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Reviewed work(s):

Source: *Classical Philology*, Vol. 105, No. 4, Special Issue: Beauty, Harmony, and the Good.

Edited by Elizabeth Asmis (October 2010), pp. 357-362

Published by: [The University of Chicago Press](http://www.uchicago.edu)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/659325>

Accessed: 02/04/2012 06:56

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losophy, beginning with the love of theater, is, in its refined form, still a love of spectacle. "Who then do you say are the true philosophers?" Socrates is asked, and he replies: "Those who love the spectacle of truth" (*tous tês alêtheias philotheamonas*, Pl. *Resp.* 475e). So although a philosophical life may in its more workaday moments be importantly informed by a love of wisdom, it both begins with and culminates in a love of clearly seen splendor, a love of beauty.

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## RESPONSE TO KOSMAN

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What does *to kalon* mean? And why on earth do we have such a hard time answering this question? On the one hand, it seems to mean beautiful not just because we find it on vases and in poetry describing alluring young bodies, bodies that we find natural to describe as beautiful, but also because there has been a more or less continuous philosophical discussion beginning with the nature of the *kalon* and ending with the nature of the beautiful. As Aryeh Kosman has reminded us, Aquinas begins his discussion of the *pulchrum* by referring to the Neoplatonic Dionysius' account of the *kalon*; later, we find that Shaftesbury's theory of beauty is indebted to what Aristotle says about the *kalon* in poetry, ethics, and nature (which, interestingly, he treats as continuous with what Cicero says about the *honestum*!), as well as to the Cambridge Platonists.<sup>1</sup> These philosophers certainly seem to be thinking about the same thing.<sup>2</sup> At least, the later philosophers seem to take themselves to be talking about the same thing as the earlier ones. So when *kalon* appears in ancient philosophical texts, it is often translated as "beautiful." And often that seems appropriate.

On the other hand, it often does not seem appropriate to translate this way. Kosman has offered a host of marvelous examples: figwood soup spoons; burying one's parents and being buried by one's children in turn; wisdom and, the most troubling, morally virtuous action. As he explains, although "the concepts of beauty and of the *kalon* share a central and important applicability to the countenance . . . of persons," after this point "their semantic courses diverge" (see p. 351 above). Whereas we go on to treat landscapes and paintings and music as central cases of beauty, the Greeks turn instead to actions, institutions, and virtues as paradigm cases of the *kalon*. The fact

1. Shaftesbury [1711] 1999; see esp. p. 415 n. 25 and p. 353 n. 12.

2. Although there are differences or disagreements among these philosophers about what the *kalon* / *pulchrum* / beautiful is, a common thread is the idea that this property is a sort of orderliness and proportionality of form of which a spectator is immediately aware and which gives pleasure. There are significant differences in the way these philosophers link their concept to the good, but it is notable that they all *do* link it to goodness in some way or other; this is so even of Shaftesbury, who is evidently talking about what we call beauty.

that the Greeks can go on applying *kalon* in a way that seems not to conform to our rules for applying “beautiful” raises the question whether *kalon* means beautiful even in the apparently unproblematic case of the *kalon* body inflaming *erôs*. Kosman is tempted to ask whether the Greeks even had the concept of beauty. Outlandish as it may initially seem, I think this is an excellent question to raise. The modern-day translator’s anxiety centers around whether *kalon* can mean beautiful in the case of moral virtue, but the difficulty of that case should also lead us to wonder whether it quite means beautiful in those contexts, the contexts of love and of art, where the attribution of beauty strikes us as more philosophically reputable. This is not a campaign to strike “beautiful” from the dictionary entry for *kalon*. Nor is the point to suggest that the Greeks failed to notice what we call “beauty.” The point, rather, is to wonder whether, when they noticed beauty, it seemed to them to be sharply different from the (to us quite distinct) merit of moral virtue or well-made wooden spoons. The answer should affect our readings of philosophical arguments that turn on the idea of the *kalon* (see pp. 351–53 above).

So we are faced with this problem: an intellectual history of treating ancient discussion of *to kalon* as a discussion of beauty and an uneasy sense of how strange it would be to regard some of the central cases of *to kalon* as beautiful. The *kalon* seems both to be and not to be the beautiful. The great interest of Kosman’s account is that it explains our difficulty. He claims that both terms have, as it were, the same definition: they both refer to the virtue of appearance. Their meanings are different, however, because our understanding of appearance differs considerably from the Greek understanding. Whereas for us an appearance is, above all, a mere surface appearance, for the Greeks an appearance is, in the first instance, the manifestation or presence to immediate awareness of the thing’s being. Thus, whereas our beauty is superficial, sensible, and possibly deceitful, the Greek *kalon* reveals a thing’s goodness and is not limited to the sensible surfaces of things.

I think this is a fascinating interpretation. Indeed, I would like to suggest a way that Kosman might extend his analysis. But I am not sure that we draw the same lesson from the story he has told. Whereas Kosman concludes that *kalon* and beautiful are different, but interestingly connected concepts, I wonder whether the difference is not so much a difference in concepts as it is in philosophical theories of those concepts. This, of course, is a tricky issue. Philosophical theories affect the ordinary meanings of words, and I think this has especially been true of the concept of beauty. Still, I would like to press the issue of whether *kalon* is as distant from the ordinary sense of “beautiful” as Kosman suggests.

First, though, let me suggest a way we could extend Kosman’s story. The idea of appearance—or perhaps it would be better to say “immediate presence”<sup>3</sup>—is central to both the *kalon* and the beautiful, but so too is

3. We need to say something like this to get around the objection that the *kalon* is, for Plato, as much a property of the Forms as of the phenomenal world. For example, when Diotima describes the lover’s encounter with “the beauty of knowledge,” also called a “great sea of beauty,” as giving rise to *philosophia*, she suggests that the objects of genuine knowledge are beautiful (*Symp.* 210d).

pleasure. Both the beautiful and the *kalon* are the essentially pleasing (to a spectator) virtue of appearance. Now, just as there has been a shift in the meaning of appearance, so too there has been a shift in the understanding of pleasure. Nowadays, pleasure is often thought of as a nonrepresenting, likable tingle. But for the Greeks, or at least for Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics, pleasure is practically meaningful. In the *Philebus*, for example, Plato seems to argue that pleasure represents the agent's situation to himself as in some sense good (36c–40d; cf. *Leg.* 657c). And Aristotle conceives of pleasure as a (fallible) indication that one's activity is going well (*Eth. Nic.* 10.4 1174b15–23). So for these philosophers (and here I am making use of Kosman's analysis), when a person delights in something *kalon*, he intuitively feels that the presence, the manifestation of this thing's goodness is a good thing from his own point of view. Thus it is no surprise that these philosophers take the pleasure afforded by the *kalon* to be ethically significant while a parallel interest in the beautiful strikes contemporary philosophers as odd and perhaps decadent. For, according to many contemporary philosophers, not only is pleasure in general a nonrepresenting sensation, but aesthetic pleasure in particular is essentially divorced from our role as agents.

Kosman's argument—and my extension of it—presupposes that *kalon* is not equivocal, sometimes meaning beautiful and other times meaning good or commendable or admirable. I, of course, agree with him that the meanings “good” and “beautiful” for *kalon* are not merely accidentally related, “for example through the happenstance—the metonymic flukes as it were—of linguistic history” (see p. 347 above). I suspect most other people would, too. But one might accept this point and nevertheless think it is a mistake to construe *to kalon* as referring to some unfamiliar amalgam of goodness and beauty. One might instead argue that it names some much thinner concept, such as the praiseworthy or the commendable. We need a fuller argument than Kosman has so far given us that the *kalon* is as interesting a concept as he assumes. Obviously, I cannot take this up in detail now. But I will make a suggestion on his behalf. It seems to me that it is hard to make sense of Plato's argument in the *Symposium* according to which souls can be drawn from *kala* bodies to *kalai* souls to *kaloi* laws to *kalai* scientific theories unless we assume that, for him, *kalon* has the same sense in all these cases and, moreover, names a property of these things that is at once common to them all and of philosophical and practical significance. Simply treating the *kalon* as the generically desirable or commendable will not do for the ladder of love, for that image suggests that the higher rungs are somehow more perfect versions of the very quality that elicited desire at an earlier stage. Similarly, Plato's argument at *Republic* 401b–403c that one's taste for the *kalon* in poetry, music, and boys' bodies shapes one's sense of the *kalon* in human character is not persuasive unless there is some robust unity to the concept. The point is not so much that his argument is not in fact persuasive; the point is that it is hard to see how Plato himself could have thought it was persuasive unless he thought that *kalon* named something robust. Likewise for Aristotle: the comparison of the virtuous person's delight in *kala* acts of virtue to the musically educated person's pleasure in *kaloi* melodies (*Eth. Nic.* 1170a8–10) would hardly be worth making if *kalon* did not mean the same

thing in both cases and point to a property more interesting than the merely commendable.

So, so much for my agreement with Kosman. Now for the disagreements. Kosman offers several reasons for thinking that *to kalon* and the beautiful diverge. They are: (1) several cases in which it seems bizarre or uncharitable to translate *kalon* as “beautiful”; (2) the claim that, unlike “beautiful,” *kalon* applies to things that cannot be perceived through the senses; (3) the claim that art is a central case of beauty but not of *to kalon*; and, (4) the claim that beauty is a value of the surfaces of things, potentially covering rot within while *to kalon* is somehow linked to the essential goodness of the thing. Let me begin with the general claims before turning to the examples.

First, the relationship between beauty and the senses. Plato believes that wisdom is *kalon*, but, Kosman says, it is strange to think of wisdom as beautiful: “A certain *display* of wisdom might be said to be beautiful. But not *wisdom* itself” (see p. 349 above; my emphasis). It’s not that wisdom is ugly; it “doesn’t *look like anything*” (p. 353 above).

However, it does not strike me as strange to attribute beauty to wisdom or any other nonsensible thing, at least in principle. It is common to say that a person is beautiful, where what we are describing is his character. And mathematicians and scientists routinely describe the proofs and theories of their disciplines as beautiful. Moreover, as central a philosopher to the history of modern aesthetics as Hutcheson can speak of the beauty of proofs. So I simply deny that the concept of beauty is limited to what we can literally perceive. The point, it seems to me, is not that beauty can be perceived, but that it is, like sensible properties, a property of which we are immediately aware. (Thus Hutcheson speaks of an internal, as opposed to an external, sense of beauty.) It is, in other words, a feature of appearances, whether seen, heard, or thought. It is, of course, true that Kant and the modern discipline of aesthetics limited beauty to perceptual appearances, but perhaps the thing to say is: so much the worse for their theories. In terms of ordinary usage, it seems to me that “beautiful” and *kalon* apply to the same ontological categories.

Likewise, I am not persuaded that the concept of beauty is specially linked to art in a way that the *kalon* is not. I have been told that ranchers discuss at length the beauty of their cattle; I am routinely struck by the beauty of my neighbor, Mary Giacamoni’s, vegetable garden, “plotted and pieced, fold, fallow, and plow”; and admiration for the beauty of character—as in, “she’s a beautiful person”—is as central to our ordinary concept of beauty as the beauty of a Manet.<sup>4</sup> I would hazard a guess that people’s aesthetic taste is developed by reference to these nonartistic cases of beauty. It is true that beautiful cattle and vegetables have not been central to philosophical reflection. But look: in retrospect we can see that making art a primary topic of the discipline that calls itself *aesthetics* depended on some historically con-

4. In discussion, Kosman pointed out that in *Pied Beauty* Hopkins describes a “landscape plotted and pieced . . .” and so proves his point rather than mine.

tingent and not obviously correct assumptions about the nature of being appeared to and about the nature of art. It seems likely to me that combining the study of beauty and of art into a single discipline also relies on some questionable assumptions about the function of art and about what counts as a genuinely aesthetic response. My point is not to deny that music and paintings are central cases of beauty or even to deny that good artworks must be beautiful. My point is only to question whether a philosophical investigation of beauty should make artistic beauty its starting point and touchstone.

I also am not persuaded that artistic examples are at the periphery of the concept of the *kalon*. In the *Republic*, *kalon* music and poetry forms the young guardians' taste for what is *kalon* in every other area of life. The ersatz-philosophers of Book 5 who are voracious for "understanding" of the many *kala* "sounds, colors, and shapes" (476b) are to be found in the theater. And in *Laws* 2, Plato devotes considerable effort to giving an account of the *kalon* that applies to music, poetry, and dance. Likewise, as I have already mentioned, when Aristotle wants to describe the sort of pleasure the virtuous person takes in the *kalon*, he compares him to a *mousikos* delighting in beautiful tunes. It certainly seems that *mousikê* is an important and as intuitive a case of the *kalon* as is the alluring object of love.

Finally, a point about the superficiality of beauty. As I said before, I agree with the central thesis of Kosman's paper, that the difference of meaning between *kalon* and "beautiful" depends on a shift in our understanding of appearance. Consequently we do, in the first instance, think of beauty as something that might be only skin deep. But, we are also familiar with the distinction between prettiness and beauty. Being pretty is a merely surface attraction. When we say that something or someone is beautiful rather than pretty, we mean that the beauty is nobler than and not to be brushed aside as superficial charm. Furthermore, we sometimes experience the beauty of a thing as revealing something about what it is.

Now for the thorny examples from the *Hippias Major*. I am not sure that these cases *do* make it awkward to translate *kalon* as "beautiful." Take the *kalon* wooden spoon. Socrates does *not* present this as an example of something that is obviously *kalon* and more *kalon* than a golden spoon. The context is this: Hippias has suggested that the *kalon*—the cause of things being *kalon*—is gold. Notice that this definition makes some sense if *kalon* means beautiful, for it is understandable that someone might think that gold *beautifies*. Socrates replies by asking why, if this account is correct, Phidias used ivory rather than gold to make the eyes of his statue of Athena. After all, Phidias was, presumably, trying to make his statue *kalon*. (By the way: this is an example that suggests that artworks are central to the concept of the *kalon*.<sup>5</sup>) Hippias then modifies his account; the *kalon* is whatever is appropriate. It is at this point that Socrates brings up the wooden spoon. Since wood

5. Or at least it suggests that *statues* are central instances of the *kalon*. Perhaps the Greeks didn't have the concept of *art* either, but it strikes me as even more questionable to link our concept of beauty to a very limited conception of art, a sort of art that most English speakers only rarely experience.

is more appropriate than gold for soup spoons, wooden spoons must be more *kalon*. The point is: Socrates is trying to make trouble for Hippias with this example, and the example could cause trouble only if, in fact, Hippias is inclined to think that wooden spoons, appropriate as they may be, are not *kalon*. And indeed, in the dialogue, the example does make trouble for Hippias' definition. He resists drawing the conclusion and tries mightily to change the subject. In the end, he grants Socrates' point only so that he can push it aside and offer another, better account of the *kalon*. There is no indication in this exchange that anyone actually finds it intuitive to favor a wooden spoon over a golden one on the grounds that it is more *kalon*. Hippias certainly does not. Of course, Plato probably *does* think the wooden spoon is more *kalon*. That is to say, I contend, he probably thinks a wooden spoon is more beautiful. This may strike us as bizarre, but not because "beautiful" is a forced translation of *kalon*; it is bizarre because it is the judgment of an austere taste. At any rate, my point is that this example from the *Hippias Major* does not pose a difficulty for translating *kalon* as "beautiful."

The example of burying one's parents and being buried by one's children is more difficult. Still, it is important to notice that this is *one* example of the *kalon*. That is to say, what's *kalon* is the entire arrangement of a life in which one outlives one's parents and is, in turn, outlived by one's children. I agree with Kosman that it is odd to offer this as an example of something beautiful. Hippias is an odd fellow. But perhaps what is odd here is not that we cannot think of this state of affairs as beautiful (it does display a gratifying orderliness), but rather that its beauty ought to be a trivial concern. Beauty, after all, is pleasant, and it is uncomfortable to consider the death of one's parents and of oneself from a vantage point that reveals its charm.

The most troubling example of something *kalon* is, of course, the *kalon* that Aristotle's virtuous person sets as the goal of his action. Could it be integral to virtue to aim at beauty in action? The idea does indeed seem outlandish if we think of beauty as the property of mere appearances that elicits the disinterested pleasure of a playful imagination, unlimited by any sense of whether the beautiful object is in any way good or, indeed, real. If aesthetic appreciation is a disinterested, contemplative attention to the surfaces of things, then making the beauty of action one's central concern does indeed miss the moral point. What I have been trying to suggest, though, is that this conception of beauty may not fit so well with our ordinary concept of beauty. The beauty of cattle to the rancher, of rows of peppers and tomatoes to the gardener, of an elegant proof, of a well-laid table . . . these beauties require some practical competence to see and often shape the character of a person's life. So, too, for the case of virtue. When we see a vicious person in action we sometimes do feel as if we are witnessing a repugnant human deformity; in other words, vice is ugly. Perhaps Plato and Aristotle give pride of place in their ethics to *to kalon* because they are struck by how very attractive, how inspiring of longing and emulation, the virtuous person is, at least for those with eyes decent enough to see. One of the great dividends of studying the *kalon*, it seems to me, is that we turn our philosophical attention to aspects of our own experience of beauty that have been neglected.