

DÉMUTH, ANDREJ (ED.): COGNITIVE, SEMANTIC
AND EVOLUTIONARY ASPECTS OF AESTHETIC
AND MORAL EMOTIONS. PETER LANG, 2024.

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The collective of authors - Démuthová, Kišoňová, Démuth, Batka, and Meteňkanyč - has produced a stimulating monograph that explores selected aspects of aesthetic and moral emotions. The authors examine these emotions primarily from cognitive, semantic, and evolutionary perspectives, analysing, for example, their dictionary definitions, antonyms and synonyms, as well as their evolutionary and neurobiological underpinnings. The monograph aims to advance research on aesthetic and moral emotions by addressing themes such as beauty, admiration, disgust, anger, guilt, and (in)justice. A unifying feature of the work is its attempt to develop an integrated concept that accounts for both the subjective experience of emotions and their objective understanding, highlighting important connections and similarities among individual aesthetic and moral emotions. From these perspectives, this book offers a valuable source of inspiration for future legal research, as it ventures into interdisciplinary perspectives that are not typically considered in standard legal scholarship.

In the first chapter titled "*Beauty: Historical Context and Contemporary Perspectives*", Slávka Démuthová undertakes a challenging exploration of the concept of beauty. She begins by stating that beauty lacks a single definition and is considered subjective, suggesting that a unified concept of beauty does not exist (Démuthová, 2024, p. 17). Historically, she outlines key understandings of beauty across major epochs, limiting her discussion to their most representative views. From an evolutionary standpoint, she examines perceptions of bodily, facial, and object-related beauty, offering explanations for why certain features are consistently evaluated as attractive. The chapter further incorporates a linguistic analysis of the concept of beauty and considers contextual variables such as age, gender, and education. Although beauty is framed as subjective, the study shows that, from an evolutionary perspective, there is a relatively uniform understanding of what is perceived as beautiful. The chapter's principal strength lies in its interdisciplinary breadth, which illuminates the complexity of aesthetic

judgment without reducing beauty to a single explanatory framework (Démuthová, 2024, pp. 51, 52).

The emotions of admiration and disgust are explored by Renáta Kišoňová, who sets out to "show the colourful shades of emotions and disgust and admiration" (Kišoňová, 2024, p. 68), which she does by first presenting significant philosophical approaches to these emotions, drawing namely on the works of Aristotle, Descartes, Charles Darwin, and Jonathan Haidt. This is followed by a concise discussion of the concept of "emotion," "feeling," and "affect." The central focus of the study lies in examining how admiration and disgust function in everyday language and in the public sphere, thereby enriching the multidimensional understanding of these emotions. In this context, Kišoňová also includes an empirical study conducted among students of her own institution, inquiring about words they attribute with disgust. Surprisingly, admiration as the opposite of disgust (as defined by the author) was mentioned by several students, but to a lesser extent than expected (Kišoňová, 2024, p. 81). The article concludes with a detailed analysis of admiration and acknowledges potential social consequences of uncritical admiration of individuals or authorities.

Andrej Démuth focuses on the emotion of anger, as one of the most extensively discussed emotions due to its complex nature. He begins by addressing the question of whether anger has opposite emotions, ultimately arguing that any such determination depends on the dimension under consideration and that identifying a single, unequivocal opposite would therefore be misleading (Démuth, 2024, p. 101). The chapter then traces historical conceptions of anger and is followed by an etymological analysis of the term *anger*, as well as an examination of related concepts and expressions. In exploring the relationship of anger and hatred, Démuth concludes with saying that anger is a feeling and an emotion "...that needs to be expressed for others to see" (Démuth, 2024, p. 109). As the title *"Anger: The Awareness of Evil and the Defiant Decision to Take Justice into One's Own Hands"* suggests, the author emphasises the social and moral dimensions of anger. He develops this argument by portraying anger as a response to perceived unacceptability that simultaneously serves to mobilise the individual toward change (Démuth, 2024, pp. 118, 119). In this way, the chapter situates anger not only as a disruptive emotion, but as one with significant motivational and normative functions within social life.

A theological perspective in the emotion of guilt is offered by Ľubomír Batka who frames his contribution with a thought experiment imagining what would the world look and feel like in the absence of guilt.¹ His opening leads to a broader question of whether guilt continues to serve a meaningful function in contemporary society (Batka, 2024, p. 130). Batka begins by explaining that guilt can be understood from multiple points of view and notes that Christian teachings on sin and guilt have been widely shaped by Greek and Jewish thinking. Christian thinking on sin, guilt and related concepts is then explored by etymological and semantic analysis in the historic evolution of thought. This analysis is complemented by Schleiermacher's, Nietzsche's, Heidegger's and Ricoeur's views on guilt and their "net of interpretations". Ľubomír Batka comes to the conclusion that „*The feeling of guilt effects a change of perception, attitude, behaviour, and brings about a new start*,” (Batka, 2024, p. 162), a conclusion that resonates with the volume's broader treatment of emotions such as anger, understood not only as affective states but also as catalysts for moral reflection and transformation.

¹ The author says that without guilt, "...punishment would be just another act of violence without the framework of justice." See Batka (2024, p. 130).

The multidimensional nature of the concepts of justice and injustice is explored by Olexij M. Meteňkanyč in his study titled "*(In)justice: On the Indeterminacy of the Concept of (In)justice*." Through etymological, semantic and conceptual analysis of these terms, the author highlights the importance of engaging with the concepts of justice and injustice themselves, rather than focusing solely on the subjective human experience of (in)justice. By examining the various contexts in which these concepts are employed, Meteňkanyč demonstrates that their meanings are not always consistent or interchangeable (Meteňkanyč, 2024, p. 193). To gain a more nuanced understanding of these concepts, the author proposes examining the notions that give substance to justice and injustice across different cultural and linguistic contexts, a step that may help remove some of the ambiguity associated with these terms. Importantly, Meteňkanyč does not interpret this indeterminacy as evidence of a lack of objectivity; instead, he presents vagueness as a constitutive feature of the concepts themselves, one that need not be understood in purely negative terms (Meteňkanyč, 2024, p. 200).

As anticipated by the authors, the collective volume represents a multifaceted contribution to contemporary knowledge. Although emotions might seem to belong primarily to the domain of psychology, the authors have managed to approach them from a multitude of perspectives. The work thus transcends a purely psychological view of emotions and provides the reader with a well-founded and comprehensive view of selected moral emotions through philosophy, psychology, theology, law, and their intersections. We consider the interdisciplinary perspective to be a fundamental strength of this publication, as it enables engagement from readers from diverse academic backgrounds.

A particularly important role in achieving the internal coherence of the volume is played by the concluding chapter authored by Andrej Démuth. The summary represents a crucial part of the monograph, because it allowed the articles themselves to communicate with each other and interconnected their core ideas. By drawing attention to shared themes and conceptual overlaps, the conclusion underscores the importance of linking seemingly distinct topics within interdisciplinary research. At the same time, it clearly articulates the main findings of the collective work and openly acknowledges that not all investigations could be fully completed, emphasising instead the monograph's aim to contribute meaningfully to the ongoing research on aesthetic and moral emotions (Démuth, 2024b, pp. 217, 218).

The publication is necessarily selective in its choice of emotions, focusing on beauty, admiration, disgust, anger, guilt, and (in)justice. While these do not constitute an exhaustive list of aesthetic and moral emotions, this selectivity should not be viewed as a shortcoming. Rather, it allows the authors to engage in a deeper and more focused analysis of their respective topics. The editor implicitly acknowledges the partial nature of this selection, which may be interpreted as an invitation for future research to extend the scope of inquiry to additional emotions and thereby further develop the interdisciplinary framework established in this volume. A significant advantage is the agreement on the key issues that the authors addressed in their studies. Although each author approaches these questions from their own disciplinary background and methodological perspective, a clear thematic coherence emerges throughout the volume. This diversity of approaches enriches the discussion and reflects the authors' varied academic orientations. At the same time, a greater degree of structural uniformity among the individual contributions might have further strengthened the internal consistency of the work.

Overall, the edited monograph represents a valuable and genuinely distinctive contribution to research on aesthetic and moral emotions. Its interdisciplinary approach

offers particular inspiration for future legal scholarship, encouraging engagement with perspectives that extend beyond traditional doctrinal frameworks. The volume may thus serve as an important point of departure for further interdisciplinary research and is likely to stimulate continued scholarly interest across multiple fields. We are already looking forward to the new insights that future research in this field may bring.

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