

Beauty Reconsidered

The Eclipse and Resurgence of a Lovely Concept

Although the notion of beauty has a noble pedigree, in recent times it has been under attack. For relativists, there can never be universal, objective standards for beauty. For philosophers in the tradition of Nietzsche beauty is all about power: calling something beautiful is to assert arbitrary authority over it. Even for some Christians the notion of beauty is suspiciously Platonic, and sub-biblical. Should we then eliminate the whole concept of beauty and find other language to deal with the aesthetic dimension of life? This workshop will suggest a way both to preserve the idea of beauty and to steer clear of the pitfalls. Illustrations from the history of art will be used to support the arguments.

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1 Will beauty save the world?

1.1 Biblical usage

1.2 Nearly universal sense of beauty

1.3 Serious problems with beauty

1.3.1 Plato's harmony

1.3.2 Kant's feeling of the sublime

1.3.3 Foucault's beauty as power

1.3.4 Another look at the Bible

2 Should art be beautiful?

2.1 Cézanne's *La Montagne Sainte Victoire*

2.2 Goya's *Shootings of May 3rd, 1808*

2.3 Grünewald's *The Crucifixion*

3 Artistic qualities

3.1 From this world

3.2 Well-crafted

3.3 True to creation, fall, redemption

Recommended Resources

Frank B. Brown: Religious Aesthetics: A Theological Study of Making and Meaning, Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1989

Adrienne Chaplin & H. Brand: Art & Soul, Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity press, 2001

Tim Dean & David Porter, eds.: Art in Question, Basingstoke: Marshall Pickering, 1987

John Dillenberger: A Theology of Artistic Sensibilities: The Visual Arts and the Church, New York: Crossroad, 1986

Derek Kidner: The Christian and the Arts, London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1959

Clyde Kilby: Christianity and Aesthetics, Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1961

Abraham Kuyper: "Calvinism and Art", in Lectures on Calvinism: The Stone Foundation Lectures, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1931

Susanne K. Langer: Feeling and Form, New York: Scribners, 1953

Madeleine l'Engle: Walking on Water: Reflections on Faith and Art, Wheaton: Harold Shaw, 1980

C. S. Lewis, ed.: An Experiment in Criticism, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961

Flannery O'Connor: Mystery and Manners, New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1962

Erwin Panofsky: Idea: A Concept in Art Theory, Columbia, SC: U of S.C. Press, 1968

H. R. Rookmaaker: Art and the Public Today, Huemoz, Switzerland: L'Abri Fellowship, 1968

-----: Art Needs No Justification, Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1978

-----: The Creative Gift: Essays on Art and the Christian Life, Westchester, IL: Cornerstone Books, 1981

-----: Modern Art and the Death of a Culture, Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970

Dorothy Sayers: "Toward a Christian Aesthetic," in V. A. Demant, ed.: Our Culture: Its Christian Roots and Present Crisis, London: S.P.C.K., 1947

Francis A. Schaeffer: Art and the Bible, Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973

Calvin Seerveld: Rainbows for the Fallen World, Toronto: IRSS, 1980

Nicholas Woltersdorff: Art in action, Grand Rapids, MI: Wedge, 1980