Introduction

Beauty Matters

The beauty ideal is changing.* Beauty is becoming more important, and as it does so the beauty ideal is transforming into an ethical ideal. That appearance matters in a visual and virtual culture should not be surprising. Yet the extent to which beauty matters, defines meaning and identity, constructs the self, structures daily practices, and against which individuals are valued (or not), is not well recognized. Too often beauty is dismissed as trivial fluff, changeable fashion, not a serious subject for academic—especially philosophical—study nor, it is implied, is beauty something that serious people should take seriously. In *Perfect Me* I will show that whatever else beauty may be, it is serious stuff. It profoundly shapes our shared culture and individual practice, and is increasingly a dominant ethical ideal. Beauty matters to individuals—to real women and increasingly men—as they navigate their lives. It matters because it makes lives go better or worse. It matters because it is something that very many of us spend time and money striving for.

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*The title of the introduction, as well as being a claim about beauty morally mattering is a homage to Peggy Brand's *Beauty Matters* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000).

It matters because the extent of the industries and infrastructure that are required to support the pursuit of the body beautiful is vast—from food to fashion, from basic grooming to cosmetic surgery. The lack of attention that moral philosophers have paid to the contemporary beauty ideal is surprising, as implied moral judgments and imperatives are ubiquitous in the beauty context: You *should* 'make the best of yourself', you're *worth* it, you *deserve* it and you *should not* 'let yourself go'. Consider possible readings of 'perfect me': an aspiration to become perfect; a statement about the nature of perfection; and a command, 'Perfect Me!', to be obeyed.

Beauty is a moral matter. In *Perfect Me* I will show how profoundly this is so. In so doing, I hope to encourage philosophers of all types to engage in this important debate, to contribute a philosophical voice to disciplines in which the beauty debate is raging, and to be of use to policy makers and practitioners as the ethical nature of the beauty ideal challenges their governance assumptions and proposed solutions. As an applied philosopher, I do not take a "one size fits all" theory "off the peg" and seek to apply it to beauty practices and the beauty ideal. Rather I work through the practices of beauty using the categories and arguments of moral philosophy. I have not sought to impose a theory on the data, but rather have taken the data seriously, especially that of women's lived experiences. I have sought to interpret it using the tools of my discipline, and the arguments are shaped and changed in response to the data.

The Arguments of *Perfect Me*

In *Perfect Me* I make four main arguments. First, the beauty ideal is a dominant and in some instances a predominant ethical ideal. It functions as an ethical ideal in that it sets ideal standards to aspire to and presents working towards such standards as a moral duty.[1] It provides a shared value framework against which individuals judge themselves morally good or bad. It is constitutive of identity and provides meaning and structure individually and collectively. Praise, blame, and reward are apportioned in accordance with it. Finally, engagement is virtuous, and failure is a moral vice engendering

shame and disgust. It is important to note that my claim is that in practice the beauty ideal *is*, and *is functioning as*, an ethical ideal for very many people; though for some it remains a prudential ideal or mere social norm. It is not a claim that beauty *should* function in this way or that it is good for us that it does so. Indeed in *Perfect Me* I track the significant current and likely future harms that result from this manifestation of the beauty ideal; while also seeking to be true to the mixed nature of the ideal.

Second, the current beauty ideal is more dominant than previous ideals to the extent that, if trends continue, the ideal will be global. I argue that there is a convergence of current trends that results in a relatively narrow range of acceptable appearance norms for the face and the body. It is not simply an expansion of Western ideals, but a global mean, which is demanding of all racial groups. No racial group is good enough without "help" as all need to be changed or added to. Thus, all women, and increasingly men, need surgical and nonsurgical technical fixes, if they are to be "perfect", or just "good enough." Moreover, as it becomes more dominant, its ethical features become more pronounced making it harder to resist and reject.

Third, key to understanding the power of the beauty ideal is understanding the construction of the self under the ideal. I begin with feminist accounts of sexual objectification and self-objectification and develop these into an account of beauty objectification without sexual threat and that is separable from sexual desire. The aim of such an account is to establish the "to be looked at" nature of the self located in the body, but not just in the actual flawed body, but also in the transforming body, a body of potential and possibility, and the imagined body, full of promise. This self, while located in the body, is no passive self, but active, both subject and object, and, under the beauty ideal, the body is never mere body, but always full of potential. This understanding of the self helps to explain both the power of the beauty ideal as an ethical ideal, and why, despite the costs and harms of beauty, we continue to embrace and celebrate the ideal. This argument, undertaken primarily in chapters 7 and 8, is the heart of the book. The first argument (that the beauty ideal is

an ethical ideal) and the final argument (about the limits of choice) only work if the claims about the nature and functioning of the self under the beauty ideal work. It is here that the claims are the most philosophical and, to my mind, the most significant.

Fourth, as individuals we do not choose our beauty ideals. Arguably, we choose the extent to which we conform to them, but the extent to which we can do this is limited by the dominance of the ideal. As the beauty ideal becomes more dominant, the ethical pressure to conform increases. Not conforming is "not an option," and previously extreme procedures, however defined, are normalized, and more practices are required to meet minimal standards of normal. Given this, to claim that engagement is simply individual choice is unsustainable and practices of informed consent are undermined. However, while individual approaches fail, so too do traditional responses of gendered exploitation, coercion, false consciousness, and adaptive preferences. None of these are sufficient to account for lived experience under the current beauty ideal. To understand the beauty ideal we need to recognize its ethical function and dominance. It cannot be dismissed as wholly harmful or as wholly benign, and it is too important to be left for individuals alone to choose.

The Structure of *Perfect Me*

The first two arguments are largely made in the first half of the book and the third and fourth in the second half; although in a real sense the book is a single argument that builds each subsequent claim on the previous claim. The first half of the book introduces and uses more empirical evidence to make its claims, while the second half is more theoretical and traditionally philosophical. Chapters 2 and 3 are particularly empirical, and those who are already familiar with this literature may wish to move quickly over these chapters. However, not only are these chapters necessary to set the scene and establish the ethical worries and provide the social and cultural contexts, but the more philosophical claims of the later chapters are also built upon these chapters. The arguments of *Perfect Me* span

the literatures of cultural studies, psychology, and sociology, amongst others, as well as my own discipline of philosophy. Bringing these often isolated literatures into conversation not only allows me to build arguments about the nature of the beauty ideal, but also brings a philosophical voice to the table. My hope is that this voice not only makes a contribution and a distinctive claim about the moral nature of the beauty ideal, and illuminates the changing construct of the self under the beauty ideal. But also, and importantly, it begins a more multidisciplinary conversation. Too often scholars who are working on the same, or very similar issues, are working in isolated disciplinary silos which can result in self-referential conversations. Given that many of these scholars, doing great work in their own disciplines, in fact have very similar concerns to those working in other disciplines, albeit expressed in different terminology and understood in different frameworks, talking across disciplines and working together can only strengthen our understandings.

I will make the arguments of *Perfect Me* over the course of ten chapters. In the first chapter, 'A Duty to Be Beautiful?' I argue that the beauty ideal is increasingly presenting as and functioning as an ethical ideal for very many people. To make this argument, I outline the features of the contemporary beauty ideal, which we would standardly regard as features of an ethical ideal. First, and most importantly, for those who fall under it the beauty ideal provides a value framework against which individuals judge themselves, and others, as being good and bad. As such, the beauty ideal is functioning, for some, as their overarching moral framework, to which they must conform to think well of themselves irrespective of, and in addition to, other metrics by which they judge themselves. Second, the beauty ideal prescribes habits and practices around which daily life is structured and ordered; third, it constructs meaning and identity; fourth, failure invokes shame and disgust and fifth, and by no means least, it promises the goods of the good life. Further I set out a number of assumptions necessary to underpin this ideal: first, the body is malleable; second, body work is required; and third, power is internalized. The ethical nature of the ideal is the first reason that the beauty ideal is different from past beauty ideals.

In the next two chapters, "Life Is One Long Catwalk" and "A New (Miss) World Order?", I argue that the ideal is more dominant than previous ideals. In chapter 2, I argue that the beauty ideal applies to more types of women, potentially all women, whether in the public eye or not. That it applies for longer, starting as young as three and continuing past the menopause, and at times when it previously did not (such as in illness and pregnancy). It is not simply that more individuals happen to value appearance more, but that, as the dominance of the beauty ideal extends, so beauty becomes more valuable and valued. As an ethical ideal, which constructs selves and identities, and creates habits and practices, the beauty ideal becomes more dominant. In turn, the extended dominance contributes to its ethical function. In chapter 3 I argue that this dominance extends to the global. This is not a claim for a Western ideal, or for a single acceptable ideal, but rather a claim that local beauty ideals are converging, resulting in an increasingly narrow range of what is considered beautiful, or just good enough. While not all can engage, or afford to engage, this does not mean that they cannot aspire to engage. Poverty is no barrier to aspiration, and I use the evidence of engagement in affordable trends (such as seeking thinness or using skin-lightening cream) as indicating engagement and aspiration, and thus as supporting the global claim. I argue that extension of the scope, coupled with the ethical nature of the ideal, is transformative. As the ideal expands, there are fewer competitor and alternative ideals, from which both to challenge the dominant beauty ideal and to provide resources for alternative ideals. Moreover the ethical and the dominant aspects of the ideal are mutually reinforcing, and together they produce a greedy ideal. The dominance of the current ideal is the second reason the contemporary beauty ideal is different from past ideals.

In the next chapter, "Routine, Special, and Extreme," I move from the dominance of the ideal to the demands. I argue that incrementally, almost stealthily, the demands of beauty rise, and practices that were previously rare, occasional treats or exceptional measures, gradually become regarded as routine. In this chapter, I map the increasing demands of beauty focusing on supposedly rou-

tine practices; particularly body hair removal. I consider five possible criteria by which to define routine practices and argue that the only criterion that consistently holds is that of "required for minimal standards." However, such demands are not minimal and what falls under minimally required is changeable. I argue the collapsing of routine into minimal is convenient, even pernicious, and contributes to the ease with which demands rise along with the harms and costs. If the demands continue to rise along current trajectories, then the costs of beauty, in terms of time and money, as well as the harms of failing to measure up, such as self-loathing and anxiety, will also continue to rise. In the final section of the chapter, I explore what it means for an ideal to be increasingly demanding if such demands are often unrealistic and impossible to meet.

In chapter 5, "Perfectly Normal," I explore the normalization of more extreme practices and the way the language of normal is used in the beauty context. I argue that as practices are normalized minimal standards of beauty rise. This means that more is required just to be "good enough," which results in the narrowing of what is acceptable or normal and a parallel expansion of "abnormal." The gradual escalation, or ratcheting up, of the demands of beauty falls on all of us. As minimal standards rise, so the choices of some to engage eventually mean that all have less choice not to engage. I then consider how normal has been used in the beauty debate to justify practices and as a legitimizing language for engagement. I argue that the narratives of "to be normal" or "to be perfect," while apparently different, are ethically similar. These expressions serve the same function; they enable individuals to access practices in correct and context-appropriate ways. The rise in minimal demands coupled with the normalizing of once extreme practices is the third difference between the current beauty ideal and past ideals.

In chapter 6, "Hidden Costs and Guilty Pleasures," I map the harms and benefits, pleasures and pains, of beauty, focusing on the communal and social rather than the individual. This chapter sets the debate about dominance and demandingness in a wider context. Recognizing the social and communal costs and benefits is crucial, as focusing only, or even primarily, on the individual leads

to policy and practice interventions that are, at best, partial and
ineffective, and, at worst, counterproductive, contributing to the
raising of minimal standards and the narrowing of normal. In this
chapter, I touch on standard justice harms including costs to vul-
nerable others, costs of resource allocation and opportunity cost,
and the harms of a toxic and discriminatory environment, and the
benefits of social bonding and the loving touch.

In chapter 7, "My Body, Myself," I describe the self under the
beauty ideal, in particular the imagined self, the end point of the
ideal. I argue that the first stage in locating the self, in part, in
the imagined self is locating the self in the body. To make this argu-
ment, I introduce traditional accounts of sexual objectification and
self-objectification. I develop from such accounts an account of
beauty objectification that does not imply sexual threat and is dis-
tanced from sexual desire. I argue that under the beauty ideal a per-
son can be objectified and self-objectified, made an "object to be
looked at," in whole or in part, and judged according to the beauty
ideal without the primary consideration being sexual. Skin can be
judged for its flawlessness and luminosity (or for wrinkles, spots
and blemishes), legs for their length and lack of cellulite (or for
their chunkiness and bumpiness), or the whole as a beautiful, ideal,
and perfect (or ugly, flawed and downright imperfect).

In chapter 8, "I Will Be Worth It!" I develop the argument of
chapter 7 and argue that objectification in beauty is not always re-
ductive in the way that sexual objectification has been claimed to
be. In beauty objectification, we are not reduced to a mere body, as
the body we are identified with is not only our actual flawed and
vulnerable body, but also our transforming and imagined body. Fur-
ther, because our actual body is already, in part, our transforming
body—and contains the promise of the imagined self—the actual
body is a source of potential. This conception of the self helps to
explain the continued power of the beauty ideal. I argue that the
self under the beauty ideal is dual: negative and critical of the cur-
rent self, and full of promise and possibility with regard to the fu-
ture self. Likewise, the beauty ideal is dual: both demanding and
rewarding. Accordingly, I argue that beauty objectification does not

reduce to a mere body or deny subjectivity as, under the beauty
ideal, we are both subject and object.

In "I'm Doing It for Me," I explore the chosen and required na-
ture of the beauty ideal. I outline why choice is regarded as trump-
ing in liberal frameworks. I argue that the "I'm doing it for me"
narrative is the correct and acceptable discourse for engaging in
beauty practices, and should not be taken at face value. I then argue
that even on its own terms the liberal choice model is insufficient
and informed consent undermined. However, while the choice-
framework fails, I go on to argue that beauty choices are not des-
perate choices or coerced, nor are they instances of false conscious-
ness or adaptive preference. I finish the chapter by mapping three
consequences of ignoring communal critiques and adopting a lib-
eral model of individual choice: first that it artificially polarizes
actors into empowered agents or passive victims; second, that it
silences debate and criticism; and third, that, despite claims to re-
spect autonomy and empower the agent, the liberal choice model
is ultimately victim-blaming.

In chapter 10, "More Pain, Who Gains?" I explore the traditional
claim that beauty practices are for the benefit of men. In this chap-
ter, I argue that traditional accounts of gendered exploitation are
not sufficient to account for what is going on in the current context.
The inequality, asymmetry and hierarchy, upon which exploitation
arguments are premised is eroding in a context in which men are
increasingly vulnerable to body dissatisfaction and increasingly
engaging in beauty practices. Men's bodies are "to be looked at,"
as women's bodies have long been, and in some quarters men are
equally subject to demanding and unrealistic appearance ideals.
This is not to say that the male ideals are equivalent; in fact, impor-
tant differences remain. Nonetheless, although differences persist,
inequality is reducing on this axis, undermining arguments of gen-
dered exploitation; although other harms, such as those deriving
from binary and hypergendered norms, remain and even extend.
I conclude that inequality and gendered exploitation are not the
primary moral problems of the dominant beauty ideal. An equal,
but equally demanding beauty ideal, would address some aspects

of gender inequality, but still be morally troubling given the extent of the demands and the functioning of the beauty ideal as an ethical ideal.

The book finishes with a short conclusion: "Beauty without the Beast," in which I revisit the argument for a beauty ideal as an ethically, dominant, demanding, and increasingly global ideal. The power of the beauty ideal constructs and sustains the construct of the self of beauty objectification, which in turn helps to explain the continued and increasing adherence to the ideal. I finish by arguing that responses to the beauty ideal must recognize both the profound attraction of the ideal and the very real pleasures involved in its pursuit, as well as the significant, growing, and potentially catastrophic harms that attach to it. Ignoring the attractions of beauty leads to false theories and bad policy and practice. If the extensive and increasingly destructive harms of beauty are to be addressed, we must begin with an accurate picture of the beauty ideal and of why it matters so much to individuals. The harms of beauty, particularly the communal harms, are very real and, if current trends continue, will profoundly limit what human beings can be and do. I suggest that effective solutions must be positive, life-enhancing, celebratory, and communal; not divisive, critical, victim-blaming, or individual.

The Limits and Limitations of *Perfect Me*

Let me finish this short introduction with a number of caveats, explanations, and apologies.

First, while gender is primary in my analysis, I adopt an intersectional approach in which gender is simply one component in the analysis and one that cannot be divided from or separated from others; including, but not exclusively, those of race, religion, class, age, and sexuality. I have tried to find a balance between recognizing and respecting difference, and being able to make substantial and general critiques. As such I have used the category "women"—anathema to some—as a class term as the beauty ideal falls on those who present as, are perceived to be, or are situated as, women. In-

deed, beautifying is one of the ways in which women are made women. In chapter 10, I argue that one of the pervasive harms of the beauty ideal is its heteronormativity and its hypergendering function. A function that is increasingly prominent and manifest in the emerging global ideal of women as "thin with curves" and in some dominant male ideals, most obviously the muscled man. Given this, the beauty ideal is experienced as gendering and gendered. Yet, there are no natural bodies, all bodies are constructed, and accordingly the category "women," as I use it, is not essentialist, nor is it intended to be exclusive or exclusionary. Rather it is a place holder for those who are made, and make themselves, women, and it is practical and political, intended to allow gender analysis that resonates in many different contexts, without trying to deny the difference of raced, sexed, and classed experience. I have sought to recognize the partial nature of my approach, and be attentive to difference, while still tracking shared experiences, communal patterns and structures. As such, and inevitably, I generalize, sometimes overgeneralize, and skip over important differences in order to make broad claims about the beauty ideal; claims that inevitably will fail in certain instances, but that nonetheless are revealing, particularly about general trends, patterns, and practices. Undoubtedly, my claims will be too general for some, particularly my claims for an emerging global ideal, and may seem presumptuous and highhanded. Also, undoubtedly, my claims will not be general enough for others, and I will be criticized for giving too much weight to the varieties of individual experience, particularly when it comes to the pleasures of beauty. To both groups I apologize, and both criticisms have truth in them. I am both overgeneral in a way that is unusual in social science disciplines and yet I seek to pay attention to actual lived experience and real-world evidence, which is unusual in my own discipline of moral philosophy.

My only defense is that only by ignoring certain differences can I track the emergence of what, I will argue, is a significant transformation in the nature, dominance, and demandingness of the beauty ideal. Moreover, as is clear throughout, my critique of the beauty ideal as an ethical ideal is not the whole story, not by any

means, and the sustained accounts of the raced, classed, sexed, and gendered nature of beauty are also necessary. Many of these I refer to and draw on in *Perfect Me* others I have not used in this work, but they have informed my thinking in broad terms, and others I am yet to discover. A challenge throughout has been the vast amount of data on this topic from social science, science, policy makers, and practitioners; and more is published every day. My critique, from the perspective of moral philosophy, should be read as offering another voice to what is already a nuanced and developed debate, a debate that spans many disciplines (including but not limited to cultural studies, medicine, law, psychology, and sociology). My contribution is to highlight the ethical nature of the beauty ideal in the hope that this goes some way to explaining the continued and increasingly pronounced dominance of it. This ethical account runs alongside and complements other accounts, and only together can progress, in both understanding and social change, be made. Thus, while I take a particular approach, in order to uncover a distinctive and neglected ethical aspect of the beauty ideal, I endorse and embrace other approaches; all approaches uncover parts of the beauty puzzle. Although I have long been committed to multidisciplinarity, in this project more than any other I have become convinced that we need the insights of all disciplines, each revealing different aspects, to understand and address complex and pressing social and ethical issues. In short, I trust my commitment to intersectionality and multidisciplinarity is clear, and I celebrate the work of many scholars from across disciplines and am very grateful for their work.

A final point on gender is that, even though I touch on the hyper-gendering and binary nature of the beauty ideal, I do not discuss the challenges and resources of LGBTQ* activist and academic communities. This is not because I do not recognize their significance or importance in both theory and practice. On the contrary, I suspect that they may offer resources for resistance, challenge, and change which are so needed. At the outset of this project I intended to include far more of this debate. However, setting out the dominant beauty ideal and its ethical functioning proved too much ma-

terial for one book. Hence, this remains a topic for future work, and perhaps in conjunction with others.

A similar omission is a discussion of the challenges of subcultures, such as body modification and body-building, as well as certain religious communities, which again I hope may provide resources to challenge and diversify the beauty ideal. The extent to which these are real alternatives or variations on a theme requires further research. For example, is strength and muscle display in body-building an alternative ideal, perhaps emphasizing the action and power of the body, or is it a version of firmness and, like the beauty ideal, "to be looked at"? Even supposedly hugely different communities that reject the display of the body are often more conforming than might be assumed; for instance, as will be discussed, focusing on the areas that can be seen (such as wearing visible rhinoplasty bandages). In addition, covered bodies can still aspire to the beauty ideal (in terms of thinness, smoothness, firmness, and youth), and there are modest, cute, and sexy variations of the beauty ideal; and such variations do not greatly challenge the demands of the ideal. The arguments about subcultures are complex and divergent; for instance, while lesbian culture can protect against the thin ideal, it can also mark nonconformity, which might or might not be problematic as the beauty ideal narrows.[2] Such divergence requires more attention than I could possibly have included in this work. This lack of discussion is an omission, but I hope not unforgivable given the breadth of the claims I am making. Again this is a hugely fruitful area for research, and I suspect such communities will be a place to start considering how to communally address the beauty ideal, the point where *Perfect Me* ends.

The final omission, and one that might be surprising, is the lack of sex in the book. Given the connections between sex and beauty ideals, for example, worries about the sexualization of young girls or the mainstreaming of porn as beauty becomes glamour, this omission may seem unforgivable. Again I had intended at the outset to address this question in detail, particularly the complex relationship between looking sexy and feeling sexy, and the fact that

one might not entail the other. Further I had intended to consider phenomena such as the slut marches, as subcultures, which might provide, as other subcultures might, resources for resistance to the dominant beauty ideal and for diversification of the ideal. However, again this debate did not make it into the final draft, and is an argument for another day. This is because the arguments for beauty objectification, as opposed to sexual objectification, track differently to, and perhaps even in the opposite direction to, the arguments about sexualization and the mainstreaming of porn. That it is possible to separate beauty objectification from sexual objectification is a key claim of this book. However, this is only one aspect of the myriad claims that could, and should, be made about how sex and beauty do, and do not, connect. In addition it is not a claim that sexism is decreasing; if anything the opposite is true. Rather it is a claim that not all beautification is sexual, sexist, or about gender. These arguments I am keen to return to in future work, as if I am right about beauty objectification, then the challenge of how to address "hotness" as a requirement and whether it is about sex or beauty or both is left hanging.

Moving from omissions to a profound and heartfelt apology. *Perfect Me* is empirically informed throughout, but it is not empirically comprehensive. As a philosopher, I lack empirical training and expertise, but as an applied philosopher I seek to respond to lived experience as it actually is, rather than as we might wish it to be. Given this, even though I use empirical data in rather unscientific ways, the empirical data is crucial. I am sure that there are data I have not used, which I should have, and data I have used wrongly, either misinterpreted or failed to recognize its import. In addition, new data will have emerged since I submitted this manuscript in November 2016. Moreover, given my scattergun approach I am sure that evidence can be found to challenge and counter my claims. However, my hope is that such evidence, while complicating my claims and providing opportunities for future discussion, will not greatly damage my arguments in *Perfect Me.* I use empirical data in a broadly illustrative, rather than strictly scientific, way and have focused on general trends and patterns. I have sought to identify

broad trends, and map the likely trajectory of such trends into the
future, and as such, despite the problems of such data use in my
discipline, and with profuse apologies to those in more data-savvy
disciplines, I trust my data will do the limited job that is required
and support the philosophical arguments of this work.

Finally a few words about what this book is and is not. Most im-
portant, as I will return to in chapter 6, *Perfect Me* is not an ethics
of practices, but a book about the beauty ideal; its ethical nature,
its dominance and demandingness, and the construction of the
self under it. My book does not seek to endorse or condemn cer-
tain practices, nor does it suggest that individual women should or
should not engage in such practices or should be, as individuals,
praised or blamed for engagement or non-engagement. Indeed it
rejects such tactics out of hand; as missing the power of the ethical
nature of the ideal and the promise of the self under the beauty
ideal. Throughout I have sought to be true to the evidence and to
take seriously the extent of the dominance that the young particu-
larly, but not exclusively, experience when it comes to managing
their bodies and their selves. As such I have attempted to recognize
the very real joys and benefits of beauty as well as the extreme and
increasing demands of a dominant, ethical beauty ideal. I do not
mean to underplay the extreme harms that attach to a dominant
and demanding beauty ideal. The harms to individuals who engage,
individuals who do not engage, and to us all are extensive and dev-
astating, in ways that I will map. But the answer has to be commu-
nal not individual, to simply tell women not to engage is unrealistic
and ineffective, and, as I will argue, profoundly unethical. This
commitment not to blame individuals and to recognize the mixed
nature of the ideal, while recognizing its ultimate harms, has led to
a very different book from the one I first conceived. Initially I had
thought that the crisis in body image and the increasing location of
the self in the body could be addressed by revised and revived sec-
ond wave feminist arguments; such as those of coercion, objectifica-
tion, and gendered exploitation. However, as I worked on the topic
and tried to make these arguments it became clear that even though
they are hugely illuminating, they no longer work as explanatory

frameworks. No longer do they speak to the experience of those who fall under the ideal, and it was not possible to explain this mismatch in lived experience away by pretending that such arguments were sufficient. While there are many harms of objectification and there are gendered harms attached to beautifying, there are also pleasures and benefits. Moreover, it is important to remember that one thing worse than locating the self in the body is locating the self in the mind and neglecting embodiment: a view my discipline of philosophy has a particularly shameful record in propagating (the ghost in the machine).

Human beings are more than bodies, something in an increasingly visual and virtual culture we are in danger of forgetting, but they are also more than disembodied minds, and this is just as important to remember as we confront the challenges of the beauty ideal. In *Perfect Me* I argue that the self is located in the body, although not reduced to the body. As embodied beings, appearance—beauty—should matter, but it should not be all that matters or what matters most. Beauty ideals should be broad, inclusive, diverse, and celebratory, not homogenous, demanding, dominant, and ultimately destructive and devastating. How we look should not be, as it increasingly is, our very selves.