

Towards a Theory of the Aesthetic Properties of Persons¹

Hacia una teoría de las propiedades estéticas de las personas

CAROL GOULD
Florida Atlantic University

Recibido: 05/06/2011

Aprobado definitivamente: 27/06/2011

ABSTRACT

This article argues that aesthetics needs to include a theory of the aesthetic properties of persons, which should be an important theme in the study of everyday aesthetics. Traditionally, aesthetic theorists have assumed that aesthetic properties can be predicated of artworks and natural things. This article argues that persons, not merely their bodies, have aesthetic properties and that aesthetic properties of persons require a different ontological analysis. Some examples of aesthetic properties are glamour, grace of manner, magnetism, charm, and wit. These are not properties of the person as body, but rather they are properties of an embodied person who inhabits a sociological space and a polis.

KEYWORDS: AESTHETIC PROPERTIES OF PERSONS, AESTHETIC PROPERTIES, EVERYDAY AESTHETICS.

1 For invaluable comments on this work, I am grateful to Naomi Zack, David O'Brien, and David Levine.

© *Contrastes. Revista Internacional de Filosofía: Suplemento* 17 (2012), pp. 157-169. ISSN: 1136-9922
Departamento de Filosofía, Universidad de Málaga, Facultad de Filosofía y Letras
Campus de Teatinos, E-29071 Málaga (España)

RESUMEN

En este artículo se defiende que la estética necesita incluir una teoría de las propiedades estéticas de las personas como tema importante en el estudio de la estética de lo cotidiano. Tradicionalmente, los teóricos de la estética han asumido que las propiedades estéticas pueden predicarse respecto de obras de arte y objetos naturales. En este artículo se sostiene que las personas, no sólo sus cuerpos, tienen propiedades estéticas y que las propiedades estéticas de las personas requieren un análisis ontológico diferenciado. Algunos ejemplos de propiedades estéticas son el *glamour*, la gracia en las maneras, el magnetismo, el encanto o el ingenio. Estas no son propiedades de la persona en un sentido corporal, sino propiedades de una persona encarnada que habita un espacio sociológico y una polis.

PALABRAS CLAVES: PROPIEDADES ESTÉTICAS DE LAS PERSONAS,
PROPIEDADES ESTÉTICAS, ESTÉTICA DE LO COTIDIANO

«Ça, chex Marguerite, c'est quelque chose que j'admire: ce n'est pas une fleche côté conceptuel ou logique mais elle a un sens de la repartie inouë. C'est un don. Moi, je suis intellectuellement surdiuée, Marguerite, c'est une pointure de l'à-propopos. J'adorerais être comme elle...» (Paloma in *L'élégance du hérisson*)²

ALTHOUGH WE USUALLY THINK OF ARTWORKS, THEIR FEATURES, and natural objects as the bearers of aesthetic properties, I argue here that persons are, too, and not just by metaphorical extension. The twelve year-old Paloma admires in her friend just such an aesthetic property—having a mastery of the on-point and surprising counter-move to rude remarks. Some other examples of aesthetic properties of persons are glamour, charisma, grace in manner, wit, originality, and magnetism. These are not properties of the person *as* body, although they are properties of an embodied person who has a sociological situation and is a member of a polis.

Many would identify an aesthetic property of a person as starting with a positive property of a body. As we shall see later, counterexamples abound in daily life, but these aesthetic properties of persons tend to elude us when

2 BARBERY, Muriel, *The Elegance of the Hedgehog*. Paris: Gallimard, 2006, p. 241. English translation: «That's something I really admire in Marguerite: she's no whizz on the conceptual or logical side but she has an unbelievable gift for repartee. It really is a talent. I'm intellectually gifted, she is a champion of precision response. I'd give anything to be like that...» [translated by Alison Anderson. London: Gallic Books, 2008, p.189]

we think of the aesthetics of the quotidian. One need look no further than to Muriel Barbery's *L'élégance du hérisson* (published in English as *The Elegance of the Hedgehog*) to see how salient and numerous these properties are. Later, I probe Barbery's novel in my analysis of aesthetic properties of persons. In this article, I offer conditions for a theory of aesthetic properties of persons and its implications for aesthetic theory.

I. PERSONS AND ARTWORKS

Before discussing aesthetic properties of persons, allow me first to stipulate what a person is. None of the following conditions is singly sufficient for being a person. A person is one (a) who is a human being with interests in the ethical sense (b) who is entitled to rights (even if those rights are denied to some in a given culture), one of which is not to be objectified or treated as a commodity (c) who has dispositions to have subjective reactions to the world and to act in various ways (d) who has —if not political liberty, or what Isaiah Berlin would consider 'negative liberty' or Charles Taylor 'negative freedom,'— the capacity to develop some degree of what Taylor considers 'positive freedom' or Plato, simply 'freedom' (e) who has the capacity for self-actualization given certain circumstances and, in the Aristotelian sense, training (f) who has the capacity for self-direction (g) who can experience and appreciate the world in a way that is not merely instrumental (h) who can be judged praiseworthy or blameworthy for her characters and/or actions (i) who, despite having a complex psyche with conflicting conscious desires and arguably unconscious ones, is capable of reflection and self-understanding, and (j) who, *qua* person, is unique in her take on the world and is an irreplaceable presence.

Each of these conditions is controversial or, at least, in need of further analysis, as are the various relations that hold among them. Moreover, most of us would consider each of these either a moral, sociological, or psychological property. Taken as a set, they may not be jointly necessary and sufficient for being a person. My purpose in offering them is to gesture towards our shared and overlapping intuitions about personhood. These conditions emphasize that persons can be subjects not only of moral, psychological, and social properties, but, also, as I argue here, of aesthetic properties, as well. These aesthetic properties of beings, as persons, are not properties that would lead us to objectify them, as would, for example, smoothness of skin, symmetrical facial features, or a graceful turn of ankle.

To switch the emphasis, my goal is to explain that some aesthetic properties are properties of persons, a philosophical point largely ignored in aesthetics. It may be that some non-human animals can be subjects of moral and aesthetic

properties, as I am inclined to think. But given condition (a), I am not considering them here.

Whatever aesthetic properties we ascribe to even the most life-like artwork could not include certain properties that we ascribe to persons. For example, we might describe a statue of a woman as beautiful, but not as witty, charming or charismatic—except insofar as it reflects the wit or charisma of the artist.

One key difference between artworks and persons, both of which can be bearers of aesthetic properties, is that the aesthetic properties of an artwork give us reason for praising or denigrating an artwork; its moral properties do not. In contrast, people's moral properties provide reasons for praising or blaming them as persons; but their aesthetic properties, or lack thereof, do not. Being uninteresting does not make someone a bad person, just as being fascinating does not make someone a morally good one. A fascinating serial killer is no less morally repugnant for being fascinating or witty. For example, being fascinating does not redeem the fictional Hannibal Lecter in the film *The Silence of the Lambs*. Similarly, a kind, quietly generous person is no more fascinating because of his moral virtues. Consider the character of Christian in Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac*, who is handsome, dull, and decent. His dullness and linguistic ineptitude do not make him a bad person.

An artwork, however, that is aesthetically boring merits our disapproval of it as an artwork. An artwork can be immoral, but if it is aesthetically excellent, it warrants our praising it as an artwork. Controversy swirls around whether an artwork's moral properties are relevant to its aesthetic value. The aesthetic moralist's claim that a work is aesthetically less valuable because of its moral content does not entail (contrary to the moralist's assumption) that the work is less excellent *qua* artwork; rather it entails that an artwork's political and social consequences trump its merits as an artwork. This view is about the function of the aesthetic artwork in a society, not about its aesthetic value. Were this not the case, it would be hard to explain how many deeply appreciated artworks maintain their aesthetic appeal in radically different historical and cultural contexts. The reception of the artwork may, of course, change; but the work's aesthetic value is what compels a culture to appreciate it.

Cynthia Ozick, the celebrated American essayist and novelist, considers Bernhard Schlink's *Der Vorleser* (*The Reader*) an evil book, precisely because of its fineness as a literary artwork. Ozick is echoing Plato's claim about the seductive dangers of literature. But even Plato, in accentuating his political anxieties, lets us know that his problem is only with literary works that are praiseworthy for their aesthetic properties. The *Oresteia* is immoral for its tacit endorsement of filial violence and misogyny, but its aesthetic excellence remains unquestioned. Perhaps more controversially, Mapplethorpe's Rosie

(1976), despite its morally controversial subject matter, is acknowledged for its aesthetic properties as a visual artwork.

II. PERSONS AND BODIES

Even the most radical physicalist would distinguish between persons and human bodies. Philosophers would not struggle with the ‘hard problem of consciousness,’ deliberate about the irreducibility of *qualia*, or question the relationship between philosophy of mind and neuroscience, were there not some important difference between a person and a body. Leaving aside here the problem of zombies that has bedeviled philosophy of mind since Descartes raised the epistemological question of other minds,³ our very social existence requires us to treat persons as something more than mere constellations of subatomic particles. Almodóvar plays on this intuition in his 2002 *Hable con Ella* (*Talk to Her*). Despite our sympathy for the disturbed, benighted Benigno, we feel outrage at his sex act with the comatose Alicia, as A.W. Eaton argues we should.⁴ The viewer may also feel indignation at his presumptuous way of caring for her, as though she were a doll rather than a woman. Benigno’s inability to see clearly the difference between Alicia’s body and Alicia is a symptom of his infantile narcissism.

This distinction between a person (however inert her body) and a person’s body is crucial for the aesthetic properties of persons. For even if we discern these properties through persons’ embodied selves, these properties are fundamentally not properties of the body, *per se*. Moreover, we assess aesthetic properties of persons to be more important than aesthetic properties of the mere organic body. Only a moral narcissist or an aesthete like Oscar Wilde’s Dorian Gray would find more aesthetic value in the color of a person’s eyes than in the mood conveyed by the eyes. Plato expresses this well in his *Symposium*, when Alcibiades reveals Socrates’ response to Alcibiades’ futile attempt to seduce him. Socrates appreciates Alcibiades’ spectacular good looks, especially in contrast to Socrates’ own ugliness. He tells Alcibiades, «If you are trying to

3 The literature is vast. For some examples, cf. CHALMERS, D.J., *The Character of Consciousness*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010; DENNETT, «The Unimagined Preposterousness of Zombies», *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 2 (1995), pp. 322-326; FLANAGAN, O., and POLGER, T., «Zombies and the Function of Consciousness», *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 2 (1995), pp. 313-321; TYE, Michael, «Absent Qualia and the Mind-Body Problem», *Philosophical Review* 115 (2006), pp. 139-168; WEBSTER, W.R., «Human Zombies are Metaphysically Impossible», *Synthese* 151 (2006), pp. 297-310.

4 Cf. her «Almodóvar’s Immoralism», in EATON, A.W. (ed.) *Talk to her: Philosophers on Film*. New York: Routledge, 2009, pp.11-26.

barter your beauty for the beauty you have found in me, you are driving a hard bargain» (218e).

III. WHAT IS AN AESTHETIC PROPERTY?

Philosophers have disputed the nature of aesthetic properties since Sibley's groundbreaking article of 1959.⁵ Aestheticians generally speak of aesthetic properties as belonging to artworks, properties of artworks, and things in nature. Some (justifiably, I believe) ascribe them to proofs, theories, and other abstract entities.⁶ An aesthetic property is, as the word suggests, *in some sense* perceived,⁷ and it emerges from other perceived qualities. An aesthetic property ontologically depends on a set of more basic properties. For example, we can describe a symphony's orchestration as lush and a painting's colors as vibrant. The symphony's lushness depends on the combination of tones and timbres that we hear; the painting's chromatic vibrancy depends on the saturation and intensity of the pigments and how they are placed in relation to one another. The sounds and the lushness are perceived simultaneously.

Not everyone hearing the symphony will hear the lushness. Someone moved by the lushness might try to persuade his impervious companion that the orchestration is lush, by advising him to attend to certain sections and to focus on particular parts of the orchestra. His companion still does not get the lushness, so as a last resort, he shows him the score. His friend might see that, compared to other orchestral scores, this one is quite different in the number of players in given sections, in the number of sections playing together, the

5 «Aesthetic Concepts,» *Philosophical Review* 68 (1959), pp. 421-450.

6 Cf. ZEMACH, Eddy, «What is an Aesthetic property?» in BRADY, Emily and LEVINSON, Jerrold (ed.), *Aesthetic Concepts: Essays after Sibley*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001, pp.47-60; *Real Beauty* (Penn State University Press, 1996); and «Aesthetic Properties, Aesthetic Laws, and Aesthetic principles», *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 46 (1987), pp. 67-73. For replies to Zemach, cf. ZANGWILL, Nick, *The Metaphysics of Beauty*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001, pp. 203-204, and GOLDMAN, Alan, «Realism about Aesthetic Properties», *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 51 (1993), pp. 31-37. Against Goldman, cf. GOULD, Carol S. «The Reality of Aesthetic Properties», *The Journal of aesthetics and Art Criticism* 52 (1994), pp. 349-51, and LEVINSON, Jerrold, «Being Realistic about Aesthetic Properties», *The Journal of aesthetics and Art Criticism* 52 (1994): 351-354. For another slant, cf. SHELLEY, James, «The Problem of Non-Perceptual Art», in *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 43 (2003), pp. 363-378; CARROLL, Noel, «Non-Perceptual Aesthetic Properties: Comments for James Shelley», *British Journal of Aesthetics* 44 (2004), pp. 413-423.

7 I say «in some sense» because if a proof can have aesthetic qualities, such as elegance or tautness, the perceptual process of perceiving the elegance of a proof is different from, or at least more complex, than perceiving the lushness of a symphony.

phrasing indications, and so forth. Ultimately, if his friend does not hear the lushness, he will not understand what it is. His friend is analogous to someone deaf since birth who cannot perceive the difference between the timbre of a clarinet and that of a flute or someone blind since birth or who cannot see the difference between shamrock green and chartreuse. In both cases, the person can grasp the difference only intellectually.

Sibley distinguishes between an aesthetic judgment and an attribution of an aesthetic property. In the above case of the two friends at the symphony, one who hears the lushness makes an aesthetic judgment; his trusting friend attributes lushness to the symphony based on his companion's testimony.⁸ So, a judgment that something has an aesthetic property is non-inferential and not rule-governed. This is not to say that we cannot adduce reasons for aesthetic judgments or rules for making them.⁹ Let's consider an aesthetic property of persons, such as swagger.¹⁰ We could judge that someone has it, and give reasons for it— but if someone else does not see it or does not grasp what swagger is, no set of reasons will be sufficient to make her see it.

An aesthetic property is ontologically dependent on, minimally, a set of physical properties. The harmony of a painting's composition, for example, cannot exist unless the physical properties of the painting exist. Although Sibley described this as emergence, the philosophical literature abounds in what this relation of ontological dependence is. The concepts of emergence and supervenience are the predominant candidates for analyses of ontological dependence. Supervenience cannot be the correct choice: for, if property \emptyset supervenes on A (where A is a set of observable properties), then any other entity that has the set of properties A (and only those observable properties) will also have \emptyset . But this does not hold for many aesthetic properties, such as chromatic vibrancy or the ethereality of a solo flute passage, and it certainly does not work for aesthetic properties of persons. No set of rules can provide guidance.

Another way to put this would be in the language of multiple realizability, a concept widely discussed in philosophy of mind. A certain type of experience, say depression, may be realized or manifested by a variety of types of neural states. Thus, an effective treatment for one person's depression might not be for another. Imagine three people, Javier, Gabriella, and Jacques, all of whom are clinically depressed. After a psychiatrist tries various treatments on each

⁸ Cf., for example, Jon Robson, «Aesthetic Testimony», *Philosophy Compass*, 7 (2012), pp. 1–10.

⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 146–151.

¹⁰ I am grateful to Kandy Lopez for giving me this example.

one, Javier responds well to a medication that works on the neurotransmitter serotonin, Gabriella to one that works on dopamine, and Jacques to a program of exercise and psychotherapy alone. They are each depressed, yet they are neurologically different. They each «realize» the type differently. So it is with an aesthetic property of persons such as charisma. As I discuss below, it is a property that has different foundations in each charismatic person. It is irreducible to a given set of behavioral correlates, just as depression is irreducible to a uniform set of neurological correlates.

Charisma is not reducible to a uniform set of behavior, motives, and feelings. There are different forms of charisma: for example, infectious curiosity, passion, and vivacity. Each of these can be «realized» differently. Consider infectious curiosity: it could take the form of focused inquisitiveness, attentiveness towards the world, or tenacity in pursuing a question. There is no uniformity or predictability in the behavior, motives or feelings of these three types of intense curiosity. The point is that there are no bridge laws that can reduce charisma to instances of behavior, motives, and feelings.¹¹

The controversy over the ontological status of aesthetic properties is exceedingly complex, for it involves many issues surrounding perceptual properties generally, as well as matters distinctive to the aesthetic. For example, some philosophers argue that aesthetic properties are essentially evaluative.¹² Others view them on the model of secondary properties, which would make them mind-dependent, but in an important sense real. Jerrold Levinson, who cogently defends their reality,¹³ explains that he does not give

«them a transcendent status, independent of human reactions. What has been defended is rather objectivity as contingent but stable inter-subjective convergence in judgments among qualified perceivers.»¹⁴

Levinson's analysis is plausible for many aesthetic properties, and, as will be apparent, for aesthetic properties of persons. One might, at this point, raise an objection.¹⁵ When we perceive a painting's chromatic vibrancy, we do so as we perceive *directly* the physical object. But when we experience a person's charisma, say, which emanates from her subjective self, we do not directly

11 I owe thanks to Naomi Zack for discussing this point with me.

12 For an excellent critical reflection on this matter and the ontology of aesthetic properties, more generally, cf. Rafael de Clercq, «The Structure of Aesthetic Properties», *Philosophy Compass* 3 (2008), pp. 894-909.

13 «Aesthetic Properties, Evaluative Force, and Differences of Sensibility,» in BRADY, Emily and LEVINSON, Jerrold (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 61-80.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 80.

15 I am grateful to David O'Brien to posing this question to me.

perceive that selfhood of the charismatic person. Eddy Zemach, in an article supporting the reality of aesthetic properties remarks,

«Most psychological terms are theoretical, defeasibly attributable to persons... hence psychological states are not directly observable. Unobservable aesthetic properties, on the other hand, are conceptually impossible.»¹⁶

This is not an insurmountable problem. In order to allow for aesthetic properties of persons, we need not reject the idea that aesthetic properties are perceived or observed. Let us consider charisma, a clear case of an aesthetic property, which I have described elsewhere as the power «to convey a passion that infects others».¹⁷ What we see is the charismatic person acting so as to convey that passion. Thus, political commentators, regardless of their sympathies, generally agree on whether a political figure is charismatic. Let us briefly consider the property of charisma.

Max Weber, in his classic account of charismatic leadership, considered it a «superhuman» power viewed by others as having a supernatural origin. It is the quality of a powerful politician, who moves people to follow her vision, the quality of a great musician who inspires others to try to be musicians themselves or to immerse themselves in the music she plays, as Pablo Casals inspired fascination in the Bach cello suites or Jacqueline Du Pré in the Elgar e minor Cello Concerto. Both artists not only made people love these works, but also impassioned other musicians to perform them. For our purpose here, it is crucial to note that charisma cannot be emulated by performing certain actions or uttering calculated words. There are no rules for achieving it. It radiates from a person's subjective mode of being, and we observe it as such. If we cannot acknowledge this because another person's subjectivity is unobservable, then we cannot grant that others mean what we take them to mean when they use language or follow the non-verbal body language of a culture. So the observation conditions for an aesthetic property of a person may be different from, or more complex than, the observation conditions for an aesthetic property of a symphony, but that does not entail that we cannot observe these properties.

III. TEMPORALITY OF AESTHETIC PROPERTIES OF PERSONS

Cynthia Freeland, in her *Portraits and Persons*¹⁸, observes that many contemporary philosophical discussions of the self mine literature for insights

16 BRADY, Emily and LEVINSON, Jerrold (ed.), *op. cit.*, p.56.

17 «Glamour as an Aesthetic Property of Persons», *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 63 (2005), pp. 238-239.

18 FREELAND, Cynthia, *Portraits and Persons*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, p.81.

into conceptions of the person, but rarely look to portraits. Her study focuses on how portraits can reveal much about the contemporaneous concepts of selfhood, with abundant analyses of particular instances. She rightly points out that portraits can reveal much about the sitter's personality, attitudes, and emotions, among other things. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, in his 1766 essay *Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, argues that painting, unlike poetry, can show us only appearances at a moment in time. In contrast, poetry reveals more about persons' characteristics by depicting actions in time. He tells us, for example, that Homer could not show us what Helen looked like so much as he could convey her charm, that is, her sexual charisma, by describing what she says and how even elderly men reacted to her.

While Lessing's insight seems helpful for understanding the power and limitations of each medium, I agree with Freeland that compelling portraits can reveal the interiors of their subjects. However inconsistent the two views may seem, a look at why they are not can help us see some important ontological and epistemological dimensions of aesthetic properties of persons.

Aesthetic properties of persons are manifested and perceived over time, which is why Homer can better convey Helen's spectacular erotic magnetism than he could the details of her appearance. A gifted portrait artist, however, can convey aesthetic properties of the person, such as mystery, cunning, or vivaciousness. A portrait can pique our imagination so that we envision a history of the subject's behavior and comportment and a set of expectations of how the person *would* act. We see the portrait as depicting a temporal slice of a person. A portrait stirs us to imagine a continuous narrative.

Freeland discusses John Singer Sargent's magnificent *Portrait of Madame X*, a painting that would put Sargent at the center of a scandal. Freeland describes why the painting of this American wife of a wealthy Frenchman caused such animosity:

«...[it was] also occasioned by the deliberately assumed arrogance of ... [her] pose. She turned her face away from the viewer in a show of indifference while at the same time angling her body to provide for the best full frontal view.»¹⁹

Portrait of Madame X depicts a woman that we imagine to be proud, arrogant, and haughty. The portrait makes one imagine her as a woman more satisfied with her own appearance than that of others, who is supremely comfortable in her own body, who has a proprioceptive tautness in her bearing. In order to respond in this way, one must imagine her reacting to other people and physically moving; that is, one must imagine her in time. Sargent's brilliance lies in his success in provoking our imagination in this way.

19 FREELAND, Cynthia, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

Consider Roger Scruton's observation that «the mouth is the window to the soul.» It is not «merely...an aperture, a hole in the flesh through which things are swallowed and through which things [for example, words] emerge.»²⁰ He remarks that a person's table manners, the way he treats food going into his mouth reveals something about the person—for example, if he drools food from his mouth, or chews with his mouth closed. As Scruton says,

«Table manners help to conserve the perception of the mouth as one of the windows of the soul, even in the act of eating. That is why people strive not to speak with a full mouth, or to let food drop from their mouths onto the plate.»²¹

To use Scruton's example, if we see a photo of a person eating messily, we do not know whether his mode of chewing betrays a lack of consideration for his dining companions or if it is instead symptomatic of a physical disorder. One needs to see the person through time. A sensitive portrait artist or photographer would include enough detail to suggest which hypothesis is more apt.

IV. VARIETIES OF AESTHETIC PROPERTIES OF PERSONS

To return to Barbery's *L'élégance du hérisson*, the novel has three protagonists: Paloma, Renée, and Kakuro, each of whom is in a condition of alterity in the insular, wealthy world of the Parisian apartment building in which they dwell. The two females are both dramatized narrators: one at the brink of puberty, the other in her mid-fifties; neither meets the norms of beauty in their culture, yet each possesses her own array of positive aesthetic qualities as a person. Paloma is on the brink of blossoming, while Renée has lost her bloom. The Japanese aesthetic finds beauty in both stages, as each stage expresses the ephemerality of all physical properties and states. It is M. Kakuro Ozu, a retired, widowed Japanese businessman, who discerns these quickly in each of them and who makes the effort to get better acquainted with both and to start a relationship with Renée, who intrigues him. Although we do not have the advantage of peering into his consciousness, as we do with Paloma and Renée, his refinement and subtle take on the world are evident in his fascination with them and in his attention to detail in his minimalist décor.

As a critique of European hierarchical social mores, *L'élégance* favors Japanese aesthetic culture over European culture. The Japanese aesthetic's emphasis on suggestion, asymmetry, the beauty of the weathered, and the mystique of the hidden all infuse the novel's imagery, narrative structure, and characters. The sympathetic characters, as they live their apparently undistinguished lives,

20 *Beauty: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 40.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 40.

embody these aesthetic values. Kakuro is eccentrically remarkable for valuing people for their interiors. Kakuro, with his wealth and caché as an available male of a certain age, has access to any social space he would choose; his choice is to be with Renée. She, however, has a terror of people seeing her cultivation, which, had she been from less crude origins, would give her considerable cultural capital. Barbery helps the reader understand the psychological forces that shape Renée's fears, and it is Paloma who helps liberate Renée from her anxiety. Renée and Paloma both have aberrant aesthetic and gastronomic tastes within their respective native spaces. Renée's refinement and Paloma's twelve-year-old originality are both instances of aesthetic properties of persons. Kakuro's discernment is yet another.

Other characters, most notably Colombe, Paloma's physically attractive, conventional older sister, exhibit predominantly negative aesthetic properties. Colombe has finished a thesis on William of Ockham, which falls into Renée's hands. Interestingly, Renée, despite her lack of formal education, has a deep appreciation of the history and systems of philosophy, both Western and Japanese. She is disgusted by the tedium of Colombe's approach to William of Ockham. Colombe goes through the motions; she lacks intellectual curiosity and intellectual fire. Aesthetic properties of persons range over many aspects of the human psyche from the most basic to the most sophisticated. They are never contrived. One cannot conceal them, nor can one imitate those of others. They must emanate naturally, unthinkingly, gracefully from a person's subjectivity.²² One cannot borrow an aesthetic property of a person.

V THE PHILOSOPHICAL IMPORTANCE OF PERSONS AND THEIR AESTHETIC PROPERTIES

This concept of an aesthetic property of a person is critical for our treatment of persons, as Socrates had indicated to Alcibiades. To appreciate the aesthetic properties of other persons *qua* persons is implicitly to acknowledge their autonomy, subjectivity, and agency. Discerning the aesthetic properties of persons is fundamental to seeing people as unique individuals. When we appreciate others as bodies, we objectify²³ them. Alcibiades, Plato implies, objectifies himself, because what Alcibiades can bring to the relationship has more to do with his wealth, physical beauty, and status than with his personhood. He

22 Cf. GOULD, C., *On true and false glamour*, *op. cit.*, pp.243-244.

23 The now-classic statement on objectification is in Martha Nussbaum, «Objectification,» *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 24 (1995):, pp. 249-291.

is willing to be Socrates' trophy-lover. Unwittingly, he is inviting Socrates to treat him as a common commodity.

In *L'élégance du hérisson*, Renée can affirm her own agency only after Paloma and Kakuro help her see her own brilliance, originality, wit, and charm. While aesthetic properties of persons are distinct from moral properties of persons, it is the particular constellation of aesthetic properties that makes us each irreplaceable. This does not entail that the moral dignity of persons rests on the aesthetic properties of persons. The relation between the moral and aesthetic aspects of persons requires more extensive treatment than I can offer here. Yet, as demonstrated in this article, the aesthetic properties of persons give richness and vitality to human life, make artworks possible, and humanize aesthetics.

