

THE CONCEPT OF BEAUTY: A STUDY IN AFRICAN AESTHETICS

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ABSTRACT

African aesthetics broadly described as the study of beauty and to a lesser extent its opposite the ugly emphasizes that it is not enough to create or enjoy aesthetic objects but that it is necessitous to try to understand, explain, critically and morally evaluate them. This paper specifically examines the concept of beauty in African aesthetics and the general attitude of Africans towards it in human existence. With the method of critical analysis, the study discloses that the esse (being) of beauty lies in the form (perceptible pleasing appearance or physical qualities) of an aesthetic object characterized by ordered proportion, symmetry in the arrangement of parts, and the resultant harmony thereupon. It identifiably unravels that with regard to the human person, beauty in African aesthetics paradigm above all intelligibly has a moral value undertone and is tied to that which is good. It maintains that this knowledge and realization of its relevance to man and human community would help us create lasting value, achieve satisfaction and serenity, maintain global harmony, and improve on the quality of life generally in all spheres.

Keywords: African, African aesthetics, beauty, community, value

INTRODUCTION

Many intelligible varying conceptualizations put forward by people of different cultures, seen in thought systems, and philosophical traditions are mostly fundamentally based on the differences on people's basic assumptions and theories about reality. Contemporary research in philosophical study of art, beauty, and the responses they engender reveal that aesthetic mindset and perspectives differ as a result of or based on cultural, historical, religious, ideological, ethical, environmental, and educational contents of the appreciating mind. African cultural predispositions and preconceptions colour the aesthetic perceptions of the African people. Certainly, appreciating knowledge and evaluation of aesthetic objects will always be conditioned by the totality of the worldview of a people. Just as the horizon of our knowledge circumscribes our vision and conception of issues, so our tactile and other sensory apparatus tend to get adapted to and approve of what it is accustomed to. There is no question as to the richness and peculiarity of African works of art, and continual upholding of perspectives of African aesthetics systematic consciousness which have been handed down from generation to generation in the continent. It is important and apposite to note that:

“The African aesthetic mentality is elastic enough to accommodate the beautiful and the ugly, the gracious and the bizarre, the serene and the strange, the primitive and the exotic, the harmonious and the discordant. It is a mentality rich in opposites and congruent. The Africans within the limits of their own aesthetic world do evince a high level of aesthetic sensibility and sensitivity, technical delicacy and gracious intricacy in their aesthetic world view”. (Ozumba, 2007, p. 154)

Aesthetically also, although we cannot totally close out individual differences and preferences within a particular culture, it is still the case that amidst the congeries of varying aesthetic perspectives there is a clear unifying criterion that undergirds African aesthetic mindset. Surely, this mindset has been fashioned due to many peculiar existential data of the African world. Hence, although the African continent is vast and its people diverse, certain criterion of aesthetic appreciation and judgement is held in common among various traditional African communities. Recent aesthetic studies have shown that there are certain reasons, though paradoxical, why the bizarre, the grotesque, the odd, the queer, the strange, are sometimes said to contain some degree of beauty. Aesthetic awareness, knowledge and sensitivity help man to realize this and enable him to valuationally categorize and adjudge an aesthetic object as beautiful or ugly. What is determinative in this categorization is the imagery presented by the work of art, the feeling the work of art creates in and the message it communicates to the observer.

Taking cognizance of the fact that any beautiful thing naturally always strikes us in a unique way and arouses curiosity, and in the light of the point that *beauty* is somewhat peculiar to culture and traditions, this paper investigates the systematic community based organized criterion of beauty in African aesthetic appreciation, perceptive and perspectival evaluation. It involves a critical discourse on whether there exist acknowledged stable consistent qualities/properties of beauty in the reckoning consciousness of the African people from their general association with the universe. In other words, it addresses itself to the question of whether we can identify those qualities which persons or objects possess that, for the Africans, evinces or manifests beauty such that we adjudge them as being aesthetically beautiful (and valuable). It then scrutinizes why in many African languages similarly related ideas are expressed in the words that designate “beauty” and “good”, and the implication of this issue in African aesthetic perception. For there is a basic consistent point in African aesthetic appreciation: the fact that a significant aesthetic object in the African worldview and thought system should be both beautiful and good, because, it is intended not only to “please the eye or the ear” and the mind but also to uphold moral values of the community. The rationale of our thematic is radically justified because as Kovach (1974) rightly asserts: “aesthetic taste changes and varies not only with individuals but also with different [cultural] societies...” (p. 68). It simply points to the reality of the fact that things that appear charming and delightful to a person, culture, and society may not after all appear wholly as such to another person, culture, and society. This in a way relates to the concept of beauty as well. We proceed by first of all having a look at African aesthetics as an organized academic discipline within the broad spectrum of African philosophy.

DEFINITION AND ELEMENTS OF AFRICAN AESTHETICS

Etymologically, the word “aesthetics” derives from the Greek word “*αἰσθησις*, (*aesthēsis*)”, which means “sense perception, sensation”. It is the study of what is immediately pleasing to our visual or auditory perception or to our imagination: the study of the nature of beauty. It encompasses the theory of taste and criticism in the creative and performing arts. According to “*The Penguin Dictionary of Philosophy*”, the word was first used in this sense by the German philosopher Alexander Baumgarten (1714-62) in his dissertation: “*Meditationes philosophicae de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus* (Philosophical Considerations of Some Matters Pertaining the Poem)” of 1735; and in his work “*Aesthetica*” of 1750. Plato, Aristotle, F. Hutcheson, Hume, Kant, Hegel and Schopenhauer are but few of the philosophers who in the past made important contributions to the development of this academic discipline (Mautner, 2000, p. 8). Baumgarten employed the term to denote what he conceived as the realm of poetry, a realm of concrete knowledge in which content is

communicated in sensory form. The term was subsequently applied to the philosophical study of all the arts and manifestations of natural beauty. Hence, aesthetics is a branch of philosophy that explores the nature of art, beauty, with its creation and appreciation, and taste; it concerns the study of the mind and emotions in relation to natural and artistic beauty and value judgement of good or bad taste. Aesthetics tries to find out what makes one work of art better than another, and whether there are objective standards of criticism; it considers how our interest in art is connected to our other great philosophic interests—science and religion.

African aesthetics outlook directly or indirectly expressed partly in various forms of oral tradition contains deep aesthetic insights which reflect the prevalent principles and canons of artistic creativity, criticism, and evaluation. And some African everyday words signifying sense of beauty are intertwined with what is normally adjudged good, proper and appreciable in the African world. By way of definition, therefore, we hold that *African aesthetics—a branch of African philosophy—is the normative science of beauty in nature and art, in other objects, and in living experience in line with African culture and tradition and ideals of the community for the well-being of all.* It can also be seen as “...the African’s way of appreciating nature, creating aesthetic objects, evaluating and improving on nature’s aesthetic raw materials for the overall improvement of their wellbeing hinged on man’s multilayered relationship that is in tune with God, nature, spirit and ancestors, plants, animals and other seen and unseen terrestrial and celestial forces” (Ozumba, 2007, p. 154). It is pertinent to indicate here that some appreciations are done at the subliminal level, the human level, and the cosmic or physical levels. In African aesthetic world, many reasons undergird the African work of art whether visual, musical, kinetic, poetic, contemplative, spiritual or other non-visual arts; for there is always a sense of purpose in whatever the African does. His paintings are informed by beliefs, traditions, religion, folklores, conquests, history, etc. Works of art whether in sculpture, building, dress, dance, carving, horticulture, tattooing, theatre, etc., are informed by concepts like peace, love, friendship, courage, toughness, strangeness, hospitality, vision, religiosity, harmony, unity, moderation, etc. On the negative side, the reason for the work of art may be to inspire fear, hate, hostility, aggressiveness, invincibility, etc. Here, artworks are both emotional and expensive, they are also unique, individual and communal, and they also gain spread and commonality over time. What is evident is that most often, whatever the African does in terms of art creation satisfies some kind of religious, moral and or physically based aesthetic need (Ozumba, 2007, p. 154). In other words, as a rule, works of art are crafted as answers to various existential problems and therefore somewhat serve practical ends. As part and parcel of the life of the African, they are not just made to be admired and appreciated disinterestedly but are active modes of expressions and representations, more or less symbolic forms of “participation” in the spiritual (religious), physical, and social life of the community, and most often indicative of the human relational taste-perceptions of the African people. Africans use

“...the medium of art to give expression to the beliefs, values and attitudes which the community approve and cherish and at the same time the individuals in the society are encouraged as the case may be to accept or reject those values. The individual artist while creating value through his work expresses not only his individual preferences and feelings but the communal values of the society. And usually his message is unmistakably clear because of their symbolic realism. (Nwala, 1985, p. 213)

The upshot of what is meant here is that African works of art mostly reflect indigenous value system of the African people. Among other values, they inspire hope, courage, perseverance, and togetherness.

It is important to understand that there are certain elements observably common across traditional African societies in their aesthetic world outlook. Traditional African society has really strong bond of togetherness in the community. The people's consciousness of their richness is more spiritual than material; and their happiness and prosperity as a people are based more on their belief system and sense of communal unity and trueness to their environment. According to Nwala (1985) most songs, drama, poems, stories, proverbs, sculpture, etc., in African worldview are embodiments of the values (or preferences) and emotional responses of the community (p. 197). It is the case that culture of team spirit inspire and underlie the crafting of many artistic works of African societies be it for community use, in professional pursuits, or for those used in family activities and chores. It thus creates mainly sense of communal and traditional value, ownership and pride in the product made. More often than not even craftsmen working on their own would have closely worked with their masters or in a group in the production of some artifacts, for Africans believe that when people work together positively, such activity is for the higher good of the community in terms of its well-being and the process of its becoming (development).

Again in traditional African society, the oral tradition of specific specialized craft-knowledge passed on from one generation to another play important part in African culture and social order. Here, aesthetic objects, many of which are hand-made, are produced usually by the craftsman/woman, his/her group or family with long specific craft tradition. The objects are usually intricately made with exquisite details and to excellent finish. Typical items include baskets, mats, hand fans, earthenware, anklets, machetes, axes, tables, chairs, drums, dresses, crockery and cutlery, etc. Sculptures, carvings, weaving, smithery, and ornamental pieces such as paintings are also popular. As the artists make the objects for themselves, friends or the local community, they impress personal touch of craftsmanship which bonds the users to the makers. Artistic objects crafted are given detailed personal attention that ensures quality construction and finish. Emphasis is normally placed on mastery of the craft-material, and fine construction.

Also a lot of *symbolism* is embedded in African aesthetics iconography, and traditionally made art objects. Much of these are based on traditional myths, stories, and African belief system that are religious inspired or otherwise. Some intricate symbolic details of certain aesthetic objects are believed to imply mystical realities in the world; some are even believed to possess healing powers, and could somehow effect good luck and fortunes, depending on the existential cultural context. The designs and creations of African aesthetic objects are sometimes informed by observations of nature, especially the wild animals, their skin patterns, body movements and other aspects of manifestations of natural elements in the environment. Often, these traditional aesthetic objects are not fully done unless *that* aesthetic quality is perceived in them. They aim at evoking certain feelings which could be stimulating, reassuring, persuading, sedating, titillating or even soothing to the spectator or audience.

In African aesthetics, concepts and modes of argument used in discussing beauty and related phenomena as well as their implications for the well-being of the community are logically and systematically analyzed. Certain states of mind, emotions and attitudes involved in the aesthetic experience are philosophically studied especially the impact the useful arts and works of art have on communal celebrations and festivities and on historical development of the people. Natural phenomena such as sunset, landscapes, waterfalls, caves, grooves, sacred trees and forests, the human face (physiognomy) and body physical characteristics cum

appearance occupy important places in African aesthetic content, knowledge and appreciation: they are deemed to have aesthetic value and considerable significance respectively. They particularly engender responses from the people in both African traditional and modern set-up. It should be noted that African aesthetic thought devotes much attention to such matters as natural beauty, the sublime, the spiritual, and art as representation and expression. African aesthetics explores how artists imagine, create and perform works of art; how the people of the community both as individuals and groups use, enjoy, and criticize them; and what happens in their minds when they look at natural phenomena, paintings, read poetry or listen to music, and understand what they see and hear. It considers how the African people feel about works of art—why they like some works of art because they are viewed as beautiful and not others—and generally how these do affect their moods, beliefs, and attitude towards life in the community.

BEAUTY AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE IN AFRICAN AESTHETICS FRAMEWORK

In the history of ideas, beauty is usually defined as “a combination of qualities that give pleasure to the senses (especially to the eye or ear) or to the mind; a pleasing or attractive feature” (Crowther, 1995, p. 92). Wallace (1977) argues that beauty as studied in aesthetics is different from the ontological perfection studied in metaphysics and commonly listed among the transcendentals; he sees it as a quality constituting the non-utilitarian value of a form, inhering in it as a subtle and hazardous union of the quantitative and qualitative elements, and discovered with increasing interest and adherence of the mind (p. 183). G. W. F. Hegel views beauty as “...the idea seen in a sensuous form, apprehended in art or nature by the senses” (as cited in Stace, 1955: 444). Whatever is beautiful, says Immanuel Kant, is liked universally (1987, p. 220); that is to say that such a thing pleases as meaningful object of universal delight. That is why in making a judgment of beauty about an object, one assumes that everyone else who perceives the object ought also to adjudge it to be beautiful if it is actually so, and, relatedly, shares one’s pleasure in it.

In African aesthetics, the determining ground of beauty is such that does not only engage our feelings (tastes), pleasant appearance and harmony concerning an aesthetic object but also our theoretico-practical cognitive faculties of judgement towards such an object. It connotes celebration of meaning, value, quality, worth and desirability perceived in things. High sense of beauty, maintenance of its manifestation in the environment, and its conscious creation in aesthetic objects are clearly evident in the existential living of the African. For instance, in his ethnographic study of the *Igbo* tribe of South-eastern Nigeria, Basden (1966) rightly notes the aesthetic picturesque of a typical *Igbo* village with beautiful surroundings that are radiant with colour, which thus indicates the people’s commitment to proper environmental order and the great value they attached to beauty in human existential affairs (p. 56). He further records that: “the arts and crafts of the I[g]bo manifest themselves first in his home. The ideas and tastes of both husband and wife are indicated by the care bestowed in the building and decoration of the house. The styles are many...” (p. 165). In other words, this people arranged the everyday objects in their dwelling in an orderly fashion in accordance with perceived definite aesthetic mindset.

In creating works of art, the African people are not solely interested in such practical results as the warmth they provide, their usability efficiency and the satisfaction they give; they consciously strive to make things/works of art look better; or produce, in case of music, a piece that is worth listening to. A masterpiece of traditional African painting or sculpture has the power to capture and hold one’s fullest and most concentrated attention. There can be no doubt concerning the beauty of African songs, chants, music and dance: they tremendously

influence the subjects, performers and spectators alike in community functions and celebrations. As a case in point, Basden (1966) descriptively illustrates thus:

“The more one listens to native music, the more one is conscious of its vital power. It touches the chords of man’s inmost being, and stirs his primal instincts. It demands the performer’s whole attention and so sways the individual as almost to divide asunder, for the time being, mind and body. It is intensely passionate....Under its influence, and that of the accompanying dance, one has seen men and women pass into a completely dazed condition, oblivious and apparently unconscious of the world around them. Both sexes are drawn under its spell and loose themselves in it...In each case the emotions are roused and the pulses quickened; but the native yields himself to its influence with absolute abandon”. (pp. 192-93)

The point in this particularly striking illustration above is that the beauty of African music and dance manifests in its harmoniously melodious and rhythmical power to refresh, enliven, energize, and uplift both the performers and the audience or spectators beyond expectation. They have extraordinary effect on the inner being of the African and convey something about African identity to people. This is an aspect of that aesthetic experience associated with all beautiful things: they delight us and involve our emotions or attention at a deeper level. Beautiful African music and dance are those that entrench the communal values and promote the common good of the African community. We are aware that as an artist conceives an idea, he/she embodies this idea in a certain representation in a work of art which is expressive of his/her feelings thereupon. In the valuation of an average African aesthetician, works of art, songs, dramas (whether comedy or tragedy), graphics, scenes, etc., even of those that do not necessarily bring forth excitement, can be “beautiful” to some degree inasmuch as each of them expresses a complete idea capable of evoking in him/her mind an organic feeling occasioned by the aesthetic phenomenon.

For the fact that a thing of beauty always gives joy to the beholder, Africans relish direct experience of aesthetic object in a *form* that is satisfying in a special way, which for them is a fundamental prerequisite for taste. They show this “formal” delight as well when they dress up, wear jewelry, build their houses, carve handles to their farm implements or add decorative ornaments to their native tools and manufactured equipment. One observes that these creations that most often serve obvious practical needs are done in pleasing shapes/designs. For an aesthetic artifact to be considered beautiful here, there must be perceived harmony in the object itself; it would have to fulfill its special functional purpose too. So beauty is not totally independent of usefulness in African aesthetics. Certain works of art/objects considered beautiful in African worldview and thought system preserve some important particular ideas in the religious, social, political, and economic life of the community. It is also easy to find that in African communities some aesthetic objects are considered beautiful in so far as they symbolically represent and remind the people and others certain memorable things in the historical evolution of such community—that is, they embody valuable historical facts or data about the people. These qualities contribute to, and to a certain extent, determine what is valuable in African aesthetic judgement. Here, beauty proves to be an aesthetic phenomenon that has to do with appearance of things and the impression we have of them, including the facts underlying the impression. It becomes the appearance and perception of the truth of being in things. That is why we find this beauty sometimes even in places we did not expect to (Hofstadter, 1967, p. 148). Beauty involves cogency on the side of the object and seizure on the side of the self in an aesthetic experience; in this sense, the beautiful thing exhibits a real and effective power it has of persuading the

self of its transcendent significance. In beauty, the African experiences the truth that being reaches by way of its ordering into its own rightful existence.

Although manifestations of beauty in nature are infinitely manifold—from the inorganic beauty of sunset, forest lake, islands, waterfalls, etc. to the varied beauties of plants and animals—we experience in them a union of the elements of *power* and *measure*: a dynamic living harmony indeed. In this group of natural things/objects, the two qualities (of power and measure)—where in particular, the power is the substantial factor of the phenomenon as its drive or impulse, and the measure is the “formal” factor, the state or condition into which the substantial factor enters—sufficiently constitute the phenomenon of beauty itself. However, in the category of human beings (with their institutions, thoughts and deeds), beauty encompasses pleasing proportional appearance, measured power, combined with living in tune with the purpose of human existence in society which emphatically concerns human being’s ratio-social moral life (i.e. *that* good character that aligns with the moral norms of the African community). This is the case with many African tribes. For the *Igbo* people of South-eastern Nigeria (the tribe of this researcher), the term “beauty” in Igbo language is rendered as “*mma*”; interestingly, this word is also used to translate the term “good”. Here, a “beautiful person” is “*onye mara mma*”. The people hold that the beauty of a person is such that the physically pleasing proportion of bodily parts of the person (external aspect) is validated by his/her morally good life (internal aspect) to be authentic. Nwala (1985, p. 212) attests to this when he notes that the Igbo language expression “*oma n’anya*” (“beautiful only in the eye”) is a way of distinguishing aesthetic value in physical things from their moral worth; that this expression, when used for a human being means that certain other basic qualities especially good conduct and character are lacking; and that it could also mean beauty that does not endure. He points out that for the Igbo, beauty that is not accompanied by moral worth, good character is repulsive, meaningless. This is why some Igbo name their children “*Agwabumma*” i.e “beauty lies in conduct”.

In line with the above, Matiza (2013, p. 61), notes that in *Shona* language in Zimbabwe, the word “*kunaka*” (beauty) denotes pleasing physical (outward) qualities and also good character in the sense of good heart and self-control. Baqie Muhammad (1993) in his own investigation of “the Sudanese concept of beauty” also came to the conclusion that beauty is connected to more than mere physical features of the body, for it has characteristics which can be found in good behaviour, skills, knowledge, dress, in strength, and even in fatness (for it is suggestive of fertility in women), and so forth; thus it is something that goes beyond physical appearances (p. 50, 53). Ette (2016, p. 234) reminds us that the *Ibibios* of Nigeria have an adage which goes thus: “*Edu ekpetie nte idem*”, which means that: “one should be both beautiful in physical outlook and behaviour”. Arden Haselmann (2014) in his sociological field study conducted in Senegal, abstracted from the responses of his participants that the inner and other external properties of beauty as described by the people are held as being not mutually exclusive (p. 11). It is a verifiable case that the linguistic exploration of terms for beauty and goodness show close relatedness among many tribes in Africa, as is evident among the *Bonk* people of Côte d’Ivoire, *Lega* and *Sonye* of Congo, the *Yoruba*, *Edo*, *Ibibio* of Nigeria among others (Vogel, 1986, p. 7). The implication of this is that *with reference to human beings, beauty in African aesthetics is such that the external physical qualities perfection and the internal moral goodness or excellence are linked; that is to say that here, physical appearance perfection of a person and the ideal social morality order of the African community are functionally unified*. Beauty as relates to man in African weltanschauung is strongly anchored on moral strength of character because man is a ratio-social and moral being; and good character is required for him to coexist peacefully with others members of his community. The African people reason that if a person is gentle,

considerate of others, morally sound, and actually manifests those other qualities that promote healthy peaceful societal living, then such a person from the reckoning yardstick values of the community can be taken to possess some degree of beauty. For a typical African community cherishes peaceful mutual coexistence of its members; and so good conducts that uphold social virtues of brotherhood and togetherness are usually communally encouraged and promoted. The social character of beauty is seen here in its communalist functionality of service by communicating the accepted norms and values of the community.

What this all come to is that a beautiful person in African aesthetic consciousness should not lack the internal and external dimensional constituents of beauty. Any person considered beautiful must reflect both constituent aspects in his/her life, for the absence of one of the constituent aspects heavily detracts from such person's beauty. Both constituent aspects are relevant to valid aesthetic judgement. Ikuenobe (2016, p. 134) rightly notes that in Africa "a person or a thing is considered good, and thus, beautiful, if directed toward achieving or enhancing harmony and order in reality of which the community, people, and things are a part". Thus, beauty of a person correlates with and is much more meaningful in the context of the acceptable moral standards of the community. A person that lives in such a way that his/her actions lead to disharmony in nature, community, and reality, is considered to be unbeautiful or ugly (Ikuenobe, 2016, p. 144). This therefore demonstrates that beauty in African aesthetics objectively communicates communal standard of its conception by the African people.

It is equally noteworthy that in creating works of art, just as the traditional artist tries to give scope to his originality and individuality in the form which his work eventually assumes, it is often the case that the inner convictions of an artist get revealed in the process. To convey the theme of his artistic creation effectively, and create a technical work of worth and beauty in African aesthetic worldview, it is important that the artist possess considerable knowledge of African cultural values, the attribute of good character, and cultivate such qualities as "poise", "self-confidence", "grace", "thoughtfulness", "calmness", "insight", "endurance", and that personal "fulfillment through artistic expression in his work" (Abiodun, 2001, p. 22). This notwithstanding, we point out here that in the matrix of aesthetic appreciation, African aesthetics holds that sometimes disagreement in aesthetic judgement by reason of which we impute beauty or ugliness to an aesthetic object could be from the subject (the beholder of the aesthetic object) which may be psychological or linguistic, rooted in the nature of man; it may be from the aesthetic object itself or something related to it such as its environment, light effects, volume, distance (between the appreciator and the aesthetic object itself), *et cetera*. Other factors that can contribute to this disagreement include: familiarity, habitual expectation, novelty, wrong consideration (incomplete perception and judging the whole from the part), relativity in comparison of different aesthetic objects, disorganized concentration, hate or lack of love for an aesthetic object, as well as our mood/disposition, attitude, and aesthetic insensitivity.

EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

African aesthetics is value-charged; it acknowledges the reality of beauty and particularly investigates its manifestation in nature and in art in a critical evaluative manner. Aesthetic judgement—the sensory contemplation or appreciation of persons, things or works of art or objects—has an important place in African culture, in practical reasoning in the conduct of everyday affairs of the community. Just like others, African aestheticians compare historical developments with theoretical approaches to the arts of many periods; they study the varieties of art in relation to their physical, social, and cultural environments. They use psychology as a tool to understand how people see, hear, imagine, think, learn, and act in relation to the

materials and problems of art, its creative process, and the aesthetic experience. For many years, scholars regarded the study of beauty as the whole or main problem of aesthetics. Now the subject has broadened to include many other aspects of art in relation to the life around it. One main pronounced task is to collect, organize, and interpret accurate information about the arts and aesthetic experience; and help people judge the aims and values of art more intelligently especially in relation to nature and human life in the world. The African people are not left out in this endeavour. We agree and affirm with Ozumba (2007) that:

“The African aesthete has his reasons for dealing on aesthetic object as beautiful or ugly. It may be amusement content, strangeness, ability to create a kind of feeling in the observer, it may be ability to communicate a message—the value may lie in the formal material and final causes or the imagery that is conjured [presented] by the work of art.

The African carries on his artwork for varying reasons, only those aesthetes who understand the teleos [(purpose or end)] behind the work can [better] appreciate them, be they Africans or non-Africans”. (p. 156)

We have endeavoured in this study to unravel real constituents of beauty, the meaning it holds from its conception from the African aesthetic cultural perspectival community background. We discovered that beauty is a conglomerate fluid concept. Its *esse* (being) lies in an object’s appearance perceptible pleasing qualities. Its chief forms in an aesthetic object are ordered proportion and symmetry in the arrangement of parts, and then in the resultant harmony thereupon. Here we see that useful arts bring imaginative design and beauty to many everyday objects in the family and community; and that proper form enhances the meaning and beauty of an aesthetic object. From the foregoing discussion, it is evident that beauty of natural things and aesthetic objects in African aesthetics is something that does qualify structure: it is not imposed on matter as form is, but rather qualifies form itself bringing about symmetrical equilibrium and *harmony*. In so far as it thus inheres in natural and artistic objects and, being distinguishable, it does provide an objective criterion; yet just like our other linguistic concepts, beauty and its interpretation depend on the human mind, since it is what eventually renders knowledge relations actual.

What then do the findings of our research imply? It is this: African culture’s approach to the concept of beauty is holistic: it encompasses both the external (pleasing appearance) and the internal (good character aspect, i.e. positive moral conduct and attitude) constituent aspects. But the internal constituent aspect, which is the linchpin wheel of the African ethical system, is placed over and above the external constituent aspect because this gradually fades with the passing of years. We thus discover that in African aesthetics, there is a close relationship between the beautiful and the good, and this is at the base of the unquestionable ethical dimension of beauty in African aesthetics discourse.

African ethical standards in the community add value to overall African aesthetic appreciation. On the whole, from African cultural aesthetics framework, one thing that is sure and especially with regard to the human being is that in beauty the moral rightness of the harmonious actuality of existence is depicted and emphasized. This means that here, beauty is linked with moral awareness and rectitude; and serves some good for the well-being of the entire community. Human institutions, human endeavours, conducts, and actions, are beautiful or ugly depending on whether they are morally good or bad. Generally, Africans accept that good character (and integrity) strongly contributes to the beauty of the human person. As stated above, for them, beauty is not only based on perceptible pleasing appearance which is only skin deep, but also on good character. From the foregoing,

therefore, we apodictically asseverate that both the values of perceptible pleasing (physical) appearance and good character are special qualities of human beauty in African aesthetic perspectival evaluation. So, to accept or address a person as beautiful, Africans combine the two aesthetics principles co-determinative of beauty in human being: they carefully consider not only the person's pleasing proportionate body physical characteristics cum appearance, this I call *pleasing form (shape) aesthetics principle*; but equally the person's good character too for "*ezigbo agwa bu mma nwoke ma obu nwanyi*" (Igbo language thought expression meaning: "*good character quintessentially beautifies a man or woman*"), and this I call *good character aesthetics principle*. The outcome of this careful consideration determines whether or not the person in question is beautiful or unbeautiful (ugly). This mode of understanding of beauty in African traditional religio-socio-cultural, and most especially ethical system drives the dynamics and dialectics of African aesthetic patterns and thought, and is very much the order in rural and modern communities in Africa.

In the final analysis, it is clear and worthy of note that this aesthetics trait from African conception of beauty based on African cultural and aesthetic values distinctiveness widens more humanity's horizon of understanding of it. This conceptual status should be sustained on conscious policy level by the governments of African states, in the operational tasks of the African Union (AU) in the continent and, among other things, exported by this body to other countries as Africa's contribution towards better aesthetico-qualitative global human community. We say this because as one of the important concepts that guide our sense of reasoning and judgement in life, proper knowledge and understanding of beauty and the realization of its relevance to man, human society, and the state would help us create value, achieve satisfaction and serenity, maintain global harmony, and improve on the quality of human life generally in all spheres.

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