

UNITED WISDOM

Beauty without Utility or Justification

Meaning and Direction

Andrey Zarinsh & Maria Evilkut

P-20-N01 · EN

@andrey.zarinsh @ilkutki

Beauty without Utility or Justification

Epigraph

> *All art is quite useless.*

Oscar Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray, Preface, final sentence; original English.

What this article is about

A beautiful encounter is sometimes immediately assigned a report: what did it provide, teach, or contribute to better work? Answers are possible, but need not be conditions of permission for the encounter itself. A drawing can be considered, a musical phrase heard, or a tree's line noticed without promising additional productivity. This article distinguishes freedom from a compulsory external benefit from freedom from every condition or responsibility. It draws on Kant's account of disinterested judgment of taste, Oscar Wilde's polemical Preface to The Picture of Dorian Gray, and selected sections of Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics, Book X. Their grounds differ: aesthetic judgment, artistic paradox and a philosophical account of happiness are no common instruction. Contemporary scenes are invented illustrations, not reported research. Beauty need not become an efficiency exercise, but neither does it cancel others' consent, accepted promises or material conditions. The question is how to leave it room without creating another duty to rest, admire or demonstrate cultural depth.

I. What report is demanded from an encounter

Imagine someone looking at a small pattern on a book cover. A friend asks why time is being spent on it. The question might express ordinary curiosity about what was noticed, or demand a useful result before the activity is allowed to count. These are different conversations. The first can concern a line, colour or arrangement. The second requires proving a benefit not previously considered. The person starts searching for justification: this develops attention, improves future work or teaches something important. None of those outcomes has been established here. The imagined encounter began as looking; a report has quietly turned it into a promise about another action that has not happened.

Where does the demand come from? It can concern a real agreement: shared work needs finishing now, and a pause affects others. The question then has a particular ground. Elsewhere, no promise has been made, but every minute seems permissible only after its future usefulness is explained. That is another matter. This essay diagnoses neither the person nor the origins of such a habit. It distinguishes a named commitment from a general requirement to justify every interest's existence. The former has participants, conditions and

@andrey.zarinsh @ilkutki

an object for discussion. The latter can extend everywhere without a definite addressee. Distinguishing them permits an actual condition to be considered without turning the whole day into a defence of permission to notice beauty.

The answer should not forbid questions. Another person can be curious about what happens nearby, and a participant in shared work can ask whether an agreement is being kept. Beauty creates no untouchable area to which questions may never be addressed. The boundary concerns what the answer must establish: a particular condition, or proof that every encounter will repay itself externally? What actually happens can be named: I am looking at a pattern and do not know whether another benefit will follow. That is a precise account, not a refusal of responsibility. An actual commitment remains separately discussable. Without one, an unknown future result need not count as a defect in present attention.

II. No compulsory benefit does not mean no consequences

“Beauty without utility” can sound too broad, as though works affect nothing and matter to nobody. The narrower point is that an external benefit need not always be declared as attention’s purpose in advance. Listening might prompt thoughts or none; someone might learn a fact or simply hear a familiar phrase differently. A possible consequence does not make that consequence an assigned task. Neither complete absence of change nor hidden efficiency in every beautiful impression should therefore be promised. A choice can be named: I am not presently requiring this encounter to improve another result. Consequences can be considered if they become known, without a report invented beforehand.

Wilde ends the Preface to The Picture of Dorian Gray by declaring all art quite useless. The sentence stands among polemical paradoxes about artists, critics, form and moral assessment of books. Treating the last line as a measured conclusion about art’s effects would be inaccurate. It can be examined as a challenge to making a work justify itself through a service function, while retaining the text’s character. Wilde is not our source for claiming that artistic activity never affects others. His formulation opens a dispute about what counts as justification. One aphorism does not settle contemporary questions of consent, promises or another person’s work in a particular situation.

The book-cover example requires no acceptance of the entire Preface. Its sharp judgments about spectators and artistic moralising do not become measures of human worth here. A question about external results can be retained while rejecting divisions into cultivated and corrupt people based on reading. Limited engagement with a source permits thinking rather than repeating a literary position as a command. Beauty needs no defence that humiliates those to whom it is presently unimportant. One person’s wish to look and another’s refusal establish no superiority of the first. Removing compulsory utility leaves room for choice, rather than assigning intense admiration as a new payment for participation.

III. Kant distinguishes questions

In § 2 of the Critique of Judgement, Kant distinguishes satisfaction connected with an object's existence from the question of its beauty. In J. H. Bernard's translation, a palace provides the example. Labour wasted on luxury can be condemned, the building unwanted for oneself, and its form still considered. Kant admits corresponding objections while clarifying that a different question is presently being discussed. The distinction orders nobody to forget the people who built the palace or grants a beautiful object moral exemption. Its relevance concerns attention's object: asking whether something is beautiful differs from asking how its existence benefits me or how its production conditions were justified in a particular history.

Disinterest in taste should not be translated as indifference to everything. Someone can have no wish to own a painting and still look closely. They can also ask who owns it and how it reached the room. Those are other, legitimate questions. Confusion arises when the aesthetic impression must answer all of them beforehand. Beauty of form then has to prove honest ownership, a useful visit and an entire history's correctness. Distinguishing questions prevents one response from carrying all that work. Information addresses checkable circumstances, discussion addresses a promise's conditions, and description names what is seen. These actions can follow one another without becoming one compulsory result of the encounter.

In §§ 3–5, Kant distinguishes the pleasant, the beautiful and the good, including usefulness as a means. That does not make usefulness bad. A means for a particular task is appropriately assessed through whether it helps fulfil the task. Not every act of attention already undertakes one, however. Shadows can be considered without selecting a tool for another job. Our editorial question is whether the subject has been exchanged: are beauty and suitability for a named purpose being discussed as though identical? A purpose, if present, can be named. If absent, it need not be invented for a respectable explanation. Lack of a declared external function alone establishes neither foolish nor unworthy attention.

IV. What is chosen for the activity itself

In Nicomachean Ethics X.6, Aristotle distinguishes activities desired for something else from those desired in themselves. X.7 presents contemplation as chosen for itself rather than for a separate product. This is a particular argument about happiness and the highest activity, not a ready theory of every art. A narrower distinction matters here: an activity can have a reason within what happens, without presenting another result. Someone listens to a phrase in order to hear it, rather than necessarily recording a new skill. That is our contemporary analogy, not a claim that all listening already fulfils Aristotle's summit of life. A related question can retain different philosophical grounds.

Aristotle also distinguishes that activity from amusement understood as relaxation for subsequent work. His account supplies neither permission for everything someone enjoys nor a requirement to justify beauty as efficient rest. Its own hierarchy is not adopted as a contemporary scale of human worth. Two possible answers become visible: I am resting for a particular continuation; this attention itself matters. They may coincide without having to. Failure to work better after meeting a work does not establish that its purpose was violated. Such a purpose first needed to be actually chosen, rather than retrospectively assigned to the person. An external standard cannot be assumed merely because it would make the encounter easier to defend.

Wildean uselessness and Aristotelian activity for its own sake are therefore not synonyms. Wilde writes a polemical Preface about art; Aristotle argues for a particular understanding of happiness and contemplation. Both allow a boundary around external results to be examined, but their answers work differently. An ordinary encounter need not first prove it belongs to the highest human activity: that proof would turn looking into another examination. A limited answer remains possible: I chose to look and presently promise no other result. It declares no supreme achievement, forbids no question about conditions and associates no absent product with an empty life. It supplies a reason for a particular choice rather than a comprehensive verdict on a person.

V. Even rest need not report an improvement

A promise of beautiful rest can quietly restore the demand for usefulness. Someone first permits themselves music, then checks whether they recovered sufficiently for subsequent work. If rest was actually chosen for a particular purpose, that question can make sense. If every encounter must restore energy beforehand, however, attention receives a new admission condition. An unavailable result becomes an accusation of resting incorrectly. This essay determines no method of recovery and offers no medical or psychological programme. It separates aesthetic attention from established efficacy. Whether a state improved can remain unknown while the action is described accurately: someone spent a while listening to a chosen sequence of sounds.

Aristotle’s X.6 distinction names instrumental relaxation but does not establish that the selected music provides it. That claim would need separate grounds unavailable here. A philosopher’s text cannot replace observing a particular state or researching a specified effect. Our imagined listener need report neither improvement nor deterioration as a compulsory conclusion. An unpleasant encounter can be stopped; a wish to continue can be considered under available conditions. Neither choice must confirm a success formula announced beforehand. Removing an external demand gives room not to invent an outcome. It supplies no

new promise that abandoning expectations will necessarily make the experience pleasant or useful.

Beauty need not always be chosen either. Available time can be wanted for movement, conversation, an ordinary task or no new impression. Satisfaction in a work is no debt incurred by receiving a pause. Someone can find a recording uninteresting, stop watching, or produce no expressive account afterwards. Our editorial boundary treats none of those choices as cultural impoverishment. Attention belongs to a person and circumstances rather than competition over complete leisure. Otherwise, defending beauty without usefulness creates a subtler demand to prove sufficiently worthy and profound rest. Freedom from reporting includes declining that task while retaining other actual agreements. It does not make a prescribed aesthetic encounter the only legitimate use of time.

VI. An encounter has conditions

Someone can watch a sunset without intending to become more productive, yet their presence still occupies particular time. They may have promised to return, need to consider access, or wish not to leave another person waiting without explanation. Those conditions do not prove that beauty must supply an external benefit. They concern human actions rather than justifying every impression. “I will stay briefly if that does not break our agreement” gives attention a definite shape without an invented report of future improvement. Refusing usefulness as a compulsory admission ticket leaves intact what has already been promised to whom. It does not license treating another person’s time as negligible for the sake of one’s own aesthetic encounter.

In X.7 Aristotle does not place contemplation outside human conditions: a contemplator still needs life’s necessities. This helps distinguish an activity’s end from the conditions making it possible. It does not establish that a contemporary person should rank contemplative life highest or pursue the likeness to the divine described there. Our scene requires a smaller conclusion: lacking an external result as a goal does not mean lacking limits. A presently unavailable visit can be postponed, altered or abandoned. That change neither devalues beauty nor proves that its encounter first had to be earned through useful work. An ordinary limitation need not become a judgement on someone’s capacity for attention or on the worth of the desired experience.

Kant’s palace example likewise does not release an object from its conditions of production. Expenditure, labour and social arrangements can be discussed separately without turning every inquiry into a single question of taste. Deciding whether participation is presently acceptable can also be distinguished from noticing an attractive form. The answers need not coincide. Someone can see beauty and decline a purchase or visit for an intelligible reason. Keeping a boundary of action does not require declaring the impression false. Conversely,

recognising beauty authorises neither any price nor another person’s sacrifice. An encounter without compulsory justification through usefulness remains an encounter whose practical form involves the responsibility of particular participants.

VII. Beautiful form certifies no conduct

Removing a demand for usefulness can be confused with exemption from every judgement. A beautiful gesture then begins to excuse a broken promise, while expressive language obscures what it does to its recipient. Form and the character of an action are different claims. In an imagined scene, someone can write an elegant message yet leave another person’s important question unanswered. Admiring the language does not settle that question. One can recognise a successful phrase and request a clear answer without choosing between finding everything admirable and being forbidden to notice any beauty. Distinguishing judgements preserves responsibility by naming more precisely what still needs a response. The message’s appearance supplies no substitute for that response.

Wilde’s Preface polemically replaces the moral classification of a book with a distinction between writing well and writing badly. Without further grounds, that cannot become a rule for every action of author, publisher or reader. In § 5, distinguishing the pleasant, beautiful and good, Kant also notes the possibility of manners without virtue. These passages form no common ethical system. They support a cautious comparison: an impression of form differs from judging its moral basis. Wilde’s literary programme and Kant’s analysis of kinds of satisfaction remain distinct. Within our boundary, neither authorises concealing an action’s consequences behind artistic independence, or requires treating every beautiful work as morally faultless.

A promise of beauty therefore cannot compel a recipient to surrender their own conditions. Pressure attached to an invitation can be discussed as pressure. Someone may decline unwanted personal disclosure required for participation while still valuing the work. These questions concern relationships and particular consent, rather than hostility to art. A refusal also need not acquire an invented justification. It is unnecessary to prove that the work is bad or the encounter useless; a limit on participation can be stated as clearly as circumstances allow. Freed from supplying a useful result, beauty does not become a duty imposed on whoever is expected to see it, experience it or confirm it through attendance.

VIII. Disagreement does not cancel an encounter

After watching something together, participants may be required to share an impression as well as obtain a benefit. One speaks about rhythm and colour, another finds nothing attractive, and a third wishes to talk later. An encounter permitting only identical admiration acquires its own compulsory result: the correct feeling must be produced. Another conversational form is possible. Each person can describe what they actually noticed and leave their judgement unfinished. One account proves no deficiency in another person’s perception. Within our editorial position, this respects participants rather than reporting research on group behaviour. It promises neither agreement, intimacy nor compulsory continuation of the shared activity.

Wilde’s Preface associates disagreement among critics with a work’s variety and vitality. That is an expressive literary judgement, not a guarantee that every disagreement is beneficial or that hurtful discussion must be endured for art’s sake. In § 1 Kant relates a judgement of taste to pleasure and displeasure, distinguishing it from cognition of an object. Within our selected scope, this helps prevent factual description from becoming sufficient proof that someone else must admire the work. Kant’s later questions about universality of taste remain, but we do not adopt them as a ready procedure for agreement. Comparing these passages clarifies attention, argument and expected response without demanding a common feeling.

Conversation can remain specific without testing membership. Rather than demand recognition of beauty, someone might ask what another person noticed, whether they want to hear a different account, or whether they prefer to end the discussion. Those questions are optional too: attention may be left without a public report. An impression need not immediately be translated into shared language, and indifference need not be explained as a deficiency. Different responses still allow argument, criticism and studying form. The distinction separates an invitation to look more closely from compulsion to experience a prescribed feeling. Participants can share space with differing impressions when respect is not made conditional on agreement and a wish is not presented as an accepted promise.

IX. Completion is optional

An optional benefit does not entail compulsory completeness. Someone opens a book, pauses on a page and stops; they stand before a drawing, then move on. Such an episode need not become a failed attempt to obtain every possible experience. In our imagined scene, no promise was made to finish by a deadline or prepare a review for someone else. An actual promise would need separate discussion. Without it, incompleteness can remain an ordinary feature of the encounter. No concluding insight must be invented to legitimate the time spent, and no hidden influence attributed to the work as a guaranteed later justification. Lacking a finished story leaves an unknown outcome honestly unknown.

This limit matters especially when beauty is assigned compulsory personal transformation. A reader may be expected to acquire depth, become reconciled to life or express gratitude. Our sources establish no such guarantees for a particular reader. Aristotle’s highest activity, Kant’s distinctions among satisfactions and Wilde’s artistic programme concern their own subjects. They cannot be combined into a promise of a changed state after encountering a work. This essay supplies no recovery method or spiritual exercise with a specified outcome. Permission to stop includes declining an imposed goal without disputing another person’s meaningful experience or turning that person’s meaning into an obligation for everyone.

Not finishing also need not deny the maker’s labour. Gratitude, payment or access conditions can be separate real relationships where they actually exist. Making a work, however, gives its author no promise that every viewer will change internally. A viewer’s missing impression likewise gives no right to disregard an agreement. Both limits can be retained. Attention without compulsory usefulness demands no particular feeling while preserving clarity about actions. When available time ends, someone can leave without accusing themselves of shallowness or declaring the work worthless. That is a particular decision about continuation, rather than a final verdict on art or an assessment of another person’s entire contribution.

X. Freedom need not produce a new outcome

An encounter can end with another temptation: declare freedom from usefulness the most useful achievement of all. Someone supposedly learned presence, became freer or finally saw what was real. These may be personal descriptions when they fit experience; they should not follow automatically from a chosen position. A smaller conclusion is available: today I did not demand a known result from this attention beforehand. It describes an action without measuring personal worth. It requires no opposition to people valuing a practical effect and makes no ordinary task a lower form of life. An external goal can be appropriate where it is actually chosen rather than assigned to every encounter in advance.

The three primary texts preserve distinctions rather than produce a slogan about everything beautiful. Kant separates interest from a selected question of taste; his philosophical project cannot be reduced to a contemporary permission simply to look. Aristotle discusses ends and a hierarchy of activities, including contemplation’s special position, rather than an aesthetic right belonging to every impression. Wilde polemically defends artistic form without supplying an established law about art’s effects. Their comparison reveals different grounds for questioning an external result. Our editorial boundary is narrower: lacking a benefit presented in advance need not prevent an encounter whose actual conditions are acceptable. It neither unites the authors into one tradition nor cancels substantive objections to a particular choice.

Beauty can therefore remain without a final justification or a settled position in someone’s life. Today a pattern was noticed; tomorrow an ordinary problem occupied attention; later the

person returned to the work or did not. Every movement of attention need not become a grand biography. Promises and assumptions, participation and feeling, interest in form and responsibility for action can be distinguished. An emerging meaning may receive words; its absence need not be replaced by an attractive report. Permission not to supply usefulness is specific and limited, yet need not be insignificant. It allows an encounter without forcing an object to prove beforehand who we will become or what we will gain through meeting it.

What this means in practice

If testing one's wording seems worthwhile, an ordinary, safe object of attention can be chosen: a page, melody or pattern in an already accessible place. This optional exercise is intended neither as treatment nor to produce a specified state. Interest can first be named without a promise: "I would like to look briefly." No future improvement needs to be proposed as repayment for that interest.

Next, only actual conditions need checking: an accepted promise, available time or a participation condition that should be considered. This is a separate question about action. Unsuitable conditions allow a different choice or an ending. Declining requires no proof that beauty is absent; continuing proves no disappearance of every other condition.

Afterwards, nothing need be written down. If an account is wanted, observation can be distinguished from an expected outcome: what was noticed, what actually happened and what remains unknown. "I do not know what this changed" allows honest incompleteness. Continuing, repeating, sharing an impression, or doing none of those things need supply no compulsory report of depth or usefulness. The exercise does not establish that attention will become more satisfying, or that abandoning expectations will improve a particular situation.

Key quotation

> *"We wish only to know if this mere representation of the object is accompanied in me with satisfaction..."*

Immanuel Kant, Critique of Judgement, § 2, translated by J. H. Bernard, printed p. 47; selected fragment.

Connections between traditions

1. **Kant, § 2, the palace and the question of representation; Wilde, the Preface's final sentence.** Both passages allow discussion to exceed external interest alone: Kant separately asks about satisfaction in a representation, while Wilde polemically refuses to make art useful. This distinguishes a demanded outcome from attention to form. The boundary matters: Kant's distinction among judgements is no Wildean manifesto, and Wilde's paradox establishes no factual absence of consequences.

2. **Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics X.7, contemplation as its own end; Wilde, the Preface's conclusion about art's uselessness.** The shared question is whether activity must be justified by a separate product beyond it. Aristotle values contemplation for the activity itself; Wilde defends artistic creation against external utility. This supports questioning an external report without equating the subjects. Aristotle's hierarchy of happiness and likeness to the divine do not describe every aesthetic impression, while Wilde's paradox supplies no such hierarchy.

3. **Aristotle, X.6, relaxation for activity; Kant, §§ 3–5, the pleasant, beautiful and good.** Both require identifying the relation under discussion rather than using "useful" indiscriminately. Relaxation has an instrumental end for Aristotle; Kant distinguishes satisfactions through their relation to interest. This prevents automatically rating every beautiful encounter as a means of recovery. The boundary is that these philosophical distinctions test no selected music's or painting's efficacy and establish no contemporary rest method.

4. **Wilde, the Preface's well-written and badly written books; Kant, § 5, manners without virtue.** Their specific similarity is that an impressive form does not coincide with a moral basis. This allows recognising a beautiful phrase while retaining questions about conduct and promises. Their difference remains: Wilde polemicises over literary classification, while Kant distinguishes kinds of satisfaction. Neither passage exempts contemporary participants from responsibility for pressure or violated consent.

5. **Aristotle, X.7, a contemplator's necessary conditions of life; Kant, § 2, the palace and separately discussed interest.** Both distinguish the value of selected attention from conditions of existence and participation. An activity's own end does not remove necessities; a question of taste does not require silence about expenditure and relationships. This separates optional usefulness from actual limits. The boundary is that Aristotle's account of necessities and Kant's thought experiment supply no universal rule for expenditure, access or someone else's sacrifice for beauty.

6. **Wilde, the Preface's disagreement among critics; Kant, § 1, taste's relation to feeling.** The selected passages help prevent describing an object from automatically commanding admiration. Wilde literarily values diverse responses; Kant distinguishes aesthetic from

cognitive judgement. Their thematic relevance is room for differing impressions without a compulsory common outcome. The boundary is that Wildean disagreement guarantees no beneficial discussion, while our selected § 1 does not replace Kant's subsequent treatment of taste's universality.

Primary sources

1. Immanuel Kant. Critique of Judgement, §§ 1–5, translated by J. H. Bernard, Project Gutenberg no. 48433. The selected sections distinguish aesthetic judgement, interest, the pleasant and the good; § 2 discusses the palace and satisfaction in a representation. The carrier's title pages identify a second edition of 1914 and a first edition of 1892. The key quotation is a fragment of § 2, printed p. 47. Translated text.

2. Oscar Wilde. The Picture of Dorian Gray, the complete Preface, Project Gutenberg no. 174. Its discussion of artistic form, classification of books, disagreement among critics and final sentence are used here. It is a polemical literary programme rather than an empirical study of art's consequences. A particular print carrier's date was not established on the page read. Preface.

3. Aristotle. Nicomachean Ethics, X.6–7, translated by W. D. Ross, Internet Classics Archive. The selected chapters on relaxation, activity for its own sake and contemplation with life's necessary conditions were read in full. Their particular hierarchy and relation to the divine belong to Aristotle's argument and are not adopted as requirements for every contemporary person. Book X.

Russian quotations are my translations of Wilde's selected original English sentence and the selected fragment of Bernard's English translation. The English edition preserves those different bases. The German and ancient Greek originals were not separately collated. Comparisons concern the named passages; everyday scenes and limits on participation are this essay's original reasoning, without asserting that the three authors shared a single aesthetic or ethical system.

Tags

beauty, aesthetics, attention, art, usefulness, interest, taste, pleasure, form, contemplation, purpose, freedom, choice, conditions, promise, responsibility, consent, boundaries, rest, incompleteness, disagreement, reading, Kant, Wilde, Aristotle, philosophy, literary programme, an activity's own end, impression, everyday life

About the authors

Andrey Zarinsh is the author and founder of United Wisdom. He explores inner transformation, the unity of traditions, intercultural dialogue, and contemporary spiritual discipline. Instagram: @andrey.zarinsh.

Maria Evilkut is a co-author of United Wisdom. Alongside her research, she seeks to test these ideas in practice and observe how principles of unity and mutual understanding work in real life between people and cultures. Instagram: @ilkutki.