

## Chapter 9

# Buddhism, Beauty and Virtue

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### The Buddhist Suspicion of Beauty

Not many books discuss the Buddhist conception of beauty, but in recent years some innovative and popular Buddhist teachers have made large claims about the importance for Buddhists of appreciating the beauty of things. The Sri Lankan teacher of meditation, Godwin Samararatne, even suggests that ‘to awaken our mind’ to natural beauty is the very point of ‘getting up in the morning ... and meditation’ (Samararatne 2011, 62). Stephen Batchelor proposes that the ‘focused awareness’ Buddhists seek is ‘also an experience of beauty’, in which our aesthetic experience of the world is ‘vividly enhanced’ (Batchelor 1998, 105). Sangharakshita seems to concur with a view he attributes to some Tibetan texts, that ‘our overall attitude to life’ and the universe should be ‘purely aesthetic’ (Sangharakshita 1996, 188).

Some of these authors, however, have elsewhere had their doubts. Sangharakshita worries that there is a ‘tension’, even a ‘conflict’, between his respective urges to be ‘a seeker of truth’ and a believer in an ‘aesthetic absolute’ (Sangharakshita 1995, 55). Batchelor, recounting his disillusionment with Tibetan Buddhism, speaks of a ‘reawakening of ... aesthetic sensibility’ through his acquaintance with Zen – the only school, he adds, that appreciates the arts as a ‘practice’ rather than as ‘decorative adornments’ (Batchelor 2011, 61, 71).

I think these authors are right to have had their doubts. I, too, once had the ambition of showing how central to Buddhist teachings is a concern with the beauty of things. Further acquaintance with the texts persuaded me, however, that they do not communicate a sustained, central and positive concern with worldly beauty. By ‘the texts’ here, I mean primarily those of the Pali canon, but matters are hardly different

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with the Mahayana sutras. When enthusiasm is expressed for worldly beauty, as in *The Larger Sukhāvāṭī-vyūha*, this is, as the title of the sutra suggests, for ‘another’ world from our own – ‘The Land of Bliss’ or ‘The Pure Land’.

The predominant attitude to the beauty of things in the classical texts is one of suspicion and sometimes hostility. Physical beauty, especially that of women, is accused of causing ‘attachment’ and ‘craving’. ‘The sign of the beautiful’, explains one of *The Connected Discourses* of the Buddha, is ‘the nutriment ... for sensual desire’ (Bodhi 2000, 1568) and thereby, as a Commentary on the *Visuddhimagga* claims, of ‘greed, hate and delusion’ too (Buddhaghosa 1991, 752). Enjoyment of one thing’s beauty, and repulsion at another thing’s ugliness, is incompatible, moreover, with the great virtue of equanimity that enjoins us to be ‘mindful and clearly comprehending’ of things as *they* are, and not as they are filtered through a subjective prism (Bodhi 2000, 1609). Finally, worldly beauty is suspect since attention to it easily distracts from the ubiquity of suffering in the world. A colleague of mine, when researching on Thai Buddhism, was shown around a monastery garden by the chief monk. ‘Beautiful, isn’t it?’, sighed my friend. ‘No, no!’, replied the monk, ‘here too all is suffering’. The antidote to being seduced by beauty away from attention to suffering is the exhortation, in many of the Buddha’s discourses, to focus one’s awareness on ‘the foul’ – on, say, rotting corpses. (These and other suspicions are clearly articulated by Story 1985, 400–4004.)

The texts are not, of course, uniformly hostile to beauty. A few discourses, as well as several of the (Male) Elders’ verses (*Therāgathā*), testify to an appreciation of natural beauty by the Buddha and his monks. In the *The Numerical Discourses*, and elsewhere, the Buddha explains that, not only is beauty a legitimate desire of householders, but a reward that a woman who has lived without anger, hatred and resentment might expect when she is reborn (Nyanaponika and Bodhi 2000, 122, 134). Focusing on an object like a beautiful disc (*kasiṇa*) is also held to be useful in tranquillity meditation.

Despite these concessions, enthusiasm for the beauty of things in the Buddhist canon is, at the very least, muted. ‘The Buddhist does not avoid objects of beauty’, as one modern Sri Lankan scholar puts it, but he ‘refrains from making them the basis for ... likes and dislikes’ (Dhirasekara 1965, 10). Certainly a Buddhist should not regard these objects as the very purpose of ‘getting up in the morning’.

This downbeat verdict raises the question of why the authors cited at the beginning make such hyperbolic claims about a Buddhist enthusiasm for the beauty of things. None of them, in fact, provide any textual support for these claims, and on the rare occasions when texts are cited in support, an author is typically guilty of questionable translation or failure to understand the special context of a remark. One translator of the *Dhammapada*, for example, makes the large claim that, for the Buddha, ‘love is beauty ... [and] to see the beauty of the universe is to see [its] truth’ (Mascaró 1973, 20). He cites two passages in support. The first, from *The Collected Discourses*, he translates as ‘friendship [association and communion] with the beautiful ... is the whole of the holy life’. But as Bhikkhu Bodhi explains in his authoritative translation of the work, not only is it questionable to render the word ‘*kalya*’ as ‘beautiful’, but it refers not to the *object* of friendship or communion, but

to the quality of this relationship between human beings, monks in particular. A better translation, therefore, would speak of the holiness of good friendship, comradeship and the like (Bodhi 2000, 1524).

Mascaró also cites a passage from *The Long Discourses* where mention is made of ‘attaining to the stage of the release [or ‘deliverance’] called “the beautiful”’ (Walshe 1987, 382). But the reference here is to the meditational technique of focusing on a disc that I mentioned earlier. Whatever the efficacy of this technique in developing a person’s meditational skills, it provides not the slightest warrant for extravagant claims about the Buddha’s identification of beauty with truth. This is not to preclude the possibility that there is beauty in experiencing truth, but this would be a type of beauty I have not yet introduced, to which I now turn.

### ‘Inner’ Beauty

I have been careful to speak, so far, not of beauty *simpliciter*, but of the beauty of things and of the world. It is to these kinds or domains of beauty to which my downbeat judgement on the place of beauty in Buddhism applied. I now turn to exploring the possibility that there is another mode of beauty which is more central in Buddhist teachings.

Early on in a discussion of beauty, Bhikkhu Bodhi announces that he does ‘not use the word to refer to physical beauty, to a beautiful face and a lovely figure, but to inner beauty, the beauty of the mind’ (Bodhi 2001, 13). The Indian artist, Shakti Maira, likewise proposes that what is important in Buddhist aesthetics is ‘the beauty of an inner state of mind’ or ‘the beauty of the inner reality’ (Maira 2003, 54). Several other contemporary writers also emphasize the importance of ‘inner’ beauty in Buddhism.

‘Inner’ is not perhaps the ideal word. It might be better to refer to beauty of character, beauty of the person, or to moral beauty. For it is not, I think, the intention of the two authors I cited to postulate a private, inner realm or entity disjoined from bodily and physical existence. Indeed, to do so might be hard to reconcile with the Buddhist doctrine of not-self. So familiar has talk of inner beauty become, however, that I’ll continue to use the expression myself – but to refer, simply, to the beauty that belongs to a person in virtue of their character, moral qualities, understanding and experience. The expression, as I use it, implies no commitment to the independence of mind from body, or of an ‘inside’ from an ‘outside’.

By contrast with the beauty of things or the world, there is good textual evidence for the importance of inner beauty in the Buddhist dispensation. In the *Cakkavatti-Sīhanāda sutta*, the Buddha answers his own question, ‘What is beauty for a monk?’, with a list of merits that include right conduct, restraint, perfection in habit, and an awareness of ‘danger in the slightest fault’ (Walshe 1987, 405). In the verses of the (Female) Elders (*Therīgāthā*), who repeatedly celebrate their emancipation from a desire to cultivate physical beauty, there is an interesting reference to one nun, Subhā, who it is said ‘went forth full of faith, beautiful by reason of the true doctrine

[*saddhamma-sobhaṇā*]’ (Norman 1995, 363). In the *Abhidhamma* literature, whole sections are devoted to categorizing and defining the various forms of ‘beautiful consciousness’ (*sobhanā citta*) and the ‘beautiful mental factors’ (*sobhanā cetasika*) – including compassion, non-delusion and mindfulness – some of which are present in all the beautiful states of consciousness (Nāroda 1993).

There is, however, something unsatisfying about the many references, both in the ancient texts and in modern writings, to inner beauty. None of the authors attempt to provide a warrant for their use of the term ‘beauty’ in talking about the inner – about character and virtues, for example. Why does the Buddha not speak of the restrained, alert, right thinking monk as simply being ‘good’ or ‘holy’? Why describe him, in addition, as beautiful? And why was Subhā beautiful, rather than just virtuous, by reason of *dhamma*? Again, why does Bodhi say that loving kindness (*mettā*) brings not simply ‘joy, happiness and peace’, but ‘inner beauty to the mind’? (Bodhi 2001, 20).

In the absence of answers to these questions, the suspicion lurks that ‘beauty’ is being used in a figurative or distended way in the passages I have cited, and that it is therefore doing no real work, and adding nothing of substance, in the discussions of people’s character and mental dispositions. For what, crucially, is missing is any attempt to connect this alleged inner beauty with the beauty of things as seen, heard or otherwise perceived through the ordinary senses, such as sight and hearing. It is, after all, the domain of the sensory or phenomenal – of what may be perceptually experienced – that is surely the primary home of beauty, the one within which applications of ‘beautiful’ and other aesthetic terms first get their sense and force. As children, we learn the use of terms like ‘beautiful’ through witnessing their application to what is visible, audible or otherwise available to the senses. Only later, and on this basis, are we able to understand the application of the terms to mathematical theorems, moral virtues or the attainment of enlightenment.

The eighteenth-century pioneers of modern aesthetics – Hutcheson, Baumgarten, Kant and others – displayed their recognition of the primacy of the sensory by defining ‘beauty’ in terms of sensory experience. But it had already been recognized by much earlier thinkers, for many of whom sensory beauty was a sign of some more elevated form of beauty. Plato, for example, makes clear in *Phaedrus* (249–50) that the ‘true beauty’ of the ultimately real is something that we earthlings may only discern when ‘reminded by the sight of beauty on earth’ – beauty that is ‘apprehended’ through *sight*, ‘the keenest of our physical senses’. The route to the appreciation of ‘true beauty’ prescribed to Socrates by Diotima in *The Symposium* begins, accordingly, with the sight of ‘beautiful bodies’. For medieval Christian theologians, too, while it may be the beauty of God that finally matters, this is a notion we can make sense of only through its relationship to that of sensory beauty. As the twelfth-century founder of the Basilica of Saint-Denis, Abbé Suger, put it, ‘the multi-coloured loveliness of gems has ... transport[ed] me from material to immaterial things’, for our ‘dull mind’ is incapable of rising to the truth except ‘through that which is material’ (cited in Raguin 2003, 14). It is in this manner, too, that one

should interpret Aquinas's succinct definition of beauty as 'what pleases through being seen'.

To return to the literature on the Buddhist idea of beauty, it is true that some writers have proposed certain analogies between inner beauty and that of objects of perceptual experience, with the intention perhaps of justifying their references to inner *beauty*. Bodhi, for instance, compares a beautiful mind with a beautiful garden: neither is 'wild' or 'disorderly' (Bodhi 2001, 28). Like beautiful artworks, Maira remarks, the beautiful mind possesses 'balance', 'proportion' and 'rhythm' (Maira 2003, 54). But unless such analogies are developed and deepened, suspicion about the merely figurative use of 'beauty' re-arises, this time in the form of a worry that terms like 'disorderly', 'rhythm' and 'proportion' are being emptied of their aesthetic content when they are applied to the inner realm. The mind of a man governed by craving and delusion may be disorderly, but is this disorder seriously akin to that of an untended garden?

It is true also that some texts – albeit ones hardly typical of the Buddhist emphasis on transformation of the mind – postulate causal connections between character and physical beauty, with the purpose perhaps of inviting a transfer of the vocabulary of beauty from the latter to the former. One thinks, for example, of the passages mentioned earlier where the Buddha describes physical beauty as a future karmic reward for a virtuous life. But causal connections like this are insufficient to warrant a transfer of terms from physical beauty to its cause in a person's character. To suppose that they are sufficient is like thinking that exercise and a healthy diet, because they help you to look beautiful, must themselves be beautiful.

If references to inner beauty are to be justified, more intimate connections than ones of analogy and cause-and-effect need to be established between the inner person and the primary domain of beauty – that of phenomena, of things as experienced through the ordinary senses. The following two sections seek to establish such connections and to suggest, in addition, that these were anticipated in early Buddhist texts.

## Expression and Virtue

'The human body is the best picture of the human soul' (Wittgenstein 1969, 178). Just as a painting may express the feelings of an artist, so the body – through gesture, comportment, facial expression, or demeanour – is an expression of a person's 'inner reality', his or her character. It is, I propose, only when the inner finds beautiful expression in the bodily that there is good reason to speak of inner beauty. When it does find such expression, it is not difficult to see why we should want to extend references to the beauty of what does the expressing – a gesture, say – to that of what is expressed, such as the virtue of compassion. This extension resembles the one we naturally make when, for instance, describing a mood as angry because of the angry behaviour that we take to be an expression of it. Or when a person's

attitude is described as cheerful because of the cheerful smile and gestures that convey it to other people.

The beautiful soul, one might say, is beautiful because its bodily expression in the world is beautiful. Expression, therefore, is just the kind of intimate connection required between the inner and the outer if aesthetic terms are to loop back, as it were, from the outer to the inner. It will be useful in what follows to have a single word for what it is about a person's character, mind or 'inner reality' that qualifies it for being described as beautiful. I propose the word 'virtue'. This is not to be taken in a narrow sense, as applying only to moral virtues like fairness and honesty, but in a sense that encompasses admirable aspects of a person – such as mindfulness and equanimity – that might not, in modern society, be counted among the specifically moral virtues.

The claim made in this section, then, is that the virtuous mind or character is only beautiful because it finds beautiful expression in and through the body. The idea that virtue, like courage, finds bodily expression is no more difficult and controversial than the idea of bodily expression of feelings, like anger and sadness. A gesture, for example, is an expression of anger or courage when it is itself angry or courageous, and in a way that presents itself as having such a quality, at least to the mindful observer. There is, however, a challenge to the claim that does require addressing. Why, it will be asked, should virtue – at all generally, at least – find expression in beautiful gestures, comportment and the like? Isn't it a matter of luck – a merely contingent matter – whether or not compassion, say, or humility is beautifully expressed? And if it is, then expression cannot be the intimate connection between the inner and the outer that we were seeking.

My response to the challenge is that the connection is not at all a contingent one or a matter of luck. I want to say that beauty – an important form of it, at least – that is expressed bodily just *is* the expression of virtue. More exactly: we recognize and appreciate gestures, facial expressions and so on as beautiful precisely because we experience them as expressions of virtue. The woman's smile, for example, is found to be beautiful because it is seen to express compassion. The monk's comportment is judged to be beautiful because it is experienced as an expression of humility. It may, of course, be that in a particular case the expression of compassion or humility is faked. But that doesn't alter the fact that our ground for finding the smile or comportment beautiful is the *perception* of it as an expression of virtue. Behaviour that expresses anger may be feigned: that does not mean that the connection between angry behaviour and an angry mood is merely contingent. Nor is the connection between beauty of expression and virtue.

This 'virtue-centric' view of bodily beauty, as it might be labelled (see Cooper 2009), was articulated by Immanuel Kant in a section, rather neglected until recently, of his *Critique of Judgement* called 'The ideal of beauty' (Kant 2008, §17). Beauty, he argues, belongs in the first instance to the human body, and it does so because of the body's manifestation of moral virtues like benevolence and courage. But there are indications in Buddhist texts too of this virtue-centric view. In the verses cited earlier about the nun, Subhā, it is implied that it is appropriate to call her '*beautiful* by reason of *dhamma*' because of the ways her holiness is manifested in her per-

sonal cleanliness and the calm and grace of her comportment. Relevant, too, are the many testimonies to the Buddha's physical beauty. Some of these, especially the more florid ones in *The Buddhacarita*, concentrate on his sexual attractiveness to women who are 'overpowered by passion' in his presence. But even in this work, the point is sometimes that the Buddha is found to be physically beautiful – even or especially by people 'with pure minds' – because of the 'gentle disposition' and other virtues that his 'fine countenance' and posture manifest (Aśvaghōṣa 1894, III.2, IV.3). And according to canonical texts, among 'the thirty-two marks' of the Great Man, nearly all of which make for a 'manly' physical beauty, are included – alongside having 'the torso of a lion' and 'straight limbs' – aspects of the Buddha's comportment, such as effortless grace of movement, cleanliness, and calm that are expressions of his virtue (Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi 1995, 89f).

It is not only in the Pali and Sanskrit literature that there is evidence of a virtue-centric understanding of bodily beauty. In East Asian Buddhist writings, too, there are similar indications. Here, for example, is a modern author's summary of the concept of *yūgen* as developed by the medieval Japanese architect of Nō drama, Zeami Motokiyo, a Zen Buddhist. This quality of mystery that the drama seeks to evoke is one of beauty, yet this is a 'beauty not merely of appearance, but of the spirit'. Indeed, it is this 'inner beauty' of *yūgen* that Zeami emphasizes. It is made clear, however, that this inner quality possesses beauty precisely because of the way it 'manifest[s] itself outwards', in the beautiful gestures, glances and poise of the actors (Ueda 1995, 182).

That there is no warrant for referring to inner beauty – for speaking of the virtuous mind or character as beautiful – unless this beauty is expressed in and through the body is, then, a claim that is at least suggested in various Buddhist writings. But does beautiful bodily expression provide a sufficient warrant for speaking of inner beauty? There is, it seems to me, something missing from what has so far been said. There is, at any rate, a further dimension of the expression of 'inner reality' that has not yet been exposed. It is the purpose of the next section to repair this omission.

### **'Attracting the Heart'**

For a person's character or 'inner reality' to qualify as beautiful, it must, I want to say, be 'magnetic'. It must, to borrow the title of a book about Sri Lankan Buddhism that I discuss below, 'attract the heart'. It matters little, for my purposes, whether this magnetism or attraction is thought of as a further condition of inner beauty, in addition to bodily expression, or as an aspect of this expression that deserves to be made salient in an account of inner beauty. Either way, it is going to be in and through the body that a person exercises magnetism and attracts hearts.

That beauty must be magnetic and attractive, through exerting an energy or radiance that draws people to it, is an idea to be found in Plato, Plotinus and later Neo-Platonist Christian thinkers such as the Pseudo-Dionysius. Indeed, it is this magnetism, such thinkers maintained, that distinguishes the beautiful from the

good. There is an elegant modern statement of the idea by Michael McGhee in his discussion of ‘the beautiful soul’. ‘Certain states of a person’, he writes, ‘can be considered “beautiful”’, and this is because the person who exemplifies such beauty ‘embodies or mediates a certain concentration of energy’. This energy sustains ‘a certain demeanour and perspective’, and through this ‘radiates and attracts’. It is an energy, McGhee continues, that is aptly described as an ‘object’ or ‘form of eros’ (McGhee 2000, 183).

This seems right. For a person to count as beautiful, it is not enough that his or her virtue shows up in some way – in, let’s say, donations that they make to charities, or in morally uplifting books that they write. It must show up in an aesthetically charged way – in gestures, say, or demeanour, ‘style’ and presence – that draws others, sensitive to the ‘energy’ being radiated, to the person.

Interestingly, McGhee gives the example of a bodhisattva as someone who qualifies in this manner to be regarded as a beautiful soul. Many Buddhists would welcome the example. It is worth pointing out before continuing that when McGhee and I talk of ‘the beautiful soul’, we do not intend to refer to an immaterial entity distinct from the body or to a ‘substance’ underlying a person’s changing mental states. We do not, that is, have in mind anything that is rejected in Buddhist texts that deny the existence of the soul, any more than we do when speaking of ‘soul music’. The phrase ‘the beautiful soul’ has become part of Western philosophical discourse, and is a convenient one – when stripped of metaphysical implications – for speaking of the beauty of a person’s mind, character and life. Buddhists, as I said, should welcome the example of the bodhisattva as someone with a beautiful soul. For, just as there was recognition that inner beauty must be bodily expressed, so there is an acknowledgement in some Buddhist texts that inner beauty must attract.

Consider once more the texts that attest to the Buddha’s personal beauty. Gotama, according to the *Buddhacarita*, was ‘radiant in his beauty’, and seeing him there ‘stand[ing] in his beauty’, men and women are drawn to ‘devote’ themselves and ‘offer reverence’ to him (Aśvaghōṣa 1894, III.23-4). Or consider the sequence of verses in the *Dhammapada* in which the search for perfection is compared to a person’s – or a bee’s – search for a beautifully scented flower. The words and actions of someone, in order to be beautiful, must exude a ‘perfume’ that attracts others. ‘The perfume of virtue’, one verse tells us, ‘gives joy to the soul’, as does ‘the light of wisdom’ emitted by a truly enlightened follower of the *dhamma* (Mascaró 1973, vv.44–59). Inner beauty exerts the same magnetism on the searcher for perfection as a flower’s scent does on the bee.

The theme of beauty’s magnetism is a persistent one. In the thirteenth century, the Japanese Zen master, Dōgen, observed that the body of a true follower of Buddhism ‘feels at ease’, and its ‘actions take on grace’, so that this person’s ‘appearance attracts others’ (Dōgen 1971, 45–6). Here, incidentally, Dōgen is almost certainly recalling not only Buddhist discussions, but a Daoist and Confucian tradition in which the *de* (‘virtue’) of ‘the consummate person’ or sage is conceived of in terms of charisma, of an inner goodness that is also a power to influence and attract others.



Beauty's magnetism is attested to by contemporary Buddhists, too. In his book, *Attracting the Heart*, Jeffrey Samuels examines 'the aesthetics of the emotions' in present-day Sri Lankan religious life. His research provides a rich source of Buddhist testimonies, mainly from monks and novices, to the magnetic power of moral beauty. His interlocutors speak, for example, of how they try to 'go beautifully in order to attract the people's hearts' – through their dignified gait, say, or clean-shaven cleanliness. A monk must be 'beautiful to the eye' – or to the ear, when reciting verses – in order to make people 'feel longing' for the holy life (Samuels 2010, xxiv, 78–9). As Samuels points out, his research confirms the value of Michael Carrithers' thesis of an 'aesthetic standard' that informs Buddhist practice and invests it with 'a quality of bodily movement ... posture ... speech and action' (Carrithers 1990, 158). Indeed, it seems to confirm that the purpose of some of the *Patimokkha* rules in the *Vinaya Piṭaka* is, as Samuels puts it, to 'transform a monk into an aesthetically pleasing object' (Samuels 2010, 72).

This and preceding sections of the chapter have attempted to justify the notion of inner beauty – a beauty of the person or character – that several authors attribute to Buddhist thinking. I have tried, too, to show that such a justification is at least intimated in Buddhist texts and testimony. What I have argued, and what is intimated in these texts, is that virtue, in order to constitute beauty of character, must be beautifully expressed in and through the body, in a way moreover that exerts magnetism or attraction.

Attention turned to inner beauty in the wake of my downbeat assessment of Buddhism's concern with the worldly beauty of things. This is not to say, however, that there can be no such concern, and in the final section of the chapter I explore the possibility that a distinctively Buddhist understanding of beauty in art may be inspired by the Buddhist understanding of inner beauty. Earlier, I questioned Batchelor's assertion that awakened experience is 'an experience of beauty', but maybe he is right to suggest, immediately afterwards, that through the awareness sought by Buddhists 'our appreciation of the arts is also enriched' (Batchelor 1998, 105). If this right, however, it will only be because the beauty appreciated in art is intimately related to the inner beauty that I have been discussing.

## Body, Art and Beauty

Let me first, however, set aside an account of the Buddhist notion of beauty in art with which my own might be confused. For some Buddhists, the most un-Buddhist feature of our ordinary discourse of beauty is its discrimination, on the basis of subjective experience, between beautiful and non-beautiful things. 'The "beauty" that simply stands opposed to ugliness is not true beauty ... [but] a dualistic idea', wrote the Japanese Buddhist theorist of art and craft, Yanagi Sōetsu. True beauty, he continues, is a state of mind, of 'freedom from impediment' and 'preoccupation'. And for someone who achieves this state of mind, 'everything is beautiful', including all works of art (Yanagi 1989, 130, 138).

These remarks try, in their way, to relate beauty in the world to an inner, ‘true’ beauty of mind, but unsuccessfully. The fact that Yanagi himself constantly makes the very distinctions between beautiful and vulgar – or graceful and garish – artworks that he enjoins us to rise above is not a fatal objection, but it does indicate a serious problem. Whether or not an intelligible concept of beauty, according to which everything is beautiful, can be developed, it is clear that this would not be our ordinary, central concept of beauty. But it is precisely this that people surely have in mind when they ask if there is a distinctive Buddhist understanding of beauty in the world and in art. To be told that, on the Buddhist understanding of ‘true beauty’, all art is beautiful is, in effect, to be told that Buddhism has nothing to contribute to the aesthetics of beauty in art.

The challenge is to work outwards towards a notion of beauty in the world and in art – one that is compatible with ‘discrimination’ between the beautiful and the non-beautiful – from the notion of inner beauty that I articulated earlier. The first step in this procedure is a very short one. We have already encountered, in effect, a clear-cut, indeed paradigmatic, case of worldly beauty – in the gesture, demeanour, comportment or whatever that gives beautiful expression to virtue of character, and thereby justifies reference to inner beauty. The body and its actions are in and of the world, their beauty is, in this sense at least, worldly beauty.

Crucially, we have also encountered a case where beauty of bodily expression is at the same time a case of beauty in art. Towards the end of the section ‘Expression and virtue’, I noted Zeami’s view that a certain kind of inner beauty ‘manifests itself outwards’ in the gestures, glances and poise of a man. But this man is an actor in a Nō drama, whose beautiful bodily expression therefore belongs to an art form. More generally, in an appropriate context bodily movements and activity may constitute artistic performance – a dance, say, or a mime. In such contexts, there is no difficulty in seeing that art inherits, via the bodily activity that constitutes it, the inner beauty that it expresses.

This point may be extended to some other arts and practices, including many of those that, in East Asia, are called ‘ways’ (Japanese *do*, as in judo). Not all of these – swordsmanship, for example, or calligraphy (*shodo*), or the way of tea (*chado*) – figure on the standard Western lists of ‘The Arts’, and certainly not of ‘The Fine Arts’. But in Asia a distinction between arts and crafts, and between these and various other *do*, is not a marked one. Indeed, it is regarded as an artificial and potentially misleading dualism. (One reason for this is mentioned below.)

Arts or ‘ways’ like archery, the tea ceremony and gardening differ from dance and mime, typically, in having a practical purpose, such as hitting a target, making tea or creating a garden. That is one reason why, again typically, these arts require the use of ‘instruments’ – a sword, a tea whisk, a hoe – as well as bodily movement. But it is not unnatural to regard these instruments as extensions of the body, as honorary parts of the body, so to speak. For in none of these practices is the instrument a mere tool, to be used in a way dictated solely by a goal. These instruments are to be used with respect and, like one’s hands, with expression. The Zen gardener or tea master is not just clearing away weeds or brewing up a nice cup of tea. He is engaged in a practice that bodies forth the virtues, including compassion and humility, mind-

fulness and friendship. In effect, he is concerned to practice an art or follow a way in a beautiful style. Like Zeami's actor or a dancer in a Buddhist temple, the gardener and tea master – through their own and their extended, 'honorary' body – seek for beautiful physical expression of an inner beauty.

Some readers, at this stage, will reasonably ask how the idea of outer beauty as an expression of the inner applies to *works of art*, and not simply to artistic bodily practices. Two points, however, should immediately be made that reduce the urgency of this request. The first is that in many of the Buddhist inspired arts or ways, the sharp distinction familiar in Western discourse between practice and product, between artistry and art-work, is rejected. It may be an exaggeration to say that, for Zen gardeners, 'caring for the garden is not a chore, but the very point of having a garden in the first place' (Keane 1996, 128). But it not only conveys that gardening is not a mere means to an end – the garden itself – but that, as a place that depends on a gardener's continuing care, the garden is not a finished product distinct from the practice of making and maintaining it. To focus, therefore, on the beauty of a practice is not, in the case of many 'ways', to ignore the beauty of something – the 'work' – that is separable from the practice.

Second, even when a distinction is made between a bodily action and its artistic product, many Buddhist artists would refuse to accept that aesthetic attention should exclusively, or even primarily, be devoted to the latter. It is easy enough, of course, to distinguish a calligrapher's action in drawing with a brush and ink from the characters – there before our eyes on a piece of paper – that are the result of this action. But when it is said of the twentieth-century Buddhist priest and calligrapher, Kobara Sensei, that he and his art 'had become one' (Davey 2007, loc 219), the point is to emphasize that the products of the man's art are not to be appreciated in isolation from admiration for the man himself, for the virtues, like kindness, that enable his works to look the way they do.

Kobara's virtue – his inner beauty – enables his works to look as they do in and through the bodily movements, the physical style, that at once express it and create the characters on the paper. This is an example of the general way in which, for Buddhists, art-works inherit the inner beauty of the people who make them. By giving a sense of the beautiful bodily engagement through which they came into existence, the works themselves body forth the inner beauty of the virtues. Interestingly in twentieth-century Western art criticism, there also developed an appreciation of works as expressive of the bodily activity responsible for them. A significant aspect, for example, of people's enjoyment of works by Van Gogh, Rodin and Pollock is the palpable sense these works provide of a strength and energy that went into their making. The difference between this episode in Western art appreciation and the more abiding Asian tradition I have been discussing is the concern in the latter for the moral beauty that is expressed in an artist's bodily practice.

By extending to art the idea of the body as being beautiful in and through its 'magnetic' expression of inner beauty, it is possible, then, to endorse Stephen Batchelor's remark that Buddhism is not just 'inner experiences. It is known through buildings, gardens, sculptures, paintings, calligraphy, poetry and craftwork' and 'present in' the marks and gestures of 'artists and artisans' (Batchelor 2011, 151).

Still, some people will wonder, aren't there beautiful works of art that do not give any sense of the bodily activity – or of the person – responsible for their production? Aren't there, that is, beautiful works that are silent about their provenance and are not, therefore, expressions of inner beauty? Possibly there are, but these will not be works that Buddhism encourages us to experience and enjoy. At the very least, they are works that – rather like the women, mentioned earlier, who possess 'the sign of the beautiful' – must be approached with circumspection, for they invite attachment and craving. They would be works, in one Buddhist author's words, whose 'aesthetic value lies only in our own conditioned appreciation', so that we have no consistent 'yardstick by which to measure [their] beauty' (Story 1985, 403). It may be, therefore, that there are modes of beauty to which some people attest but that cannot be accepted as authentic ones by Buddhists. This will only sound like a criticism of Buddhism to those persuaded by a recent popular tendency to present Buddhism as an entirely genial spiritual dispensation that smilingly welcomes almost the whole range of people's tastes and enjoyments.

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