

Can Beauty Point Us to God?

A Posteriori Argument:
Reasoning from beauty back to God

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Consider the following Quote:



“Now if a man believes in the existence of beautiful things, but not of Beauty itself, and cannot follow a guide who would lead him to a knowledge of it, is he not living in a dream?” Plato's *Republic*, 476c.

Plato is the “father” & fiercest critics of the philosophy of Aesthetics in Western thought & culture.

An Introduction:

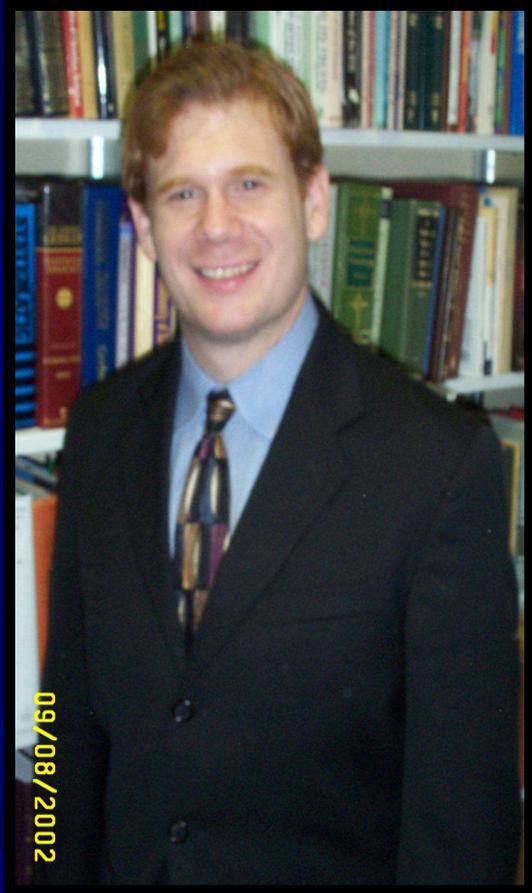
- Is it reasonable to believe that beauty points us to God? Or is beauty merely in the eye of the beholder?
- While not discounting the possibility of a subjective aspect to beauty, subjectivity does not automatically mean the non-existence of objective beauty or that objectivity is necessarily oppositional to subjectivity. Could it be that both objective beauty and subjective beauty are co-extensive (i.e., two sides of a coin)?

Consider:

Arguments and evidences that are used from moral law for God's existence may be translated into aesthetic arguments and evidences for God's existence.

For example:

Consider: We have a standard of validity:



How had I got this idea of beauty and ugliness? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line. What was I comparing object X with when I called it ugly?

Straight Line = Standard

Consider the following relationship:

**1. Moral laws imply
a Moral Law
Giver.**

**Beauty implies a
Mind of beauty.**

**2. There is an
objective moral
law.**

**There is objective
beauty.**

**3. Therefore, there
is a Moral Law
Giver.**

**Therefore, there
is an objective
Mind of beauty.**

Outline:

- Eight Types of Arguments & Evidences from Beauty for God's Existence:
 - I. Logical Arguments
 - II. Aesthetic Value Judgment Argument
 - III. Intuition Argument
 - IV. Aesthetic Experience Argument
 - V. Practical Argument
 - VI. Existential Desire Argument
 - VII. Cultural Argument
 - VIII. Evidences of universal Signatures of Art Against Relativism and Subjectivism

Consider the following Logical Arguments from Beauty for God's existence:

- A. Argument from Aesthetic Normativity
- B. Argument from Universal Signatures of Beauty
- C. Argument from Aesthetic Order
- D. Argument from objectivity for the Existence of God
- E. Argument from Objective Beauty to an Absolute Mind
- F. Idealist Argument from the Human mind to Infinite Mind
- G. Argument from Aesthetic Norms of Beauty for God's
Existence:

Argument from Aesthetic Normativity for God's Existence:

1. It appears to human beings that aesthetic normativity (i.e., a transcultural standard of validity) exists.
2. The best explanation of aesthetic normativity is that it is grounded in God.
3. Therefore God exists.

Argument from Universal Signatures of Beauty for God's Existence:

1. Universal signatures of beauty exists (e.g., symmetry, proportion, unity, complexity, intensity)
2. Universal signatures have the properties of being objective.
3. The best explanation for the existence of universal signatures of beauty is provided by theism.
4. Therefore the existence of universal signatures of beauty provides good grounds for thinking theism is true.

Consider the following by Thomas Aquinas:

“Beauty demands the fulfillment of three conditions: the first is *integrity*, or *perfection*, of the thing, for what is defective is, in consequence ugly; the second is proper *proportion*, or harmony; and the third is *clarity*- thus things which have glowing colour are said to be beautiful.”



Frederick Hart (1943-99)
Three Soldiers at Vietnam Memorial

Argument from Aesthetic Order for God's Existence:

- 1. Beauty is a rational enterprise.**
- 2. Beauty would not be a rational enterprise if there were no aesthetic “order” in the world (e.g., unity, intensity, complexity).**
- 3. Only the existence of God traditionally conceived could support the hypothesis that there is an aesthetic order in the world.**
- 4. Therefore, there is a God.**

An Argument from Objective Beauty for God's Existence:

1. There must be objective beauty.
2. Objective beauty is beyond individual persons and beyond humanity as a whole.
3. Objective beauty must come from an objective Mind of beauty because.
4. Therefore, there must be a beautiful, personal Mind behind objective beauty.

Let's further unpack this powerful argument:

An argument from Objective Beauty to God:

1. **There must be objective beauty; otherwise:**

- (a) There would not be such great transcultural agreement on its meaning.
- (b) No real disagreements of beauty would ever have occurred, each person being right from his own perspective.
- (c) No value judgment of beauty would ever have been wrong, each being subjectively right.
- (d) No question of beauty could ever be discussed, there being no objective understanding of beauty
- (e) Contradictory views would both be right, since opposites could be equally correct.

An Argument from Beauty to God:

2. Objective beauty is beyond individual persons and beyond humanity as a whole:
 - (a) It is beyond individual persons, since they often sense a conflict with beauty/ugliness;
 - (b) It is beyond humanity as a whole, for they collectively fall short of beauty and measure the progress of civilization by its art-forms in terms of beauty.

An Argument from Beauty to God:

3. Objective beauty must come from an objective Mind of beauty because:

(a) Beauty has no meaning unless it comes from a mind; only minds emit meaning.

(b) Beauty is meaningless unless it is a meeting of mind with mind, yet people inherently desire to experience beauty.

(c) Hence, discovery of and desire for beauty make sense only if there is a Mind or Person behind it.

4. Therefore, there must be a beautiful, personal Mind behind objective beauty.

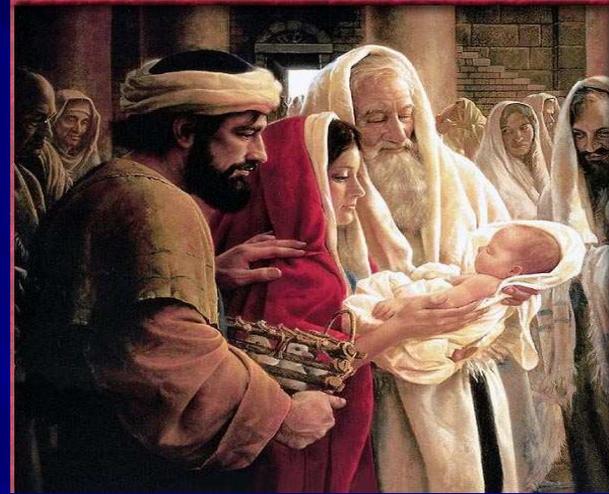
7 Evidences for Objective Beauty:

Let's pause and further explore this argument by considering 7 evidences for objective beauty.

These evidences were translated from moral law evidences in *I Don't Have Enough Faith to be Atheist* by Norman Geisler and Frank Turek, pg. 172.

7 Evidences for Objective Beauty?

- 1. We know what is beautiful and what is ugly by the manner we react to what we see.
- 2. We would not know what is ugly if there was no absolute sense of what is beautiful (you only know something is ugly by comparing it to an unchanging standard of what is beautiful).



Simeon's Moment



Kopi Luwak Coffee Beans

What evidences do we have?

- 3. Real disagreements over beauty would not be possible without some reference to objective beauty. Every issue of beauty would merely be a matter of opinion.

In terms of beauty, there would not be a significant difference between a clear, star starry-filled night and a trash dump.



Star-filled sky



Trash Dump

What evidences do we have?

- 4. Beauty cannot strictly be subjective. There must be some independent standard. Otherwise, no one can criticize beauty. There would really be no substance to one's argument.

What evidences do we have?

- 5. We would not make excuses for making something ugly if we didn't have some conception on what is objectively beautiful. In fact, it is naturally *difficult to desire* to produce something ugly whether it is a landscape, a painting, or musical medley.

What evidences do we have?

One can't listen extensively to the random sounds off John Cage as compared to Bach or Mozart.. I can stare at Van Gogh's *Starry Nights* for hours as compared to a toddler's drawing off a bug.. Sure, some creations take on a particular significance to us because of their meaning to our lives...like my daughter's drawing or my son's painting. Nevertheless, we might have different art work on our walls across the world, but we generally sweep the trash off the floor...



John Cage



Van Gogh's *Starry Nights*

What evidences do we have?

- 6. We would not substantively know if an artist's work is getting worse or better if there was no conception of an objective standard of beauty.
- 7. Since we know what is absolutely ugly, there must be an absolute standard or basis of what is beautiful.

Beauty must come from a perfect mind of beauty.



Consider...

- When we attribute aesthetic value to a work of art we are attributing value to the work itself. We are saying that it has aesthetic value and that its value is grounded in the NATURE OF THE OBJECT ITSELF, not in the fact that most observers favor it (this would be a consequent of the fact).
- What object X demands from the observer is his considered judgment of its merit, and this judgment is based upon the work's properties alone, not on the properties of any observer or relation to it. Consider the following theories of objective value:

Consider Aristotle's comments...

- Beauty is a real property of things (*Metaphysics* 1072b32-35). Aristotle writes:

“Those who suppose, as the Pythagoreans and Speusippus do, that supreme beauty and goodness are not present in the beginning, because the beginnings both of plants and of animals are causes, but beauty and completeness are in the effects of these, are wrong in their opinion. For the seed comes from other individuals which are prior and complete, and the first thing is not seed but the complete being, e.g., we must say that before the seed there is a man,-not the man produced from the seed, but another from whom the seed is produced.”

Consider Aristotle's comments...

Moreover, in *Parts of Animals*, 645a23-25, Aristotle relates beauty to design:

“Absence of haphazard and conduciveness of everything to an end are to be found in nature's works in the highest degree, and the end for which those work are put together and produced is a form of the beautiful.”

So, while Aristotle's view of beauty may be vague, it is clear that he believed beauty to be objective; beauty is derived from the nature of the beautiful object; it is related to size and proportion; it is related to design.

Consider Aristotle's comments...

- While Aristotle doesn't provide offer a robust account of philosophical aesthetics whereby he deals with the problems of defending aesthetic judgments, we are able to conclude the following from Aristotle:
 - Aesthetics involves objective reality; it is cognitively perceived and can be imitated.
 - Aesthetics is pedagogically valuable and serious.
 - Beauty is a real property; He is an empiricist who believed all knowledge begins in the senses.

Argument from Objective Beauty to an Absolute Mind:
Beginning with the objectivity of beauty, one may reason to an
absolutely perfect Mind:

1. An absolutely perfect ideal of beauty exists (at least psychologically in our minds).
2. An absolutely perfect idea of beauty can exist only if there is an absolutely perfect Mind of beauty:
 - (a) Ideas can exist only if there are minds (thoughts depend on thinkers).
 - (b) And absolute ideas depend on an absolute Mind (not on individual [finite] minds like ours).
3. Hence, it is rationally necessary to postulate an absolute Mind as the basis for the absolutely perfect idea of beauty.

Idealist Argument from Beauty to God's Existence:

1. There is objective beauty that is independent of human consciousness of it and that exists in spite of human lack of conformity to it:
 - (a) Persons are conscious of beauty beyond themselves;
 - (b) Persons admit its validity is prior to their recognition of it;
 - (c) Persons acknowledge its claim on them, even while not yielding to it;
 - (d) no finite mind completely grasps its significance;
 - (e) all finite minds together have not reached complete agreement on its meaning, nor conformity with its ideal.

An Idealist Argument from Beauty to God's Existence:

2. But ideas exist only in minds.
3. Therefore, there must be a supreme Mind (beyond all finite minds) in which this objective beauty exists.

Argument from Aesthetic Norms of Beauty for God's Existence:

1. Certain aesthetic norms of beauty have authority (e.g., exact imitation, representation, depiction, proportion, unity, complexity, intensity).
2. If they have authority, there must be a reliable motive for human beings to strive to follow these norms of beauty.
3. No such motive could exist, unless there is a God to attach sanctions to behavior under aesthetic norms of beauty.
4. There is a God.

II. An Argument from Value Judgments:

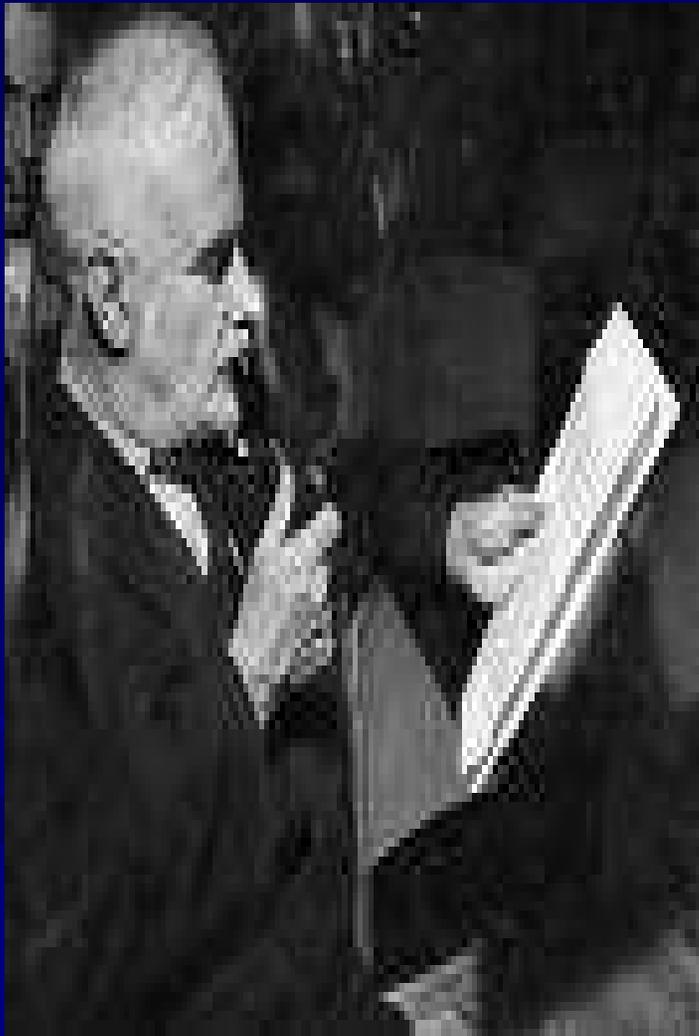
This argument is rooted in the idea that a naturalistic worldview entails skepticism.

- 1. Aesthetics value judgments is a rational enterprise.**
- 2. Value judgments would not be a rational if skepticism were true.**
- 3. There is too much unresolved disagreement for us to suppose that skepticism can be avoided if human sources of aesthetic value judgments are all that we have.**
- 4. Therefore we must assume that there is an extra-human, divine source for aesthetic value judgments.**

III. Intuition Argument:

- The following is an argument from the Intuition Tradition of G. E. Moore. Within this tradition we will examine C. E. M. Joad's statement and then frame it into an argument.
- Joad contends that beauty is not an objective, natural property (e.g., symmetry). Rather, objective beauty is a non-natural property, one that is altogether unique. Thus, objective beauty is an un-analyzable property that is discoverable when we invoke non-natural powers of detection, namely, the faculty of intuition.

C. E. M. Joad's conception of non-natural "objective" beauty:



Beauty is a simple, un-analyzable property whose presence can only be intuited but not determined by any empirical tests. He writes, "*Beauty is directly apprehended by the mind in just the same way that shape is directly apprehended.*"

~ "The Limits of Psychology in Esthetics" in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Vol. XI, 1932, 209-10.

- It is still an objective property (though non-natural)

Intuition Argument:

■ Argument for Objective Beauty from God's existence based upon Intuited recognition of un-analyzable Property of Beauty:

1. Beauty is a simple un-analyzable property intuited by the human mind.
2. The best explanation for this objective un-analyzable property intuited by the human mind is that it is that it is grounded in God.
3. Therefore God exists.

For Joad, object X has the objective property of beauty that is uniquely esthetic and different from all other properties in the universe:

“Esthetic emotion is a mental process which accompanies the apprehension of beauty, as fear is a process which accompanies the apprehension of a tiger [Ibid].”

Consider T. E. Jessop's assertion:

“When I attribute property to an object the tribute seems to be wrung from me by the object, and if on reflection I conclude that I have misapprehended the object, I am unable to retain the attribution ... I cannot at pleasure give it, withhold it, or change it. Under the influence of mood beauty may lose its savor, but not its beauty; in a reflective person the judgment remains the same as long as the object does.”

“The Definition of Beauty,” *Proceedings in Aristotelian Society*, Vol. 33, 1932-3) 161, 165.

IV. Argument from Aesthetic Experience:



Argument from Normative Aesthetic Experience for God's Existence:

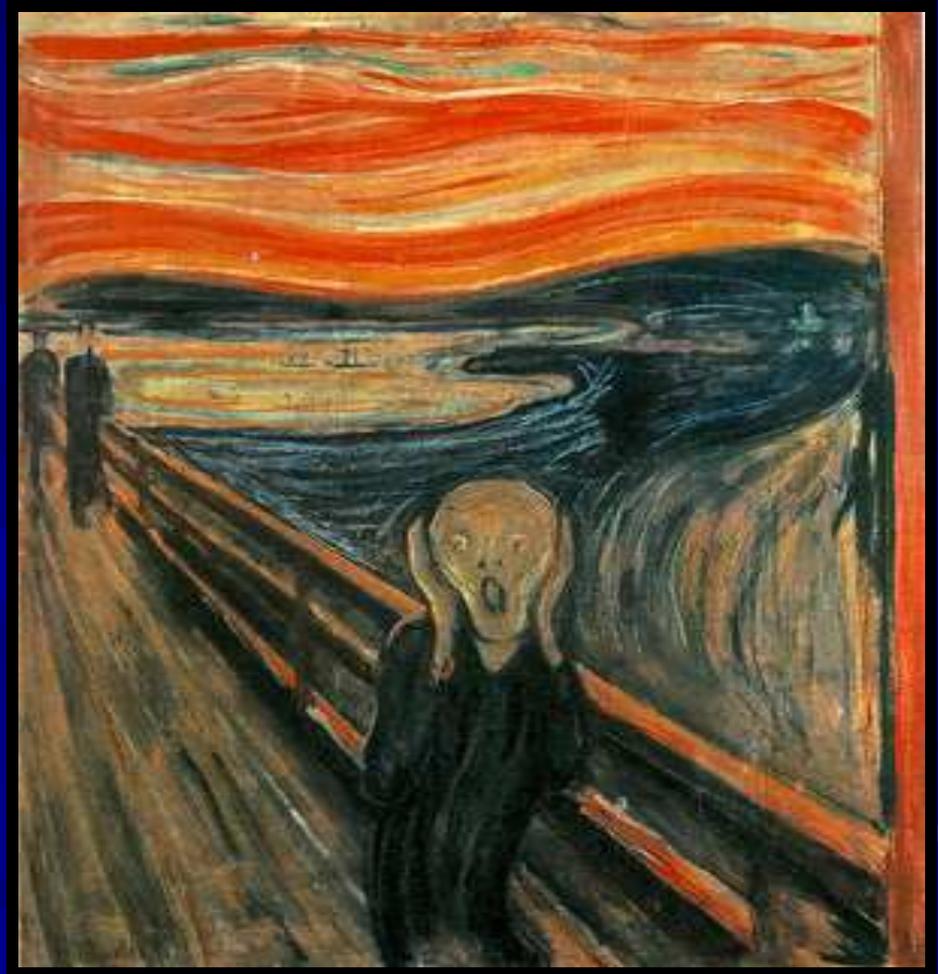
1. It appears to human beings that normative (transcultural) aesthetic experiences occur.
2. The best explanation for aesthetic normative experiences (transcultural) is that it is grounded in God.
3. Therefore God exists.

V. A Practical Argument from Objective Beauty for God's Existence:

1. **It would be demoralizing not to believe there is objective beauty.**
2. **Demoralization is morally undesirable.**
3. **There is a moral advantage in believing that there is objective beauty.**
4. **Theism provides the best theory of the source of beauty.**
5. **Therefore there is a moral advantage in accepting theism.**

Why is Demoralization undesirable?

1. Moral values have supremacy over all other values.
2. Art “infects” the direction of communities & cultures.



“The Scream” by Edvard Munch, 1893

VI. Existential Hunger for Beauty?

Why aren't we satisfied with the mundane?

Why aren't we satisfied with monotony?

Why aren't we satisfied with "colorless" surroundings?

Why do we anticipate an encounter with the sublime?

Why are we in "awe" when we encounter something that is truly beautiful and are "repulsed by what is "ugly."

Why do we hunger for beauty (e.g., partner, spouses, home, personal presentation, accessories, vehicle).

Why do we want to be around "beautiful" people?

Could the sublime be anticipatory to Him who is the Ultimate Sublime, the Sum-total of His Infinite Perfections (Revelation 1; 21-22)

VI. Existential Hunger for Beauty?

Why are we not satisfied with those things that are “ugly.” Why aren’t we satisfied with what is ugly, out of proportion, random, and chaotic? Moreover, why do we respond negatively to that which is random, not proportional, etc?

When we seek to depict or represent something, *why* do we seek to make it beautiful in terms of arrangement, order, shape, and color?

We will even call an object beautiful if the artist is able to recreate the object perfectly—even if the object itself is ugly.

Aquinas puts it this way:



Famous “Ugly Dog”

Thomas Aquinas:

“Everyone who represents or depicts something does so in order to produce something beautiful.”

~ In De divi. Nom. C. IV lect. 5 (Mandonnet, 366).

*But why do we seek to produce something beautiful?
Because we take pleasure in harmony, symmetry,
complexity, intensity, etc. Consider the following
argument from Aquinas:*

Consider this argument from Aquinas: Aesthetic and biological pleasure:

- “The lion rejoices when he sees or hears a stag, because of the promise of food. And man experiences pleasure with the other senses and not only because of food, but also because of the harmony of sense impressions. And since sense impressions deriving from the other senses give pleasure because of their harmony—for instance, when a man delights in well harmonized sounds—then this pleasure is not connected with keeping him alive.”

~ *Summa Theol.*, II-a II-ae q. 141 a. 4 ad. 3.

Existential Desire for The Highest Form of Beauty by Blaise Pascal:

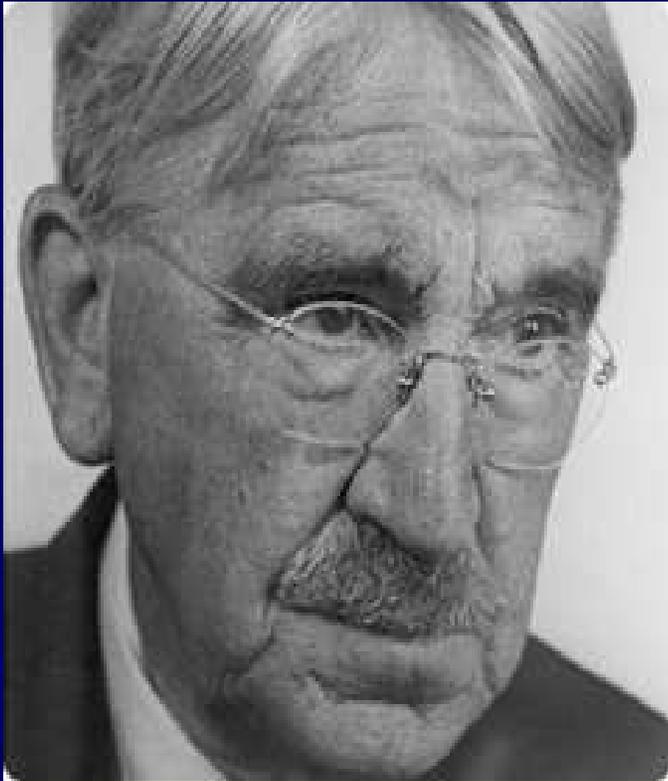
"Man does not like to remain alone; and as he loves, he must look elsewhere for an object for his love. He can find it only in beauty. Since, however, he is himself the most beautiful creature that God has created [Genesis 1:26-27], he must find within himself a model for the beauty he seeks beyond himself."

~ Blaise Pascal, *Discours sur les passions d'armour*,
Oeuvres completes (ed. de la Pleiade, 1954, 539-40).

VII. Cultural Apologetic Argument # 1:

- What happens when humanity is oppressed by humanistic doctrines such as Marxism? Why do some artists strive to construct "shock art"?
- Consider an acute observation made by John Dewey in his classic work *Art as Experience*:

Cultural Apologetic Argument # 1:



- "Industry has been mechanized and an artist cannot work mechanically for mass production.... Artists find it incumbent... to betake themselves to their work as an isolated means of 'self-expression.' In order not to cater to the trend of economic forces, they often feel obliged to exaggerate their separateness to the point of eccentricity."

Positively, when art is generated from a Christian worldview we personally and sociologically illustrate and explore what it means to truly be human (creatively, imaginatively, intellectually, emotionally, spiritually, personally, & collectively):

- "Art is communication, the announcement of observed beauties, the calling of attention to human values, the bestowing upon one's fellow human beings of beauty, singing and testifying, rejoicing and praising, opening eyes and building an outlook truly worth of human being."

Hans Rookmaaker in "Norms for Art and Entertainment," *The Complete Works of Hans Rookmaaker*, 6 vols, 3:77.

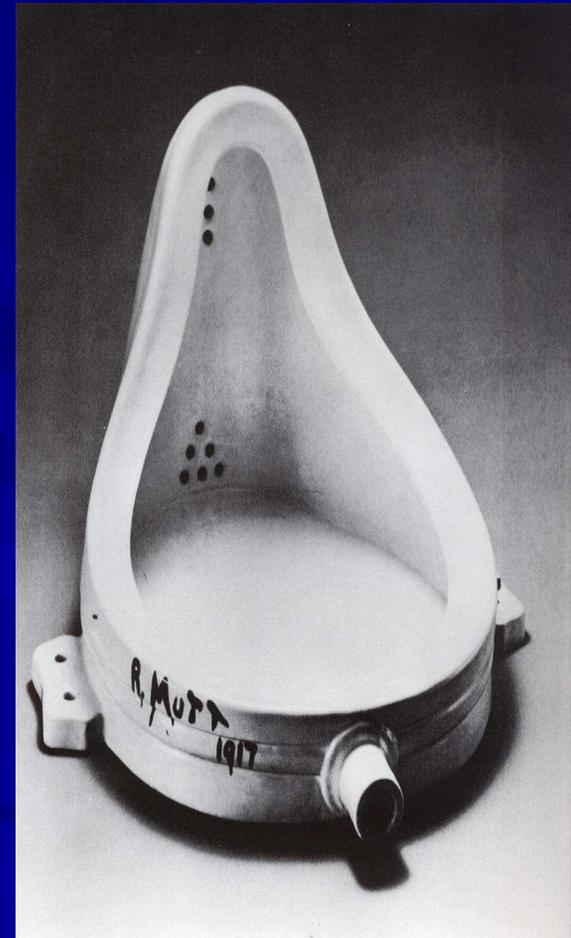
Cultural Apologetic Argument # 2:

- In his Gifford Lecture series, William Temple makes an interesting statement:

"It takes a considerable time for a secure aesthetic judgment to be formed, and with regard to contemporary art there is much debate. But when a common judgment is reached after long periods of discussion, it is secure as scientific theories never are. Many may be uncertain in this second quarter of the twentieth century about the aesthetic rank of Epstein as a sculptor or T.S. Eliot as a poet. But there is no serious dispute about Pheidias or Aeschylus, about Giotto, or Piero, or Botticelli, about Velasquez or Rembrandt, about Dante or Shakespeare. No doubt I 'date' myself by the precise list which I select; Beethoven to Bach; but every name thus mentioned is securely established in the list of Masters; and the actual works of the earliest touch us now they touched the hearts of those who knew them first.... It takes longer for the aesthetic judgment to become stable than for the scientific, but when it reaches stability it also achieves finality as the other does not." ~ *Nature, Man, and God* (Macmillan, 1956), 158-9.

What type of art is venerated *and* venerated trans-culturally?

- Ready-made art?
- Shock art (art made with fecal matter, animal remains, pornography, etc)?
- Anti-art art (philosophically subversive?)



What type of art ennobles and enriches society?

- Art serves a moral aim. Even ancient Greeks realized this: Consider the following quotes from Aristophanes:

“Answer me, for what reasons ought one to admire a poet? For ability and advice, because we make the inhabitants of the various cities better men [*Ranae*, 1008].

“But a poet at any rate ought to conceal what is base and not bring it forward and put it on stage. For mere boys have a schoolmaster to instruct them, grown men have poets. From every point of view it is our duty to speak of good things [*Ranae*, 1053-1056].

What type of art ennobles and enriches society?

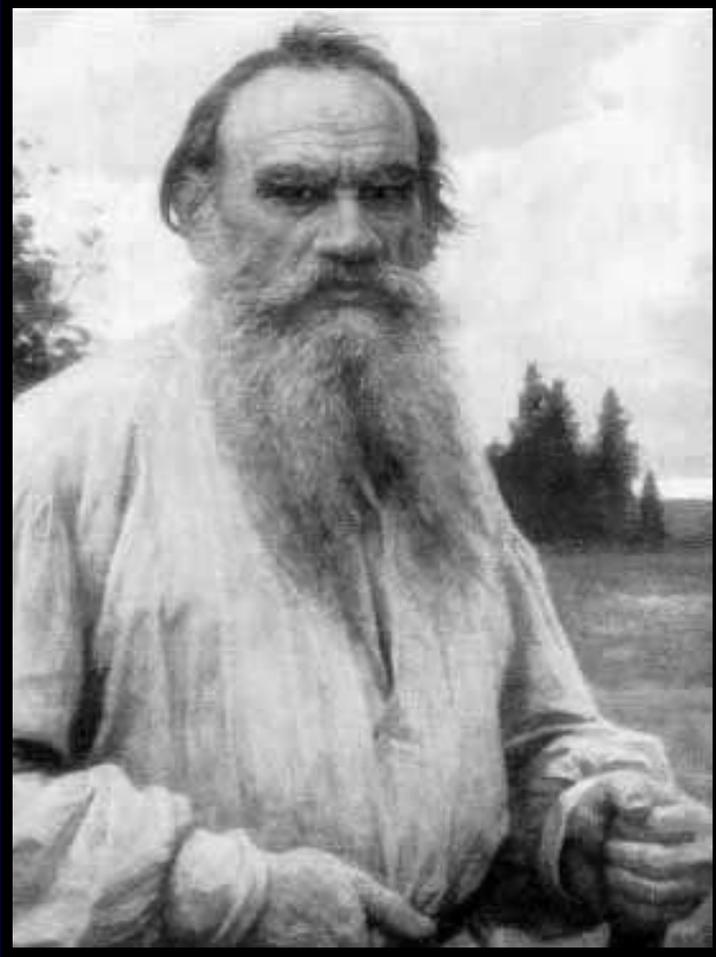
- Art reflects a moral aim. Consider this observation by Sextus Empiricus:

“In sum, music is not only a sound of rejoicing, but is heard also in sacred hymns and feasts and sacrifices to the gods; and because of this it incites the mind to emulate the Good.”

~ *Adv. Mathem.* VI. 18

In contrast, “degenerative arts” incites the mind to emulate what is corrupt. How does this impact us personally and collectively as a community?

In his famous work, "*What is Art?*" Tolstoy observed that ...



Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoy, 1828-1910

What is Art? (1897)

Great and true art are those pieces that express/conforms with the highest religious perceptions of our age: the Christian ideal of the union and brotherhood of man as opposed to art which is socially divisive or elitist fails in its true function and so is counterfeit/bad art.

Art that promotes hedonism does not survive this test.

Celebrated American sculptor Frederick Hart:

“If art is to flourish in the 21st century, it must renew its moral authority by rededicating itself to life. It must be an enriching, ennobling and vital partner in the public pursuit of civilization.”

“Art must touch our lives, our fears and cares – evoke our dreams and give hope to the darkness.”

www.frederickhart.com

VIII. Evidences of Universal Signatures of Art Against Relativism and Subjectivism:

In his article, “Aesthetic Universals,” in *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*, Denis Dutton brilliantly contends that there are universal features of art that everyone shares. The evidences counter relativistic and exclusive subjective notions of art. These features transcend our cultural boundaries because they are “rooted in our common humanity.” He writes:

Consider:

“A balanced view of art will take into account the vast and diverse array of cultural elements that make up the life of the artistic creation and appreciation. At the same time such a view will acknowledge the universal features the arts everywhere share, and will recognize that the arts travel across cultural boundaries as well as they do because they are rooted in our common humanity” “Denis Dutton, “Aesthetic Universals, 213].

Evidences of Aesthetic Normativity:

- While I appreciate Dutton's insights, I disagree with his starting point for these universal signatures of art: evolutionary theory/Humean worldview. In fact, I find Dutton's assumption to be non-convincing given both the absence of any convincing non-design explanation for these universal features of aesthetics and the growing amount of empirical studies that justifiably argues for a divine Creator.

Evidences of Aesthetic Normativity:

Given both (1) the growing amount of studies demonstrating “information as design” (evident in our human DNA), “specified complexity,” and “irreducible complexity” in biology, and cosmology (e.g., Big Bang; Anthropic principle) that point to a divine Creator, and (2) moral laws, duties, and accountability that transcend cultures, it is no surprise to see universal features that flow from our God - created humanity. In fact, these universal features of aesthetics point us back to our Creator.

Evidences of Aesthetic Normativity:

Therefore, I propose that the reason why we have these universal signatures of art exist is not because of evolution but because we are created by God. He assumes that evolution is the answer for these features. However, I find Dutton's assumption to be non-convincing given the growing amount of empirical studies that point to an intelligent designer who is morally good!

Consider the following universal signatures adapted from Denis Dutton's article, "Universal Signatures":

Universal Signatures Include:

1. **Expertise or virtuosity**, namely, specialized and technical skills, are noticed in societies and are generally admired; certain individuals stand out by virtue of their talents and are honored for it [Dutton, “Aesthetic Universals,” 210].

Universal Signatures Include:

2. Non-utilitarian pleasure. Whether story, object, visual, music, or fine art performances, object *X* is viewed as a source of pleasure in itself, rather than (or not merely) as a practical tool or source of knowledge [Ibid., 210].

Universal Signatures Include:

3. **Style.** Art objects and performances including fictional or poetic narratives, are made in recognizable styles, according to rules of form and composition [Ibid., 211].

Universal Signatures Include:

4. **Criticism.** Dutton observes:

“There exists some kind of indigenous critical language of judgment and appreciation, simple or elaborate, that is applied to arts. This may include the shop talk of art producers or evaluative discourse of critics and audiences. Unlike the arts themselves, which can be immensely complicated, it has often been remarked that this critical discourse is in oral cultures sometimes rudimentary compared to the art discourse of literate European history. It, can however, be elaborate even there. (The development of a critical vocabulary and discourse, including criteria for excellence, mediocrity, competence/incompetence, and for failure, is intrinsic to almost all human activities outside of art.) [Ibid., 211].”

Universal Signatures Include:

5. **Imitation.** Hutton states:

“In widely varying degrees of naturalism, art objects, including sculptures, paintings, and oral narratives, represent or imitate real and imaginary experience of the world. The differences between naturalistic representation, highly stylized representation, and non-imitative symbolism is generally understood by artists and their audiences. (Blueprints, newspaper stories pictures, passport photographs, and road maps are equally imitations or representations. While imitation is important to much art — notable exceptions being abstract painting and music — its significance extends into all areas human intellectual life.) [Ibid., 211].”

Universal Signatures Include:

6. “Special” focus. Hutton writes:

“Works of art and artistic performances are frequently bracketed off from ordinary life, made a special and dramatic focus of experience....These objects or performance occasions are often imbued with intense emotion and sense of community. They frequently involve the combining of many different art forms, such as chanting, dancing, body decoration, and dramatic lighting in the case of New Guinea sing-sings. (Outside of art, or at its fringes, political rallies, sporting events, public ceremonies such as coronations and weddings, and religious meetings of all sorts also invoke a sense of specialness)” [Ibid., 211-12].

Universal Signatures Include:

7. Imaginative Experience:

“The experience of art is an imaginative experience for both producers and audiences. The carving may realistically represent an animal, but as a sculpture it becomes an imaginative object. The same can be said of any story well told, whether ancient mythology or personal anecdote. A passionate dance performance has an imaginative element not to be found in the group exercise of factory workers. Art of all kinds happens in the theatre of the imagination: it is raised from the mundane practical world to become an imaginative experience. (At the mundane level, imagination in problem-solving, planning, hypothesizing, inferring the mental states of others, or merely in day-dreaming is practically co-extensive with normal human conscious life) [Ibid., 212].

In his discussion of relativism versus universalism Dutton observes:

“Aesthetic relativism, although adopted with the best intentions, has blinded investigators to the elements arts have in common worldwide. Not even putative cross-cultural misunderstanding can be turned into a general denial of the possibility of universal aesthetic values. It is important to note how remarkably well the arts travel outside their home cultures: Beethoven and Shakespeare are beloved in Japan, Japanese prints are adored by Brazilians, Greek tragedy is performed worldwide, while, much to the regret of many local movie industries, Hollywood films have made wide cross-cultural appeal. As for sitar concert, anyone who has set through the tedious tuning of a sitar might well want to applaud when the music was finally set to begin. And even Indian music itself, while it sounds initially strange to the Western ear, can be shown to rely on rhythmic pulse and acceleration, repetition, variation, and surprise, as well as modulation and divinely sweet melody: in fact, all the same devices found in Western music” [Ibid., 213].

Concluding Thought:

- “There are two kinds of beauty, one of which is spiritual and consists in proper ordering and abundances of spiritual goods; and the other is external beauty, which consists in the proper ordering of the body and an abundance of external properties pertaining to the body.”

~ Thomas Aquinas, *Contra impugn.*, c. 7 ad 9
(Mandonnet, *Opuscula*, vol. IV).

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