

**DO YOU BELIEVE?**  
A BOOK SERIES FROM RATIO CHRISTI

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# ARTS & APOLOGETICS

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 RATIO  
CHRISTI

**FAITH & REASON** are at odds in our culture. For many, faith has come to mean little more than wishful thinking and blind belief. Such a concept is completely foreign to the pages of Scripture and historical Christianity. As Edward Feser notes, “In short, reason tells us that there is a God and that he has revealed such-and-such a truth; faith is then a matter of believing what reason has shown God to have revealed. In that sense faith is not only not at odds with reason but is grounded in reason.”

## **WHAT IS RATIO CHRISTI?**

Ratio Christi, Latin for “the reason of Christ,” wants to help reverse this trend of anti-intellectual Christianity. We organize apologetics clubs at colleges, universities, and even for high school groups in order to strengthen the faith of Christian students and faculty and challenge the rampant atheism and secularism on most campuses. Our mission is to fill the intellectual gap, to make Christianity something worth thinking about, both personally and in the public square.

## **RATIO CHRISTI IS HIRING APOLOGISTS.**

Ratio Christi isn’t just another apologetics organization. We use our theological training to share the Gospel on college and university campuses across the globe. We reach the people that nobody else can – and we need your help.

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**NOTE:** *Some of the content in this booklet may not necessarily represent the views of every person involved with, or the official position of, Ratio Christi. Ratio Christi’s official statement of faith can be seen at [ratiochristi.org/about/beliefs](http://ratiochristi.org/about/beliefs)*

When I began delving into the world of Christian apologetics, my one desire was to find ways of forging connections between Caravaggio and Creation, Titian and Truth, Gauguin and God. As an artist, I earnestly sought ways to use the arts in apologetics, but found little in my initial searches.<sup>1</sup> When I began to get interested in apologetics, I began to collect all the popular apologetics books, the first of which was *When Skeptics Ask: A Handbook on Christian Evidence*.<sup>2</sup> In eager anticipation, I flipped to the subject index and scoured the listings...Aquinas, Aries, Aristotle, Athanasius, Augustine...Nothing on the arts. Next, I purchased *A Ready Defense: Over 60 Vital Lines of Defense for Christianity*. Surely among “60 lines of defense” I would find something. I flipped to the back and scanned...Aristotle, Arius...Armenian...Arriyuk...Artaxerxes...Rats! Even the best-selling apologetic classic *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist* did not have a listing on the arts.<sup>3</sup> If you don't believe the arts have gotten the frayed end of the brush, consider the apologist, Douglas Groothuis' 752-page book, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith*, does not include an argument from the arts. To his credit, Groothuis has lectured on the topic since his book was published and a new edition is coming out this spring (2022).<sup>4</sup> Perhaps a few words on the arts have been added. But why does it matter? Do the arts really have anything to offer apologists?

## THE MEANING GAP

My contention is that the arts are the most powerful apologetic tools we have today. People shy away from debates about religion and logic is given short shrift; give people an imaginative drama of forbidden love or a sculpture displaying grief-stricken agony, however, and suddenly the big questions of life *matter*. By bringing the arts into our apologetics, we can capture the hearts and minds of our skeptical friends in a powerful way, pointing them to the hope in a life reconciled to God.

In a recent podcast, author and apologist, Holly Ordway, explained why many people cannot interact with traditional apologetic arguments. Many have ceased to find the ideas associated with Christianity interesting enough to consider due to a lack of understanding. She calls it the “meaning gap” and explains, “It’s not so much that they disagree, they just don’t even get it. They don’t find anything to latch onto, so we’re not even at the point of disagreement.”<sup>5</sup> Ordway illustrates by suggesting an apologist who tries to offer Aquinas’ five arguments for the existence of God to a skeptic today might as well say, “Let me give you five arguments for the existence of elves in your garden.”<sup>6</sup> People are unable to see how Christianity connects to real life. To her point, we need to be aware of the “meaning gap” when we engage in apologetic discussions and equip ourselves accordingly. The fundamental rule of communication always applies: Know your audience.

What do we know about our audience? They are all human! Therefore, since “art is coincident with man, universal in origin and significance,” not a single person is untouched by its influence.<sup>7</sup> The legendary Wheaton English professor Clyde Kilby noted, “Even if one desired, one could not rule art out of his daily life.”<sup>8</sup> Many philosophies of beauty and the arts have been tackled by theologians and philosophers across the centuries. Unfortunately, much of the literature is as dense as molding paste and dry as sandpaper. Must we slog through aesthetic theory before making headway? Thankfully, an in depth knowledge of the philosophies of art and beauty is not necessary. Undoubtedly, there will be times when the arts are able to draw skeptics into conversation more readily

than “scientific arguments which explain everything to the understanding without satisfying the heart...”<sup>9</sup> On that note, this booklet is an attempt to make a clear connection between the arts and apologetics and show how the arts point to God.

## The Argument from Bach

Let me share a brief story. I had almost given up on finding practical arguments from the arts, until one rare free afternoon when I found myself crouched down in a forgotten, dusty corner of the Religion section of Half-Priced Books and happened upon the *Handbook of Christian Apologetics* by Peter Kreeft and Ronald Tacelli. Out of habit, I flipped to the index and scanned...Aquinas...Aristotle, Arthur, Athanasius...Duped again! And then my eyes traveled a bit further down...Avicenna...Aztecs...Bach...Wait...Bach!? What was Johann Sebastian Bach doing in a book defending the Christian faith? On page 81, I found an apologetic argument called “Argument #17 The Argument from Aesthetic Experience.” It ran as follows:

*There is the music of Johann Sebastian Bach.  
Therefore there must be a God.  
You either see this one or you don't.*<sup>10</sup>

That was all there was; a witty nod to the great Baroque composer whose masterful music revealed God as self-evident. There was nothing to be done but turn on Bach’s “St. Matthew Passion” and pray. I found this argument amusing but I was determined to find arguments from the creative realm of human activity that provided both wit and intellectual rigor for skeptics to engage with.

Don’t get me wrong; all the books I’ve mentioned so far are full of Christian evidences. By and large, however, contemporary apologetics has neglected the arts like a stubby pencil. After finding Kreeft and Tacelli’s book, I resolved to find ways to effectively use the arts in apologetics, with the conviction that “Great art reveals the human condition—past, present, and future, helping man understand himself, the universe, and life itself.”<sup>11</sup> Rather than focus on the heavy-handed philosophy that often accompanies aesthetic considerations, or arguments that fail to make a real connection with people, I’m going to share eight different arguments I wish I would’ve found years ago. These are simple, effective ways to use the arts to point people to God. We’ll look at personal testimony, shared aesthetic experiences, historical testimony, arguments from beauty, human creativity, and mathematics in music. Then we’ll turn it upside down and present an argument from ugliness, and finally a fun teleological argument from art supplies. We’ll also tango with a couple of Richard Dawkins’ counterarguments, give them a twirl, and watch them fall flat. We may not be able to dive deeply into all of the philosophical aspects of the arts

in this brief booklet, but we will look at some practical ways the arts can be used to point people to the truth of the Christian faith in real life, in real conversations. After all, apologetics is inseparable from evangelism and our ultimate goal is to see unbelieving friends and family come to saving faith in Jesus Christ. As Kevin Lewis, professor of theology and law at BIOLA University, routinely tells his classes, “Apologetics fills the potholes in the road that leads to the door of the house of salvation.”<sup>12</sup> So let’s fill holes!

## The Testimony of Peter Hitchens

Personal religious experience or testimony is a legitimate component of a cumulative case argument for God. Such arguments often include cosmological arguments, design arguments, ontological arguments, moral arguments, arguments from mind/consciousness, and finally, the testimony of someone’s religious experiences can be offered to round out the case for the God of the Bible. This is the typical method proposed by many classical apologists; In the argument I’m going to make, I’m simply beginning at the end—with personal testimony. You can decide whether or not you think personal testimony is a good starting point based on who you’re talking to and how the Lord leads you in specific conversations. There may be times when personal testimony may work toward closing the meaning gap, whereas a traditional argument would only widen it. The use of particular arguments, their timing and order, should be selected with wisdom and a sincere desire to point people to God.

The particular testimony I’m going to focus on comes from Peter Hitchens, brother of the late, well-known atheist, Christopher Hitchens. In his book *The Rage Against God* Peter Hitchens recounts a pivotal event:

*What I can recall, very sharply indeed, is a visit to the Hotel-Dieu in Beaune, a town my girlfriend and I had gone to mainly in search of fine food and wines of Burgundy. But we were educated travelers and strayed, guidebook in hand, into the ancient hospital. And there, worth the journey according to the Green Michelin guide, was Rogier van der Weyden’s fifteenth century polyptych The Last Judgment.*

*I scoffed. Another religious painting! Couldn’t these people think of anything else to depict? Still scoffing, I peered at the naked figures fleeing toward the pit of hell, out of my usual faintly morbid interest in the alleged terrors of damnation. But this time I gaped, my mouth actually hanging open. These people did not appear remote or from the ancient past; they were my own generation. Because they were naked, they were not imprisoned in their own age by time-bound fashions. On the contrary, their hair, and in an odd way, the set of their faces, were entirely in the style of my*

*own time. They were me and the people I knew. One of them—and I have always wondered how the painter thought of it—is actually vomiting with shock and fear at the sound of the Last Trump.*

*I did not have a “religious experience.” Nothing mystical or inexplicable took place—no trance, no swoon, no vision, no voices, no blaze of light. But I had a sudden, strong sense of religion being a thing of the present day, not imprisoned under thick layers of time. A large catalogue of misdeeds, ranging from the embarrassing to the appalling, replayed themselves rapidly in my head. I had absolutely no doubt that I was among the damned, if there were any damned.<sup>13</sup>*

Peter Hitchens goes on to recount the process by which he eventually recovers the Christian faith he had abandoned as a youth. We might disagree with him on whether or not his experience was religious (I think it was) but recounting Hitchens’ experience may bring to mind memories of similar experiences someone has had standing before a great work of art. Sharing Hitchens’ testimony can provide opportunities for open-ended questions such as, “In what ways has art impacted you?” or “What do you make of him feeling “among the damned?” Testimonies such as Peter Hitchens’ are personal stories people can relate to. They provide opportunities for them to connect the meaning of Christian concepts to their own life. That’s not all: The artwork elucidated biblical truth in a way that softened Hitchens’ heart and confronted him with his own sinfulness. It is precisely at such a point that the presentation of the gospel is salve to the soul—which, by the way, is the whole point. Christ came to seek and save the lost.<sup>14</sup>

**IN CONVERSATION:** Personal testimonies like Peter Hitchens’ reveal the persuasive power of the arts and how God works through them. In Hitchens’ case, art pointed him to God by capturing his imagination and pricking his conscience. The gap between personal guilt and his responsibility before God was narrowed by viewing a powerful image of divine judgment. Consider visiting an art museum with a skeptical friend and/or challenge them to read Peter Hitchens’ journey from atheism to Christianity in his book *The Rage Against God*.

## **Argument from Art History**

Apologist J. Warner Wallace’s recent book *Person of Interest* (2021) gives an argument from art history that is sure to pique the interest of artistically inclined friends and family. In his book, Wallace lays out the history of the arts beginning in the early centuries of the Christian church and continuing through the Middle Ages and Renaissance. He shows in illustrated detail how architecture, painting, sculpture, and other art forms flourished as

the Christian church strove to create objects of worship. He ties the artistic production of the ages together with a stunning fact:

*No other sacred figure has stirred the imagination in this transcendent manner. Consider, for example, the religious systems that preceded Christianity and are still active today. Indra, Thakur Jiu, Zoroaster, Krishna, and the Buddha had a dramatic head start on Jesus, yet combined they haven't had the global impact on art that Jesus has had. Jesus is not just the most inspirational historical figure in the West—he's the most inspiration figure in the history of the world.*<sup>15</sup>

This is a spectacular way to bring the arts into apologetic conversations and point people to Jesus. Admirably, Wallace demonstrates that two thousand years of art history has produced artwork inspired by Jesus in every style, genre, and time period. Does this prove God's existence or the truth of the Bible? No, but it does set the Christian faith apart and highlights something rarely considered in apologetics: "No other historical figure has received this much artistic attention."<sup>16</sup> This incredible fact of art history was noted as far back as the early 20th century by Harvard professor, Pitirim A. Sorokin when he demonstrated that "before the tenth century ninety percent of all Western art was religious, and that it was not until two centuries ago that secular art took the preponderance."<sup>17</sup> In an even broader stroke, the acclaimed historian, Jaroslav Pelikan, affirmed this saying, "Regardless of what anyone may personally think or believe about him, Jesus of Nazareth has been the dominant figure in the history of Western culture for almost twenty centuries."<sup>18</sup> Jesus is not like any other religious figure; He stands alone.

**IN CONVERSATION:** Remind skeptics that without Jesus, the world's art galleries would be woefully depleted. Famous art of the past and present communicates eternal truths that can be tapped into by studying the life of Jesus. Remind skeptics that reading the gospels will help them interpret an enormous amount of art, past and present. If you have a friend who's interested in the prominent place Jesus holds in the arts, find out when their birthday is and gift them with a copy of Wallace's *Person of Interest*.

## Shared Aesthetic Experience

We're not limited to history when using the arts in apologetics. Let's take a look at a line of argumentation easy enough to share around the dinner table: Shared aesthetic experience. The French apologist Viscount de Chateaubriand, alluded to the power of beauty when he asked, "How can a man return an infidel from the regions of solitude?"<sup>19</sup> All humans share aesthetic experiences of grandeur and awe. These moments render us



entranced with a sense of the beauty and majesty of the world around us, and also in the presence of great art. Anyone who's been to an art museum, theater performance, or music concert has experienced the inexplicable power of human creativity to move the soul: we shout in concerts, clap in theaters, and cry during movies. Aesthetic experiences are attested to by believers and unbelievers alike, but only Christianity offers satisfying explanations for this shared human experience. Christianity offers a worldview that includes all the things that can't be tasted, touched, or seen. By contrast, the idea that naturalism can explain aesthetic experiences is an assumption that should be challenged. The wonder and emotions we feel in the presence of the arts is not a scientific matter and we must press the skeptic and ask them to explain these *matters of the heart* that defy empirical investigation. The reason we sense there is something bigger, greater, and transcendent in those moments is because there is! There is more to life than matter in motion. Physics, chemistry, and biology cannot explain the enjoyment we have watching a ballet performance, nor can the chemical composition of a cello explain what we feel listening to Yo-Yo Ma.

One of the greatest mathematicians in history recognized the necessity of the heart in matters of faith. Blaise Pascal, stated, "The heart has its reasons of which reason knows nothing: we know this in countless ways."<sup>20</sup> What Pascal meant was that human reason has limits. As embodied souls, we are more than just physical beings with brains. The feelings we have in the presence of great art and the way it works on our imaginations cannot be accounted for by natural processes alone. As creatures made in the image of the Divine Artist, we have the capacity to create art and to appreciate the beauty we see in the world and "there is no other explanation which so fully covers the observable facts."<sup>21</sup> In nature and in man-made arts, on the mountains and in the music hall, our shared aesthetic experiences point to the spiritual realm and to the God of the Bible.

**IN CONVERSATION:** Challenge a skeptic to think about a time they had a strong emotional reaction to the arts. Be willing to share your own aesthetic experiences and how you make sense of them through your faith in God. Memorable experiences can be used to help fill the potholes in a materialistic worldview and point people to the truth of the Christian faith.

## Arguments from Beauty

If your audience requires formal arguments by prestigious philosophers, there are several arguments from beauty to choose from. The late apologist and author, Francis Schaeffer, wrote extensively on the theology of art and highlighted ways in which the arts of the centuries illustrate man's quest for meaning. He did the Christian church a great service by reminding us that the "Father of Jesus was also the God of beauty."<sup>22</sup> Likewise, sophisticated arguments have been made from objective beauty in the world, demonstrating the God of the Bible as the best explanation. British philosopher, Richard Swinburne,

makes an argument from objective beauty in nature, but the idea can be applied to the liberal arts: "...if God creates a universe, as a good workman he will create a beautiful universe. On the other hand, if the universe came into existence without being created by God, there is no reason to suppose that it would be a beautiful universe."<sup>23</sup> Concerning our ability to perceive beauty in things he continues by saying, "...there is certainly no particular reason why, if the universe originated uncaused, psycho-physical laws would bring about aesthetic sensibilities in human beings."<sup>24</sup>

As an evidential apologist, Swinburne argues that God is the best explanation for the beauty that exists and for our ability to perceive it. Without a divine designer, valuations of any kind are difficult to account for, so he argues from what we see and experience in everyday life as evidence for God. As opposed to chance processes, the beauty we see in the world points to a "good workman."

As apologists, we can point our skeptical friends to the beauty in the world and in the fine arts, as well. As Swinburne argues, there is no particular reason why we should recognize beauty if we live in a random chance universe devoid of meaning. If the universe is merely *time + matter + chance* what meaning could beauty possibly have? It's important to recognize the logical implications of atheism on this point—if there is no God, beauty is ultimately an illusion. Christianity, however, makes perfect sense of beauty and our appreciation of it. Since humans are made in the image of the God (the Divine Artist), we have the ability to create things like our Creator does, in limited measure. All of the fine arts manifest God's image upon us. Materialistic explanations that chalk it all up to biological accident (genetic drift) or the chance emergence of an adaption at some remote point back in evolutionary history fail to adequately address the full range of human experiences we've looked at so far. Since the arts do not aid in our reproductive success or our survival, evolutionary explanations fail to provide explanatory power in the area of aesthetics.

In his 2017 lecture on aesthetics and God, Groothuis argues for objective beauty:

*There are objective objects and events that display objective beauty. These elements of beauty and artistic qualities cannot be adequately explained by naturalism, pantheism, or postmodernism.*<sup>25</sup>

Skeptics may challenge the idea of objective beauty, but we can offer examples from nature and the fine arts. Is there no unified perception of beauty in the night sky filled with twinkling stars? In other words, who in their right mind calls it ugly? Examples from the fine arts might include Michelangelo's ceiling frescoes in the Sistine Chapel. We admire these famous paintings for their beauty and awe-inspiring display of skill. No one argues that they are unworthy of attention! Some will attempt to relativize beauty and say it only exists in the eye of the beholder, however, Groothuis says, "Beauty may be in the eye of the eye of the beholder, but it's not *only* there. It's also in what's beheld. Moreover you can make mistakes. You can call something ugly that is beautiful and something beautiful that is

ugly.”<sup>26</sup> What he means is there is a subjective judgment made about a work of art, but there is also something inherent in the work itself, independent of our minds. Since it is independent of our minds, our minds can get it wrong. There’s a standard that exists for evaluating beauty and ugliness and when people argue about the aesthetic merit of different works we can “see” a standard exists. People do not have serious arguments about their favorite flavor of ice cream, but try suggesting a certain composer is the “best” among a group of classical musicians and you’ll see consensus is hard to come by. The fact that people disagree when evaluating art does not destroy objective beauty, it supports it. It suggests a standard beyond us and “points us beyond this world, to a ‘kingdom of ends’ in which our immortal longing and desire for perfection are finally answered.”<sup>27</sup> There is much more that could be said on this, but the point is to be able to respond to aesthetic relativism.

**IN CONVERSATION:** Press the skeptic to provide an explanation for objective beauty. Share with them that the Christian faith has an answer: God is the source of Beauty (Psalm 50:1-2) and as creatures made in His image (Genesis 1:27) humans are able to perceive it. If skeptics accept aesthetic relativism (the idea that beauty is in the eye of the beholder) remind them that if aesthetic relativism is true, then all artistic judgment is arbitrary and no work of art can be judged as better than another. Are they are willing to give up all value judgments about art?

## Humans are the Only Artists on Earth

My favorite argument related to the arts is an argument from human creativity. Either humans developed the ability over eons of non-purposeful biological evolution or we’ve been gifted the ability to create art from God. As far as I know, no other options have been seriously proposed or defended. An introduction to the argument requires a clear definition of *art* which I define as “the expression or application of human creative skill and imagination, typically in a visual form such as painting or sculpture, producing works to be appreciated primarily for their beauty or emotional power.”<sup>28</sup> The argument claims humans are the only artists on earth, building the uniqueness of the human species as distinct from all others and made in God’s image. It can be delivered as a disjunctive syllogism:

- The human artist is the result of mindless evolution or the result of special creation by God.
- The artist is not the result of mindless evolution.
- Therefore, the artist is the result of special creation by God.

This argument is laser-focused on the *human as artist*, specifically on the uniqueness of the human ability. Current figures put the known number of species on our planet

at approximately 8.7 million.<sup>29</sup> No other species on earth creates works of art. Why are humans the only species on earth that draws representationally and symbolically? Some will say monkeys can draw, but when we carefully define terms, we see monkeys only make marks on paper. Elephants in Thailand have been trained to paint for tourists but they cannot draw unassisted and untrained. When we look closely at the animals that have been hailed as “artistic,” we do not find their work comparable to human artwork. Human art is qualitatively unrivaled on the planet and evolutionary biologists have failed to provide adequate explanations.<sup>30</sup>

Before the Enlightenment, art was generally understood to come from a supernatural source. For example, the ancient Greeks attributed the arts to the inspiration of the Muses. The Enlightenment, with its focus on science and rationalism, led to a huge shift in thinking about the arts. Thoughts of the supernatural and divine inspiration were pushed out and the art world changed dramatically. You can see this shift when you visit a museum. Art before the Enlightenment often conveys spiritual signs and symbols that evoke the transcendent. When you take a turn through the modern and contemporary galleries, religious content is conspicuously absent, and evolution is given the credit as being the source of human creativity.

Some skeptics are quick to name Neanderthals as early artists, pointing to a gradual evolutionary progression of artistic abilities in so-called non-human ancestors. However, much evidence has arisen in recent years placing Neanderthals in the camp with modern humans. Scientist and author, Michael Oard explains, “Despite all the prejudice against including the Neanderthals into *Homo sapiens*, even many evolutionists have become impressed with the evidence for Neanderthal’s humanity, as research casts a more complimentary light on the older cousins. This updated view depicts Neanderthals as having a capacity for creative, flexible behavior somewhat like that of modern people.” In 2010, additional evidence was discovered revealing Neanderthals wore make-up and played music.<sup>31</sup> The more evidence we find, the more obvious it becomes that Neanderthals were human, possessing both artistic abilities and aesthetic inclinations. The Bible tells us why humans are the only artists on earth:

*So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.*<sup>32</sup>

Only humans were made in God’s image and this accounts for human creativity. Every human artist displays the skill placed within them by the Divine Artist, setting us apart from all other living things. Our unique ability to create art points directly to the Creator.

**IN CONVERSATION:** If skeptics think animals are artists, clarify the definition of art. By art, we don’t mean simply making marks on a piece of paper but the creation of representational or symbolic imagery. Share how only the Christian faith makes sense of

the fact that humans are the only artists on earth.

## Argument from Ugliness

The shared aesthetic experience of ugliness can be as powerful as beauty. Like beauty, the objective nature of ugliness is apparent in real life experiences. One such experience, attested to by many people, is visiting a holocaust museum. The ugliness is undeniable; any claims to aesthetic relativism in the face of the photos of Nazi Germany's tortuous and genocidal actions against the Jewish people quickly prove hollow. The pain, sorrow, and unfathomable cruelty strike us in the core of our being. Who does not grieve while viewing photographs of emaciated children in caged in barbed wire? No one has to make an argument that evil is ugly.

In 2020, I traveled to Israel and visited the Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem. Tears flowed down my cheeks as I walked through the exhibition rooms. The propaganda posters screamed hatred from the walls. Scientific experiments could give information about the size and structure of the exhibits and chemical analysis of the materials used to produce the objects, but none of those results begin to capture what we feel. Science cannot touch it.

Because of the interrelatedness of goodness and beauty, an argument from the existence of ugliness can be used to defend objective beauty in the same way an argument for the existence of evil can be used to defend objective morality. Here's one way to think about the logical progression of the argument:

- When you say there's such a thing as ugliness you assume there's such a thing as beauty.
- When you assume there's such a thing as beauty you're assuming an Aesthetic Law, by which you can differentiate between ugliness and beauty.
- When you assume an Aesthetic Law, you must posit an Aesthetic Law Giver.
- Why? Because if there's no Aesthetic Law Giver, there's no Aesthetic Law.
- If there's no Aesthetic Law, there's no beauty; if there's no beauty, there's no ugliness.
- Therefore, the existence of ugliness affirms objective beauty.<sup>33</sup>

With this argument, we can argue for objective beauty and ugliness in the same way we would argue for objective morality. The mere fact that skeptics acknowledge the existence of evil/ugliness points to the existence of beauty/goodness. As humans, we may not be able to perceive moral or aesthetic values perfectly, but we know they exist and we cannot live consistently without assuming their existence.

**IN CONVERSATION:** Press the skeptic to make sense of shared sorrow and revulsion in the presence of evil. How do they explain it? Use the holocaust as an example of objective ugliness. Challenge them to find a consistent standard by which to make judgments between beauty and ugliness without God. The fact that they can tell the difference between ugly and beautiful things points to God as the Aesthetic Law Giver.

## Arguments from Math

The Greek philosopher Aristotle noted centuries ago that, “those who assert that the mathematical sciences say nothing of the beautiful or the good are in error.”<sup>34</sup> Another way we can use the arts to point people to God is to show them how the laws of math connect to the arts, especially music. Your friends may not be particularly interested in painting, sculpture, or dance, but everyone has favorite music they enjoy. The popularity of audio streaming platforms attests to the universal popularity of this art form. As of November 2021, the platform Spotify had a valuation of a \$66.95B with 60,000 new songs uploaded to the platform daily.<sup>35</sup> We tend to take it for granted, but it is only the Christian worldview that grounds the laws of math necessary for music to work. From the mathematical laws governing harmony, pitch, and frequency to the duration of notes and time signatures that govern how many beats are within each measure, mathematical laws must be in place before a single note sounds. Amazingly, all the notes in a piece of music have a numerical connection. Three characteristics of mathematical laws should catch our attention: they are invariant (they don’t change), they are universal (they work everywhere), and they are immaterial (they are invisible). Think about it: the math involved in music theory is not material or physical. You cannot touch the concepts and they are not made of physical matter. Every song being uploaded to Spotify as you read this booklet presupposes immaterial laws of math, which in turn, presuppose God’s existence and the truth of the Bible. Why? The Christian worldview allows for numbers to have real existence even though they are not physical things. Astronomer and apologist, Jason Lisle says, “Laws of mathematics are a reflection of how God thinks about numbers. The internal consistency of mathematics is a reflection of the internal consistency within the Godhead. ... Laws of mathematics are real and, yet, not physical — just as God is real and not physical in His essential nature.”<sup>36</sup> We all assume the universality, immateriality, and immutability of math in order to play an instrument or enjoy a concert. Author and apologist, Vishal Mangalwadi, notes the connection between math and music saying, “Since music is mathematical, Augustine argued, it must be rational, eternal, unchangeable, meaningful, and objective—it consists of mathematical harmony. We cannot make musical sound from just any string. To get a precise note, a string has to have a specific length, thickness, and tension. This implies that the Creator has encoded music into the structure of the universe.”<sup>37</sup> Take away mathematical laws and all you have is noise. Only the God of the

Bible can account for the invariant, universal, and immaterial laws of mathematics that make the melodies we enjoy possible. The ancient Greek philosopher, Plato, used music as a basis for logical reasoning and noted (no pun intended) that just as the laws of logic are exact, so each musical note must be precise. Everyone in the orchestra must play the same F sharp or there will be discord, not harmony.

That's not all. Mathematical laws also govern perspective in painting. The mathematician Blaise Pascal speaks of these laws in determining where the proper viewing point is to fully grasp the depth and dimension of the space saying, "There is just one indivisible point which is the right place...others are too near, too far, too high, or too low. In painting the rules of perspective decide it..."<sup>38</sup> Just as there would be no music without math, there would be no perspective in the visual arts, either. Only the God of the Bible makes sense of the incredible, invisible laws governing perspective.

**IN CONVERSATION:** Start a discussion about the strong correlation between music and math. Press the skeptic to give an account for laws that are universal, immaterial, and invariant. How would those kinds of things ever evolve from physical processes? Explain that only the Christian worldview makes sense of the invisible laws governing Mozart's symphonies and Michelangelo's frescoes.

## Argument from Art Supplies

If you have friends who are artists, they probably love to visit art supply stores. Have you ever noticed how our planet is replete with materials to create art? From the luminous white marble Michelangelo used to sculpt David, to the brilliant blue of ground lapis lazuli stone Medieval monks used to bejewel their manuscripts, materials found in nature are amazingly suited for colorful creativity. There are many types of plants used to create a rainbow of pigments. Across the ages, artists have used oak tree gall to make brown pigments, the Madder plant for reds, verdigris for greens, and crocus flowers for yellow, just to name a few. In addition to plants, earth contains an amazing array of rocks and minerals with which to create beautiful objects. On the Christian worldview, God gave humanity dominion over creation and gifted us with a planet rich in resources.<sup>39</sup> It is incumbent upon the skeptic to explain the presence of such a variety of materials that seem to be lavishly placed within the earth. The variety and color of natural materials goes far beyond anything needed for reproduction or survival and works against evolutionary theory. God gave us a planet resplendent with art supplies and the galleries of the world are a testimony to his benevolent gifts. Just as "Easter eggs" in a video game often point to the game designer, the surprising materials we find within and around the globe point to an infinitely creative Artist.

**IN CONVERSATION:** This line of argument does not prove God, it points to God. Evolution by natural selection working on genetic mutations does not explain the presence of so many colorful natural materials in the world. Do we really need dozens of shades of green to survive? How would colorful minerals and natural pigments ever have arisen as a feature in a random chance universe? Why isn't all creation gray or brown?



## DAWKINS STRIKES OUT

Ratio Christi has a clear mission: to equip students to know why they believe what they believe and help them respond to challenges against the Christian faith. Remember the earlier argument from Kreeft and Tacelli from the music of J.S. Bach? They argued the music of Bach existed, therefore God existed. Let's take a look at how notorious atheist, Richard Dawkins, has answered similar suggestions:

*I have given up counting the number of times I receive the more or less truculent challenge: "How do you account for Shakespeare, then?" (Substitute Schubert, Michelangelo, etc.) The argument will be so familiar, I needn't document it further. But the logic behind it is never spelled out, and the more you think about it the more vacuous you realize it to be. Obviously Beethoven's late quartets are sublime. So are Shakespeare's sonnets. They are sublime if God is there and they are sublime if he isn't. They do not prove the existence of God; they prove the existence of Beethoven and of Shakespeare.<sup>40</sup>*

Has Dawkins hit a home run? Not even close. Strike one: He agrees that humans share aesthetic experiences but offers no counter-explanation for how that's possible given atheistic, materialism. Strike two: When he says "Bach's quartets are sublime," he makes a value judgment which he assumes is also shared, but offers no explanation for how objective "sublimity" is possible given atheism's materialistic commitments. Strike three: his final sentence indicates he has misunderstood the argument. Christians do not say the arts prove the existence of God, but that they *point to God*. They are an aspect of reality that demands explanation. The Christian worldview accounts for both the existence of Beethoven and Shakespeare and our ability to appreciate their work. God created humans and gifted them with a measure of his own infinite creativity. Atheists punt to evolutionary processes over eons of time and frequently commit the fallacy of reification at the same

time. Richard Dawkins may enjoy wearing the original, hand painted neckties designed by his wife, artist Lalla Ward,<sup>41</sup> but when he implies evolution can produce artists and art, he commits the fallacy of reification. Reification is attributing a concrete characteristic, such as human creativity, to something abstract.<sup>42</sup> Lalla Ward creates, evolution does not. Evolution does not design, paint, or compose. Be on the watch for atheistic arguments that commit the fallacy of reification.

In his brief response to the arts in *The God Delusion*, Dawkins attempts another hit against the transcendent nature of the arts:

*But there is an additional point that I might have made, and which needs to be made whenever religion is given credit for, say, the Sistine Chapel or Raphael's Annunciation. Even great artists have to earn a living, and they will take commissions where they are to be had. I have no reason to doubt that Raphael and Michelangelo were Christians—it was pretty much the only option in their time—but the fact is almost incidental. Its enormous wealth had made the Church the dominant patron of the arts. If history had worked out differently, and Michelangelo had been commissioned to paint a ceiling for a giant Museum of Science, mightn't he have produced something at least as inspirational as the Sistine Chapel? How sad that we shall never hear Beethoven's Mesozoic Symphony, or Mozart's opera The Expanding Universe.<sup>43</sup>*

First, it's not at all clear that the hard sciences can provide the inspiration needed to produce artwork equal to that of the Renaissance. Second, the idea that all of the art produced during the Renaissance was obligatorily Christian is incorrect. Historian Steven D. Smith remarks on the famous art era of the Renaissance, saying, "Christian themes are as pervasive as pagan ones in the Renaissance writing and art, maybe more so. Alongside the exuberant paintings of Venus Bacchus, Cupid and Apollo, there are also countless more pious Madonnas, Pauls, Peters, and Jeromes—"44 There was never a fully unified Christian subject matter in the history of Renaissance art when the Church was financing commissions. When Dawkins asserts the art created would've been different had the Church not been the primary patron, we can respond by saying *it was different* in many instances and often focused on pagan themes. There have surely been artists who created religious art solely for a paycheck, but no evidence is provided to support the claim. Even if Raphael was painting just for florins, that wouldn't disprove his desire to create works that glorified God out of a sincere faith, and it certainly doesn't prove he would've painted evolutionary themes if he were living in modern times. The better question is not whether great Christian art was executed for income, but rather, why it has had such a powerful and enduring effect on people ever since that time.

## AGAINST A DARWINIAN THEORY OF BEAUTY

You may come up against skeptics who are familiar with Darwin's theory of beauty and the subsequent work of Ronald Fisher, who worked to expand evolutionary explanations into the field of aesthetics. If we look back at Darwin's writing on the subject, he crudely reduced aesthetics to sexual selection. In the *Descent of Man* (1871) Darwin attributed the beauty we see in nature to sexual selection. For Darwin, it was all about picking attractive mates and passing on genes. Since Darwin, biologists have used Darwin's ideas about sexual selection to extend the creative power of evolution to encompass aspects of our humanity which are unnecessary in the struggle for survival, such as aesthetic preferences. While we do seek out attractive spouses, our desire to reproduce alone doesn't explain the limitless ways beauty affects our lives every day.

Additionally, Darwin used the peacock to build his hypothesis, but beauty is not limited to the animal kingdom. A field full of wildflowers shows us abounding beauty in living things without eyes, feathers, or legs. Ultimately, the theory fails, since neither Darwin—nor anyone since—has spoken with a peacock or any other animal to assess whether or not they are making aesthetic choices in mate selection. Esteemed professor of philosophy at the University of Buckingham, Anthony O'Hear says of Darwin's theory on beauty, "While Darwin...shows that in a particular species the development of (to us) ever more aesthetically striking characteristics can happen as a result of female choice, it still does not show that the females are choosing for aesthetic reasons."<sup>45</sup> Evolutionists have repeatedly failed to provide good answers for questions in this area. As apologists, we can work against reductionist explanations. Art is about much more than mating preferences.

## WHAT IS BEAUTY?

Nailing down a concise definition of beauty is difficult. Mark Noll, previous professor of history at Notre Dame, offers some helpful comments saying, “The God who dwells in unapproachable glory has appeared in Jesus Christ, who as an ordinary human being is nonetheless a being of surpassing beauty.”<sup>46</sup> He aptly adds, “...where proportion, harmony, fittingness, excellence, and balance exist in the world, they reflect in human measure what appeared on the Mount of Transfiguration without reserve.”<sup>47</sup> To see beauty for what it is, we must *see Christ for who he is*. When we become frustrated when others distort beauty, turn it into spectacle, or promote disorder, chaos, and ugliness, we have to recall that as Christians, we are born again: we are new creatures with new sight.<sup>48</sup> Empowered by the Holy Spirit, we can see things truly. Jesus said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”<sup>49</sup> Jesus shines the light of life upon reality when we repent of our sins and place our whole trust in him for salvation. The renowned theologian, Jonathan Edwards, spoke about the “spiritual sense” given by God through supernatural new birth back in the 18th century saying, “The first effect of the power of God in the heart in regeneration, is to give the heart a divine taste or sense; to cause it to have a relish of the loveliness and sweetness of the supreme excellency of the divine nature.”<sup>50</sup> Edwards is referring to the necessity of salvation for the proper recognition of God’s nature. He continues, “... a person must not only see the effects of God’s work in the world but also savor the beauty of God’s nature in the gospel, and in all that he has made, and in all that he does.”<sup>51</sup> We have to be spiritually awake to recognize true beauty, just as we do goodness and truth. Again, Jonathan Edwards’ conception of beauty is helpful: “For as God is infinitely the greatest being, so he is allowed to be infinitely the most beautiful and excellent; and all the beauty to be found throughout the whole creation is but the reflection of the diffused beams of that being who hath an infinite fullness of brightness and glory.”<sup>52</sup> We see natural beauty and man-made beauty and all of it reflects the nature of God as revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. The more

we learn about Christ, the more we realize God's primary purpose in giving us beauty is the manifestation of himself. As we engage skeptics through the arts, we should commit a line to memory: For with you is the fountain of life: In your light we see light.<sup>53</sup> In Christ and in the light of God's word, we gain a God's eye point of view on the arts and His word is the authoritative voice on the subject. We echo the Psalmist, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."<sup>54</sup>

## A PALETTE FULL OF ARGUMENTS

We've considered several ways the arts can be used in the service of Christian apologetics:

1. Utilize a personal testimony that incorporates the arts, such as Peter Hitchens'.
2. Draw attention to shared aesthetic experiences, i.e., those moments of awe and wonder.
3. Use the testimony of art history to provoke curiosity about Jesus.
4. Point out the uniqueness of human creativity among all known species.
5. Challenge the skeptic to give an account for the law of mathematics as they relate to music and perspective.
6. Challenge the skeptic to justify ugliness, as well as beauty.
7. Recognize the uniqueness of human creativity. An argument from art materials in nature.

No matter the style or form of art you're considering, only the Christian worldview makes sense of it. God is the ultimate source of beauty; He created our world with objective beauty all around us that reflects his nature, and then he created human beings in his image with the ability to perceive it and create it after him. Genesis 1:27 tells us: "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." I've included that verse many times because of its theological bedrock in Christian aesthetics; it's the starting point. Then the very next verse teaches we have dominion over the earth and all creation. We have preeminence. "He made us a little lower than the angels" it says in Hebrews 2:7. That's why we create art and animals do not. Ugliness entered into the world with the fall of man into sin (Genesis 3) and though we still perceive beauty, our perception is imperfect. In spite of our fallen condition, we are still

able to reflect the image of our Creator by making art and enjoying it. Most importantly, we are able to restore our perception of beauty by supernatural regeneration and the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. When we repent and trust in Christ, we are born again, and “the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ.”<sup>55</sup>

## CALL FOR A CREATIVE DEFENSE

Today, the study of aesthetics is often overrun with naturalist assumptions and what the late philosopher Roger Scruton referred to as “the cult of ugliness” reigns in the art world. Why? With insight and erudition, Scruton observed “...that the degradation of art was a direct consequence of the West’s loss of faith.”<sup>56</sup> Apologist and theologian Francis Schaeffer also laid blame at the feet of the Church back in the 70s: “If therefore, Christianity has so much to say about the arts and to the artist, why is it that recently we have produced so little Christian art?...We have not produced Christian art because we have forgotten what Christianity says about the arts.”<sup>57</sup> They were right; There is a vacuum of truth in the arts and, unfortunately, the confusing and offensive nature of modern art leads many Christians to keep them at a distance, while many churches abandon them altogether.

How can you capture the apologetic power of the arts? First, by having a thorough understanding of what the Bible says about the arts you can begin to make connections to the Christian faith. If you’re interesting in diving deeper into the arts and their relationship to the Christian faith I recommend the little book *Art and the Bible* by Francis Shaeffer. At 94 pages, it’s a quick read on what the Bible says about art with copious Scripture references. Hopefully, some of the arguments in this booklet inspire you to come up with even more ways to forge connections between Scripture, the arts, and contemporary life. By allowing Scripture to form your thoughts about beauty and the arts you can “use every color on the apologist’s palette...to explain, defend, and commend Christianity.”<sup>58</sup> Here’s to showing others the beauty of Christ and helping them hear the melodious call of the gospel!



## ENDNOTES

- 1 For the purposes of this booklet, “the arts” refers to things that have no utilitarian function or purpose but produce pleasure in and of themselves, such as music, painting, poetry and literature.
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- 9 Francois-Rene, Viscount De Chateaubriand, *The Genius of Christianity; or, The Spirit and Beauty of the Christian Religion* (1875; repr., Miami, FL: Hardpress Publishing, 2013), 134.
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- 16 *Ibid.*, 138.
- 17 Pitirim A. Sorokin, quoted in Clyde S. Kilby, *Christianity and Aesthetics* (Grantsburg, WI: Nicol Books, 2019), 48.
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- 20 Blaise Pascal, *Pensees* (1670; repr., London, England: Penguin Group, 1966), 154.
- 21 Kilby, *Christianity and Aesthetics*, 26.
- 22 Francis A. Schaeffer, *Art and the Bible*, Forward by Michael Card (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 8.
- 23 Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 190.
- 24 *Ibid.*
- 25 Groothuis, *For the City*.
- 26 *Ibid.*
- 27 Roger Scruton, *Beauty: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 145.

- 28 <https://www.google.com/search?q=art+defintion&oq=art+defintion&aqs=-chrome..69i57.1677j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>.
- 29 <https://www.britannica.com/science/species-taxon>.
- 30 For more on the inadequacy of evolutionary explanations, see the section “Against a Darwinian Theory of Beauty,” p. 22.
- 31 NPR, “Study: Neanderthals Word Jewelry and Makeup,” January 12, 2010, <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=122466430>
- 32 Genesis 1:27.
- 33 This argument for morality is taken from points made in C.S. Lewis’ *Mere Christianity*.
- 34 Albert Hofstadter, Richard Kuhns, *Philosophies of Art and Beauty: Selected Readings in Aesthetics from Plato to Heidegger* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 96.
- 35 <https://appinventiv.com/blog/spotify-statistics-facts/#:~:text=Over%2060%2C000%20songs%20are%20added%20everyday%20on%20the%20platform.&text=As%20per%20Spotify%20listening%20stats,platform%20on%20a%20daily%20basis>.
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- 44 Steven D. Smith, *Pagans and Christians in the City: Culture Wars from the Tiber to the Potomac* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2018), 202.
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- 48 2 Corinthians 5:17.
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