

Shrek & Beauty

Shrek lives in a world where he perceives what is typically considered ugly by the general population to be in fact beautiful. As philosophers, we must ask questions about how we define objects as beautiful and ugly.

Philosophers refer to judgments of beauty and ugliness as aesthetic judgments, for which two main arguments exist:

- 1) That beauty is in the eye of the beholder, and thus a matter of personal taste or preference, or
- 2) That there is a set of standards or principles that make something beautiful. The second argument also believes that all people with good taste will have positive responses to an object of beauty, or in other words that there is a universal acceptance of what is beautiful.

When considering what makes Shrek ugly, for example, the first argument would say that Shrek is ugly because he does not appeal to the characters he meets on his journey. The second argument, however, would say that Shrek is ugly because he objectively lacks any degree of the property of being beautiful. In other words, on the second view, Shrek is considered ugly because, objectively speaking, he *is*.

Shrek not only looks ugly, but he also seems to do ugly things, things that to most people seem dirty, fraudulent, and dangerous. Nevertheless, Shrek is still a desirable character. So even though, for example, we feel appalled at Shrek's narcissistic delight in discovering that the "hundreds of hideous creatures" he sees in the hall of mirrors are all images of himself, we nevertheless find ourselves rooting for Shrek. We want him to succeed, and find happiness. As philosophers we might ask questions about the connection between beauty and desire.

Typically we associate good with beautiful and bad with ugly. Usually people desire what is good, and thus people desire to see beautiful things. Some philosopher's, however, argue that that we don't in fact need desire to see things as beautiful. What this means is that we can desire things concerning beauty, but it's not intrinsic to the pleasure of beauty and the universal acceptance of beauty. This is not to say though that beauty cannot produce desire. What is interesting in Shrek's case is that he does see his ugliness as beauty. This not only brings the debate back around to the question of whether beauty is subjective or objective, it also makes provides an example of the connection between desire and beauty. Shrek desires to be horrible, because for him, horribleness is beautiful.

This intermingling of the subjective understanding of beauty and the connection between beauty and desire is again raised in Shrek's love for the

ugly princess. As philosophers we ask if he's falling in love with her because he has a positive response to her physical beauty. Does he think she is beautiful? Or, does he love her because she is like him? Philosophers have said that to love someone is to identify ourselves with him/her. Furthermore, loving someone is when we make a decision to dedicate ourselves to their values. As philosophers we question the nature of Shrek and the princess's love, and the nature of love in general.

Questions to Consider

Defining Ugliness:

Shrek's mother was ugly and his father was ugly, but Shrek was uglier than the two of them put together

1. What makes Shrek ugly?
2. How does Shrek feel about his ugliness? Does he like or dislike it?
3. How do other characters in the movie feel about Shrek?
4. How can people think different things are ugly?
5. What about a beauty contest? How do the judges choose the most beautiful?

Looking Ugly and Being Ugly:

Some things that Shrek does, like taking down the dragon and the knight, might be considered mean.

1. What does Shrek do that is mean?
2. What does Shrek do that is nice?
3. Would you call Shrek more or less ugly based on his actions?
4. Why do we call things ugly? Do we only call things ugly if we don't like them?
5. What is it that we don't like about someone that makes us think they are ugly? Is it just looks/appearance, or do other things play a role?
6. Can you think things/people are beautiful even if they do mean things?
7. Are people more beautiful when they only do nice things?

Love and Ugliness:

Shrek falls in love with the princess because she is stunningly ugly.

1. Can you like things that are ugly?
2. Can you love someone who has warts or is hairy like the princess?
3. Do people love other people/things only because of the way they look?
4. Do we only love people who are like us?

Shrek Reflection Assessment

Using Shrek to support your arguments, through a two-page double spaced write up defend either:

- 1) That beauty is in the eye of the beholder, and thus a matter of personal taste or preference, or
- 2) That there is a set of standards or principles that make something beautiful. This argument also believes that all people with good taste will have positive responses to an object of beauty, or in other words that there is a universal acceptance of what is beautiful.

Timeline

January 11 – Watch Film

January 12 – Finish Film & Work Period

January 14 – Reflection Due @ start of class

Success Criteria

	Level 4	Level 3	Level 2	Level 1
Knowledge/ Understanding - Have you clearly chosen an argument and supported that argument	Demonstrates thorough knowledge of the chosen view	Demonstrates considerable knowledge of the chosen view	Demonstrates some knowledge of the chosen view	Demonstrates limited knowledge of the chosen view
Thinking - Have you fully explained the topics in and organized manner?	Demonstrates planning skills through the organization of ideas and summary of information with a high degree of effectiveness	Demonstrates planning skills through the organization of ideas and summary of information with considerable effectiveness	Demonstrates planning skills through the organization of ideas and summary of information with some effectiveness	Demonstrates planning skills through the organization of ideas and summary of information with limited effectiveness
Application - Have you applied information from Shrek to support your view	Applies knowledge and skills in familiar context with a high degree of effectiveness	Applies knowledge and skills in familiar context with considerable effectiveness	Applies knowledge and skills in familiar context with limited effectiveness	Applies knowledge and skills in familiar context with some effectiveness
Communication - Have you checked your spelling and grammar? - Have you used appropriate academic language?	Uses conventions, vocabulary, and terminology with a high degree of effectiveness	Uses conventions, vocabulary, and terminology with considerable effectiveness	Uses conventions, vocabulary, and terminology with some effectiveness	Uses conventions, vocabulary, and terminology with limited effectiveness