

# Women's Fashion: Function of Sex or Social Construction?

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**Abstract:** A perennial influence on the aesthetics of fashion, fostered by Plato and Aristotle, is challenged today by a prevalent social constructionism. The latter embraces an impracticable *biodenial* as well as an incoherent epistemic relativism, reminiscent of Greek Sophism, whereby truth-claims about good fashion may be both true and false either in the same culture at different times or at the same time in different cultures. But a normative aesthetics of Aristotle and Plato, that affirms an epistemic realism, roots women's fashion in their psychobiological nature. The relation of this nature to their sex proceeds *paripassu* with an erogeneity proper to women's fashion. The case for this fashion as a mode of art that fulfills the complementary natures of men as well as women is not merely coherent. Beyond the coherence, the case is evidenced by the healthfulness of good art that ranges from its beneficial effects in architecture to medical findings on beautiful music such as Bach, Mozart, Celtic and Indian.

**Keywords:** art, aesthetics, architecture, fashion, medicine, music, Plato, Aristotle, value of beauty, beauty fulfilling our psychobiological nature.

Several caveats are in order before examining women's fashion. First, this essay requires a frank analysis of sex in terms of fashion. Second, while the title may seem to commit a false dichotomy by ignoring other fashion influences, from social revolution to religion, some influences are noted precisely by way of sex and social construction. Third, a disregard of male fashion stems from seeking to make this essay succinct and an assumption *ceteris paribus*, without either being sexist or begging the question about asexual basis of fashion, that women more than men have historically highlighted their bodies by stylistic trends.<sup>1</sup> So the trends, it may reasonably be supposed, can illustrate the provoking themes of sex versus social

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Ashley Mears, 'The Social Construction of Men's Worth-lessness in Fashion Modeling', Presented to the American Sociological Association, New York, 11 August 2007. [http://www.allacademic.com/meta/pmlaaparesearchcitation/1/8/4/4/7/p184477\\_index](http://www.allacademic.com/meta/pmlaaparesearchcitation/1/8/4/4/7/p184477_index).

construction in the Greek and contemporary eras. The eras of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, from classical Christian Dior gowns to avant-garde fashions shown artistically by Model Mayhemor Ellen Von Unwerth, especially clarify the themes. The themes are considered by noting first what is meant by fashion being a function of sex or social construction.

### I. SEX VS. SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF WOMEN'S FASHION

Daphne Patai and Noretta Koertge articulate an archetypal and dominant relativistic social constructionism that is held by gender feminists who, by rejecting any major biological differences of men and women, reject as well many of our culture's long-established notions. These notions range from 'family' to 'gender'. And given that gender is a mere social construct wherein truth-claims about what is proper to women may be both true and false *inter alia* either in the same culture at different times or at the same time indifferent cultures, there is the foregone conclusion that fashions suitable to women and not to men is bogus. To infer the bogusness is to accept an ideological denial of biology; that is, to accept what they call a biodenial.<sup>2</sup>



Figure 1: The word 'stiletto' is from the Greek *stylos* or *pillar*. Above is a high-fashion stiletto, designed by Nicholas Kirkwood, whose elegant curves call to mind a Greek aesthetic ideal of geometric simplicity. The simplicity is often typical of avant-garde and even deviant fashion. The fashion is likened by Kirkwood to cutting-edge architectural designs. The photo is by Richard Stow with permission for its use by Chris Suarez, Commercial Director of the Nicholas Kirkwood Studio in London, England.

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<sup>2</sup> Daphne Patai and Noretta Koertge, *Professing Feminism: Education & Indoctrination in Women's Studies* (NY: Lexington Books, 2003), pp. 135-6. Koertge is Editor Emerita of the journal *Philosophy of Science* and Professor Emerita of the History and Philosophy of Science Dept at Indiana University. Patai is Professor in the Languages, Literatures and Cultures Dept at the University of Massachusetts. With expertise in feminism by having pioneered Women's Studies they reject, even so, a BIODENIAL that now sustains a feminist worldview of social constructionism. This constructionism consists of an epistemic relativism that is evocative of Greek Sophism insofar as properties of phenomena depend virtually *in toto* on culture.

The biodenial has resulted in fashions favored for women that neutralize gender differences. The differences range from pants to short male-like haircuts (although some of the haircuts still seem feminine and charming in a traditional sense — the woman's defiant intention being critical to feminists) that became *au courant* in the 1970s with an escalation of the women's liberation movement. A central question is whether this movement, mostly evolving in academia into gender feminism, either can prolong or ever did generally sustain *in toto* a genderless style. If the answers to the question are negative, then further questions ensue of whether the styles were not sustained because of whimsical changes or natural desires of women to appear distinctively feminine.

A feminine nature conflicts with a constructionist view of fashion. Fashions that are not gender neutral are said by many constructionists to be associated with unhealthy behaviors to attract men: underarm shaving that, coupled to carcinogenic deodorants, causes breast cancer; leg shaving that, in tandem with tanning, can lead to precancerous actinic keratoses<sup>3</sup>; post-surgical problems of implants to increase breast size; botox injections, paralyzing facial muscles, to reduce wrinkles; caesarian surgery to avoid tearing genitalia in child birth for cosmetic concerns of ordinary women as well as models;<sup>4</sup> using makeup with toxic parabens and suntan lotions with melanoma-inducing oxybenzone to replace unsightly white colors in safer zinc-oxide lotions; anorexia that, induced by the fashion industry, can result in death such as the deaths of models Ana Reston of São Paolo or Uruguay's Luisel Ramos in 2006; and wearing stiletto heels that injure backbones and feet, exacerbated by foot surgery for accommodating the heels, called 'tart trotters' by the late Princess Diana.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Robert Thomas, MD, 'Why Women Should Avoid Using Anti-Perspirants that could cause breast cancer', *Mailonline: Health*, 12 September 2007. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-479772/Why-women-avoid-using-anti-perspirants-cause-breast-cancer>.

<sup>4</sup> Emily Cook, 'Women Who Have Caesareans Less Likely to Bond', *Mailonline: Health*, 13 July 2006. From Michael Odent, MD, 'Primal Health Research – Is Falling in Love Pathological?' in *Birthlight Conference Held at Homerton College, Cambridge*, 11-12 July 2006. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article395218/Women-Caesareans-likely-bond>, 15 September 2009.

<sup>5</sup> Tart trotters and criticisms notwithstanding, stilettos are said to be good for women's feet as well as backs by J Dawson et al, 'An investigation of risk factors for symptomatic osteoarthritis of the knee in women using a life course approach' in *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* 57.10 (2003) pp. 823–30.

Diana's remark, reference to foreign models, and extensive medical quandaries suggest an intercultural recognition of the apparent effects of erogenous fashion. But this fashion's alleged patriarchal effects, besides being a *red herring* irrelevant to the arguments herein that advance psycho-biologically rooted fashion, are not necessary consequences of the fashion and indicate its predominance, if not its being grounded more exactly in women's sexual nature. This nature is underscored, precisely for example, by high heels that have been a perennial fetish item, in Eastern as well as Western cultures, and that highlight sensual appearances of leg-muscle tone. How in principle can concern for this tone and other anatomical features be unrelated to either a mutual attraction of the sexes or sex-related morphological differences? Bearing on these differences in terms of foot fetishes is Plato's humor, illustrated by a story that creatively extends his idea of love being of the good by drawing our nature back to its original wholeness.<sup>6</sup> That is, physical love is a desire for our once beautiful whole when the two sexes were one, tumbling harmoniously. So it is that men and women were initially coupled by women's *feet* joined to men's heads forming a wheel. They rolled along happily until they hit a bump and broke apart, and have been trying to get back together again ever since!

Their trying to get back together was tackled less facetiously by Plato when he related our psycho-biological natures to beauty by noting that women seek a masculine beauty they lack by sexually attracting and



Above is a famed portrayal of Aspasia (Ἀσπασία, circa 469–406 BC) who, although the sensuous mistress of the Athenian statesman Pericles, was famous for her philosophical acumen. Before living with him — her marriage prohibited since she was a foreigner, she was a high-class *artiste* similar to a courtesan but more like a Japanese geisha. Often thought to be Diotima in the *Symposium*, written by Plato, she nicely illustrates Plato's connections of erotic love and beauty to Beauty itself.

<sup>6</sup> Plato, 1971. *Symposium* 180e-192. The following quotes of Plato are from *Plato: Collected Dialogues*, Ed. by E. Hamilton and H. Cairns (NJ: Princeton University Press).

coupling with men. And men seek a feminine beauty they lack by mating with women. For 'Love is always the love of something, and that something is what it lacks'.<sup>7</sup> And what it lacks ultimately is Beauty *per se*. So men and women on this account do not desire merely a transient superficiality of sex but the aesthetic fullness of Beauty itself. This quest for Beauty evoking St. Augustine's *aide-mémoire*, that men embracing their wives or prostitutes because of their beauty should consider the beauty of God Himself,<sup>8</sup> does not mean Plato either disparaged sex or women's limited beauty. For one thing, he did not deny the fêted beauty and philosophical acumen of the female *artiste* named Aspasia. His point is that Beauty itself must *be*. It must *be* a fully real Being, a really real Form of Beauty that is not material. For all material things are less than perfect and change. And to say that changing things are *real* is to be able to say what they *are*. But since they are continually changing they would already *not be* what they were just said to *be*. Consequently, there must be an unchanging, immaterial, universal and perfectly ideal Form of Beauty that, unlike only partly real physical things, permits their true aesthetic comparisons.

The comparisons are possible in virtue of many beautiful things limitedly sharing in Beauty *per se*. And this beauty inspires or induces us (*aitia*) to love beautiful things and to seek through them that aesthetic ideal standard. The standard is Beauty as a flawless Form that, being really real in another eternal world, renders coherent our saying truly both that one thing is really more beautiful than another and that the Form Beauty aids our psychobiological fulfillment. Yet the point of this fulfillment can be missed by pursuing sex or stimulating fashion for its own sake. And this caveat about pursuing the erotic for its own sake became an ancient apologetics for modern societies to proscribe legally by sanctions and morally by traditions, at times overzealously, the use of clothing (or its lack) for seducing the opposite sex and pornography (from the Greek *porni* for 'prostitute'). Finally, Plato taught the young Aristotle who nonetheless rooted the formation and wellbeing of the state, not in Plato's political types of individuals, say the aristocratic person, but in complementary male and female sexual natures via the natural family.<sup>9</sup> The family's wellbeing

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<sup>7</sup> Plato, *Symposium*, 200e.

<sup>8</sup> St. Augustine, 1985. *On Free Choice of the Will*, Tr. by Anna S. Benjamin and L. H. Hackstaff (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co.), p. 67.

<sup>9</sup> A woman's nurturing nature complements a man's principled reason, says Aristotle, without neglecting her dignity or his authority. Though the 'courage of a man is shown in commanding' (*Politics* 1260a), his caution that a man should fear 'insult to his wife' (*Ethics* 1115a) and that they should 'help each other by throwing their peculiar gifts [as different

was both a practical and theoretical concern in later traditions that mandated how sexuality should influence fashion. And this fashion mandate is inconsistent with a relativistic Sophism as well as with today's sophisticated social constructions.

In sum, this construction's culturally arbitrary and relativistic gender-neutral concepts relate negatively to a socio-ethical scope of aesthetics (*ästhetische moral*).<sup>10</sup> Can it be moral in any sense if it is either trivial or incoherent?<sup>11</sup> A coherent tradition of Plato and Aristotle alike, by contrast, is grounded morally in our psychobiological natures as human beings *being* fulfilled. This fulfillment does not imply puritanical limits on sexual attraction fostered by fashion. Indeed, there tends to be a moralistic attitude towards fashion today that is imposed anachronistically on Plato. One naïve idea of Platonic love, warns Lydia Amir, is that the love is restricted to a 'non-sexual aspect of the loving relationship' when his 'theory of love includes sex.'<sup>12</sup> Bearing on sex, the Greeks did indeed look upon the naked body in awe as an aesthetic *magnum opus* of Nature wherein art is linked to love and loving the sensual (*erōs*). Myron's famous statue of the Discus Thrower (*Discobolus*), for instance, symbolizes a sensual beauty, grace, balance, harmony and artistic elements of architecture (as a kind of *frozens music*) that classical Greece idealized. *Paripassu* ideal fashions that are

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species] into the common stock' (*Ethics* 1162a) may reduce some of his alleged misogamy: Ethics as art originates psycho-biologically in men *and* women, women providing emotionally expressive elements and men a structuring rational one.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Michael Onfray's works such as *La Sculpture de soi: La morale esthétique* (Paris: Grasset, 1993) that relate beauty to our physical vitality in terms of a Renaissance virtù – an *ästhetische moral*. From Paul Bishop, 'Elementary aesthetics, hedonist ethics: The philosophical foundations of Feuerbach's late works,' *History of European Ideas* 34.3 (2008) 298-309, <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science>, 24 Nov 2009.

<sup>11</sup> One well established criticism of the relativistic Sophism and social constructionism (augmented later in this article) is illustrated by the formulation 'A sentence "S" can be true in  $\mathcal{C}_1$  and false in  $\mathcal{C}_2$ ' where ' $\mathcal{C}_1$ ' and ' $\mathcal{C}_2$ ' denote that to which 'truth' is allegedly relative, e.g. different cultures. On the one hand, if sentence *S* has different meanings because the cultures comprise different truth-conditions for *S*'s truth-values, making its different values logically necessary, then the formulation is trivially true. On the other, if *S* is expressed by a proposition *p* with a clear meaning and truth-condition other than the cultures such as physical reality, then the formulation is incoherent. For if the condition for what makes *p* true is the *same*, its *different* truth-values cannot be coherent. Hence the formulation is logically incoherent, if not trivial (Cf. W.H. Newton-Smith, 1981. *The Rationality of Science* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul), pp. 35-7.

<sup>12</sup> Lydia Amir, 2001. 'Plato's Theory of Love: Rationality as Passion' in *Practical Philosophy: The Journal of the Society for Philosophy in Practice* 4.3, pp, 6-14. <http://www.practicalphilosophy.org.uk/> Volume4, 15 Oct 2009.



Figure 3: This image of a woman with a short male-like hairstyle, that became *chic* with an androgynous feminist ideal, does not negate a stunning erogenous feminine beauty. This beautiful photo is by courtesy of the fashion-trend photographer Clarita of Rome, Italy, 2009.

sensual to both sexes, where the erotic is related to beautiful art, involves art that aids our moral and intellectual ascension to Beauty itself in the case of Plato. And for Aristotle sensually alluring fashions, despite the modest public dress of most Greek women (who even so regularly used cosmetics to be attractive to men),<sup>13</sup> would better induce men to court women without which formations of families by marriage could be impeded. And widely ignored is that this impediment is noted tacitly by St. Thomas who, calling Aristotle '*the philosopher*' states that 'those women who have no husband nor wish to have one,' or those women in conditions 'inconsistent with marriage, cannot without sin desire to give lustful pleasure to those men who see them, because this is to incite them to sin'.<sup>14</sup>

## II. WAS PLATO'S AESTHETICS REACTIVE AND PROACTIVE?

Did Plato and Aristotle merely react to the aesthetics of their time or was their time and posterity influenced proactively in innovative ways? Since Aristotle's thought was beholden to Plato they were surely innovative as evidenced alone by Plato's *Republic*. The latter is the heart of his theory of Forms and foundation for all his ideas. The ideas range from knowledge to human nature to virtue and how virtue bears on social-political ideals. These ideals are superbly expressed in his cave allegory (BK. VII) in terms of three political classes. The most elite class consists of the aristocratic

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<sup>13</sup> F.J. Kluth, 'Hairstyles and Cosmetics in Ancient Greece'. Presented to the Ohio Academy of Science, 2001. <http://www.fjkluth.com/hair>.

<sup>14</sup> St. Thomas, 'Whether the adornment of women is devoid of mortal sin?' in *Summa Theologica* II-CLXIX-II, <http://www.fisheaters.com/modestyinsumma>, 7 August 2009.

philosopher king and auxiliary rulers in case of the ruler king's death. Dwelling outside the cave in the sun – the sun denoting an ultimate triune Form of the One, Good and Beautiful, the ruler has a rational faculty and ensuing virtue of wisdom by beholding this ultimate Form. This Form imparts perfection into a hierarchy of lower more specific Forms including those in which visible things share. So all women share in the Form Woman and this *One* Woman, sharing in the One, Good and Beautiful has a perfect beauty in which the *Many* flesh-and-blood women share (*One* over *Many* thesis). And there is the suggestion that women may manifest differently, though limitedly and unequally, Beauty itself, explaining why men can be enamored with and seduced by women with diverse forms of beauty.

Beauty's seductive power is addressed in the Scriptures, starting with the seeming sensual power of Eve over Adam after who ensuing generations of men are tempted to love women more than God, warning men against an inordinate lust for women's beauty; beauty related inescapably to the erotic. Echoing this sentiment on the erotic is the prophet Sirach who counsels men, 'Give no woman power over you to trample upon your dignity'.<sup>15</sup> Here, the dignity of men is held by some vain women to be inversely proportional to the self-esteem of women. Hence these women have pride and the men lust, their lust being induced by some women for power. The power can be avoided by men averting their 'eyes from a comely woman' through who's 'beauty many perish, for lust for it burns like fire'.<sup>16</sup> Bearing on this fiery desire, a Vatican official stated that research showed men to be more 'tempted by lust, while women' by 'the sin of pride'.<sup>17</sup> Yet pride need not characterize all beautiful women, including those in erogenous dress, because God employs the Godly woman Judith to defeat an Israelite enemy. The enemy was a military leader who, enraptured by her erotic sandals and alluring festive attire, lowered his guard that enabled her to cause his death.<sup>18</sup>

A specter of death aside, the erotic as an aesthetic phenomenon was generally held to enhance life and, in many ancient cultures, was

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<sup>15</sup> Book of Sirach, <http://www.ncchusc.org/nab/bible>, 26 March 2009. From *New American Bible*, 1970. (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co.).

<sup>16</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>17</sup> Carol Glatz, 'Women, Men Experience Sin Differently' in *Catholic News Service*, 19 Feb 2009. From Mgr. Wojciech Giertych, 'The unsuspecting resources of weakness' in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 16 Feb 2009.

<sup>18</sup> God uses the weak to confound the strong. See the Book of Judith, <http://www.ncchusc.org/nab/bible>.

expressed optimistically in fashion as a mode of art. An artistic realism was held in the case of Plato who, reflecting both views, eschewed creative fantasies since political states should model art on reality, on really real Forms. Negatively, the Forms as ideals for art would prevent it from descending into surreal decadent copies of things in this flawed physical world. In this world, natural things are *copies* of Forms and have an inferior status of being neither unreal nor real: real insofar as they share in Forms and otherwise unreal. This unreality is not just a derisory threat to aesthetic fulfillment – the fulfillment relating to reason and ethics by Beauty being one with the One and Good,<sup>19</sup> but also would make fashions *even less than copies of copies* of Forms. Ignoring the Forms diverts us from fulfilling our nature and hastens our death, with a rising sense of unreality and emptiness, by the demise of reason and beauty. Positively, Beauty is ‘present to all existence’ as imperfect instances ‘of these essences’.<sup>20</sup> So the more these essences are copied or shared in by visible things, the better these things can enhance life and inspire persons to seek the Good. And hence good fashions, being beautiful and buoyed by the ruler, would improve the wellbeing of its citizens. How are citizens and fashion related by the ideal state?

Whereas the ideal state is governed by the virtue of wisdom since the ruling king has philosophic and scientific *knowledge* of the physical world and Forms, the lower virtue of courage typifies the guardians with a lesser scientific *understanding*. Their understanding is sufficient to protect the state, however, ensuring that the king’s wisdom is exercised regarding the partly real physical things – denoted figuratively by statues they parade in front of a fire. At the cave’s center, the fire casts shadows on the inner cave wall. And by this wall in darkness, symbolizing ignorance, the lowest and largest class of citizens (the multitude) sits in shackles that force them to look upon the shadows they opine to be reality. Reality is not beheld, of course, but wholly unreal shadows. So shadows that flicker are beheld by a flickering unstable mindset, with no understanding, of sophistic opinion. The opinion would beget fanciful fads of fashion and presage a present-day relativistic social construction. And although constructionist-like sophistic opinions can be replaced only by other opinions, given the multitude’s

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<sup>19</sup> The One is a *principle of rationality as the basis of mathematics*, the Good a *principle of ethics* and the Beautiful a *principle of aesthetics*: All Forms and things sharing in them have *aesthetic, moral and rational* dimensions, typifying the Greeks who did not segregate the ‘sciences’ of art, architecture, physics etc as the modern era.

<sup>20</sup> Amir, ‘Plato’s Theory of Love: Rationality as Passion’.

debased nature, opinions that are true should reign in virtue of more realistic fashion-related statues. That is, the statues should be paraded by authentic guardians, not by predatory fashion-mongering marketers (in today's context), who have not only the right but also a positive moral duty to manipulate the multitude's desires for the good of the state.

Thus the state is revealed in a proactive or anticipatory manner to be harmed when fashions are manipulated by decadent fashion trades that change style, with mounting silliness and profligacy, for the mere sake of money. Money alone motivates emotionally immature and civically irresponsible marketers who, as the multitude, are subjugated psychologically to base biological appetites and whose virtue, at best, would be a temperance that must be enforced by real guardians. The 'guardians' in question are avaricious pretenders who often have this status because of a democratic egalitarianism, scorned by Plato (and later Aristotle) and who do not guard the state's good. This lack of good results from wolves in sheep skin who usurp the republic. The republic thrives only if a wise ruler both grasps the Forms and rules aesthetically cultivated guardians who model fashion on real beauty. Moreover, they must have the courage to persist in socializing desirable tastes even if the tastes are initially unpopular.

Unpopular good fashions will become popular fads when, by repetitive shadows, citizens opine that if most people look a certain way, they should too: the monkey-see-monkey-do syndrome. This syndrome calls to mind the Athenians who, due mainly to the Sophists, put Socrates to death. Even death can result from behavior based on bad fads. One need only recall the SUV FAD when more and more Americans began driving sports utility vehicles (SUVs) as the fad caught on. Despite its dangerous high center of gravity, rising number of deadly accidents, vulgar box-like design and appalling gas mileage, 'The new fad, all the rage among yuppies, suburban families and seemingly testosterone unbalanced males, is the [SUV] as an everyday commuting machine'.<sup>21</sup> Bearing on silly trends in fashion, 'its true purpose has been abducted... by Madison Avenue.' And those engaging in this fad are 'so caught up in it, they throw away all... reason in order to be part of a trend'. In these senses Plato's philosophy is proactive as well as reactive by providing reasons for being pessimistic about fads when they lack intelligent origins.

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<sup>21</sup> This and the following quotes are from A.J. Nomai, 1998. 'SUV FAD: A Public Menace' in *Free Heretic Publications* 3.1, <http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill>, 28 March 2009.

### III. ARISTOTLE'S AESTHETICS AS REACTIVE AND PROACTIVE



Figure 4: The above photo illustrates a soft avant-garde fashion, seen sometimes at Model Mayhem, that often amplifies erotic bodily areas with clothing. The photo is used by courtesy of Clarita, Rome, 2009.

Aristotle's aesthetics would indeed be proactive as well as reactive with a caveat that fashion is rooted more scientifically in our nature. The nature of a rational ruler, for Plato, afforded knowledge of both the Form Beauty and beautiful fashion because Beauty was known *a priori* via his recollection theory of truth. That is, truth about Beauty is recalled by seeing beautiful things. But these things afford truths that, for Aristotle, are inferred *a posteriori* since forms are entirely in visible things. The sole reality of these things as unities of matter and form, with forms imparting to them a geometric and arithmetical nature, avoided an incoherence of Plato's divided worlds: one world of Forms that is unchanging and immaterial, another of material changing particulars; notwithstanding the latter allegedly having beauty by Beauty itself being *shared in*, these empty poetical words begging for a lucid analysis which implies that there is only one visible world.<sup>22</sup> This world is therefore the sole source of artistic fashion. Consider why Aristotle's notion of fashion would be reactive after noting why it is proactive.

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<sup>22</sup> Aristotle, 1941. *Metaphysics* 991a 20-22. All Books are from *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, Tr. by W. D. Ross and Ed. by R. McKeon, 16<sup>th</sup> printing (New York: Random House).

Proactive influences on art and thus on artistic fashion include Aristotle's novel attention to our psychobiological nature. The natures of men and women are the same in some ways but also different, different biologically because women have nurturing eggs, wombs and breasts that induce them psychologically to have a more caring emotionality than men. And men are the principle of motion in the sex act with active sperm, having a more kinetic biology that tends to make them more muscular, aggressive, command oriented and authoritatively rational.<sup>23</sup> This rationality does not mean that men are more intelligent than women but rather that women's intelligence may often be employed naturally in different ways. But women and men are the same inasmuch as they share certain organic functions that include such things as breathing and heartbeats (part of a vegetative *psyché* or soul), capacities of sense (sensitive soul) and cognitive aptitudes (rational soul or faculty) with a proviso that this faculty, as noted, will often be exercised differently by the different genders.

Gender differences arise from the overall relation of our faculty to the sensitive and vegetative souls wherein a principle of *symmetry* suggests that these souls are related to and inform that faculty, as well, on artistic fashion. Fashions of women can fulfill aesthetic norms of males, and females, in virtue of the female's complementary form with its nurturing appendages being accented amorously and arithmetically by clothing, enhancing its beauty. This beauty implies a beauty *a fortiori* of the female form without clothes and, in turn, erotic nudity having aesthetic status. This status *is not to say* that we should go around nude, that being nude or erotically dressed is always proper and never riskily stimulating, that non-erotic dress cannot be beautiful with other mathematical ratios, or that modesty alone is not often suitable. It *is to say* that erotic beauty fulfills our psychobiological nature and finds rightful expression in many profound modes of art. This art in terms of current research holds for a male form's beauty to women despite their less acute attraction to other bodily ratios<sup>24</sup> and the erotic ratios' effects increased or decreased by genetic/paternal traits,

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<sup>23</sup> This rationality, as related biologically to the active sperm, influenced the later Greek and Medieval idea of *rationes seminales*. The latter is not either naïve or anthropocentric in being part of the development that resulted in St. Thomas' proofs of a First Cause, serving to explain the rational change of phenomena. Cf. Robert C. Trundle's 'A First Cause and Causal Principle' in *Philosophy in Science X* (Kraków: Papal Academy of Theology, Vatican Astronomical Observatory and University of Arizona, 2003), pp. 107-35.

<sup>24</sup> D.S. Maisey et al, 1999. 'Characteristics of male attractiveness for women' in *The Lancet: International Journal of Medical Science & Practice* Vol. 353, Issue 9163, p. 1500.



Figure 5: Though this photo illustrates a Christian Dior Gown that is typically modest, similar to some modest gowns of ancient Greece, it has a graceful feminine contour: Courtesy, fashion photographer Tammy Manet of California, 2009.

‘to choose... or avoid something good or bad’ (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1111b). Hence in Aristotle’s *Poetics* (1448a) our nature admits of artistic agents who are either ‘good men or bad’ because ‘the line between virtue and vice is one dividing the whole of mankind.’ And thus he says that societies should generally imitate good persons in their art. And when art imitates them, it has a high cultural status as evidenced by many ancient people such as the Dorians and Megarians who vied for honors of having discovered certain forms of art (*Poetics* 1448a).

e.g. an affinity for children that bears on a long-term attractiveness.<sup>25</sup> In short, the attractiveness is related to mathematical ratios and the ratios to beauty. Beauty assize and order is, says Aristotle (*Poetics* 1450b), reminiscent of both a rationality of mathematics and his *Metaphysics* (*ta meta ta phusika* or ‘things after physics’) where ‘The chief forms of beauty are order and symmetry and definitiveness’ that ‘the mathematical sciences demonstrate in a special degree’ (1078b).

Degrees of mathematical order reflect all of the arts and art, therefore, has qualities of poetry. The poetical arts are expressed by language or harmony or balance or rhythm or a blend of these. And these qualities are not accidental but have psychobiological origins in our heartbeat, breathing, walking gait and so on. Yet our nature includes a morally relevant free will since although our will ‘is not common to irrational creatures,’ we have a rational capacity

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<sup>25</sup> J.R. Roney et al, ‘Reading Men’s Faces: Women’s Mate Attractiveness Judgments Track Men’s Testosterone and Interest in Infants’ in *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, 9 May 2006, <http://rspb.royalsocietypublishing.org/content/273/1598/2169.full.pdf+html>, #4. Discussion.

Therefore the reactive element to art and artistic fashion is Aristotle's criticism of the Sophists who would deny that artistic truth is discovered. The discovery of good art means art is good apart from the will or wishes of persons. But persons decide what is good for the Sophists. The Sophist Protagoras held, for example, that man is the sole measure of what *is*. Yet this thesis is incoherent, if not trivially true. For if truth-values for the claim *C* vary because persons determine 'truth' by amounting to truth-conditions that differ, then the different truth-values are logically necessary and the thesis is trivially true. And although there are paraconsistent logics or other logics (or epistemologies) that may coherently permit reasoning *a posteriori* from reality to both *C* and  $\sim C$  because there is no contradiction in saying that reality need not abide by a Principle of Non-Contradiction, the contradiction is permitted *a priori* by the relativism whereby anything follows.<sup>26</sup> And besides the illogic of social construction and Greek Sophism, these sophisms lack a cogency of Aristotle's view that viably explains both conspicuous causes of good art and why the art is not either a capricious construct of culture or a fabrication of our imagination.

Given the nonsense of beautiful fashion being a mere imaginative concoction, we can reasonably infer by its shared qualities of such things as balance and harmony that it is rooted singularly in similar qualities of our psychobiological nature, especially since our nature benefits from art. We can infer also that artistic fashion involves a choice that allows for praise or blame because there are certifiably good (noble) and bad (ignoble) fashions. In short, good fashions are not rooted in either whimsical cultural constructs or in logically inconsistent truth-claims. The claim is false *prima facie* that a given fashion can be good or beautiful in one culture and not in another, although a given beautiful fashion might be improper in some cultural context, say today by wearing a well-designed bikini at an indoor formal affair – although the affair's borderline for proper dress maybe unclear in terms of the later Ludwig Wittgenstein.<sup>27</sup> While it is beyond my purpose to expand on Wittgenstein, beauty could be integral to a primal *form of life* that is common to human behavior. Is it senseless to say that this behavior might result in beautiful fashions that border more superficial conventions?

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<sup>26</sup> Jørgen Villadsen contrasts paraconsistent and classical logic, 'Classical logic predicts that everything... follows from inconsistency. A paraconsistent logic is a logic where an inconsistency does not lead to such an explosion, and since in practice consistency is difficult to achieve there are many potential applications of paraconsistent logics in knowledge-based systems, logical semantics of natural language, etc.' Jørgen Villadsen, 2003. 'A Paraconsistent Higher Order Logic', AarXiv:cs/02 07088v3[cs.LO], abstract.

<sup>27</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, 2001. *Philosophical Investigations*, Ed. by G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd) #206.

#### IV. CONCLUSION: MUSIC, MEDICINE AND ARCHITECTURE



Figure 6: Beauty may be integral to a basic *form of life* on one interpretation of the later Ludwig Wittgenstein, which is universal or 'common [to the] behavior of mankind.' So without any cultural relativism, the beauty may challenge more superficial conventional *boundaries* such as one between formal and informal affairs. Is it senseless to speak of the affairs as permitting changing *borderline* modes of beautiful fashion that might include the bikini-like 'trikini suit' shown above? The beautiful photo is by courtesy of Tiago Chediak of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 2009.

Despite various conventions, good art and artistic fashion would fulfill our psychobiological nature and our nature would be impeded by bad art. Finally, since art includes music it is noteworthy in regard to fulfilling our nature that there is a Mozart Effect, affirmed in the *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*. Noting that patients with comas and epilepticus got better with Mozart, John Hughes, M.D. refers to a 'periodicity in the power of Mozart's music, seen also with JS Bach...'<sup>28</sup> He adds, 'periodicity is key' to improving 'many brain and bodily functions'. And the improved functions are amplified by Italian researcher Pietro Modesti, M.D., Ph.D., who says that rhythmically homogeneous music comparable to Bach, such as 'classical, Celtic and Indian,' do indeed 'have an antihypertensive effect'.<sup>29</sup> And since these effects are enhanced by music, we may reasonably infer that other art (similar to *frozen music*) can also fulfill our nature, as the art in architecture enhances our health. The healthful effects, say several renowned architects, include 'informing

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<sup>28</sup> For this and the next quote see John R. Hughes, M.D., 2001. 'The Mozart effect' in *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* 94.6, p. 316.

<sup>29</sup> P.A. Modesti et al, 'Daily Sessions of Music Listening in Mild Hypertension Can Reduce 24-Hour Ambulatory Blood Pressure After One Month' in *American Society of Hypertension* 14-17 May 2008. New Orleans, Abstract, emphasis, <http://www.mindcull.com>.

design, leading to cutting-edge projects, such as residences for seniors with dementia in which the *building itself is part of the treatment*.<sup>30</sup>

In sum, Plato and Aristotle are aesthetic realists for who art and fashion are rooted in reality. And while the relevant reality is the Form Man or Woman in terms of Plato and more overtly our psychobiological nature for Aristotle, Aristotle is indebted to Plato. He credits Plato with discovering forms as objects of knowledge and, for Aristotle, our nature is known by the forms *man* or *woman* being fully in each person. Also, Plato's divided-line simile presaged Aristotle's link of beauty to mathematics because Plato regarded the Forms as geometric entities. The entities prefigured modern *formalized* theories of physics by relating observation to theoretical terms in a context of the calculus and geometry (Euclidean or Non-Euclidean), and bore as well on a geometric-mathematical order and symmetry of the Form Beauty.

In the end, beauty is related inescapably to sex (*erōs*) as illustrated by the sinuous curves and proportions on Greek paintings, painted vases and sculpture of ordinary persons. These persons are acknowledged in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* that refers to sensuous women who dwell in their homes 'clad in diaphanous garments of yellow silk' and to transparent clothes at Amorgos where women appear almost nude'.<sup>31</sup> In regard to the nude and erotic, one scholar notes that the ancients, especially Greeks and Romans, were far 'more comfortable with explicitly erotic images than most moderns'.<sup>32</sup> He adds that the '*borative*, as part of ethics, is what is good for human life' and the 'erotic definitely qualifies... If the erotic is a matter of the beautiful and the sublime, as well as the good life, this earns it aesthetic status'. This status, suggests Dr. Valerie Steele – provocatively if not plausibly, may be sternly resisted because of a moralizing strain of Puritanism in the Protestant Anglo-American middleclass culture as opposed to older cultures more influenced by Catholicism in Europe (or, say, Hinduism in the East).<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Emily Anthes, 'Building Around the Mind' in *Scientific American Mind*. <http://www.sciam.com>, emphasis, 15 April 2009.

<sup>31</sup> Aristophanes. *Lysistrata*. From Dr. Michael Lahanas, *Αρχαία Γυναικεία Ενδυμασία* (Ancient Greek Fashion), <http://www.mlahanas.de/Greeks/Fashion2>, 11 July 2009.

<sup>32</sup> For this and the next two quotes see aesthetician and Kant Scholar Dr. Professor Emeritus Kelly L. Ross, 'The Erotic as an Aesthetic Category', <http://www.friesian.com/erotic>, emphasis, 22 June 2009.

<sup>33</sup> Steele is the Director of the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York. See Jessica Jernigan, 'Grrrl Talk Interview – Reconsidering the Corset' <http://valeriesteelefashion.com/blog/grrrl-talk-interview-reconsidering-the-corset/>, 7 Feb 2008. See also Dr. Krishnanand L. Kamat's 'Erotic Arts of India' <http://www.kamat.com/kalranga/erotica/intro>, 6 Oct 2009.

A disdain for erogenous femininity is now worsened since social constructionists are rife in academia.<sup>34</sup> In denying the femininity, these academics *disavow* modes of art that fulfill our nature and *avow* a biolenial that puts women at medical risk. They incur more risk *directly* from breast to cervical cancer, by ignoring healthy behaviors of their sex,<sup>35</sup> than from sexist-related ailments such as underarm shaving or anorexia related *indirectly* to feminine fashion. Reacting to fashion healthfully, most women accept sexual, economic, psychological and other realities. In terms of this realism, Aristotle and Plato would be gratified that the fashion trades do not entirely manipulate style. In closing, one style specialist counsels 'when in red [economically] wear black'.<sup>36</sup> Another, Christian Lacroix, 'famed for his love of bright colours' features black heavily because 'colour and the "laser geometry of shapes" may have been "linked unconsciously to the recession"'. Finally, the Pantone Color Institute's Director, Leatrice Eiseman, refers to a principle for economic and social-political worries about the world. Women's tastes, without discarding sexiness, are now more practical. There is a return to basic colours that 'from a psychological point of view, still empowers you,' making 'you feel that you are still looking fashionable and sophisticated'. Could the cases for Plato and Aristotle be better!

CONCLUDING NOTE: In order to preserve a continuity of the foregoing essay, let me say here that Platonic-Aristotelian connections of beauty to science (wherein scientific and aesthetic claims can be true) are denied by a Humean-Kantian-Positivist tradition. Since this tradition denies that even scientific theories are known to be true, the thinking goes,

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<sup>34</sup> It is 'now widely accepted conjecture that [even] mathematics is a social construct. This conjecture has increasingly been linked to the concept of mind itself as a social construct... in the postmodern world of the late twentieth century.' See W.K. Bauchspies et al's, 2002. 'The Sociology and Philosophy of Mathematics Revisited' in P. Valero and O. Skovsmose (eds.), *Proceedings of the 3<sup>rd</sup> International Mathematics Education & Society Conference* (Copenhagen: Center for Research in Mathematics) pp. 1-3.

<sup>35</sup> For the behavior-related breast cancer see the Collaborative Group's 'Breast cancer and breastfeeding: collaborative re-analysis of individual data from 47 epidemiological studies in 30 countries, including 50302 women with breast cancer and 96973 women without the disease' in *The Lancet: International Journal of Medical Science and Practice* 360.9328 (2002) p.187. And for behavior-induced cervical cancer see Patricia Novak's *Mosby's Medical Nursing and Allied Health Dictionary* (NY: Elsevier Science Publishers, 2005), p. 328.

<sup>36</sup> This and the following quotes are from Ian Johnston's 'When in the Red, Wear Black,' *Fashion: The Independent*. 4 May 2008. The remarks by these fashion experts are strikingly Platonic and Aristotelian. <http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/fashion/news/when-in-the-red-wear-black-820865>, emphasis.

how could there be truth in less rigorous sciences such as that of aesthetics that, for Aristotle, studies the cause of beauty? A central problem related to others is a K-K Thesis of 'Knowing we Know' since scientific knowledge presupposes knowing a causal principle that, being *synthetic a priori*, is not known to be true. While it is beyond my scope to expand on the dilemmas, suffice it to say that the dilemmas may rely on bogus restrictions to empirically contingent and trivially necessary truth. This truth has limits suggested by Aristotle who discovered modal logic – its being used until the time of St. Thomas, revived in the 20<sup>th</sup> century by C.I. Lewis and developed by others such as W.V.O. Quine and R.B. Marcus.<sup>37</sup> One result is that an epistemologically strong sort of truth may be ascribed to the principle since although it is *logically possible* for events to have no causes, it may be *physically impossible* where this impossibility can be recast as a non-trivial necessity: Necessarily (N) if there is no cause ( $\sim C$ ), then there is no event ( $\sim E$ ): denoted, *not* as a truth-functional conditional  $\sim C \rightarrow \sim E$  but as an *alethic modality*  $N(\sim C \rightarrow \sim E)$ . And an *epistemic modality* may permit reasoning from systematically true predictions of a theory to its truth, avoiding mere theory falsifications prescribed by Sir Karl Popper that rely on truth-functional conditionals. In virtue of conditionals that are modal, such problems are resolved. Resolved arguably also is the *strict implication* of a First Cause of the cosmos per revived modalities for Thomas', if not Aristotle's, proof of Nature's God,<sup>38</sup> denying this God or Cause excluding astronomical inquiries since they suppose the uncaused cause for their intelligibility, an infinite regress of causes implying that either there was no cause of the cosmos or the cosmos caused itself (its absurdly being a phenomenon unlike all other phenomena that depend on causes). And the intelligibility that requires this causal Creator of Nature means *prima facie* that our nature *is* as it *should* be.<sup>39</sup> Hence there can be a naturalistic ethics with no naturalistic fallacy (of inferring how our nature *should* be fulfilled from how it merely *is*) whereby, generally, those things that fulfill our psychobiological nature permit objectively true claims that they are good: Good fashion may thus afford claims that are as certifiably true as the truths in biology, psychology and medicine that inform those claims.

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<sup>37</sup> See Ruth Barcan Marcus, 1993. *Modalities: Philosophical Essays* (NY: Oxford University Press). Marcus is famous for her Barcan Theorem of modal logic.

<sup>38</sup> Compare W.L. Craig's Islamic Kalam proof in 'The Ultimate Question of Origins: God and the Beginning of the Universe,' *Astrophysics and Space Science* Vol. 269-270 (1999) 723-740, to Trundle's modal-logic proof in 'A First Cause and Causal Principle', pp. 107-35.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Peter Kreeft's 'First Cause Argument,' <http://www.peterkreeft.com/topics/first-cause>, 2005. From Kreeft's *Fundamentals of the Faith* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988).

## IMAGE ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

1. High-heel Stiletto designed by the Nicholas Kirkwood Studio, shown at Studio website <http://www.nicholaskirkwood.com>, 12 March 2009. Photo by Richard Stow with permission to use by Christopher Suarez – Commercial Director of the Nicholas Kirkwood Studio, London, per email ([studio@nicholaskirkwood.com](mailto:studio@nicholaskirkwood.com)) 12 Mar 2009.
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6. Lady in bikini-like trikini suit by Tiago Chediak of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, titled Fashion Rio Inverno 2006, Michelle Alves, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/tiagochediak>, 15 May 2009, licensed for free use by Creative Commons at <http://creativecommons.org>.

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