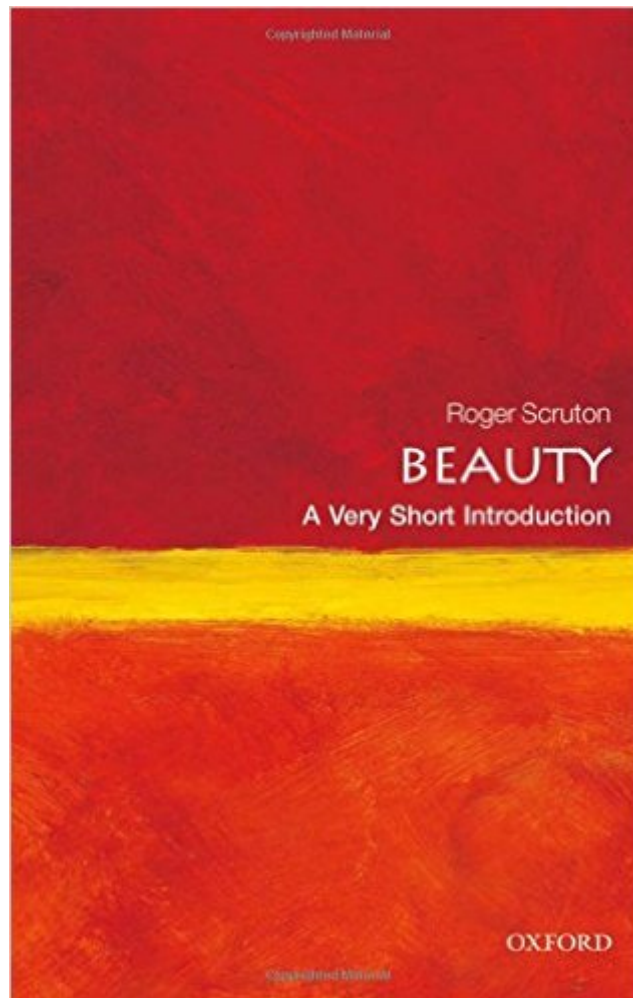


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Beauty: A Very Short Introduction



Synopsis

Beauty can be consoling, disturbing, sacred, profane; it can be exhilarating, appealing, inspiring, chilling. It can affect us in an unlimited variety of ways. Yet it is never viewed with indifference. In this Very Short Introduction, the renowned philosopher Roger Scruton explores the concept of beauty, asking what makes an object--either in art, in nature, or the human form--beautiful, and examining how we can compare differing judgments of beauty when it is evident all around us that our tastes vary so widely. Is there a right judgment to be made about beauty? Is it right to say there is more beauty in a classical temple than a concrete office block, more in a Rembrandt than in an Andy Warhol Campbell Soup Can? Forthright and thought-provoking, and as accessible as it is intellectually rigorous, this introduction to the philosophy of beauty draws conclusions that some may find controversial, but, as Scruton shows, help us to find greater sense of meaning in the beautiful objects that fill our lives.

Book Information

Paperback: 208 pages

Publisher: Oxford University Press; 1 edition (April 8, 2011)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0199229759

ISBN-13: 978-0199229758

Product Dimensions: 6.8 x 0.6 x 4.4 inches

Shipping Weight: 5.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 starsÂ Â See all reviewsÂ (45 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #133,061 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #24 inÂ Books > Textbooks > Humanities > Philosophy > Aesthetics #36 inÂ Books > Arts & Photography > Other Media > Conceptual #76 inÂ Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > Aesthetics

Customer Reviews

Roger Scruton is a moral philosopher whose work is for many of us a source of reassurance and hope. He stands against the modern and especially post- modern trend which suggest that Truth , Goodness and Beauty are not values, but forms of oppression which must somehow be violently opposed and devalued. In a sense his heart is that of an Enlightenment Rationalist who argues that our Thought and our Art are meant to enhance our understanding of the world, and our appreciation of Life. In seeking in a sense to give us back our sense of how Beauty enriches our life Scruton does a service not only to Aesthetics but to the way we live in our everyday world.I find his work

among the most persuasive and inspiring philosophical writing that is being done today.

Few books have fulfilled my expectation as well as Roger Scruton's *Beauty*. Many decades ago, I entered college intending to become a graphic artist. Going into publishing instead, I became disgusted with art as it succeeded in its efforts to be disgusting. Scruton reconnected me with what I once valued so much - its transcendence. It was a pleasure to read someone who takes art more seriously than most artists do. I strongly recommend this book. -- [...]

Although Scruton doesn't come out and tell us what *Beauty* is he does manage to write a superb and provocative book on the subject throughout history. His chapters include: Judging Beauty, Human Beauty, Natural Beauty, Everyday Beauty, Artistic Beauty, Taste and Order, Art and Eros, The Flight from Beauty and Concluding Thoughts. Before reading *Beauty* I had long felt that much of the art of the twentieth century has suffered from a nefarious need to ruin beauty. Scruton, with this book, is preaching to my choir and I was immediately sympathetic. For those who are disgusted by the shock theatrics of modern opera directors, the pseudo story-lines and characters of kitsch romanticism, the prevalence of garden gnomes and the porn-horror of the *Saw* genre, this book is for you. Scruton begins by discussing how we judge beauty, quoting Kant and Plato. He then explores the realms of Human, Natural (i.e. landscapes), Daily and Artistic beauty. From the human body to gardens, to the beauty of the mundane (a wife setting her table) and to the works of artists, he covers the gamut succinctly and stylistically. Art and Beauty concern expression, style, thought, philosophy, love and appreciation. Beauty is closely related with the sacred and for Scruton we live in a loveless culture wherein beauty is desecrated because people are afraid to love. The rise of Kitsch he notes is closely aligned with the rise of the Holocaust and the Gulag where the human being is like a doll we kiss in one moment and throw away the next. Considering we live in an ipod world where everything is at our fingertips, art is fast disappearing, either through the morass of entertainment or the cheap effects of modern artists striving to stir as oppose to inspire thought. This book is an essential read.

In this brief volume, Roger Scruton persuasively comes to the aid of those of us eager to hear nowadays, say, a Mozart opera or a Shakespearean play but who to do so have to endure the by now conventional shenanigans of Regie directors bent on defaming clearly admirable characters and setting noble works of Western Culture in brothels or other tiresome dens of iniquity. Scruton makes an unanswerable case that such post-modern exemplars are engaging in a predictable,

frankly adolescent sort of sacrilege, not so transgressive in fact as just merely and less glamorously repetitive of their own peers' practice. Post-modern "rebellion," reminiscent of teenage behavior, is a rebellion by its numerous advocates marching in embarrassing lockstep. If his book were to be widely read, it would surely influence younger artists to innovate, moving out of the dead-ends of such trite postmodern practice. Scruton's central thesis is that while Beauty is something that must be individually experienced, nevertheless it is essentially rational and thus connected to Truth and Goodness, rather than being a mere preference one cannot expect other rational selves ever to agree upon. Scruton's knowledge of aesthetics, ranging from Plato and Plotinus down through the centuries to contemporary theorists and artists is undeniably impressive. His is a work to reread and savor.

Scruton is a philosopher who stands in stark contrast to much of what the modern world proposes on art....i.e., that beauty is something completely subjective; that it is a private elitist vision, directly related to undemocratic high art. By demonstrating that beauty is something much more objective...of which all retain an innate appreciation...Scruton quietly demolishes such nonsense, accompanying so much contemporary discussion on art, sculpture, and architecture. His discussion on popular kitsch is particularly revealing of the modern (and post-modern) world's intrinsic reductionism, and of the false and insulting premise, which strongly asserts that the common man is not capable of appreciating anything but the lowest, unambitious, and highly subjective artistic expressions. I think this little essay is a strong assertion for a reconnection to the great traditions of art, not as something of the past...not as something to build a wall against...but as a living vibrant tradition, to which all can aspire, in our own era.

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