The Aesthetics of Natural Environments

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Walton there proposes that aesthetic judgments about nature are "relative to the way in which a perceiver happens to perceive a part of nature or a natural object on a particular occasion." This is essentially correct for sounds. It does not rule out communication between similarly (mentally and physically) placed listeners.

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14

Scenery and the Aesthetics of Nature

Donald W. Crawford

I. Introduction

Many discussions of the aesthetic appreciation of nature have considered, from a wide range of perspectives, the various similarities and differences that may exist between it and our appreciation of art. This is not merely a recent concern, as one can find this topic discussed by eighteenth century aesthetic theorists as well as by traditional nature writers such as Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, and Aldo Leopold. But it has received considerable recent attention as contemporary authors have attempted to answer the question of whether there is a particular type of appreciation that is unique or most appropriate to our aesthetic appreciation of nature.

Precisely what aspects of nature are relevant to these discussions is itself not a straightforward issue for several reasons. First, nature often presents itself to us not in pristine forms, but in a variety of forms resulting from human modification or interaction—ranging from hybridized species of plants and animals to botanical gardens, arboretums, and parks, as well as to wilderness areas protected from naturally occurring forest fires. Second, there is the question of whether our focus should be on nature simply as the objective part of the non-human world or whether it should extend to expressive qualities we find in nature, such as the strength of an old oak, the delicacy of a cherry blossom, or the gracefulness of a gazelle. Third, does our aesthetic appreciation of nature extend to what we might take aspects of nature to reveal or symbolize, such as the layers of the Grand Canyon representing millennia of past geologic history or the dynamic force of a hurricane symbolizing how the forces of nature can in principle always overpower us, thereby showing our transience and limitations? Finally, there is the question of whether, when we appreciate natural scenery, we are appreciating nature *as nature* or as something other than it really is. This is the issue I focus on in this paper, examining some contemporary answers to this question that conclude that scenery is not, strictly speaking, part of the aesthetics of nature.

Before providing the details for the reasons behind this skepticism, it is important to keep in mind the multitudinous aspects of nature upon which aesthetic discussions focus, since it may be the case that, because of this variety, no single answer can be given to the question of whether a particular type of appreciation is

most appropriate to our aesthetic appreciation of nature. Let me briefly categorize this range of what constitutes nature appreciation before returning to the main issue of this essay.

a. *Objects and organisms:* This is the category of plants and animals, their parts, their products, as well as inorganic complexes that exhibit orderly structures or intensive qualities. A list of examples illustrates these subdivisions: a swan (organism), a cedar tree (a plant), a tulip blossom (a part of a plant), a bird's plumage (a part of an animal), a spider web (the product of an animal), a fallen pine cone (the product of a plant), a snowflake (an orderly inorganic structure), a sapphire (an orderly inorganic structure with intensive quality).

b. *Ecosystems:* A second aspect of nature especially prominent in recent aesthetics focuses on natural environments or ecological systems and communities—the interdependencies of organisms, climate, and inorganic elements as they exist in a particular locale through time.

c. *Events, phenomena, and monuments:* A third aspect of nature, more often found in traditional aesthetic literature and nature writing generally, consists of natural events, phenomena, and monuments—cascading streams and waterfalls, thunderstorms, cloud formations, the sun or moon shining through the clouds, waves breaking against the shore, sunsets, deep canyons, caves, etc. What is curious about this category is that in many cases the point of view of a spectator is brought into play; that is, these often are aspects of nature whose description essentially involves reference to some human location from which these aspects of nature are observed.

d. *Scenery:* A fourth paradigm of nature in the literature also, but even more explicitly, requires a human perspective. This is the category of scenery, which is frequently exemplified in landscapes. This is the initial focal point for my question, "Is Scenery Part of the Aesthetics of Nature?"

This could be a very short essay if I answered my question by saying, "Well, stage scenery is not part of the aesthetics of nature but natural scenery is." Although I'm going to leave stage scenery in the wings, so to speak, one cannot ignore the fact that the applications of the English words "scene" and "scenery" to nature began only in the early eighteenth century, while their use in theatrical contexts was common more than a hundred years earlier. For example, when Shakespeare, in the Prologue to *Romeo and Juliet*, writes "In faire Verona, where we lay our scene," he is simply referring to the stage and the place in which the staged action of the play or a part of it (a scene) is supposed to occur. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, it seems to have been some 13 years later, in 1605, when Ben Jonson first used the term to refer to the painted hangings set at the back and sides of the stage, which were designed to represent the locale of the play's action.[1] Incidentally, there are no occurrences of this use of the term "scene" in Shakespeare. Jonson's comment seems to mark the beginning of the transference of the word "scene" from the theater stage to scenes of nature—first as represented in stage sets but then to aspects of nature fit to be viewed, namely in the form

of *prospects* and *landscapes*. My question thus is more accurately put: "Is natural scenery—prospects and landscapes—part of the aesthetics of nature?"

In what follows I consider three arguments that, somewhat surprisingly, answer this question in the negative. The first says that scenery is not part of the aesthetics of nature because nature is objective while scenery in general and particularly landscapes and prospects are necessarily based on uniquely subjective human points of view; George Santayana seems to be the earliest writer to articulate this position.[2] The second argument denies that scenery is part of the aesthetics of nature because, it alleges, experiencing scenery follows the model of art, being concerned with compositional values, whereas the appropriate aesthetic appreciation of nature must follow the model of science and be informed by natural history and ecology. Allen Carlson is the best representative of this view.[3] The third argument denies scenery a place in the aesthetics of nature on the grounds that the latter must involve active engagement with nature, while the experience of scenery is said to be passive and contemplative; Arnold Berleant and Holmes Rolston are well known for holding this position.[4]

II. Scenery as Landscape: Nature or Human Construct?

The category of scenery or scenic beauty is most clearly exemplified in the concept of landscape. Initially used in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries to refer to the work of the Dutch *landschap* painters, "landskip" and then "landscape" were terms used to refer to scenic representations and then to scenery in general or a particular scene.[5]

Perhaps because of the influence of twentieth century geography, we now also use the term "landscape" in an objective sense, to refer to the condition of the land, both physical and cultural. Thus when we characterize a stretch of land as flat or mountainous, treed or barren, moist or arid, tilled or untilled, we are describing an aspect of the (its) landscape.[6] Following this use it is common today to speak also of urban landscapes as well: townscapes, cityscapes, and the like.

The landscape vs. a landscape: The distinction between the general and the particular senses of the term "landscape" ("*the* landscape" versus "*a* landscape") was first analyzed by Philip Gilbert Hamerton in 1885. According to Hamerton, "'landscape' without the [indefinite] article means the visible material world, all that can be seen on the surface of the earth by a man who is himself upon the surface," while "'*a* landscape' means a piece of the earth's surface that can be seen at once, and it is always understood that this piece will have a certain artistic unity or suggestion of unity in itself."[7]

Both of Hamerton's senses, it should be noted, introduce a subjective element that is retained in the common, contemporary conception of landscape—an expanse of land that is viewed in a single viewing. And Hamerton's definition of "a landscape" introduces the notion of artistic unity—in other words, some degree of aesthetic value. In aesthetic contexts today, "landscape" refers to the visible

aspects of some portion of land, including both living and non-living things upon it (plants, animals, rocks, water, fallen trees, and leaves), as well as land/water and land/sky interfaces.[8]

We speak of *the* landscape in referring to the visible characteristics of the land, but we also speak of *a* landscape, of this one and that one. Landscapes, like scenic spots, have specific locations; they can be ostensively defined and pointed to. Thus we have two distinct questions. The first, which I have already touched upon, is a question of definition or identification: What is it for something to *be* a landscape? The second is a question of individuation: What makes one landscape different from or the same as another one? There is no simple answer to this second question. Landscapes are peculiar ontological entities. They cannot be counted in any straightforward way. It makes little sense to say, "From here you can see four different landscapes."

George Santayana puzzled over this feature of landscapes, calling a landscape an "indeterminate object" with "no real unity."[9] He concluded that although a landscape contains innumerable things that have determinate forms, from the standpoint of aesthetics each and every landscape is an indeterminate product of imagination and reality.[10]

Why did Santayana call landscapes "indeterminate objects"? First, he believed that objectively speaking there are no boundaries to landscapes, a point that is well illustrated by our experience of landscape paintings. Santayana, in describing our experience of *real* landscapes, is concerned with how it is that what we isolate in terms of our own vision becomes an identifiable object, since its boundaries seem to be drawn in a quite subjective way. Insofar as the landscape exists as a part of the real world, it is not a well-defined object of our visual experience.[11]

Without here judging the cogency of Santayana's view that aesthetically landscapes are indeterminate products of imagination and reality, we can note that he correctly conceived one key to our identification and individuation of landscapes—*a point of view*—although Santayana failed to define this concept. Webster's dictionary comes surprisingly close and gives the following as its primary entry under "landscape": "a portion of land or territory which the eye can comprehend in a single view, including all the objects so seen, especially in its pictorial aspect."[12]

This is close, but not quite right in two respects. First, what is meant by "pictorial" requires additional explanation to avoid circularity. Second, this definition places too much weight on the meaning of "view," for if that term is interpreted neutrally, then any portion of land that occupies my field of vision becomes a landscape. But if I look down at the ground in front of my feet, I do not see a landscape—unless I am standing on the edge of a viewpoint and can see some distance away. So, in aesthetic contexts at least, a landscape is a portion (better, a *stretch*) of land as viewed from some distance, usually with a foreground but almost always with a midground and background—the three key focal points of our binocular vision. Often viewing a landscape makes use of a viewing position, such

as an advantageously elevated spot on the surface of the earth (a *perch* or *vantage point*). There may be an artificially raised platform for this purpose, like a mound or an observation tower, or one can view the land from a vehicle or a ship's deck. These are ways of seeing a landscape.

Although described from a point of view, *a* landscape cannot be identified with any particular view of it. The reason is simple enough. There are different views of the same landscape, and these may differ in aesthetic quality. So although *a* landscape is a topographic entity, not a psychological one, it takes on aesthetic significance in terms of the features we can discern from a particular vantage point or range of vantage points.[13]

Does this perspectival subjectivity preclude landscapes from being part of the aesthetics of nature? To answer in the affirmative is to embrace what might be called the "rainbow argument" and to claim that landscapes, like rainbows, are not really part of nature but subjective objects, since they *exist* only as seen from a point of view. In a recent book, Philip Fisher holds that two people standing side by side don't really see the same rainbow, nor do they see the same reflection in a pool of water, since what the two people see "is uniquely determined by the point where he or she stands, by the angle between the eye, raindrop, and sun."[14] Fisher's conclusion is radically uncompromising:

> Without human observers ... there are no rainbows. They [rainbows] are part of the human world. On an uninhabited planet, there would continue to be sun and rain, stars, and snow, but there would be no rainbow and no horizon.... In its requirement of a human observer to exist at all, rainbows and horizon lines are closer to music or geometry: had there been no human world there never would have been any such thing.[15]

Can one extend this argument from rainbows and horizon lines to scenery in general and landscapes in particular? In a recent essay, Holmes Rolston seems to think so: "In the forest itself, there is no scenery, for example; we compose the landscape vista. Subjective experience [that is, scenery] and objective forests beauty and trees—this conjoins and juxtaposes opposites ...."[16]

I think the invocation of the subjective/objective distinction is misplaced here. A landscape, as an object of aesthetic appreciation, is in fact an expanse of the surface of the earth (plus the objects on it as well as its interfaces with sky and water); and although its qualities are those we determine by looking at it from a particular viewpoint, that does not preclude it from being part of nature. Let me repeat the point made earlier: although *a* landscape is a topographic entity, not a psychological one, it takes on aesthetic significance in terms of the features we can discern from a particular vantage point. Even if we adopt Hamerton's view that what we call "*a* landscape" will have or suggest a certain artistic unity, the fact remains that the elements so unified are features of the land as seen from a particular vantage point. The argument from subjectivity fails in its various forms either by confus-

ing physical viewpoint with subjective point of view or by being based on the epistemologically untenable position that we never experience the world, only our own unique sensations.

There are two ways to recast the subjectivity argument in light of my objections. One is in terms of *what* is viewed, arguing that scenic features and relationships have no standing *as nature*, or are an inaccurate or inadequate experience of nature. Another is in terms of *how* these features are viewed, arguing that the features and relationships are not viewed *as nature*, but rather are viewed compositionally, like art. I believe that both of these reformulations of the subjectivity objection to scenery being part of the aesthetics of nature in fact devolve to the second objection, to which I now turn.

III. Nature as Art: Picturesque Scenery versus Ecology

The second major argument against scenery being part of the aesthetics of nature maintains that the experience of scenery is not the experience of nature *as nature* but rather the experience of nature *as art*. In contrast, this argument continues, the *appropriate* aesthetic appreciation of nature must experience it *as nature*, and that means our experience must be directed by knowledge about nature, specifically knowledge provided by scientific understandings of the workings of nature (such as natural history or ecology). For convenience, I call this *the ecology argument*. My approach here is first to discuss what it means to experience nature as art. I then consider whether this is incompatible with experiencing it as nature.

The claim that experiencing nature as scenery is viewing it as art harkens directly back to Kant's characterization of natural beauty in the *Critique of Judgment*. In §23 Kant remarks: "Natural beauty ... carries with it a purposiveness in its form, through which the object seems as it were to be predetermined for our power of judgment, and thus constitutes an object of satisfaction in itself."[17] Here Kant seems to think that natural beauty is the exemplar of the "purposiveness of form" that he earlier (§14) claimed was the basis of pleasure in the beautiful. Nature is considered with respect to its formal properties, which for Kant means the spatial and temporal relationships of its elements. When nature appears beautiful, it is *as if* its elements were arranged in a manner designed for our reflective powers of judgment. Then later, in §45, he advances his tantalizing but non-poetic couplet: "Nature is beautiful because it looks like art, and art can be called beautiful only if we are conscious of it as art and yet it looks to us like nature."[18] The beautiful in nature appears as if it were designed, made in accordance with rules of art. But Kant also says that art's purposiveness of form "must seem to be as free from all constraint by arbitrary rules as if it were a mere product of nature."[19] And, true to his time, Kant was considering natural beauty solely in terms of nature's visible features—how nature appears to us. In his frequently maligned attempt to provide the divisions of the fine arts, Kant gives a curious definition of painting: "The *art of the painter* ... I would divide into that of the beautiful *depiction* of nature and

that of the beautiful *arrangement of its products*. The first would be *painting proper*, the second the art of *pleasure gardens*" [= landscape gardening].[20]

Kant's further comments on the relationship between landscape gardening and landscape painting are revealing. A designed garden "coincides with merely aesthetical painting which has no definite theme (which puts air, land, and water together by means of light and shadows in an entertaining way)."[21] And the (pure) judgment of taste concerning what is beautiful in a landscape garden "is determined in a single way: namely, to judge only the forms as they are offered to the eye, individually or in their interconnection, in accordance with the effect they have on the imagination."[22]

This seems to be precisely the view that the ecology argument wishes to counter. On this view, the aesthetics of scenery is the aesthetics of the picturesque, in which one experiences only nature's formal or surface features as if it were a design and thus judges it by reference to compositional aesthetic values that have their origin in the visual arts. Historically the linkage has been to painting, but the picture one thinks of now is just as likely to be a photograph or a post card as a painting or drawing. What might be called the "postcardesque" is the offspring of the picturesque.

Historically, the concept of the picturesque developed along with the sublime to challenge traditional conceptions of natural beauty. Picturesque beauty was said to be more varied, less smooth and regular, relatively rough and intricate, and thus more surprising than the simply beautiful. In the eighteenth century, the distinction between the beautiful and the picturesque was a point of some contention. Some referred to the picturesque as a special subcategory of the beautiful, as noted by the common expression "picturesque beauty," while others advocated a new category of the picturesque as distinct from the beautiful. Under either formulation the picturesque emerged in competition with the classical model of natural beauty as symmetry and proportion. Attention also turned to wildness and wilderness in nature, even if this were the result of creative landscape design—the intricate and surprising scenes to be found around the bend, within the grotto, over the ha-ha. As an aesthetic category, the picturesque, although hotly debated, was influential in changing the course of landscape gardening in particular as well as nature appreciation in general, leaving a lasting mark on the aesthetics of nature in both theory and practice.

This is not the place to trace that fascinating intellectual history. But two points are worth making briefly. First, although the rise in popularity of the picturesque is often traced to the influence of Italian landscape painting and a reaction against formalism in landscape design, its genesis had other important sources as well. One of these was the Arcadian glorification of rural life and exploring nature, with the alleged benefit of moral regeneration—a theme that informed practical books on the art of gardening in the picturesque manner as well as guidebooks to picturesque travel. Both types of literature often incorporated a Neo-Platonic emphasis on the moral benefits of contemplating nature rather than reaping her harvests.

In addition, public parks created in the picturesque style were envisioned from their outset as retreats from the city in order to find spiritual renewal through experiences closer to nature. In short, the picturesque never was a purely *aesthetic* category, but integrated moral and social values as well. Second, the link between the picturesque in landscape painting and the picturesque in nature is through the concept of picturesque vision, an artistic way of looking at nature in terms of its composition. As expressed by Uvedale Price:

> The use, therefore, of studying pictures, is not merely to make us acquainted with the combinations and effects that are contained in them, but to guide us, by means of those general heads (as they may be called) of composition, in our search of the numberless and untouched varieties and beauties of nature.... We may look upon pictures as a set of experiments of the different ways in which trees, buildings, water, etc. may be disposed, grouped, and accompanied, in the most beautiful and striking manner.[23]

Visible beauty in nature is thereby called "picturesque" by association with what the art of painting has accomplished and what it is uniquely suited for. To view nature with a painter's eye is to experience the picturesque.

This is adequate for my purposes here as one traditional account of what it means to experience nature *as art*, namely as the picturesque. A longer version of this essay could supplement this by an analogous account of the sublime, but that would not change the basic issues.

Let us return now to the argument that rejects the aesthetics of the picturesque and argues the aesthetic appreciation of nature must be directed or guided by knowledge about nature, specifically knowledge provided by a scientific understanding of the workings of nature (such as natural history or ecology). Is this argument strong enough to require the rejection of the claim that the aesthetics of nature can also include scenery—nature as viewed through a picturesque approach, the engagement of the well-trained eye, the "painter's eye," with nature's varied appearances? Notice that I have been careful to frame the issue in terms of the compatibility of two types of aesthetic experiences. I do not believe that the defense of the picturesque requires maintaining that it is the *only* way to appreciate nature aesthetically.

Some defenders of the ecology argument appear to concede the above point, but argue that the picturesque appreciation of nature is outmoded and unimportant. J. Baird Callicott, for example, characterizes it as "the prevailing natural aesthetic," but then dismisses it: "It does not flow naturally from nature itself; it is not directly oriented to nature on nature's own terms; nor is it well informed by the ecological and evolutionary revolutions in natural history. It is superficial and narcissistic. In a word, it is trivial."[24] In saying that a pictorial aesthetic does not flow naturally from nature itself, Callicott has in mind that it is dependent on the model of artistic composition and design features, and hence is not autonomous. Instead,

one should rely on "ecology, history, paleontology, geology, biogeography—each of them forms of knowledge or cognition—[to] penetrate the surface provided by direct sensory experience and supply substance to 'scenery.'"[25] Thus he notes the importance of including sensory modalities in what he considers a more responsible aesthetics of nature, following what he calls Aldo Leopold's "land aesthetic," which is "self-consciously informed by evolutionary and ecological biology" but also "involves a subtle interplay between conceptual schemata and sensuous experience."[26] Attractive as this view may be, it is not at all clear how this provides for an autonomous aesthetics of nature.

Allen Carlson provides another attempt to develop the ecological argument by distinguishing the aesthetic appreciation of nature from that of art. Carlson contrasts what he calls "design appreciation" with "order appreciation," the former being paradigmatically appropriate to art while the latter is more appropriate to nature.[27] Although art appreciation indeed focuses on the art object, it is nonetheless artist or designer centered in the sense that all its significant qualities are considered the results of decisions by a designer. Design-centered appreciation thus requires attention to three factors: the aesthetic undertaking of the artist, the skills exercised, and the resulting product or artistic expression. A work of art is open to our appreciation and understanding just because we treat it as a work of human creation, an artifact. Although Carlson recognizes that the appreciation of some unconventional works of art might not map comfortably onto the design-centered model, he maintains that design appreciation is the paradigmatic, conventional model of art appreciation. On the contrary, order appreciation occurs when we approach an object's qualities not in terms of its being designed but rather simply in terms of finding ordered patterns. So if an ordered pattern is to be appreciated and understood by us, something other than design must guide our appreciation. Carlson's candidate for that which guides nature appreciation as order appreciation are the forces of nature—thus by the "order" in nature he means the natural order as revealed by natural science. In the non-theistic world of science, the forces of nature replace the artist, and order replaces design.

Underlying the ecology argument is the view that the appropriate aesthetic appreciation of nature can only be directed to the natural forces of nature as revealed by scientific investigation and theorizing. Appearances may be the starting point, but appearances without theory are a limited, and therefore inadequate, perspective. The ecology argument thus claims that the aesthetic appreciation of nature is not *of nature* unless it is guided by knowledge about nature, and in particular the knowledge provided by the natural and environmental sciences.[28] The contrasting view I am suggesting here is that the history of landscape painting and the incorporation of picturesque vision into approaches to the aesthetics of nature reveal a legitimate alternative against this fairly circumscribed scientific perspective. What the picturesque painter shows, and what we can experience when we adopt the painter's eye in viewing nature, is not simply design or artistic composition but *the effects of nature* on us as perceivers. The impressionist painters, for

example, self-consciously represented nature's effects in the realm of reflected and refracted light in natural settings. The effects of visible nature not only include light, but also texture (as in the face of a cliff), color gradations (as in a canyon), shape, pattern and movement, as well as powerful forces (waterfalls, ocean waves crashing against the shore). Perceiving these effects of nature need not exclude scientific knowledge, but on the other hand it can occur without scientific knowledge constituting the controlling influence on appreciation in order for that appreciation to be both aesthetic and of nature.

There is a second way of showing the limitations of the ecology argument, which I do not have space to elaborate here, though I have argued for elsewhere.[29] There is no analysis of the concept of *nature* that supports a particular limited definition of "nature" in aesthetic contexts. In other words, there are no purely *aesthetic* grounds for privileging an experience of nature that is grounded in environmental science or ecology. From the pure standpoint of aesthetic experience, there is no way in principle to choose between the experience of patterns in natural phenomena as perceived from a particular human point of view and the experience of ecological harmonies within a scientifically circumscribed environment. That is not to deny that other considerations might lead us to place a higher value on the ecologically informed experience. But doing so will require an appeal to principles beyond the aesthetic and beyond the concept of nature to force that conclusion.

Several authors have explored this position recently. Yuriko Saito, for example, although agreeing that the aesthetic appreciation of nature can be informed by scientific understanding, takes exception to the claim that everything in nature is aesthetically appreciable: "Some phenomena in nature overwhelm us with their endangering aspects, making it very difficult, if not impossible for us to ... aesthetically appreciate their story. Furthermore, even if we are able to do so, I question the moral appropriateness of doing so.... not everything in nature can or should be appreciated aesthetically."[30] She has also argued that "the appropriate aesthetic appreciation of nature ... must embody a moral capacity for recognizing and respecting nature as having its own reality apart from our presence."[31] Marcia Eaton adopts a similar position in arguing against an unrestrained imaginative experience of nature, noting that "imaginative fancies—often directed by fictional creations—can and do lead to harmful actions."[32] The example she cites is the sentimental film version of the story *Bambi*, which has made it difficult for forest managers to convince the public that deer populations should be severely decreased in some areas. In Eaton's view, "a sound nature aesthetic ... must be based upon, tempered by, directed and enriched by solid ecological knowledge."[33] But her justification for this insistence goes beyond the realm of aesthetics to her embracing the overarching goal of a responsible stewardship of nature—creating and maintaining sustainable environments.

My criticism of the ecology argument should not be interpreted as denying that the experience of nature focusing on scientific and ecological aspects of nature as manifest in perception *can* be aesthetic. My point is rather that there are no purely aesthetic grounds for insisting that the aesthetic appreciation of nature *must* be tied to knowledge gained through the natural sciences, although there may very well be good non-aesthetic reasons for holding this view. Eaton may be right in holding that "human valuings are holistic" and that "we rarely experience something purely aesthetically or purely ethically or purely religiously or purely scientifically."[34] But that does not mean we are unable intellectually to distinguish the various components underlying those valuings. Making such distinctions remains an important task of philosophical inquiry.

IV. The Experience of Scenery versus Aesthetic Engagement

The third and final argument I consider for excluding scenery from the aesthetics of nature is that the experience of scenery fails to satisfy a necessary condition for the aesthetic experience of nature, since it is a passive experience of nature as presented to us rather than our active engagement with nature.

There are two main variants of this claim. One version claims that the experience of scenery is founded on the mistaken, traditional conception of aesthetic experience as disinterested and contemplative. We are reminded that Shaftesbury introduced the concept of aesthetic disinterestedness by means of examples of viewing and appreciating nature without controlling it, owning it, or focusing on its providing gustatory pleasures.[35] This view then becomes entrenched in aesthetic theory from Kant and Schopenhauer to the present, and is probably best expressed by Jerome Stolnitz's definition of the aesthetic attitude as the "disinterested (with no ulterior purpose) and sympathetic attention to, and contemplation of, any object of awareness whatever, for its own sake alone."[36] There have been many recent critiques of this view, ranging from George Dickie's well known criticism that it does not demarcate a special mode of attention to the feminist view that no vision is neutral vision and that some feminist art cannot be experienced in a detached, contemplative way.[37] Whatever the reason, the argument proceeds by assimilating the appreciation of scenery with disinterested contemplation, and in rejecting this traditional view scenery falls by the wayside, so to speak.

This rejection of aesthetic disinterestedness does not go far enough to draw the conclusion, however. What is required is an alternative model of aesthetic experience against which one can test whether the experience of scenery qualifies as, or is eliminated from, the aesthetic. Even if one grants that the traditional way of characterizing the experience of scenery is flawed, it does not follow that scenery is not part of the aesthetics of nature. To show the absurdity of this conclusion it is sufficient to point out that on similar grounds—the rejection of disinterested contemplation as the paradigm for experiencing art—one could conclude that traditional art is not part of the aesthetics of art.

A second and more promising variant to this argument is that the aesthetic experience of nature *as nature* is an experience that is not object-oriented but instead requires active engagement with nature. Arnold Berleant is probably the most

forceful proponent of this position.[38] To exclude the experience of scenery from the aesthetic experience of nature one might argue, as Berleant seems to, that aesthetically active engagement is necessary to experience *nature* and that the experience of scenery does not satisfy this condition because it is not a "participatory aesthetics."[39]

I am actually quite sympathetic to the philosophical underpinnings of Berleant's argument, since I believe that perception is not a passive affair. Berleant says that "perception is not passive but an active, reciprocal engagement with environment" and that perception "is not just a visual act but a somatic engagement in the aesthetic field."[40] One should note in passing that Kant often gets blamed unfairly for the view that sense perception is passive, if sense perception is construed as experience. What Kant says when he is consistent is that sensibility is our ability to be affected by objects but that experience (or consciousness) does not come into existence through sense perception alone. Rather experience—even sense experience—requires the active powers of mind (imagination and understanding) working with sensibility.

The problem with the aesthetic engagement argument is that its underlying assumption about perception in general undermines the conclusion that scenery is not part of the aesthetics of nature. It may be that the experience of scenery is not engaged with as many aspects of the natural environment as one thinks it should be, but given the view that *all* perception is engagement with an environment, the experience of scenery certainly qualifies. Here again, we find that certain values are being prioritized over others and that these prioritizations simply take the form of denying that a type of experience is aesthetic (meaning only that it is not as significant an aesthetic experience) or is not an experience of nature (meaning only that there are other aspects of nature more important than what we attend to in experiencing scenery).

These issues can be discussed and evaluated on their merits, but the three arguments against scenery being part of the aesthetics of nature make it difficult to do so, hiding the real issues behind definitions of "nature" or the "aesthetic."

V. Conclusion

To sum up: The first argument denies that scenery is part of the aesthetics of nature because scenery is not nature, but dependent on human perception—a product of nature and human perception. This argument fails either because it confuses physical viewpoint with subjective point of view or by being based on the epistemologically untenable position that we never experience the world, only our own sensations.

The second argument denies that scenery is part of the aesthetics of nature because the experience of scenery is not the experience of nature *as nature* but only of nature *as art*. This argument runs into trouble because it fails to recognize that when we adopt the painter's eye in viewing scenery we are experiencing *the*

effects of nature on us as perceivers. In addition, this argument must resort to extra-aesthetic grounds for privileging an experience of nature that is guided exclusively by the natural sciences, thereby excluding expressive qualities and associations, bodily engagements with nature, and imaginative experiences and responses.

And the third argument denies that scenery is part of the aesthetics of nature because the experience of scenery lacks a necessary condition of aesthetic experience: engagement. This fails because it is based on an epistemological premise about the nature of human perception and experience that by its very universality would also be applicable to the experience of scenery.

As for me, there will be times when I'll just marvel at a rainbow; and other times when I'll drive into a scenic roadside pull out to view the distant landscape with the painter's eye; and, yes, there will be times when in viewing a damp meadow I will reflect on its being a stage between lake and forest; and times when I'll want to walk through the forest during a thunderstorm and feel totally immersed in nature. But I do not believe that any analyses of the concepts of the *aesthetic* or of *nature* will require or exclude any of the above. So until someone comes up with a better argument, I'll continue to enjoy natural scenery and think that I'm both experiencing nature and doing so aesthetically.

Notes

1 In *Masque of Blackness* [1605] Jonson writes: "First, of the Scene, was draune a *Landtschap*, consisting of small woods...."

2 George Santayana, *The Sense of Beauty: Being the Outline of an Aesthetic Theory* [1896] (New York: Collier Books, 1961), p. 99 ff.

3 Allen Carlson, "Appreciation and the Natural Environment," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 37 (1979): 267-276 [reprinted in this volume, Chapter 2]; "Appreciating Art and Appreciating Nature," in *Landscape, Natural Beauty and the Arts,* eds. Salim Kemal and Ivan Gaskell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 199-227. These two essays are reprinted as chapters 4 and 7 in Carlson's *Aesthetics and the Environment: The Appreciation of Nature, Art and Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2000). See also: Holmes Rolston III, *Environmental Ethics: Duties to and Values in the Natural World* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), p. 243.

4 Arnold Berleant, *Art and Engagement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991). See also Berleant's *The Aesthetics of Environment* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992) [Editors' Note: Chapter 11 of *Aesthetics of Environment*, "The Aesthetics of Art and Nature" is reprinted in this volume, Chapter 3], and *Living in the Landscape: Toward an Aesthetics of Environment* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998); and Holmes Rolston III, "The Aesthetic Experience of Forests," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 56 (1998): 157-166 [reprinted in this volume, Chapter 10].

5 M.W. Mikesell, "Landscape," in *International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences* (New York: Macmillan, 1968), Volume 8, p. 576. See also J.B. Jackson, "The Mean-

ing of Landscape," *Kulturgeografi* 88 (1964): 47-51. According to Ogden and Ogden, the word "landscape" was first published in English in a translation of Giovanni Paolo Lamazzo's *Trattato dell'arte de la Pittura* in 1598, or possibly in an undated treatise on perspective at about the same time. See Henry V.S. Ogden and M.S. Ogden, *English Taste in Landscape in the Seventeenth Century* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1955).

6 The conception of the natural landscape was developed by the American geographer Carl O. Sauer, who urged geographers to attempt to reconstruct the condition of an area prior to human incursion and to use this as the base line for geographical studies. The marginal relevance of this procedure to the analysis of current landscape conditions (or their recent evolution) led the majority of geographers to invoke the distinction between primitive and cultivated landscapes, and to concentrate on the latter. See Mikesell, "Landscape," pp. 576-578. Sauer's seminal 1925 article, "The Morphology of Landscape," is included in *Land and Life: A Selection from the Writings of Carl Ortwin Sauer*, ed. John Leighly (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), pp. 315-350.

7 Philip Gilbert Hamerton, *Landscape* (London: Seeley; 1885), p. 2.

8 It is worth noting that a view of only the sky or water is no longer a view of a landscape. Hamerton makes this point nicely: "In its general sense, *landscape* is also understood to include lakes and even the sea, because land and water are often visible at the same time. Strictly speaking, a view of the open sea, far out of sight of any shore, can hardly be called a landscape—it is a waterscape; but for the sake of convenience the generic term *landscape* is supposed to include everything that is seen upon the surface of the globe" (Hamerton, *Landscape*, p. 2). Yi-Fu Tuan notes that the Chinese term for the art genre "landscape" is *shan shui* [mountain and water]. Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1974), p. 127.

9 Santayana, *Sense of Beauty*, p. 99.

10 Ibid., pp. 100-101.

11 In looking at a landscape painting, ordinarily one is not concerned with the fact that the representational canvas is bounded by a picture frame. The frame or edge does not interfere with our appreciation of the represented scene; it probably enhances it. Imagine a painting that had an indeterminate edge, oozing out onto the wall or down to the ground. So we accept the boundaries of the painting. Why? There are two reasons for this, and they coalesce. First, when viewing a picture we respect the convention of the frame (or at least the edge of the picture); we do not criticize the painting because it does not depict a wider scene—we accept whatever expanse it provides. The frame or edge *defines* the landscape of the painting; this is a primary convention of representational art. We concentrate our attention on the depicted space of the painting; the space of the painting becomes, so to speak, self-contained. Second, when we do this, and treat the represented space as a realistic representation, we assume that the space so depicted is contiguous with some spatial reality. We do not believe the scene ends where the frame is, but that it continues to the sides, above and below the frame. In other words, we look at the painting as if it is a portion of a larger landscape.

12 *Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language*, Second Edition, unabridged (Springfield: G. & C. Merriam, 1937), p. 1389.

13 One further complication should be noted. What is it we view when we see a distant stretch of land from an airplane or balloon? A view directly down onto the earth's surface from a balloon does not seem to be accurately described as a view of the landscape; rather it is an aerial perspective. Hamerton recognizes the difficulties here, remarking that "views from the summits of lofty mountains or from a balloon may come under the term *landscape*; but they are hardly landscapes, they are panoramas" (Hamerton, *Landscape*, p. 3). Relatively low views from airborne craft, however, do seem to be views of the landscape. Whether the resulting views are considered landscapes seems to depend upon the angle of viewing relative to the expanse of the surface of the earth. A landscape is paradigmatically a stretch of land as viewed from the surface of the earth; we characterize the landscape primarily both in terms of its qualities and the constituent objects we can recognize at the macro level, as they are present to view.

14 Philip Fisher, *Wonder, the Rainbow, and the Aesthetics of Rare Experience* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 36-37.

15 Ibid., p. 37.

16 Rolston, "Aesthetic Experience in Forests," p. 161 [this volume, p. 189].

17 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment* [1790], trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), §23, p. 246 (marginal page number).

18 Ibid., §45, p. 306 (my translation).

19 Ibid., §45, p. 306.

20 Ibid., §51, p. 323.

21 Ibid., §51n., p. 323n.

22 Ibid., §51, p. 324.

23 Uvedale Price, *An Essay on the Picturesque, As Compared with the Sublime and the Beautiful; and on the Use of Studying Pictures, for the Purpose of Improving Real Landscape*, Second Edition (London: 1796), Volume I, pp. 4-5.

24 J. Baird Callicott, "The Land Aesthetic," in *Environmental Ethics: Divergence and Convergence*, Second Edition, eds. Richard G. Botzler and Susan J. Armstrong (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1998), p. 134. Other versions of this essay have appeared in *Orion Nature Quarterly* 3 (1984): 16-22, and *Renewable Resources Journal* 10 (1992): 12-17.

25 Callicott, p. 136.

26 Ibid.

27 Carlson, "Appreciating Art and Appreciating Nature."

28 This view is explicitly articulated and defended by Carlson in "Appreciation and the Natural Environment."

29 Donald W. Crawford, "The Aesthetics of Nature and the Environment," in *Blackwell Guide To Aesthetics*, ed. Peter Kivy (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003).

30 Yuriko Saito, "The Aesthetics of Unscenic Nature," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 56 (1998): 109.

31 Yuriko Saito, "Appreciating Nature on Its Own Terms," *Environmental Ethics* 20 (1998): 135-149 [reprinted in this volume, Chapter 7], p.148 [this volume, p. 151].

32 Marcia Muelder Eaton, "Fact and Fiction in the Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 56 (1998): 149-156 [reprinted in this volume, Chapter 9], p. 152 [this volume, p. 175] Eaton here is criticizing Emily Brady's views as advanced in "Imagination and the Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 56 (1998): 139-147 [reprinted in this volume, Chapter 8].

33 Eaton, "Fact and Fiction," p. 153 [this volume, p. 177].

34 Ibid., p. 155 [this volume, p. 179-180].

35 Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, *The Moralists: A Philosophical Rhapsody* [1709], Part III, Section II, in *Philosophies of Art and Beauty*, eds. Albert Hofstadter and Richard Kuhns (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964), pp. 246-248.

36 Jerome Stolnitz, *Aesthetics and Philosophy of Art Criticism* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960), pp. 34-35.

37 George Dickie's view is expressed in many of his writings, but his classic statement is in "The Myth of the Aesthetic Attitude," *The American Philosophical Quarterly* 1 (1964): 55-65. An excellent summary of recent feminist theorizing in aesthetics can be found in Mary Devereaux's "Oppressive Texts, Resisting Readers and the Gendered Spectator: The New Aesthetics," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 48 (1990): 337-347. See also Peg Brand, "Can Feminist Art Be Experienced Disinterestedly?" in *Aesthetics: A Reader in Philosophy of the Arts*, eds. David Goldblatt and Lee B. Brown (Upper Saddle River: Prentice-Hall, 1997), pp. 532-535.

38 Berleant, *The Aesthetics of Environment*; see especially Chapter 2, "The Aesthetic Sense of Environment," and Chapter 11, "The Aesthetics of Art and Nature" [reprinted in this volume, Chapter 3].

39 Ibid., p. 171 [this volume, p. 84].

40 Ibid., pp. 18 and 166 [this volume, p. 80].

15

Aesthetic Appreciation and the Many Stories about Nature

Thomas Heyd

In recent years the aesthetic appreciation of nature has received considerable attention.[1] This area of research has been much propelled forward by the work of Allen Carlson. With the publication of his *Aesthetics and the Environment* we now have a handy volume that brings together many of his writings on environmental aesthetics.[2]

In this essay I show that there are important problems with Carlson's claim that natural science (and its predecessors and analogues[3]) does or should provide the primary account or story informing our aesthetic appreciation of nature.[4] I propose that there are good reasons for believing that aesthetic appreciation does and should benefit from many, diverse stories, as gathered by people from a great variety of walks of life and cultures.[5]

I. Carlson's Case for the Priority of the Scientific Story

Carlson argues that aesthetic appreciation requires knowledge if it is properly to engage with its object. On Carlson's account, aesthetic appreciation involves a kind of "sizing up,"[6] and, hence, requires knowledge of the thing to be appreciated. So, appreciation of works from the contemporary art scene would be illfounded if, out of ignorance, they were appreciated as works from the Renaissance are appreciated, since the respective works are intended to be differently appreciated. Carlson proposes that the remedy for this situation is art history, since it gives us insight into the various aims and intentions presumably expressed in the diverse artworks. In the case of nature, though, aesthetic appreciation cannot be based on an understanding of aims and intentions expressed since nature is not the result of artistic design.

To understand what it is to aesthetically appreciate nature Carlson asks us to consider certain *avant-garde* and anti-art works, such as Jackson Pollock's dripped paintings or chance poetry, which, similarly to the natural world, are not the result of artistic design. Carlson's suggestion is that in those cases, as well as in the case of nature, the object of our aesthetic appreciation is the order exhibited.