



## Theology of Beauty and Imagination: A Guide to Wonder with Dr. Junius Johnson

### Lesson 2: The Subjectivity and Objectivity of Beauty

#### Outline:

Decentering the “eye of the beholder”

- Because God is beauty itself, we cannot be content to rest at the eye of the beholder, to reduce beauty to merely a question of taste.
- We are not throwing out the “eye of the beholder”, but we are going to decenter it.
- Beauty is not merely subjective, but it is also not merely objective.

The world God has made is not well described by a strong opposition between subject and object.

- The nature of the world is such that we want to have a more complicated relationship between subjectivity and objectivity.
- God did not make the world for us, but for his own glory. We are only ever stewards.
- God’s speaking created “light”. Creation is the externalization of the thoughts of God. Everything that’s created existed in God’s mind before it was created.
- Thoughts are subjective. Subjective means that it is the type of thing that is internal to some mind and not subject to public verifiability.
- Objective means that it is the type of thing that is external to a mind and subject to public verifiability.
- God’s subjective thoughts become the ground of the world. He creates an objective world out of his subjective thoughts.
- Before the beginning of the world, God was a subject and object of himself in the mystery of the trinity.
- Neither extreme of subjectivity or objectivity is the way to go.

How do subjectivity and objectivity fit together?

- We need to order them to one another.
- The subjective is nested under the objective. Within ourselves and within our world we have a limited power of determination.
- Even though we only approach the objective through the subjective, the objective is such that it constrains the range of possible subjective approaches.
- It is a subjective objectivity, because it is objectivity subjectively appropriated.



- We're encountering a really objective reality, but we're always encountering it filtered through our subjectivity.
- Objectivity is powerful enough to break in to subjectivity.

What is the theological account of beauty?

- **The experience of the beautiful is a moment in which we are being reminded of God.**
- We have to know something about God. Do we have enough of a knowledge of God to be reminded of him?
  - Romans 1: God's invisible power is so clearly seen that we have no excuse not to recognize them.
  - Psalm 19: The heavens declare the glory of God.
  - Ecclesiastes 3: God has placed eternity in our hearts.
- Not everyone finds the same things beautiful, because not everyone sees God the same way.
  - We have made different amounts of progress in coming to understand who God is as he has revealed himself through Christ and the scriptures.
  - We are not the same person. We were each created to see God in certain ways that are unique to us.
- This explains why some people see beauty where it isn't. This is another form of failure in our vision of God. This is a kind of blasphemy.
- Beauty is at the center of our longings. We are made for beauty, both to behold beauty and to ourselves be beautiful. We cannot turn off our desire for beauty. The most we can do is corrupt it and misdirect it.