

“True, Right, and Beautiful“

A common experiential basis for judgments of truth, morality, and beauty

Christian Unkelbach & Rolf Reber

The present chapter will argue that there is a common underlying experience that strongly influences people’s assessment of morality, truth, and beauty. These constructs are obviously connected in language and literature (“beauty is truth”), we argue that there is also a psychological connection in form of a common experiential basis for these constructs. Based on Brunswik’s lens model (1952), we first assume that morality, truth, and beauty are not directly accessible; they are distal concepts which people must infer from proximal cues and feelings may provide such proximal cues. We will then review insights from Haidt’s (2001) conception of intuitive moral judgment, Reber and colleagues (2004) fluency account of aesthetic pleasure, and Unkelbach and colleagues (2014) experiential account of truth judgments. Finally, we argue that a common denominator of all these accounts is the consistency or coherence (or the lack thereof) of informational input with existing information. This coherence results in an experiential output that people use to determine whether they find an action to be moral, a statement to be true, or a picture to be aesthetically pleasing.