

Last time we talked about:

## I. Secular and Postmodern views of beauty

- Postmodernism denies or relativizes beauty
- The Bible establishes a cultural triad of truth, goodness, and beauty reflecting the perfections of God
- The world sees truth, goodness, and beauty as independent rather than inter-related qualities
- Part of the creation mandate involves arranging creation in accordance with truth, goodness, and beauty

## II. Truth, Goodness, and Beauty in the Eye of the Beholder

Our culture questions (doubts) truth, goodness, and beauty — this culture of doubt is the environment in which we live.

Justification of sin is nothing new, but the use of relativism as justification is the popular method in modern Western culture.

### A. Truth in the mind of the beholder

1. Modern views: truth is subjective, unless it is from science, then no questions asked
2. Reality: Objective truth: there is such a thing as a “God’s-eye view,” even if the individual fails to comprehend it all.



### B. Goodness in the heart of the beholder

1. Modern views: morality is pragmatic – it is what works to best promote evolution, but there is no ultimate standard
2. Countering moral relativism
  - a. Universal consciousness of evil



C. S. Lewis:

“I know that some people say the idea of a Law of ... decent behaviour known to all men is unsound, because different civilisations and different ages have had quite

different moralities,” Lewis said.<sup>1</sup> That’s basically the postmodern argument against the objective reality of goodness.

Lewis used a counterargument that was very relevant at that moment. There was no sense in saying Hitler was wrong, he said, “unless Right is a real thing which the Nazis at bottom knew as well as we did and ought to have practiced.” [Ward, 389]

#### b. Examples:

- 1) “different cultures have different morals” — but those who hold such views condemn other cultures when it suits them
- 2) When someone is in danger, others instinctively rush to their aid (seared consciences or sociopathic individuals notwithstanding)

3. Everywhere in history, people give evidence of knowing the moral law, even when they disobey it because God wrote it on their heart (Rm 2.14-15)

#### C. Beauty in the eye of the beholder

##### 1. Definition of beauty:

“Beauty, is what makes art, art. ... [Art means] first, that somebody made it (for we don’t call accidents ‘art’), and, second, that its appearance has the potential to reward those who pay attention to it. That is, it can be appreciated for its beauty.”<sup>2</sup>



- a. Scientism on beauty: “The sense of beauty has emerged through the process of sexual selection.... By making himself beautiful the man is doing what the peacock does when he displays his tail: he is giving a sign of his reproductive fitness, to which a

<sup>1</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2009), 5.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Munson and Joshua Farris Drake, *Art and Music: A Student’s Guide*, ed. David Dockery (Wheaton: Crossway, 2014), 15.

woman responds as the peahen responds, claiming him ... on behalf of her genes.”<sup>3</sup>

b. Postmodernism on beauty: “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.”  
[Ward, 390]

## 2. Critiquing the scientific view:

a. It’s a “just so” story

b. How can it be proved or disproved?

c. Another evolutionary view: beauty unites the group around an object or objects, which is an “evolutionary advantage” over others

1) Remember Joshua Bell: music points beyond itself to a divine order

2) Our own experience of beauty – beautiful things are significant

a) Admired

b) Collected

c) Treasured/valued

“Materialism strips all significance and meaning from beauty, just as it does with everything else in the universe. ... You can’t act as if the beautiful things you treasure are beautiful only by evolutionary accident.”

[Ward, 390]

## 3. Critiquing the postmodern view:

a. Postmodernism strips meaning away by saying each individual’s view has equal weight (my idea is as good as your idea)

b. We know beauty has value by experience *and* by revelation (Ps 19.1)

<sup>3</sup> Roger Scruton, *Beauty: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 31. [See also Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871; repr., New York: Penguin Classics, 2004), 114–15.]

#### 4. Subjective elements in beauty

##### a. Different cultures have differing expressions of beauty

- 1) “Russian” flavor to Rachmaninoff; “English” sound of Vaughan Williams
- 2) Arabic or Hindi music quite different from Western music
- 3) However, there are elements of beauty common to all cultures

“Symmetry and order; proportion; closure; convention; harmony, and also novelty and excitement: all these seem to have a permanent hold on the human psyche.”<sup>4</sup>

##### b. Accounting for taste

- 1) Taste can be educated and cultivated – good taste should be cultivated
- 2) Difference of taste can mean that one or both of two differing observers are wrong
- 3) The tastes of modern intelligentsia seems often very corrupted – strange “art” works on display
  - a) Canada’s \$300,000 “Stripes” painting
  - b) An empty room in the Tate Modern Gallery with the lights programmed to go on and off every five seconds
- 4) If this is so, then there must be some way to define good taste and true beauty (more coming)

#### 5. The purpose of beauty

##### a. Beauty calls to our attention, impresses us with its own significance

##### b. However, beauty doesn’t exist only for man – there are beautiful things in the universe that are only recent discoveries of man

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 119.

- 1) The beauty of the Great Barrier Reef, only known after Cousteau invented scuba gear
  - 2) The beauty of far off nebulae, never seen until Hubble
- c. Beauty exists for God as well as man, and God is the standard of beauty (Rm 11.36)

**Conclusion:**

“The way God’s own beauty can serve as the standard of all human-created beauty will take some explaining. But for now the important point is that, like truth and goodness, beauty is both subjective and objective. The fact that human eyes often miss beauty doesn’t mean beauty is not really there to be seen. You must be a certain kind of person to truly appreciate beauty.” [Ward, 392]