

The Origins of Beauty

**A Center-Oriented Philosophy of Coherence, Purity, and
Living “In Beauty”**

By Greg Bahora

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Abstract

Beauty is often framed as subjective preference or cultural ornament. Yet beauty appears with striking regularity in nature's outcomes across scale: spheres and halos, symmetry, proportion, nested wholeness, and cooperative order. This paper advances a center-oriented account: beauty is the perceptual signature of coherence produced by a generative center, especially when the center exhibits purity understood as integrity—low distortion in its organizing source or signal. The argument is placed in dialogue with (1) Kantian aesthetics on judgments of taste as felt yet “universally communicable,” (2) John O’Donohue’s account of beauty as “becoming” and a kind of “homecoming,” and (3) Louie Schwartzberg’s claim that beauty moves hearts toward care (“we protect what we love”). ([Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#)) The paper concludes by outlining how a life—and, by extension, a society—can be shaped to live “in harmony and beauty” by emulating nature’s center-driven principles, referencing *Centerlife – Happiness by Design* for daily practice and i-Citizen for civic design.

1) What is beauty?

Aesthetic theory begins with a paradox: beauty is experienced inwardly—through feeling—yet judgments of beauty often reach beyond private preference, implicitly inviting agreement. Kant’s account makes this explicit: a judgment of taste is “based on” pleasure while also claiming universal communicability—that others ought to share the feeling. ([Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#))

Beauty is also more than “niceness.” John O’Donohue insists that beauty is “more rounded, substantial becoming,” a depth-event in which something comes into fuller coherence—an experience that can feel like a kind of homecoming into wholeness. ([The On Being Project](#))

A working definition that accommodates both experience and structure is:

Beauty is coherence made perceptible—the felt presence of unity, symmetry, proportion, and belonging-together in form, action, or meaning.

Elaine Scarry adds a practical test: beauty is generative—encountering beauty tends to incite replication and sharing (“beauty brings copies of itself into being”).

([tannerlectures.org](#))

2) Little Known: Beauty Naturally Emerges from a Center-Driven Creative Process

Beauty is often treated as an overlay placed upon reality by human taste. A center-oriented account begins earlier: beauty frequently arises as an output of how systems form.

2.1 The Center-Oriented Thesis

The guiding claim is simple:

Beauty emerges when a system is organized by a strong center, because center-driven formation produces coherence and harmony-like qualities—symmetry, balance, wholeness, and relational fit.

A “center” here is not merely a geometric midpoint. It is a source of organizing influence—a point (or principle) that makes relationship legible and coordination possible. Christopher Alexander’s theory of wholeness and centers is relevant: living structure arises when centers intensify one another through properties such as strong centers, boundaries, and gradients. (web.sfc.keio.ac.jp)

This paper’s emphasis is more explicitly causal: beauty arises not because centers are merely present, but because a center organizes disparate parts into a synchronized whole—and that synchronization generates a system-level coherence (“field effect”) that becomes perceptible as harmony and beauty.

2.2 Purity: Integrity of the Originating Signal

Purity matters, but it is not moral superiority. It is integrity:

- **Physical purity:** low defect density, highly uniform, clear constraints, minimally distorted initial conditions.
- **Biological purity:** signal fidelity early in development; robust, coordinated patterning.
- **Meaning purity:** integrity of intent—low contradiction, low manipulation, low “noise” in what organizes attention and behavior.

Purity strengthens the thesis because it explains why coherence can persist and intensify as the system grows rather than degrading into noise.

2.3 Examples Across Scale: Centers (and Purity) Generating Beauty

Cosmology: origin integrity and the refusal of early collapse

Cosmology offers an archetype: vast structure unfolding from an extraordinarily ordered beginning. Sean Carroll emphasizes that keeping the early universe “very, very smooth” is a delicate condition; any irregularities would have collapsed under gravity, short-circuiting later articulated structure. ([The Singlu Post](#)) The philosophical point is the same across domains: integrity near the origin enables coherent unfolding.

Star formation: a tiny irregularity becomes a true center

Star birth fits center-first formation elegantly. NASA describes star formation as beginning in cold molecular clouds where gas clumps into small, high-density pockets; some pockets gain mass until gravity causes collapse, forming a protostar. ([NASA Science](#)) In center-oriented terms: a small gravitational seed becomes a deepening organizing well—a center that gathers matter, locks in coherent structure, and becomes a self-sustaining whole.

Atmospheric structure: the hurricane eye as a centered calm

The hurricane eye is a striking center-with-envelope phenomenon: a relatively calm, generally clear region at the center surrounded by the eyewall of intense activity. NOAA notes the eye is a calm area of sinking air and lighter winds compared to the surrounding storm. ([NOAA](#)) Even here, centered organization produces legible geometry and a kind of dynamic symmetry.

Atoms: center-formation and stable identity

At the atomic scale, the nucleus acts as a compact organizing center: its protons and neutrons are nearly identical in structure (distinguished chiefly by a minute difference in charge)—a form of uniformity, and the strong nuclear force binds them into a remarkably stable core that draws electrons into durable, patterned arrangements. A key aesthetic lesson is structural: a tiny center coordinates a larger envelope into ordered relation, producing stable identity and reliable behavior.

Biology: early integrity and whole-body coherence

Living form is guided rather than assembled. Development relies on coordinating signals that gather proliferating complexity into an integrated body plan. The philosophical point is temporal: small distortions early propagate forward, reshaping the whole. Purity here is signal fidelity, not moral purity. In biology, one of the clearest embodiments of this is DNA: its power lies less in how compactly it is packed and more in the integrity of its informational code—replication fidelity, repair, and coherent regulatory instructions. When that code is preserved, development can unfold with remarkable order; when it is corrupted, distortion can cascade across the organism's form and function.

Human embodiment: the vagus nerve and “warm expansion” in beauty and goodness

At a central junction of the nervous system—the brainstem region where mind (brain) meets spinal cord—there is an instructive parallel. In a Scientific American interview, Dacher Keltner describes the vagus nerve as originating in the brainstem at the top of the spinal cord, and notes that when active it is linked to a warm expansion in the chest (for example, when moved by someone's goodness or when appreciating beautiful music). He adds that “very new science” suggests it may be closely connected to receptor networks for oxytocin (involved in trust and bonding). ([scientificamerican.com](#)) This does not “prove” metaphysics, but it supports a powerful continuity: small centers can generate large fields of feeling associated with beauty, love, and connection.

Human meaning: shared centers that create collaboration and enduring beauty

Communities cohere around shared centers: symbols, aims, vows, narratives. Integrity of the shared center enables collaboration; contradiction and ulterior motive fragment the whole. This is “purity” as truthfulness and coherence—where clean centers create clean relational lines, and distorted centers create defensive rerouting and mistrust.

Across all these cases, beauty is not an ornamental layer. It is frequently the readout of coherent formation: symmetry, balance, wholeness, and the sense that parts belong.

3) Humans Are Reflections of This Beauty—Physically and Psychologically

If beauty is coherence made perceptible, it makes sense that humans are tuned to recognize it. The argument is not that people “invent” beauty, but that human perception and physiology are structured to *detect* and *resonate with* coherent formation—especially symmetry, balance, and wholeness.

3.1 Physical Recognition: Symmetry as One Cue Among Many

Research in face perception supports (carefully) a long-held intuition: symmetry is one of several traits that can influence attractiveness judgments. A major review notes that facial characteristics influencing attractiveness include symmetry (along with averageness, sexually dimorphic cues, and skin texture/color, among others). ([PMC](#)) The point is not to reduce beauty to symmetry, but to note that symmetry often functions as a perceptual shorthand for coherent development—a form successfully organized rather than randomly distorted.

3.2 Inner Structure: The Brain Is Itself Organized Around Bilateral Symmetry and Coordination

The mind does not merely notice symmetry “out there.” The brain is broadly bilaterally symmetric, and modern resting-state neuroscience has repeatedly examined coordinated activity between homotopic (mirror) regions across the two hemispheres—sometimes called *homotopic functional connectivity*. Reviews describe widespread synchronized spontaneous activity between mirror regions as a notable feature of the brain’s functional architecture. ([Frontiers](#))

3.3 A Vivid (But Non-Foundational) Illustration: Amen’s “Symmetrical Surface” Intuition

As an illustrative observation, Daniel Amen has popularized a simple visual heuristic from his large SPECT imaging database: that a healthy “surface” scan shows “full, even symmetrical activity,” and that “the color is not important, it’s the shape that matters.” ([Amen Clinics](#))

3.4 Psychological Recognition: Beauty Inside Recognizes Beauty Outside

A center-oriented view proposes a correspondence: beauty-oriented structure on the inside recognizes and appreciates beauty on the outside. When attention is scattered or distorted, beauty becomes harder to perceive—nature becomes background, art becomes content, grace becomes easy to miss. When attention is integrated—when inner life is more centered—beauty becomes more available and more nourishing.

O'Donohue's language fits this: beauty is not merely prettiness; it is "becoming," and can feel like a homecoming into wholeness. ([Nature](#))

Schwartzberg adds the ecological consequence: beauty opens the heart and moves people toward care—"we protect what we fall in love with." ([ResearchGate](#)) Scarry names the behavioral signature: beauty tends to reproduce itself—beauty "brings copies of itself into being," through imitation, preservation, and propagation. ([PsychiatryOnline](#))

In summary, the human response to beauty is not arbitrary. It reflects an organism and a mind built for coherence—structurally (bilateral coordination), perceptually (symmetry as a cue), and behaviorally (care and replication).

4) Living "In Beauty" by Emulating Nature's Principles

If beauty is the perceptual signature of center-driven coherence, then living "in beauty" is less about pursuing aesthetic moments and more about aligning life with the universe's own formative logic. Nature does not force harmony from the outside in; it generates it from the center outward—especially when the center is clear, strong, and undistorted.

CenterLife applies this directly: it seeks to embed purity (integrity) into the prime centers of a human life—physical, emotional, mental, intellectual/wisdom, social, and spiritual. Here, purity is not moral perfection. It is wholesomeness and low distortion: wholesome foods, clean water and air, clarity of intention, passion, genuineness, and truthful relationship.

When these inner centers are purified and strengthened, the same signatures that appear in nature's most coherent creations begin to appear in lived experience: greater symmetry and balance, fewer internal contradictions, more reliable meaning, more collaborative relationships, and a steadier sense of well-being. In this sense, happiness is not manufactured by willpower; it is an emergent outcome of centered coherence—happiness by design, as nature designs it.

5) I-Citizen: Society Living "In Harmony and Beauty" by Emulating Nature's Principles

A center-oriented philosophy extends naturally from individuals to societies. i-Citizen is framed as a virtual, worldwide community intended to improve lives through more sensible, holistic ways of living and relating—grounded in a simple premise: human nature reflects nature's formative logic. The same center-driven dynamics that yield coherence in living systems can yield coherence in civic life—if a society's rules, incentives, and institutions are designed to reinforce humanity's higher tendencies: balance, meaning, kindness, and responsibility.

A center-first social design emphasizes:

- **Re-centering values:** clarify what society treats as central, shifting away from extractive and destabilizing incentives toward more balanced, enduring aims.
- **Translating values into structure:** embed those aims across culture, education, media, and governance so they become lived patterns rather than slogans.
- **Scaling through replication:** multiply mindful, kind, purposeful action across millions; shared centers become contagious—echoing Scarry’s claim that beauty “brings copies of itself into being.”

In this view, a “beautiful society” is not a cosmetic ideal. It is a society whose centers are strong, coherent, and ethically sound—clear enough to generate balance, collaboration, endurance, and human flourishing as natural outputs.

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