

Doctrine of Art

Is Beauty in the Eye of the Beholder?

1. Is beauty something that is subjective, or are there objective standards, and criteria by which something may be judged to be beautiful?
2. The cultural motif is that, "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder." It is argued that there are no ultimate standards for beauty.
3. This should not be surprising, for the current cultural core belief is that truth itself is subjective, and there are no absolutes.
4. Society says that we have truths, but no truth, and we have beauties, but not beauty. We have purposes, but no purpose.
5. In every aesthetic experience, there is a subjective response. Humans do have preferences in art, literature, and music.
6. The question arises, "Is there something beyond our personal feelings, and preferences, that can define beauty?" "Is there an objective basis for beauty?"
7. The debate is not only between the objective, and the subjective, but between the normative, and the relative.
8. It should be mentioned that language shifts in culture. People complain about the loss of values. In another generation, people spoke about the loss of ethics.
9. The term, value, is the modern substitute for the word, ethic because the norms that once determined ethical standards have been set aside in favor of relativism.
10. Historically, values have been distinguished from ethics, and have been known to be subjective. There is a subjective view of values. The way one person values their home, or car, may not be the same way the neighbor values his home or car.
11. In contrast, ethical behavior rises above personal, subjective values.
12. The normative says something ought to be done, or said.
13. The relative says something may be done, or said.
14. When God says, "Thou shalt not kill," that is a normative, ethical standard. Murder is not a values judgment. Murder is not something that is irrelevant to society. It ought not to happen.

15. When applied to art, the question comes. "Is there a kind of art, that so corresponds to the character of God, that we ought to appreciate it?"
16. Colleges once offered art appreciation courses, with a view to having students learn to appreciate the various forms of art in harmony with classical standards of form and beauty.
17. If God is the foundation of beauty, and if there are norms for beauty that are grounded in the character of God Himself, then humanity is bound to discover what those norms are and embrace them. Private preferences, and private expression, should not determine what is beautiful.
18. In the debate over norms, and standards, there is a difference between chaos and cosmos.
19. Carl Sagan became famous for his book, Cosmos. He said that he believed scientific knowledge was possible.
20. It is true. The universe is cosmos. The universe is organized, and lends itself to logic and scientific inquiry.
21. Ironically, modern society is anti-logical. A large portion of society refuses to believe in God. Foolish individuals would rather attribute the universe to time + space + chance = everything.
22. People reject logic, even though they cannot live without it. A simple drive from a person's home to the nearest store demonstrates the necessity for logic, or there would be no traffic signals, and no organized store for that matter. Without order there would be nothing but a mess of rubble.
23. Without order, without cosmos, there are no patterns. If there are no patterns, there is no order, and no structure. There is only chaos. Chaos is unintelligible.
24. In physics, there is the study of what appears to be chaos. However, upon second glass, a pattern always emerges.
25. The assumption of science is cosmos.
26. In antiquity, to the time of Plato (c. 428 – 348 BC), at the entrance to his academy was a sign on the arch saying, "Let none but geometers enter here."
27. Plato wanted people who were committed to the study of form, based on rationality and structure. Research has always followed mathematical discoveries, which are symbolic logic.
28. The astronomers looked at the skies, and found mathematical harmony and precision. The stars and planets followed a pattern which allowed for ancient farming to be fruitful.

29. Aristotle was a student of Plato, and the teacher of Alexander the Great. Aristotle was a universal man, in that he wrote about philosophy, biology, ethics, physics, and drama. He passed this passion for knowledge on to Alexander.
30. When Alexander went forth to conquer nations, he took with him individuals with scientific minds to collect animals, and plants along the way.
31. One area of particular interest to Aristotle was art. He sought to discover the principles that established the norms of beauty.
32. Aristotle observed certain facets of beauty. His observations would be embraced later by Thomas Aquinas (1225 – March 7, 1274), and later still by Jonathan Edwards (Oct 5, 1703 – March 22, 1758).
33. The principle of beauty include:
 - Proportionality. Consider the difference between primitive art on cave walls, and the masterpieces of Rembrandt, Michelangelo, and Raphael.
 - Harmony. Consider the difference between a symphony and noise. Harmony is where the pieces that are used in a given work of art are used in an integrated way. They do not clash. They are not garish. The difference between music, and noise, is based on the principle of harmony.
 - Simplicity. Consider a stick figure, compared to a portrait of a person. Care must then be given to proportion of the various body parts to one another. Something can be simple, and beautiful. There can be beauty in a Gregorian chant, or a plain song, but it is not simplistic. There is still relationship involved.
 - Complexity. There is skill attributed to those who can produce works of art that are in proportion with harmony, for they are related. To a simple harmonica can be added violin, trumpets, drums, oboes, and other instruments to form complexity, with harmony. That does not happen in a random manner.
34. These basic principles can be found in painting, sculptor, literature, buildings, dance, and music.
35. Beauty is not based upon an arbitrary feeling, or chaos. Beauty is based upon an interaction of structural components.
36. Pablo Picasso (Oct 25, 1881 – April 8, 1973) descended into artistic decadence, but managed to convince many of a philosophy of art, which became an avant-garde for others.
37. In music, John Milton Cage Jr (Sept 5, 1912 – August 12, 1991) pioneered indeterminacy in music.

Special Note.

In 1952 Cage composed his 4'33", which stood for four minutes and 33 seconds of silence. Cage was trying to make a statement that music is random. Music is by chance. There is no order. This was a philosophical avant-garde view of music rooted in his studies in Indian philosophy and Zen Buddhism. In a 1957 lecture, *Experimental Music*, he described music as "a purposeless play" which is "an affirmation of life – not an attempt to bring order out of chaos, not to suggest improvements in creation, but simply a way of waking up to the very life we're living."

Ironically, Cage was a gourmet mushroom collector. When he went into the forest to collect his mushrooms, he never did it arbitrarily. He would have died had he lived by the principle he was trying to communicate with his art. Such is the foolishness of humanity. Such is the idiocy of those who embrace the foolishness of individuals like Picasso and Cage.