘The Sceptic’: ‘Beauty is not a quality of the circle... It is only the effect, which that figure produces upon a mind, whose particular fabric or structure renders it susceptible of such sentiments’ (1965: 125). Beauty is socially constructed, is Hume’s point, and it has taken over 200 years for the anthropological insights of Voltaire, and before him of Montaigne, and the philosophical insights of Hume, to be utilized in sociology (Berger and Luckman 1967).

Yet Hume was also a traditionalist, and in his most famous work, A Treatise of Human Nature (1738: 2, 1, 8) he restated Aquinas’s definition of beauty (that which pleases), adding a corollary on ugliness or deformity (1985: 350)

beauty is such an order and construction of parts, as... is fitted to give a pleasure and satisfaction to the soul. This is the distinguishing character of beauty, and forms all the difference betwixt it and deformity, whose natural tendency is to produce uneasiness. Pleasure and pain, therefore, are not only necessary attendants of beauty and deformity, but constitute their very essence.
The addition of pleasure and pain to the ancient Platonist equation contributed another dimension to the beauty-ugliness mystique. Kant rejected Hume’s empiricism and relativism. In his complicated *Critique of Judgement* he returned to a Platonist-type idealism: ‘the beautiful is the symbol of the morally good’ (1951: 198). More lyrical was Schiller in his essay ‘On the Subline’ and in his letters on aesthetics. In one letter he writes: ‘Beauty alone makes the whole world happy, and each and every being forgets its limitations while under its spell’ (1967: 217; letter 27).

Hegel was equally captivated by beauty. In his *Aesthetics* (1835) Hegel states that ‘everything beautiful is truly beautiful as sharing in this higher sphere [of the spirit] and generated by it’ (1975: 2). And in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, he says: ‘the beautiful is essentially the spiritual that expresses itself sensibly . . . in such a way that the sensible does not have being on its own account, but only has complete significance within the spiritual and through the spiritual, and is the sign of the spiritual’ (1987: 585, cf. 477). In Hegel’s view the human sensory form is determined by the spirit, the exterior by the interior, thus we create ourselves physically as well as spiritually (1975: 433–4):5

The external human form is alone capable of revealing the spiritual in a sensuous way. The human expression in face, eyes, posture, and air is material . . . but within this corporeality itself the human exterior is not only living and natural, as the animal is, but is the bodily presence which in itself mirrors the spirit. Through the eyes we look into a man’s soul, just as his spiritual character is expressed by his whole demeanour in general.

Hegel adds that ‘a face altogether regular in form and beautiful may nevertheless be cold and expressionless’ (1975: 173); but he insists that the body, especially the face, manifests the soul: ‘the face has a . . . centre in which the soulful and spiritual relation to things is manifested’ (1975: 729). Again, a man’s ‘glance is what is most full of his soul, the concentration of his inmost personality and feeling’ (1975: 732). These ideas about the face go straight back to Plato and, as we shall see, are still ‘true’ today.

Schopenhauer (1788–1860) agreed with Hegel about the spirituality of the face but, unlike Hegel, was a convinced physiognomist. He wrote: ‘That the outer man is a picture of the inner, and the face an expression and revelation of the whole character, is a presumption likely enough in itself, and therefore a safe one to go by’. His fascism is clearer in the emphatic statement that ‘the face of a man is the exact expression of what he is, and if he deceives us, that is our fault, not his’ (n.d.: 250, 254). Hence he recommended physiognomics: it is the study of truth.

The reality of beauty not only fascinated poets and philosophers
but also naturalists. In *The Descent of Man*, Darwin discussed the variations in, and functions of, animal beauty and the differences in cultural definitions of beauty; he concluded that: 'It is certainly not true that there is in the mind of man any universal standard of beauty with respect of the human body' (1981: Vol. II, 353). None the less, in his view, beauty was immensely significant in the evolutionary scheme of things, contributing to sexual selection; this would, 'after the lapse of many generations modify to a certain extent the character of the tribe' in line with the aesthetic values of the tribe (Darwin 1981: Vol. II, 369). Beauty, therefore, contributes to sexual selection and to the descent of Man.

Beauty has been the light which has illuminated Plato's idealism, as the face inspired Aristotelian physiognomics; by the modern age, both the beauty mystique and facism were grounded in Platonist metaphysics, Aristotelian physiognomics and Thomistic theology. They have been reinforced by the cosmic holism of ancient astrology and the doctrine of correspondences; furthermore Dante and Castiglione had added secular dimensions to the spiritual during the Renaissance. Montaigne and Voltaire had philosophized about the relativity of beauty, and Hume had discussed the subjectivity of beauty. Schiller, Hegel and Schopenhauer had praised the face as a symbol or mirror of the self. The romantics, notably Keats, equated beauty with Truth — a coinciding of virtues which reflected Plato; and Darwin accorded a biological role to beauty in his theory of evolution. The significance of beauty and the face even seemed to be legitimized by the Bible, notably by the verse: 'A man may be known by his look, and one that hath understanding by his countenance, when thou meetest him' (Ecclus 20: 19; cf. also 25: 17; 26: 9; 37: 17).

The significance of beauty and the pre-eminence of the face are therefore secure in Western culture, with roots deep and strong in both the Judaeo-Christian and the Graeco-Roman traditions.

THE FACE AND CONTEMPORARY CULTURE

In the twentieth century, the twin beliefs that the face (and the body) mirror the soul, and that beauty and goodness are one, and are reflected in the face, still persist as they did in the past. In a well-known passage Wittgenstein stated that 'the human body is the best picture of the human soul' (1968: 178). One cannot help observing that Wittgenstein himself did not have a notoriously beautiful body. Also, the implications for the physically handicapped are clear.

George Simmel was fascinated by the face and declared bluntly in his essay 'The Aesthetic Significance of the Face' that 'in the features of the face the soul finds its clearest expression': and again: 'the face
strikes us as the symbol, not only of the spirit, but also of an unmistakable personality’ (1901; 1965: 276, 278). The face tells the truth.

Emerson, the American philosopher and poet, often wrote about beauty. In one essay, ‘Beauty’, he says, echoing Bacon, that ‘Beauty is the mark God sets upon virtue’; and adds, in Platonist mode, that ‘Beauty, in its largest and profoundest sense, is one expression for the universe. God is the all-fair. Truth, and goodness, and beauty are but different faces of the same all’ (1968: Vol. 1, 19, 24). In another essay, ‘Michael Angelo’, he asserts his belief that ‘Beauty is the virtue of the body, as virtue is the beauty of the soul’. Indeed: ‘a beautiful person is sent into the world as an image of the divine beauty, not to provoke but to purify the sensual into an intellectual and divine love’. Furthermore, ‘perfect beauty and perfect goodness are one’ (1968: Vol. 12, 240, 217). Continuing on this theme he asserts that ‘Beauty is its own excuse for being’ (1968: Vol. 9, 38); and is ‘welcome as the sun wherever it pleases to shine, which pleases everybody with it and with themselves, seems sufficient to itself... Her existence makes the world rich’ (1968: Vol. 2, 178). These are classic statements of the beauty mystique.

However, by the turn of the century the new social sciences were impacting on traditional philosophies. Thorstein Veblen offered the first sociological theory of beauty, suggesting that ‘the utility of articles valued for their beauty depends closely upon the expensive-ness of the article’ (1953: 94); beginning with spoons, he then discussed the aesthetic values of parks and lawns, cats and dogs, and finally dress, men and particularly women. Of the ideal of feminine beauty, he observed (1953: 107)

The ideal requires delicate and diminutive hands and feet and a slender waist. These features ... go to show that the person so affected is incapable of useful effort and must therefore be supported in idleness by her owner. She is useless and expensive, and she is consequently valuable as evidence of pecuniary strength.

Thus the beautiful woman is a status symbol; she not only does not work, but cannot work; long hair, corsets, high heels, long dresses, and so on, are intended to indicate this: they too are status symbols; and the decoration of the woman with jewellery, making her an expensive ornament, reinforces this process, as does the attention to fashion and ‘the alleged beauty, or ‘loveliness’ of the styles in vogue at any given time’ (1953: 121, 125–6). Feminists in the second half of this century developed some of these ideas further, as we shall see.

Freud argued somewhat differently: ‘There is to my mind no doubt that the concept of “beautiful” has its roots in sexual excitation and that its original meaning was “sexually stimulating”
(1977: 69n2). Indeed Freud seemed mildly perplexed by beauty: ‘Beauty has no obvious use; nor is there any clear cultural necessity for it. Yet civilization could not do without it’, apparently because the enjoyment of beauty can compensate for the threat of suffering. He suggests that: ‘The love of beauty seems a perfect example of an impulse inhibited in its aim’ (1985: 270–1). Yet Freud’s theory of beauty originating in ‘sexual excitation’ neatly complements Darwin’s theory of sexual selection, quite apart from any compensation roles it may play.

Rollo May is reminiscent of Socrates and Shelley in the title of his autobiography, My Quest for Beauty (1985). This reflects Kahlil Gibran (1883–1931): ‘We live only to discover beauty’ (1968: 27). Edward O. Wilson, the founder of sociobiology and surely closer to Darwin than to Freud, also eulogizes beauty, the beauty of science.² He quotes Hermann Weyl, the perfecter of quantum and relativity theory: ‘My work always tried to unite the true with the beautiful; but when I had to choose one or the other, I usually chose the beautiful’ (1984: 6). There is an echo of Keats here; but for Keats beauty and truth could not clash. Wilson himself suggested that ‘Mathematics and beauty are devices by which human beings get through life with the limited intellectual capacity inherited by the species’ (1984: 61). Indeed he finally suggested that beauty may lie ‘in the genes of the beholder’ (1984: 109), i.e. much that we perceive as beautiful, is determined by some sort of genetic memory of mankind’s earliest and optimal environments in the savannah, on hills and by water. Here, of course, Wilson referred to natural rather than to facial beauty; but the idea is intriguing.

Twentieth-century scientists have therefore introduced new equations of beauty: beauty as status symbol (Veblen), as sexual excitation (Freud), as aesthetic goal (May), and as genetically determined and as mathematical (Wilson). These added dimensions to beauty and to the face coincided with increased attention to both from beauticians and cosmeticians. The German physician Anna Fischer-Duckelmann, in her long (970 page) work on feminine hygiene in 1901 included a number of beauty hints and stated that ‘Beauty is power’, especially for women. The book was very successful, sold half a million copies in seven years, and was translated into 10 languages (Kern 1975: 162–3). The doctor perhaps expressed what was already known of Helen of Troy and Cleopatra, but had not been said; yet it was not until the 1970s that sociologists and social psychologists began investigating in detail this power of beauty.

In The Complete Beauty Book (1906/1912), the American Elizabeth Anstruther defined beauty simply as ‘health, dress and winsomeness, all of which are cultivable’. Indeed she downplayed physical beauty: ‘Perfection of features would be nice, of course, but so would a good
many other kinds of perfection which are not possible in this workaday world'. On the one hand, 'a clean skin, ... bright eyes, white teeth, a good figure, beautifully kept hair, attractive hands, and a graceful carriage, everyone may have who wills them'. Also health, wholesomeness and 'bubbling good spirits'. Beauty in this view, is not a matter of classical good looks, but of health, dress and charm or good manners. But Anstruther warned that 'the history of the world's beauties has always been tragic' (1912: 1–4) — a somewhat negative view of physical beauty.

By the 1950s, beauty was being re-defined again. Health, dress and charm were being treated separately, not as components of physical beauty. *The Family Circle’s Complete Book of Beauty and Charm* (Milo and Marshall 1951) explicitly separated beauty and charm in the title, but did not separate them in the text. In their view, 'To achieve lasting beauty . . . you will have to develop the feeling of beauty'. The authors described a number of 'routines' in detail, including the following: enjoy being alive; be sensitive to beauty; enjoy new experiences; have nice things; think beauty — think of yourself as a beautiful person; and others (1951: 2–4). They insisted that beauty comes from within: 'it is within yourselves that you find the source of your beauty'. The authors advised that 'beauty is as beauty does' — an essentially moral definition of beauty which follows Epictetus and Plotinus; and they asserted that 'the inward wellsprings of beauty are in your attitudes towards yourself'. The emphasis on high self-esteem and beautiful (= ethical) behaviour and positive attitudes is subtly different from Anstruther's insistence on charm and manners, for Anstruther did not recognize a distinction between inner and outer. Milo and Marshall were also more positive about beauty, and insisted that: 'The great beauties of history have also been great wits and charming women — they did not rely on their looks alone for their reputation' (1951: 374–83). History, like beauty, is constantly being revised.

Ten years later another beauty expert stated clearly that 'Beauty is a duty. Love of self, as reflected in the care of your person and the enhancement of your looks, is an expression of a healthy personality' (Hauser 1961: 4). The notion that beauty is a duty, particularly for women has been asserted since the Victorian era, and both physical and spiritual beauty were discussed (Steele 1985: 102–5). Hauser too discussed beauty as a moral phenomenon: 'Body and mind nourish each other, and both of them nourish beauty ... happiness is literally translated into physical beauty'. His *bon mots* include 'Laugh and be beautiful, I say'; 'Love is the best of all cosmetics'; 'Most beautifying of all is the knowledge of being loved, that someone finds you beautiful and desirable'; 'Lift the spirit and you lift the face' (1961: 18–25, 153). For Milo and Marshall (1951), philosophy was crucial. Hauser paid lip-service to this theme, emphasizing happiness
rather than self-esteem, but it was peripheral to his work, most of which was concerned with nutrition, skin care and cosmetology. In this century, therefore, beauty is being re-defined from an effect of attitudes, beliefs and philosophy, variously defined as charm, self-esteem, happiness, education, and virtue, to a purely physical phenomenon of bones and muscle, diet and make-up.

In the 1980s, the redefinition of beauty continues. The Avon Book of Beauty is titled Looking Good Feeling Beautiful; the book offers beauty advice and tips on exercise, relaxation and diet, and promises "You'll not only look good, but feel beautiful . . . every day of your life" (Avon 1981: 157). In this view, the physical determines the emotional in a total capsize of the causal directions asserted by Milo and Marshall (1951) and Hauser (1961). Similarly the Vogue Complete Beauty emphasizes the circularity of the issue, but comes down firmly on the side of the physical as paramount: "Feel beautiful and you will look beautiful. But how do you go about feeling beautiful? The answer is a circular one. You must start by looking good" (Hutton 1982: 11). These are complete redefinitions of beauty within 30 years: from beauty as primarily psychological to primarily physical, from inner to outer, from mind to body, from attitudes to techniques. Truth and goodness are irrelevant.

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NOTES

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1. There were apparently beauty contests on the island of Lesbos; but in Sparta the women were not allowed to use cosmetics, jewellery or perfumes, nor could they wear coloured clothing (Pomeroy 1975: 83, 55; Lefkowitz and Fant 1977: 52).

2. Beauty is therefore not only an integral part of Plato's metaphysics, but it is also integrated with his psychology and his theory of the 'three types of men', pursuers of wisdom, honour or sensory gratification discussed in Phaedrus. These are the men of gold, silver and bronze in the famous 'noble lie' (Republic 3: 414–5), who in turn have three different types of soul, rational, spirited or appetitive located respectively in the head, chest and belly; only the first of these, pursuing wisdom and beauty, is immortal (Timaeus 69–70, 89–90). Plato's metaphysics, politics, psychology and anatomy therefore reinforce each other.

3. Aristotle also defined the beautiful, or the noble in the Bollingen edition, as 'that which is desirable for its own sake and also worthy of praise; or that
which is both good and also pleasant because good" (Rhetoric, 1366a: 33; cf. also Poetics 1448b: 4).

4. Christina Rossetti wrote a poem called 'Beauty is vain'. Anticipating contemporary feminists she asks 'Shall a woman exalt her face/ Because it gives delight? She concludes, gloomily, 'Whether she flaunt her beauty/ Or hide it away in a veil/ . . . Time will win the race he runs with her/ And hide her away in a shroud'.

5. If this idea seems a little fanciful to those of us accustomed to the idea of genetic inheritance, it is as well to remember not only your own aesthetic and physiological patterns, including dieting, obesity, tanning, body-shaping courses, plastic surgery, weight-lifting, and so on, but also Sartre's development of this idea in a moral dimension.

6. In The Mikado, Katsuo protested this admiration of facial beauty: 'You hold that I am not beautiful because my face is plain. But you know nothing. You are unenlightened. Learn, then, that it is not in the face alone that beauty is to be sought... I have a left shoulder-blade that is a miracle of loveliness. People come miles to see it. My right elbow has a fascination few can resist'.

7. Note that, according to Plato, this is higher up the ladder of beauty than the beauty of objects.

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