

What About ... Beauty

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Definition: Beauty is a combination of qualities that pleases the senses.

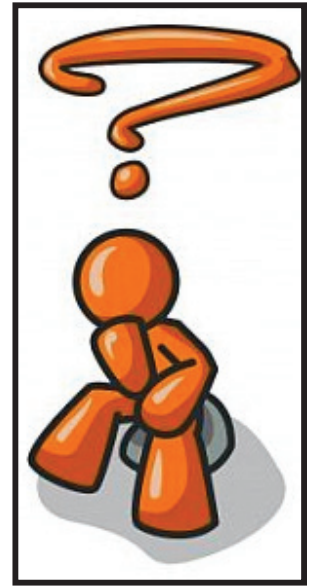
Beauty is Absolute, Not Relative

Beauty is NOT “in the eyes of the beholder,” if that means beauty is subjective. Consider the following pictures. Suppose you had to put the label of “Beautiful” or “Ugly” on each.



I suspect you would have no trouble at all labeling each as either beautiful or ugly. I further suspect that the vast majority of us would have the same photos labeled the same way. I also suspect that if we showed these photos to anyone anywhere in the world at any time in history, the vast majority, if not everyone, would label all the photos the same as everybody else. Actu-

ally, you don't even want to look at the ugly ones. They are repulsive. But you want to look longer at the beautiful ones.



The universal recognition of beauty is not restricted to sight. The vast majority of all mankind would think the smell of a rose is more beautiful than the smell of a chicken coop, the sound of the music of Mozart is more beautiful than that of a police siren, the touch of a velvet cloth is more beautiful than sandpaper, and the taste of chocolate is more beautiful than cod liver oil. Beauty is an attribute or characteristic of God, *being understood through what has been made* (Roman 1:20).

Beauty Judges the Beholder

Anyone who misjudged the six photos above would be revealing their own sense of perversion. Of course, if we blended the beauty and the ugly things together in the same photo, then there would be different opinions, but not because we disagree on what is beautiful or ugly.

Beauty Is Beauty Everywhere

Of course, there are differences in style that vary from age-to-age and culture-to-culture, but those are just different ways to depict beauty, not a contradiction between what is beautiful and ugly.

Consider the Old Testament depictions of beauty given between 3,000 and 4,000 years ago and in a completely different culture. The descriptions we have of, say, Joseph, Saul, David, Rachel, Esther, and Solomon's

Shulammite bride, sound like the depiction of the same beauty we would recognize today (Genesis 39:6; 1 Samuel 9:2; 16:12; Genesis 29:17; Esther 2:7).

"Ugly" Is a Lack of "Beauty"

Like bad is a perversion of good, “ugly” is a perversion of “beauty.” Ugly is a modifier. It requires beauty for its existence. For example, the picture of the rotting dead fish floating in the water is only possible because there were live fish swimming in a lake. A view of the live fish would be beautiful and the deterioration of that is ugly. But the ugly could not exist if it were not for the beauty (Ezekiel 28:17).

Beauty Can Only Be Imitated, Not Created

When we depict beauty in our handiwork, we can do no better than to return to natural beauty. The most beautiful humans, animals, plants, flowers, trees, and landscapes can only be imitated in, say, our cartoons, films, or paintings. We can make them more ugly, but not more beautiful. We can distort them into monsters, we can pollute, contaminate, adulterate, and taint them in various ways, but we cannot improve on the beauty depicted in nature. We can only imitate the beauty of nature or pervert it (Ezekiel 16:12-13 & 17).

Beauty is valuable, and it is to be sought and enjoyed, as it is defined by the character of God in the Word of God.

Applications about Beauty

Application #1: We should consider it natural and normal to desire beauty.

Beauty is good and should never be discouraged, say, in our appearance, our clothing, our homes, our work place, our spouse, or our children.

Application #2: We should use the example of beauty to emphasis the existence of God.

It could be said that the universe is filled with useless beauty. A universe developed along functional lines of blind mechanical viability has no explanation for beauty or our enjoyment of it. Beauty is never a product of randomness, and it is unnecessary for survival of the fittest.

Application #3: We should not be deceived by radical groups who claim to depict beauty.

A Muslim might say it is beautiful for a woman to cover her head, a biker group might think it's beautiful to be covered in tattoos, a teenage social clique might think tongue and cheek piercings are beautiful. But these only reflect the mental instability or moral perversions of the group.

Application #4: We should imitate the beauty of God.

Beauty is a characteristic of God and a work of God (Psalm 27:4; Isaiah 33:17; 62:2-3). When we depict beauty in our works of art (such as in music, literature, paintings, and sculpture), it should be consistent with the beauty of God. There is nothing wrong with depicting ugly things in our creativity, as long as it is not blasphemous or offensive to God, in and of itself. But we should never depict the ugly as beautiful, or the beautiful as ugly.

Application #5: Beauty is best adorned in moderation.

The apostles taught that personal adornment should be proper, defined as that which is done modestly and discreetly (1 Timothy 2:9-10; cf. 1 Peter 3:3-4).

Application #6: We must be careful not to turn beauty into pride (Isaiah 13:19; 23:8-9; 28:1), coveting (Exodus 20:17), lust (Matthew 5:28), or externalism (James 1:11).

When we see value in beauty apart from the character of God, it leads to pride. When we want to possess it, it leads to coveting. When the recognition of it is perverted, it leads to lust. When we focus on temporary beauty, it tends to keep us from the beauty of the Kingdom of God.