
WHY IS BEAUTY BEAUTIFUL?

For my wife Irene on the Platonic idea of beauty

by Pierre Beaudry, 3/2/17

INTRODUCTION

*“Beauty is not in the eye of the beholder;
it’s in the creative process of the mind.”*

Dehors Debonneheure.

Is a photographic reproduction of the Monet garden of Giverny, France more beautiful than a Claude Monet painting of it? Is beauty a momentary fad or is it a permanent matter of mind? Is beauty a matter of eternity or is it a matter of a passing perception? The capacity to discover beauty is very mysterious and is by no means easy to appreciate. Nevertheless, even if no one seems to know why beauty is beautiful anymore, I venture to say, with Plato, that beauty is beautiful because it is an offspring of the Good.

The reason I chose to compare this photography of Claude Monet’s garden (**Figure 1**) in Giverny, France, and the best looking painting that he made of it (**Figure 2**) is to demonstrate that Monet’s painting lacks precisely in the beauty that his garden has, and that this was, precisely, the reason why he painted it as he did. Monet’s painting is less beautiful than his garden because that was the point the artist wanted to demonstrate. Monet’s intention was to generate a fuzzy and blurred momentary impression. That is the reason why, from the vantage point of classical artistic composition, Monet’s painting is a successful fraud, a true fallacy of composition because beauty is not a matter of perception. The point Monet was making was that art was no longer a domain of eternal beauty.



Figure 1 Photo of the Claude Monet garden in Giverny, France. Aterom-Fotolia.



Figure 2 Painting by Claude Monet, "*Nymphéas, harmonie verte*" 1899.

In his [Republic VI](#), Plato gave the reason for Monet's fallacy of composition. He wrote:

“Apply this comparison to the soul also in this way. When it is firmly fixed on the domain where truth and reality shine resplendent, it apprehends and knows them and appears to possess reason; but when it inclines to that region which is mingled with darkness, the world of becoming and passing away, it opines only and its edge is blunted, and it shifts its opinions hither and thither, and again seems as if it lacked reason.” ([Republic VI](#), 508d, translated by Paul Shorey.)

1. PLATO, REPUBLIC VI: BEAUTY AS THE MEASURE OF THE GOOD

“Then are not all beautiful things beautiful by beauty?”

Socrates, *Greater Hippias*, 287c.

The purpose of this report is to investigate the idea of beauty as an aspect of the moral virtue that Plato identified as the Good, because the Good is the source motivation of creative knowledge. The way to establish this important connection is to discover, from the start, that creative knowledge can only be beautiful through the good made to others; that is to say, by resulting in the improvement of humanity.

Look at Monet's “*Nymphéas*” as the shadows and reflections coming from the distorted wall of Plato's Cave and ask yourself: “What was Monet's motivation? What was he thinking? What was he trying to force on the viewer?” The answer is very simple. He was reducing the mental power of the viewer to the level of mere passing existential impressions. His painting was meant to be an accompaniment for reading Marcel Proust.

For Plato, the idea of the Good (ἡ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἰδέα) ([Republic VI](#), 508e2-3), is the supreme idea of proportionality that generates all other ideas; that is to

say, as the Sun allows us to see everything in the physical domain, so does the Good in the intelligible domain. The Good is therefore that which makes ideas beautiful as the Sun is what makes things visible.

Furthermore, for Plato, the Good is “what gives truth to the things known and the power to know to the knower” (*Republic VI* (508e2)). It is not only the cause of knowledge and truth, it is also the object of knowledge of “an inconceivable beauty you speak of, he said, if it is the source of knowledge and truth, and yet itself surpasses them in beauty.” (*Republic VI*, 508e-509a) Thus, the Good is the ultimate object of knowledge, without being knowledge itself; it is above and beyond knowledge itself. As Lyn would say, the Good is located in the “*Hypothesis of the Higher Hypothesis.*”

This idea of the Good is something that Aristotle could not have grasped, because it did not fit his notion of reality based on sense perception. For Aristotle, the Good cannot cause or explain anything in the physical world because whatever aspires to the highest Good, teleologically, cannot be perceived in the physical domain.

This conflict between Plato and Aristotle was best addressed by Friedrich Schiller in his fourth Aesthetic Letter on the “beautiful soul,” when he said: “Every individual man, one can say, carries by predisposition and destiny, a purely ideal man within himself, to agree with whose immutable unity in all his alterations is the great task of his existence.” (Friedrich Schiller, *Over the Aesthetical Education of Man*, in FRIEDRICH SCHILLER POET OF FREEDOM, New Benjamin Franklin House, New York, 1985, p. 228.)

What is preventing man from this “great task of his existence” is that he is being systematically reduced to the menial sensual and physical existence of his being. Where is the beauty in that?

2. BEAUTY IS LOCATED IN PROPORTIONALITY

“I could wish, I said, that I were able to make and you to receive the payment and not merely as now the interest. But at any rate receive this interest and the offspring of the good. Have a care, however, lest I deceive you unintentionally with a false reckoning of the interest.” (Plato, [Republic VI](#), 507a.)

People generally have a hard time making the difference between a concept and an object of sense perception, because they lack the *sense of proportionality*. The difficulty lies in the ability to make the difference between understanding and seeing with respect to what Plato called “*the offspring of the good;*” that is, the creative process of the highest beneficent design. Plato said:

“This, then, you must understand that I meant by the *offspring of the good* which the good begot to stand in a proportion with itself: as the good is in the intelligible region to reason and the objects of reason, so is this in the visible world to vision and the objects of vision.” ([Republic VI](#), 508b-c.)

There is a delicious play on words, here, with the Platonic term *τόκος*, meaning both “*interest*” and “*offspring.*” This is why Socrates is warning the reader against the possible deception “*with a false reckoning of the interest.*”

The question is, why is proportionality understood as the “*offspring of the good,*” and one of its privileged domains of application is aesthetics and artistic composition? And, why is Socrates warning against a possible deception?

Because Plato is introducing the question of how to go beyond the fakery and deception of underlying assumptions. The difficulty, here, is to attain the domain of the truth; that is, the domain of the *unhypothesized higher principle*, the [ἀνυπόθετον](#) (unconditioned, absolute). The difficulty arises, therefore, because this

domain is beyond all assumptions. Lyn would say, beyond all deductions. Plato wrote:

“Consider then again the way in which we are to make the division of the intelligible section.”

“In what way?”

“By the distinction that there is one section of it which the soul is compelled to investigate by treating as images the things imitated in the former division, and by means of assumptions from which it proceeds not up to a first principle but down to a conclusion, while there is another section in which it advances from its assumption to a beginning or principle that transcends assumption, and in which it makes no use of the images employed by the other section, relying on ideas only and progressing systematically through ideas.”

“I don't fully understand what you mean by this,” he said.

“Well, I will try again,” said I, “for you will better understand after this preamble. For I think you are aware that students of geometry and reckoning and such subjects first postulate the odd and the even and the various figures and three kinds of angles and other things akin to these in each branch of science, regard them as known, and, treating them as absolute assumptions, do not deign to render any further account of them to themselves or others, taking it for granted that they are obvious to everybody. They take their start from these, and pursuing the inquiry from this point on consistently, conclude with that for the investigation of which they set out.”

“Certainly,” he said, “I know that.”

“And do you not also know that they further make use of the visible forms and talk about them, though they are not thinking of them but of those things of which they are a likeness, pursuing their inquiry for the sake of the square as such and the diagonal as such, and not for the

sake of the image of it which they draw? And so in all cases. The very things which they mould and draw, which have shadows and images of themselves in water, these things they treat in their turn as only images, but what they really seek is to get sight of those realities which can be seen only by the mind.

“True, he said.” ([Republic VI](#), 510b-e.)

This description has no significance in and of itself outside of announcing that the reader is already in the perplexing grip of the crucial experiment of the Cave, which is coming up just around the page, in book VII (514-516). This “potentiality” of a change is very much like what Lyn identified in his 2005 report on Nicholas of Cusa, when he said:

“Thus, the originality of mankind’s original discovery of a principle, lies in the act of discovery of a universal implication of the existing universe, a *potentiality* which had been previously hidden from the view of mankind’s knowledge. Man’s acting on the basis of that discovered *potentiality*, changes the universe, bringing it into a new dynamic state. (Lyndon LaRouche, [Man’s Original Creations](#), EIR, June 6, 2005, reproduced for EIR, March 3, 2017, p. 59.)

The connection with that point is that this *unhypothesized higher principle* represents a monistic doctrine of principles, otherwise known by Thales as *hylozoic monism*, which represents the unique living and original principle (*αρχη*) of all other principles; *a principle of principles*. Again, the difficulty, here, is not the elimination of dualism, to which all of the Aristotelians have always reacted violently throughout history, but the very nature of *how the unhypothesized principle works*. Socrates made the crucial axiomatic point:

“This then is the class that I described as intelligible, it is true, but with the reservation first that the soul is compelled to employ assumptions in the investigation of it, not proceeding to a first principle because of its inability to extricate itself from and rise above its assumptions, and second, that it uses as images or likenesses the very objects that are themselves

copied and adumbrated by the class below them, and that in comparison with these latter are esteemed as clear and held in honor.

“I understand, said he, “that you are speaking of what falls under geometry and the kindred arts.”

“Understand then,” said I, “that by the other section of the intelligible I mean that which the reason¹ itself lays hold of by the power of dialectics, treating its assumptions not as absolute beginnings but literally as hypotheses, underpinnings, footings, and springboards so to speak, to enable it to rise to that which requires no assumption and is the starting-point of all (*παντὸς ἀρχήν*), and after attaining to that again taking hold of the first dependencies from it, so to proceed downward to the conclusion, making no use whatever of any object of sense but only of pure ideas moving on through ideas to ideas and ending with ideas.” (*Republic VI*, 511a-c.)

This is the axiomatic turning point where Socrates organizes the different levels of knowledge in proportion to the degrees of truth of their objects. This raises the same question of proportionality as the *Filioque* did in Christianity. (See my report: [OLIGARCHISM VS REPUBLICANISM](#).) Similarly, in the *Timaeus* (32abc), Plato expresses the idea of proportionality as a matter of privileged state of mind, as God created the universe with the “best of bonds” in relating to the good when the mind conducts its investigation of principle in a special manner such that *this is to this as that is to that*. So, that’s where the “*offspring of the good*” comes in. That’s where beauty sleeps.

3. THE LAROUCHE PRINCIPLE OF HYPOTHESIZING THE HIGHER HYPOTHESIS.

“And remember, she said, that it is only when he discerns beauty itself through what makes it visible that a man will be quickened with the true, and not the seeming virtue – for it is virtue’s self that quickens him, not virtue’s semblance.”

Plato, *Symposium*, 212a

For Lyn, this matter of beauty applies to the higher principle of *hypothesizing the higher hypothesis* in the Science of Musical Composition. When one considers the series of compositions generated from a study of Bach’s theme of the *Ricercar* in *The Musical Offering*, such as Mozart’s K. 475 Fantasy, or Beethoven’s Opus 111 and Opus 132 string quartet, etc., the beauty of the succession of such different compositions is generated by the modalities of transformation that Lyn identified as “the generalized principle of motivic thorough-composition.”

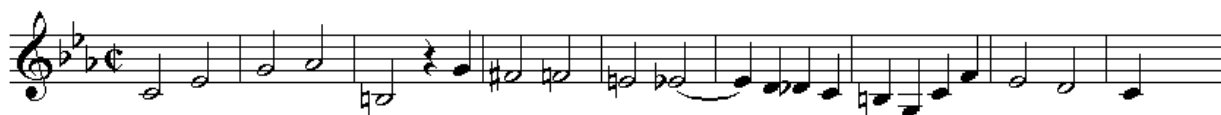


Figure 3 Bach’s ricercar theme for the *Musical Offering*.

Lyn’s idea of “*hypothesizing the higher hypothesis*” is reminiscent of Plato’s “*unhypothesized principle*.” Although he doesn’t reference Plato’s *Republic* directly on this point, Lyn relates this idea to the domain of Classical motivic thorough-composition as does the Leibniz “*principle of sufficient reason*” to the domain of physics. As he said, “the role of higher hypothesis, of hypothesizing the higher hypothesis, has the same significance in music as Leibniz’s principle of *necessary and sufficient reason* in mathematical physics.” (Lyndon LaRouche, [*The Essential Role of ‘Time-Reversal’ in Mathematical*](#)

[Economics, Part I](#), The Schiller Institute, from the Winter 1996 issue of FIDELIO Magazine.)

The significance of this connection to music is fundamental, because this is the most effective domain of expression of beauty which relates directly to the idea of proportionality derived from the Good.

4. THE OFFSPRINGS OF THE SOUL



In the *Symposium*, probably the next most important dialogue of Plato after the *Republic*, there is a time-reversal echo of Saint Paul's Thirteenth chapter of *First Corinthian* in which Plato relates to the Good of the beautiful soul. That echo resonates in the encomium of love that Diotima of Mantinea conveyed to Socrates about her "Ascent to Beauty." (See *Symposium* 201-212.)

I reproduce below, in its entirety, the concluding part of Mantinea's elocution translated by Benjamin Jowett.

Figure 4 Józef Simmler, **Diotima of Mantinea**, 1855.

[209] "But souls which are pregnant—for there certainly are men who are more creative in their souls than in their bodies—conceive that which is

proper for the soul to conceive or contain. And what are these conceptions?—wisdom and virtue in general. And such creators are poets and all artists who are deserving of the name inventor. But the greatest and fairest sort of wisdom by far is that which is concerned with the ordering of states and families, and which is called temperance and justice. And he who in youth has the seed of these implanted in him and is himself inspired, when he comes to maturity desires to beget and generate. He wanders about seeking beauty that he may beget offspring—for in deformity he will beget nothing—and naturally embraces the beautiful rather than the deformed body; above all when he finds a fair and noble and well-nurtured soul, he embraces the two in one person, and to such a one he is full of speech about virtue and the nature and pursuits of a good man; and he tries to educate him; and at the touch of the beautiful which is ever present to his memory, even when absent, he brings forth that which he had conceived long before, and in company with him tends that which he brings forth; and they are married by a far nearer tie and have a closer friendship than those who beget mortal children, for the children who are their common offspring are fairer and more immortal. Who, when he thinks of Homer and Hesiod and other great poets, would not rather have their children than ordinary human ones? Who would not emulate them in the creation of children such as theirs, which have preserved their memory and given them everlasting glory? Or who would not have such children as Lycurgus left behind him to be the saviours, not only of Lacedaemon, but of Hellas, as one may say? There is Solon, too, who is the revered father of Athenian laws; and many others there are in many other places, both among Hellenes and barbarians, who have given to the world many noble works, and have been the parents of virtue of every kind; and many temples have been raised in their honour for the sake of children such as theirs; which were never raised in honour of any one, for the sake of his mortal children.

“These are the lesser mysteries of love, into which even you, Socrates, may enter; [210] to the greater and more hidden ones which are the crown of these, and to which, if you pursue them in a right spirit, they will lead, I know not whether you will be able to attain. But I will do my utmost to inform you, and do you follow if you can. For he who would proceed aright in this matter should begin in youth to visit beautiful forms; and first, if he be guided by his instructor aright, to love one such form only—out of that he should create fair thoughts; and soon he will of himself perceive that the

beauty of one form is akin to the beauty of another; and then if beauty of form in general is his pursuit, how foolish would he be not to recognize that the beauty in every form is one and the same! And when he perceives this he will abate his violent love of the one, which he will despise and deem a small thing, and will become a lover of all beautiful forms; in the next stage he will consider that the beauty of the mind is more honourable than the beauty of the outward form. So that if a virtuous soul have but a little comeliness, he will be content to love and tend him, and will search out and bring to the birth thoughts which may improve the young, until he is compelled to contemplate and see the beauty of institutions and laws, and to understand that the beauty of them all is of one family, and that personal beauty is a trifle; and after laws and institutions he will go on to the sciences, that he may see their beauty, being not like a servant in love with the beauty of one youth or man or institution, himself a slave mean and narrow-minded, but drawing towards and contemplating the vast sea of beauty, he will create many fair and noble thoughts and notions in boundless love of wisdom; until on that shore he grows and waxes strong, and at last the vision is revealed to him of a single science, which is the science of beauty everywhere. To this I will proceed; please to give me your very best attention:

“He who has been instructed thus far in the things of love, and who has learned to see the beautiful in due order and succession, when he comes toward the end will suddenly perceive a nature of wondrous beauty (and this, Socrates, is the final cause of all our former toils)—a nature which in the first place is everlasting, [211] not growing and decaying, or waxing and waning; secondly, not fair in one point of view and foul in another, or at one time or in one relation or at one place fair, at another time or in another relation or at another place foul, as if fair to some and foul to others, or in the likeness of a face or hands or any other part of the bodily frame, or in any form of speech or knowledge, or existing in any other being, as for example, in an animal, or in heaven, or in earth, or in any other place; but beauty absolute, separate, simple, and everlasting, which without diminution and without increase, or any change, is imparted to the ever-growing and perishing beauties of all other things. He who from these ascending under the influence of true love, begins to perceive that beauty, is not far from the end. And the true order of going, or being led by another, to the things of love, is to begin from the beauties of earth and mount upwards for the sake

of that other beauty, using these as steps only, and from one going on to two, and from two to all fair forms, and from fair forms to fair practices, and from fair practices to fair notions, until from fair notions he arrives at the notion of absolute beauty, and at last knows what the essence of beauty is.

“This, my dear Socrates,” said the stranger of Mantinea, “is that life above all others which man should live, in the contemplation of beauty absolute; a beauty which if you once beheld, you would see not to be after the measure of gold, and garments, and fair boys and youths, whose presence now entrances you; and you and many a one would be content to live seeing them only and conversing with them without meat or drink, if that were possible—you only want to look at them and to be with them. But what if man had eyes to see the true beauty—the divine beauty, I mean, pure and clear and unalloyed, not clogged with the pollutions of mortality and all the colours and vanities of human life—thither looking, and holding converse with the true beauty simple and divine? Remember [212] how in that communion only, beholding beauty with the eye of the mind, he will be enabled to bring forth, not images of beauty, but realities (for he has hold not of an image but of a reality), and bringing forth and nourishing true virtue to become the friend of God and be immortal, if mortal man may. Would that be an ignoble life?’

“Such, Phaedrus—and I speak not only to you, but to all of you—were the words of Diotima; and I am persuaded of their truth. And being persuaded of them, I try to persuade others, that in the attainment of this end human nature will not easily find a helper better than love. And therefore, also, I say that every man ought to honour him as I myself honour him, and walk in his ways, and exhort others to do the same, and praise the power and spirit of love according to the measure of my ability now and ever.

“The words which I have spoken, you, Phaedrus, may call an encomium of love, or anything else which you please.” (Benjamin Jowett, [*The Dialogues of Plato*](#), Vol. I, Oxford University Press, London, New York, 1892, p. 580-583.)

Thus, Socrates was made to discover that both love and beauty belonged together not as residing in things but as residing in the *loving beauty* that pertains

to the offsprings of the soul of the creative process for the benefit of mankind. *Loving beauty* is the true nature of artistic creative powers.

CONCLUSION

Here, Plato is a true precursor of Paul's *Corinthian, 1, 13*, in understanding that loving beauty resides in the beautiful soul of the poets who are, as Percy Bysshe Shelley said, "the unacknowledged legislators of the world," and that the Good of the beautiful soul resides in the love of mankind. Like Paul said: "Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, [love] is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things." Similarly, Agathon said:

"[196] Of his virtue I have now to speak: his greatest glory is that he can neither do or suffer wrong to or from any god or any man; for he suffers not by force if he suffers; force comes not near him, neither when he acts does he act by force. For all men in all things serve him of their own free will, and where there is voluntary agreement, there, as the laws which are the lords of the city say, is justice. [...]"

Thus, mankind is the reason why beauty is beautiful. Without the development of mankind there could not be any beauty at all. But, the mission of improving mankind, first and foremost, has been given to the creative process of artistic composition. This is why Agathon added:

"In the first place he (Love) is a poet (and here, like Eryximachus, I magnify my art), and he is also the source of poesy in others, which he could not be if he were not himself a poet. And at the touch of him every one becomes a poet, even though he had no music in him before ; this also is a proof that Love is a good poet and accomplished in all the fine arts; for no one can give to another that which he has not himself, or teach that of which he has no

knowledge.” (Benjamin Jowett, *The Dialogues of Plato*, Vol. I, Oxford University Press, London, New York, 1892, p. 566.)

And, John Keats confirmed the point:

*“Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.”*

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