

# Smoky Mountain Bible Institute

## Philosophy 103 Aesthetics

Aesthetics, remember, deals with beauty, art, enjoyment, sensory-emotional values, perception, and matters of taste and sentiment. So, the proverbial disagreement over the color of the church carpet falls under this topic of discussion.

One might consider aesthetics to be a simple matter of personal taste. However, while beauty may be in the eye of the beholder, that does not mean that there are not clear, measurable scientific reasons why the beholder beholds beauty. You only need to look at cars as an example; we each have in our minds what a great car looks like, but that perception is influenced by many things. First, there are certain shapes and forms that are naturally pleasing to the human eye and brain, and there are certain colors that evoke different emotional responses as well. Those who design cars learn these things as part of their education, and through a relentless analysis of what customers like, are always trying to design something new and fresh, while incorporating those trigger elements so that your impulse to purchase is firing on all cylinders, so to speak. And after the design process is complete, the marketing department goes into high gear to help you to covet what they have designed. None of this is a big conspiracy; rather, it's simple above-board business practice in a free enterprise economy. We know that they are seeking to manipulate our aesthetic sensibilities, and we like them to compete for our hard-earned money.

The word aesthetic is derived from the Greek word meaning "sensitive" or "sentient". At its root, the word means to perceive, feel, or sense. The term "aesthetics" was first coined in German by Alexander Baumgarten in 1735. This branch of philosophy dealing with the nature of art, beauty, and taste, is more scientifically defined as the study of sensory or sensory-emotional values, sometimes called judgments of sentiment and taste. More broadly, scholars in the field define aesthetics as "critical reflection on art, culture and nature."

More specifically, aesthetic theory has practical implications, relating to any specific branch of the arts such as literature, film, music, painting, theater, landscape, sculpture, and any number of broad or narrow categories of art. Each of these areas of art theory has certain principles of aesthetics underlying the analysis of any work of a particular artist or artistic movement. These are agreed-upon principals upon which those who critique in a given area base their analyses. Of course, over time, these principals can and do change, just like our taste in what a good car looks like changes, or why I think the styles we wore in the 1970s should never be worn by any later generation. Unfortunately, style has cycles, *ergo*, the term "everything old is new again."

Someone who works in this field might be called an *esthetician*, that is, a person who is versed in aesthetics, and seeks to establish meaning and validity upon which to base critical judgments concerning works of art, and the principles underlying or justifying such judgments. However, the term tends to be more commonly used to refer to a person trained to administer facials, or to advise customers concerning makeup or the care of skin and hair.

When people use jargon to describe what to like or don't like about a particular wine, food, or art, these are aesthetic words used to quantify things that are really hard to quantify. Take wine for example; acidity, aroma, bouquet, full-bodied, smooth, bitter, sweet, nose, woody, fruity, and spicy are just a few of the very large aesthetic vocabulary used to describe the taste, smell and feel of wine.

You probably know more now than you ever wanted to about aesthetics, but keep this in mind the next time you find a face or a flower or a sunset particularly beautiful: your Creator loves beauty, order, and even symmetry, and He placed in each of us the ability to appreciate and enjoy His beautiful creation. He also gave us different tastes and different preferences, which can be helpful in the sense that we do not all want the same thing. If we did, it might lead to fighting over who should have it. Because God gives us so many various preferences, this is an area in which there is no right or wrong, so it is more important that we get along than it is for everyone to get their favorite carpet color. So enjoy every gift God gives you: your life, trees, flowers, family, your spouse, music, food, drink, or whatever part of His glorious creation you particularly enjoy. As you enjoy them, thank and praise Him for creating it, and for creating in you the ability to enjoy and appreciate it. (Aesthetically speaking, that is.)