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CHAPTER 6

AESTHETICS
OF NATURE

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THE long period of stagnation into which the aesthetics of nature fell after Hegel's relegation of natural beauty to a status inferior to the beauty of art was ended by Ronald Hepburn's ground-breaking paper (1966). In this essay, which offers a diagnosis of the causes of philosophy's neglect of the aesthetics of nature, Hepburn describes a number of kinds of aesthetic experience of nature that exhibit a variety of features distinguishing the aesthetic experience of nature from that of art and endowing it with values different from those characteristic of the arts, thus making plain the harmful consequences of the neglect of natural beauty. The subtlety of Hepburn's thought precludes simple summary, and I will do no more than enumerate a few of his themes that have been taken up and developed in the now flourishing literature on the aesthetics of nature (although not always with the nuanced treatment accorded them by Hepburn).

First, there is the idea that, through being both in and a part of nature, our aesthetic involvement with nature is typically both as actors and spectators. Second, there is the idea that, in contrast to what is typical of works of art, natural things are not set apart from their environment as objects of aesthetic interest: they are 'frameless'. Third, there is the idea that the aesthetic experience of nature should not be restricted to the contemplation of uninterpreted shapes, colours, patterns, and movements. Finally, there is the idea that the imaginative realization of the forces or processes that are responsible for a natural thing's appearance or are active in a natural phenomenon is a principal activity in the aesthetic experience of nature.

1. AN AESTHETICS OF ENGAGEMENT

Arnold Berleant (1993) stresses the first two of these ideas in the course of proposing what he calls an 'aesthetics of engagement' for the aesthetic appreciation of nature (something he recommends as a model for the appreciation of art also), which represents the aesthetic subject as being an active participant in a condition of perceptual immersion in the natural world, with a sense of continuity of the subject's self with the forms and processes of nature, in place of traditional aesthetics, which is an aesthetics of disinterested contemplation, the subject being an observer distanced from a clearly circumscribed object of aesthetic interest. But an aesthetics of engagement is not a sound development from these two ideas and it suffers from three principal defects. First, as Hepburn (1998) has insisted, being essentially *in*, not over-against, the landscape does not prevent our aesthetic experience from being contemplative, which often it properly is. Second, the principal conception of the notion of disinterestedness in traditional aesthetics is Kant's, according to which a positive affective response to an item is disinterested only if it is not, or is not just, pleasure in the satisfaction of a desire that the world should be a certain way, a way indicated by one's perception. And disinterestedness of response in this sense is not only compatible with the various aspects of engagement that Berleant articulates which are aesthetic, but is a condition that, it seems, any satisfactory understanding of the notion of an aesthetic response must satisfy. Third, Berleant's rejection of both contemplation and disinterestedness, coupled with a failure to replace them with alternatives that are viable components of specifically aesthetic experience or appreciation, disqualifies his aesthetics of engagement with nature from being acceptable either as an account of nature appreciation or as a conception of aesthetic experience of nature.

2. ENVIRONMENTAL FORMALISM

One version of the view, rejected by Hepburn, that aesthetic appreciation consists in the aesthetic appreciation of uninterpreted items—items considered independently of the kinds they exemplify—is formalism. Environmental formalism is formalism about the aesthetic appreciation and evaluation of the natural environment. Allen Carlson (1979*b*) has developed an argument against environmental formalism built on the first two of Hepburn's ideas listed above. Formalism maintains that (i) aesthetic appreciation should be directed towards those aspects that constitute the form of the object, and (ii) the aesthetic value of an object is entirely determined by its formal qualities. The perceived form of an object consists of 'shapes, patterns, and designs'.

Formal qualities are 'qualities of such forms, such as their being unified or chaotic, balanced or unbalanced, harmonious or confused'. So formal qualities are qualities that objects or combinations of objects have in virtue of their shapes, patterns, and designs. But these arise from (consist of) the relations among the sensory qualities of objects—qualities of textures, colours and lines. So in a wider sense the perceived form of an object consists of textures, colours, lines, shapes, patterns, and designs.

It is this wider notion of perceived form that figures in Carlson's understanding of the doctrine of formalism. Accordingly, environmental formalism holds that, in the aesthetic appreciation of the natural environment, one must abstract from the nature of the items that compose the environment—land, water, vegetation, or hills, valleys, rivers, trees, and so on—and focus solely on the environment's perceived form, its lines, colours, and textures and the relations in which they stand to one another; and that a portion of nature is aesthetically appealing in so far as its perceived form is unified, is balanced, possesses unity in variety or whatever, and is aesthetically unappealing in so far as it is disharmonious or lacks integration.

The essence of Carlson's argument against environmental formalism is this. A crucial difference between traditional art objects and the natural environment is that, whereas works of art are 'framed or delimited in some formal way', the natural environment is not. And this entails a difference between the formal qualities of (traditional) works of art and those of the natural environment. For the formal qualities of a work of art 'are in large part determined by the frame': they 'are (or are not) unified or balanced within their frames and in relation to their frames'. Hence a work's formal qualities, the recognition of which must underpin a correct evaluation of the work, 'are an important determinate aspect of the work itself' and so can be easily appreciated. But it is only a framed view of the natural environment, not the environment itself, that possesses formal qualities: any part of the environment can be seen from indefinitely many different positions and framed in indefinitely many different ways, and whatever formal qualities it is seen to possess will be relative to the frame and the position of the observer, appearing unified or balanced from one position as framed in a certain manner, chaotic or unbalanced from a different position or when framed differently.

Now the conclusion that the natural environment does not itself possess formal qualities, but only appears to possess formal qualities when framed from particular positions, does not seem to make much, if any, dent in the doctrine of environmental formalism. For the formalist can concede the relativity of formal qualities to frames and points of view, and so the necessity of framing to aesthetic appreciation, and yet still maintain that the aesthetic appreciation of the natural environment consists in the appreciation of formal qualities—the different formal qualities presented by the environment as variously framed from whatever points of view an observer chooses.

The conclusion that Carlson favours is the stronger claim: that the natural environment as such does not possess formal qualities, by which he means that, *when*

appreciated aesthetically in the appropriate mode, it is *not possible* to see it as having any formal qualities. His argument runs as follows. The appropriate mode of appreciation of the natural environment is 'the active, involved appreciation of one who is in the environment, being a part of and reacting to it'. But:

In framing a section of the environment, one must become a static observer who is separate from that section and who views it from a specific external point. But one cannot be engaged in the appropriate active, involved appreciation while maintaining the static, external point of view required by framing. In short, one cannot both be in the environment which one appreciates and frame that environment; if one appreciates the environment by being in it, it is not a framed environment which one appreciates. (Carlson 1979b: 109-10)

But this argument is not compelling. Even if the appropriate mode of aesthetic appreciation of the natural environment is of the active, involved kind, this should not be understood to imply that one must never become a static observer on pain of forfeiting one's right to be thought of as engaged in the aesthetic appreciation of the environment. There is nothing amiss in being a static observer of an ever changing skyscape, and choosing a spot to stop at and contemplate a scene from is a proper part of the aesthetic appreciation of the natural environment, not something inconsistent with it. So Carlson has not established that the natural environment cannot be appreciated and valued aesthetically in terms of its formal qualities just because the appropriate mode of aesthetic appreciation precludes this.

Nevertheless, environmental formalism's insistence that the aesthetic appreciation of the natural environment must not be directed at items in the environment conceptualized as what they are (clouds, trees, valleys, and so on) is certainly unwarranted, being a product of a conception of aesthetic appreciation that, without adequate justification, restricts aesthetic experience to the experience of items in abstraction from the kinds they exemplify, a conception no better suited to the aesthetic appreciation of the natural environment than to that of art.

3. NATURE'S EXPRESSIVE QUALITIES

The alternative that Carlson (1979b) proposes to environmental formalism is that the natural environment must be appreciated and valued aesthetically in terms of its various non-formal aesthetic qualities, such as expressive qualities (serenity, majesty, sombreness) and qualities like gracefulness, delicacy, and garishness. One weakness with this proposal is the unclarity of the range and nature of expressive qualities. If austerity is severe simplicity, serenity tranquillity (calmness, lack of disturbance), ominousness the property of being threatening, and majesty the property of being grand (imposing), then (i) a desert landscape is *literally* austere (severely simple), a quiet meadow serene (lacking in disturbances), the sky before a storm

ominous (indicative of an approaching threat), and a mountain range majestic (imposing in virtue of being formidable, and so inspiring fear, respect, or awe); and (ii) no specifically aesthetic sensibility is needed to detect the austerity, serenity, ominousness, and majesty (so that, on one understanding of the aesthetic, they are *not aesthetic* qualities). But if this is typical of so-called expressive qualities, expressive qualities will be limited to those qualities that items literally possess, a non-standard use of the notion and one that, it seems, Carlson himself (1976) does not embrace. And this suggests either that the kind of understanding proposed above, of austerity, serenity, ominousness, and majesty, is mistaken—'majestic' could of course be understood to import the ideas of dignity and nobility, properties that a mountain range does not literally possess—or that Carlson's notion of expressive qualities accommodates qualities of heterogeneous kinds. It is regrettable that, although in recent years a considerable body of work has been produced on expression in art, no satisfactory account has been given of the experience of nature as the bearer of expressive properties (despite the notable attempt of Wollheim 1991).

But the uncertain character of expressive qualities does not itself weaken the force of two arguments that Carlson has developed in which expressive qualities figure, one being directed specifically against environmental formalism, the other not.

The argument directed specifically against environmental formalism (Carlson 1977) maintains that formalism cannot explain the loss of aesthetic value to the natural environment caused by various intrusions into it by humanity, such as the construction of a power line that passes through it. For from a formalist point of view a power line might not only be aesthetically attractive in itself but, taken together with its environment, constitute an aesthetically attractive formal design, even, perhaps, helping to frame or balance a view of the landscape. So what does explain the loss of aesthetic value? Carlson's answer is: 'the non-formal aesthetic qualities of the natural environment which are affected by the actual presence of the power line and/or by its own non-formal aesthetic qualities':

For example, the relevant natural environment may have certain expressive qualities due to its apparent or actual remoteness, but the expression of these qualities may be inhibited by the presence of the power line, or the power line may itself have certain expressive qualities which, unlike its formal qualities, do not 'fit' with the expressive qualities of the natural environment. (Carlson 1997: 159)

(The idea is that the expressive qualities of the power line, perhaps aggression and power, might be incongruous with the expressive qualities of the natural environment, perhaps tranquillity.)

Carlson's other argument (1976) is a defence of the view (the 'eyesore argument') that one good reason why the natural environment should be cleaned of the human detritus that clutters it is that (i) the refuse is not aesthetically pleasing, and (ii) an aesthetically pleasing environment is preferable to one that is not. The objection that

Carlson wishes to counter is that there is a cheap alternative to removing the refuse: if the refuse is initially found aesthetically displeasing, one can develop one's *camp sensibility* such that it becomes aesthetically pleasing. He meets this objection in two ways. The first concedes that the camp alternative to cleaning up the environment works fine against the eyesore argument in the sense in which something can be aesthetically pleasing in virtue of its colours, shapes, textures, patterns (the 'thin sense'), but not in the sense in which something can be aesthetically pleasing in virtue of these *and* its expressive qualities (the 'thick sense'). (Carlson considers roadside clutter to be unsightly primarily because of its [negative] expressive qualities.) For (i) the expressive qualities of litter are such qualities as waste, disregard, and carelessness; and (ii) although camp sensibility can make us more aware of such qualities, most of us are unable to enjoy aesthetically the expression of such qualities.

Furthermore, if we are unable to find an object aesthetically pleasing in the thick sense because of the negative nature of its expressive qualities, this often makes it difficult or impossible to aesthetically enjoy the object in the thin sense. Hence if camp sensibility makes us more aware of an item's negative expressive qualities, it will render us unable to enjoy it aesthetically at all. Accordingly, an object with such negative expressive qualities cannot be aesthetically enjoyed by adopting camp sensibility. But, since this argument depends on two empirical claims that might be contested, Carlson offers the following sketch of an alternative line of argument—a moral/aesthetic argument. To enjoy aesthetically the expressive qualities of refuse would be to condone the values and attitudes that are responsible for it and in virtue of which it possesses those expressive qualities, since aesthetic enjoyment of something counts against wishing to eliminate it. But these values and attitudes—waste, disregard, carelessness—are morally unacceptable, and condoning the morally unacceptable is itself morally unacceptable. Accordingly, even if it is possible to enjoy litter aesthetically (in the thick sense), morally we should not.

Carlson (1977), and to some extent Carlson (1976), has been critically examined by Yuriko Saito (1984). But her focus shifts away from aesthetically unfortunate intrusions of humanity into nature to the destruction of nature; and the dilemma she ends by confronting Carlson with is ineffective against a position that does not conceive of the aesthetic as a realm impermeable by ethical considerations—a position embraced by Carlson (1986).

4. THE AESTHETIC APPRECIATION OF NATURE AS NATURE

Given that the aesthetic appreciation of nature should not be thought of as the aesthetic appreciation of (arrays of) uninterpreted particulars, how should it be

understood? A surprisingly popular conception, one that aligns the aesthetic appreciation of nature with the appreciation of art extremely closely, represents the aesthetic appreciation of nature as consisting in nature's being regarded as if it were art. But it is clear that any version of the view that the aesthetic appreciation of nature involves regarding nature as if it were art will suffer from two defects. First, it will be unable to provide a successful argument that takes us from the undeniable fact that it is possible to regard a natural object as if it were a work of art to the conclusion that this is how we must or should regard natural objects when we experience them aesthetically. Second, it will be untrue to the phenomenology of the aesthetic experience of nature—at least, to the character of my own and many others' experience (Budd 2000).

The rejection of this conception of the aesthetic appreciation of nature raises the question of what the correct alternative is. The obvious alternative is that the aesthetic appreciation of nature should be thought of as the aesthetic appreciation of nature *as nature*—more particularly, the aesthetic appreciation of a natural item *as the natural item it is* (Budd 1996). (Compare artistic appreciation, which is the appreciation of art *as art*, so that, accordingly, the artistic appreciation of a particular work of art is the appreciation of it *as the work of art it is*, which involves experiencing it under the concept of the kind of work it is, as a painting rather than a colour photograph, for example.)

5. CATEGORIES OF NATURE AND OBJECTIVITY

Carlson (1981) both argues for this conception of the aesthetic appreciation of nature and uses it to counter the view that, whereas aesthetic judgements about works of art—judgements about the aesthetic properties of works of art—aspire to and are capable of being objectively true, aesthetic judgements about nature are condemned to relativity. In other words, the view is that, whereas a work of art really does possess certain aesthetic properties, so that it is straightforwardly true that it is exuberant, serene, or full of a sense of mystery, for example, natural items can properly be thought of as possessing certain aesthetic properties only relative to whatever the way may be in which someone happens to perceive them. His argument turns on ideas expressed by Kendall Walton.

Walton (1970) has shown, with respect to works of art, that (i) what aesthetic properties an item *appears* to possess—what aesthetic properties we perceive or experience the item as possessing—is a function of the category or categories under which it is experienced (i.e. what sort of thing it is perceived as being); and (ii) what

aesthetic properties an item *really* possesses is determined by the right categories to experience the item as falling under—it really possesses those aesthetic properties it appears to possess when perceived (by a duly sensitive person, under the appropriate conditions, and so on) in the *right* categories to experience the item as belonging to, that is in its *correct* categories. The aesthetic significance of the categories under which a work is perceived is due to the fact that various non-aesthetic perceptual features are what Walton calls ‘standard’, ‘variable’, or ‘contra-standard’ with respect to a (‘perceptually distinguishable’) category, and the perceived aesthetic character of a work is a function of which of its non-aesthetic perceptual features are standard, variable, or contra-standard for one who perceives the work under that category. (A category is perceptually distinguishable only if, in order to determine perceptually whether something belongs in it, it is never necessary to decide this partly or wholly on the basis of non-perceptual considerations.)

The question is whether Walton’s two theses transfer to nature, as Carlson argues they do. The essence of Carlson’s argument is this: The psychological thesis does. That is, it is at least sometimes true that what aesthetic properties a natural item appears to possess are a function of the category under which it is experienced. For consider, first, the aesthetic appreciation of a natural *object*—an animal of a certain species, say. If we have some knowledge of what is standard for animals of that species—their adult size, for example—this knowledge will affect the aesthetic properties an animal of that kind, perceived as such, appears to us to possess if, for example, it falls far short of, or is considerably greater than, that standard size. Thus, Shetland ponies are perceived as charming and/or cute and Clydesdale horses are perceived as majestic and/or lumbering when perceived as belonging to, and judged with respect to, the category of horses. Consider, second, the aesthetic appreciation of the natural environment. Here is an example of Hepburn’s:

Suppose I am walking over a wide expanse of sand and mud. The quality of the scene is perhaps that of wild, glad emptiness. But suppose I bring to bear upon the scene my knowledge that this is a tidal basin, the tide being out. The realization is not aesthetically irrelevant. I see myself now as walking on what is for half the day sea-bed. The wild glad emptiness may be tempered by a disturbing weirdness. (Hepburn 1966)

(Note that the aesthetic properties a natural item is experienced as possessing might well *not* change if the item is experienced first under one natural category—say, a category it does not in fact belong to—and then under another—one it does belong to: the apparent aesthetic properties of a heavenly body that I have landed on, considering it to be a planet, need not be vulnerable to the later realization that it is, not a planet, but a moon.)

What about the philosophical thesis? Are there, from the aesthetic point of view, correct and incorrect categories in which nature can be perceived, or should the correctness or otherwise of aesthetic judgements about nature (unlike those about art) be understood as *relative* to whatever category someone happens to perceive something

natural as falling under? If there are such categories, then the ‘category-relative interpretation’ of aesthetic judgements about nature—the interpretation of them as implicitly containing a reference to some particular category or set of categories, so that apparently opposed judgements about the aesthetic properties of a natural item are compatible—is mistaken. Carlson’s answer is that there are correct categories, both for natural objects and for the natural environment. These are the categories, established by natural history and natural science, that the natural item falls under: the correct categories are the categories that natural items actually belong to.

The main difficulty that needs to be overcome if the philosophical thesis is to be transferred successfully to nature is the establishment of the correct categories (if there are such) in which nature can be perceived, which means *which* of those concepts of nature a natural item falls under—for it falls under many—it should be perceived under *from the aesthetic point of view*, where this means that perception under these concepts discloses the aesthetic properties it really possesses and thereby makes possible a proper assessment of its aesthetic value. For example, the reason, in the case of art, for prioritizing a more specific category to which an item belongs over a less specific category to which it belongs—for identifying the more specific category as the correct category to perceive the item under from the aesthetic point of view—where the artist intended it to be perceived not just under the more general category but under the more specific category as well, is lacking in the case of nature. On the other hand, a reason would need to be provided for prioritizing a less specific category—for insisting that a Shetland pony or a Clydesdale should be perceived not under the category Shetland pony or Clydesdale, but under the category horse. In the absence of such reasons, neither a more specific nor a more general category can be deemed the correct category, in which case a natural item cannot be deemed to possess a particular set of aesthetic properties, but will possess contrasting sets for at least some of the categories of which it is a member. But in any case, there are important disanalogies between art and nature which render the application of the philosophical thesis to nature problematic, and which are relevant to an assessment of the doctrine of positive aesthetics with respect to nature (see Section 8 below).

6. POSITIVE AESTHETICS

Positive aesthetics with respect to nature maintains that, from the aesthetic point of view, nature is unlike art in that negative aesthetic evaluative judgements are out of place—out of place because pristine nature is essentially aesthetically good, that is always has a positive aesthetic value. Two linked questions immediately arise: ‘What

exactly is the force of this doctrine?' and 'Is there any good reason to embrace it?' Clearly, the acceptability of the doctrine depends on what form it takes, and it can assume many different forms in accordance with the answers it gives to three kinds of question: (i) of scope (what elements or aspects or divisions of nature it applies to); (ii) of strength (whether, e.g. it disallows the attribution of negative aesthetic qualities to nature, or disallows comparative judgements about natural items that assign a higher aesthetic value to one item than to another); and (iii) of modal status (Godlovitch 1998*a,b*; Budd 2000).

It would be a very small step from the proposition that no natural item, or combination of items, possesses negative aesthetic qualities to the conclusion that every natural item, or array of such items, has a positive overall aesthetic value—a step vanishingly small, given the kind of freedom that characterizes the aesthetic appreciation of nature (see Section 8). For this freedom guarantees that any natural item will offer *something* of positive aesthetic value, something that is aesthetically rewarding, even if the rewards are very small. But, while it is clear that nature is immune to many of the defects to which works of art are liable—nature cannot be trite, sentimental, badly drawn, crude, insipid, derivative, or a mere pastiche, for example—the premiss is questionable, holding true for, at most, items that are not, or do not contain, forms of life. A negative aesthetic quality is a quality that, considered in itself, makes a negative contribution to an item's aesthetic value and so constitutes an aesthetic defect in the item. For a work of art to possess a negative aesthetic quality in the relevant sense, it must be defective *as a work of art*. Likewise, for a natural item to possess a negative aesthetic quality, it must be defective *as a product of nature*. But this means that it must be defective as an instance of the kind of natural thing it is. And this is possible only for forms of life: a cloud, a sea, a boulder, cannot be a defective cloud, sea, or boulder, for the kinds of things they are—clouds, seas, boulders—lack natural functions that particular instances of them might not be well suited to perform. Perhaps one species of organism can properly be thought of as being defective in comparison with another such species. But however that might be, a member of a species can be a defective instance of that species, for example malformed, or unable to function in one or more ways normal for the species, perhaps disabling it from flourishing in the manner characteristic of the species; and only living things can be in an unhealthy state, be ill, decline, and die.

If the possibility that nothing in nature, or nothing within the scope of the doctrine of positive aesthetics, can possess negative aesthetic qualities, qualities that, unless outweighed, would endow their subject with a negative aesthetic value overall, is left aside, then arguments for a positive aesthetics of nature—arguments that do not rest on that assumption—do not appear compelling. Allen Carlson (1984) has demolished three arguments that might be offered in support of the doctrine, but has provided two of his own, one (Carlson 1984) based on the claim that positive aesthetic considerations partly determine the categories that are created by science to render the natural world intelligible, the other (Carlson 1993) maintaining

that the appreciation of nature must be understood as a form of so-called 'order appreciation', which implies that the appreciation of nature consists in the *selection* of objects of appreciation in the natural world and focuses on the *order* (the natural order) imposed on them by the forces of nature, the selection, 'which makes the natural order visible and intelligible', being governed by the story given by natural science.

It is unclear exactly which version of positive aesthetics with respect to nature these arguments are intended to establish. But it is clear that they certainly fail to establish the most ambitious version of positive aesthetics: that *each individual* natural item, *at each moment of its existence* (or, slightly weaker, *considered throughout its duration*), has a roughly equal positive overall aesthetic value; and there are reasons for believing that it is *not possible* to show that the superstrong version of positive aesthetics is correct (Budd 2000). To change the scope of the doctrine of positive aesthetics from *individuals* to *kinds* would effect no alteration in the doctrine unless sense can be given to the idea of a kind possessing a positive aesthetic value that does not reduce to the idea that each instance of the kind has that value. But even if this is possible—perhaps it would be possible to invoke the idea of a *normal* instance of the kind—the doctrine would still be hazardous. One reason is the diversity of categories of nature, introducing different principles of identity and individuation for the items that belong to them, and recording such different phenomena as mere visual appearances, items defined as what they are by the use made of them, by what has brought them about, or by their relation to other natural items—think for instance of the categories of cloud, tributary, seashell, gust of wind, stamen, sky, forest, egg, flash flood, geyser, cave, stalactite, lodge or nest, eye of storm, swamp, herd, school, or swarm, bone, snakeskin, dune or wave, nut, eclipse, fossil, aurora. Given this diversity, given that nature was *not* perfectly designed for aesthetic contemplation or appreciation by human beings, and on the assumption that natural things *are* possible subjects of negative aesthetic qualities, it would be remarkable if everything in nature, no matter how nature is cut at the joints, were to have a roughly equal positive overall aesthetic value.

7. MODELS OF NATURE APPRECIATION

Carlson has suggested that a model of the aesthetic appreciation of nature, and in particular of the natural environment, that will indicate *what* is to be aesthetically appreciated and *how* it is to be aesthetically appreciated—something we have a good grasp of in the case of works of art—is needed. In the case of art, we know what to appreciate in that we can distinguish a work and its parts from anything else and its aesthetically relevant aspects from those that are not aesthetically relevant; and we

know how to appreciate in that we know what actions to perform in order to appreciate the work. But what about nature and the natural environment? This is problematic in the case of nature because of a vital difference between art and nature. Our knowledge of what and how to appreciate in the case of art stems from the fact that works of art are our own creations. But nature is not our creation. Carlson's (1979a) proposed solution to this problem is his natural environment model.

The leading idea of the natural environment model is that, to appreciate nature aesthetically for what it is and for the qualities it has, the fact that the natural environment is (a) natural, and (b) an environment must play a central role. Now an environment is our surroundings, the setting within which we exist, which we normally experience through all our senses, although usually only as background. To appreciate it aesthetically, we must (using all our senses) foreground it—that (in outline) is *how* to appreciate an environment aesthetically. But the natural environment is natural, not a work of art, and as such has no boundaries or foci of aesthetic significance. So *what* is to be aesthetically appreciated in the natural environment? The answer is that the considerable common-sense/scientific knowledge of nature that we possess, which transforms our experience from what would otherwise be meaningless, indeterminate, and confused to being meaningful, determinate, and harmonious, provides 'the appropriate foci of aesthetic significance and the boundaries of the setting'. Accordingly, 'to aesthetically appreciate nature we must have knowledge of the different environments of nature and of the systems and elements within those environments'. And, because there are different natural environments, *how* to aesthetically appreciate the natural environment varies from environment to environment:

we must survey a prairie environment, looking at the subtle contours of the land, feeling the wind blowing across the open space, and smelling the mix of prairie grasses and flowers. But... in a dense forest environment... we must examine and scrutinize, inspecting the detail of the forest floor, listening carefully for the sounds of birds and smelling carefully for the scent of spruce and pine. (Carlson 1979a: 273-4)

Furthermore, a requirement of the natural environment model—one that Carlson uses against the so-called object model—is that the appreciation of a natural item, whether or not it is still in its environment of creation, must involve the consideration of it as located in its environment of creation and shaped by the forces at work in that environment (on pain of misrepresenting the item's expressive properties).

There are many problems with the natural environment model. I will highlight two problems of scope that afflict it. First, there is the question of the intended scope of the model. Although focused on the appreciation of the natural environment, it appears to be offered as the correct model not just for the appreciation of the natural environment, but for the aesthetic appreciation of nature. But this would be to identify the aesthetic appreciation of nature with the aesthetic

appreciation of the natural environment, and would rule out the possibility of aesthetically appreciating a natural object (as natural) that is not in its natural environment of creation, unless in appreciating it it is considered (in imagination) in relation to its place and history in its former context. But trees planted in towns, for example, can be aesthetically appreciated as being natural objects, even though they are located in and have grown up in a non-natural or partly non-natural environment, and have spent their early weeks in pots in a greenhouse, as can—to take the most obvious case—the flowers in one's garden. In any case, Carlson's natural environment model seems skewed to the appreciation of inanimate objects, or of living natural objects that lack the power of locomotion. Creatures capable of movement have no natural position in their environment of creation and need not, and often do not, remain in it—as with birds, who emerge from their eggs and leave their nests (in one sense their environments of creation) and move around in the atmosphere and on the surface of the earth.

The second problem of scope concerns not the scope of the model, but the scope of the knowledge relevant to the aesthetic appreciation of nature. Carlson's thesis is that common-sense/natural scientific knowledge of nature is essential to the aesthetic appreciation of nature. But how much knowledge about a natural item is relevant? If not all, what makes a piece of knowledge relevant to the item's aesthetic appreciation? For instance, what knowledge of the sun and its relation to the earth (the sun's great or exact distance from the earth) is relevant to the appreciation of a sunset, and in virtue of what is this knowledge relevant? On the one hand, it is clear that not everything that is true of a natural item needs to be understood in order to appreciate it aesthetically as the natural item it is. A flower is the sexual organ of a plant. But to judge a flower to be a beautiful flower it is not necessary to know its function as the sexual organ of a plant, let alone to appreciate it with respect to how well it performs that natural function. On the other hand, it is clear that scientific knowledge can enhance the aesthetic appreciation of nature (Budd 1996). The effectiveness of Carlson's claim that knowledge of what is standard for natural things of a certain kind will affect the aesthetic properties an item of that kind appears to possess can be conceded. But this does not go far enough. All it shows is the aesthetic relevance of a certain sort of category of nature that an item is perceived as instantiating: it does not engage with the issue of what the distinction is between relevant and irrelevant knowledge of nature. Carlson appears not to recognize this lacuna in his position.

As an illustration of this deficiency in Carlson's account, Robert Stecker (1997) has responded in the following way to Carlson's use of Hepburn's example of a tidal basin, the wide expanse of sand and mud which appears to have different aesthetic qualities depending on whether it is perceived as just a beach or as a tidal basin. The shore of a tidal basin can be appreciated in three ways, none of which is mal-founded: as beach, as sea-bed, as sometimes beach—sometimes sea-bed. And although the last is more 'complete' than the first two, since it comprehends each of

them, there is no good reason to prefer the more complete conception, which might, but well might not, enhance one's appreciation. Furthermore,

The more complete conception can still be supplemented indefinitely with knowledge of the physics of tides, the ecosystems of the basin, and additional facts from biology, chemistry and geology... Nature does not guide us in selecting among this possible information, since encompassing all these facts, it is indifferent about which we mine in pursuit of aesthetic enjoyment. (Stecker 1997: 398)

For Carlson, the aesthetic qualities that an item actually possesses are those that it appears to possess (to the right perceiver, under the right conditions) when it is perceived in its correct category. The correct category in which to perceive the expanse of sand and mud is the category of tidal basin; accordingly, the quality of the expanse of sand and mud is not just that of wild, glad emptiness, but of wild, glad emptiness tempered by a disturbing weirdness (Carlson 1984). Note that, although the expanse of sand and mud appears to have different qualities when perceived in the categories *beach* and *tidal basin*, the categories are not incompatible: each of them is a correct category—the category *only a beach, never a sea-bed* would be an incorrect category—and the qualities are related in the following way. The second is the first with an additional feature, a qualifying characteristic. Accordingly, in itself the example is relatively unproblematic for Carlson: what would be deeply problematic would be a case in which the qualities the item appears to possess when perceived in two correct categories are incompatible. Nevertheless, Carlson shows no awareness of the fact that both beach and tidal basin are correct categories and appears to select as the correct category the more encompassing one, simply because it is more encompassing.

Stecker draws the conclusion that 'it is not clear that knowledge of nature can perform the same function as that of art', namely that of delimiting aesthetically relevant knowledge. But the notion of delimiting aesthetically relevant knowledge of nature is ambiguous, and there are two questions that must be distinguished. (I focus on natural *objects*.) On the one hand, there is an issue about what *can* properly figure in the aesthetic appreciation of a particular natural object: are there facts about a natural object that are irrelevant to its aesthetic appreciation (as natural), i.e. that could not constitute part of its aesthetic appeal or inform its aesthetic appreciation? On the other, there is an issue about what *must* figure in that appreciation if the appreciation is not to be defective, imperfect, shallow, or in some other way inadequate: is there a set of facts about a natural object, each of which is essential to its (full) aesthetic appreciation, no fact outside the set being relevant? Stecker's conclusion gives a negative answer to the second question. But this does not imply a negative answer to the first. In fact, the first should receive a positive answer, although it is not easy to explain why various kinds of fact are disqualified from figuring in the aesthetic appreciation of a natural item (Hepburn 1996; Budd 1996).

Noël Carroll (1993) has advanced an arousal model, not as a replacement for the natural environment model, but as 'a co-existing model' (each of these models

applying to some, but not all, of those responses to the natural world that constitute aesthetic appreciation of it, the two models sometimes overlapping). Carroll's model is simply that of being emotionally moved by nature, of emotions being appropriately aroused by nature, not all such emotions being rooted in a cognitive component containing a scientific category as part of its content. For example,

we may find ourselves standing under a thundering waterfall and be excited by its grandeur; or standing barefooted amidst a silent arbor, softly carpeted with layers of decaying leaves, a sense of repose and homeyness may be aroused in us. (Carroll 1993: 245)

When we are overwhelmed and excited by the grandeur of the towering cascade of water, we focus on certain aspects of the natural expanse—'the palpable force of the cascade, its height, the volume of water, the way it alters the surrounding atmosphere, etc.'—a focusing that does not require any special scientific, or even common-sense, ecological knowledge. And being exhilarated by grandeur is an appropriate response to what is grand. Hence there is a form of aesthetic appreciation of nature (as nature) that does not conform to the natural environment model. (Note that Carroll understands Carlson's natural environment model to require *systematic knowledge of natural processes*, so that the common-sense knowledge that is involved in the aesthetic appreciation of the waterfall—that what is falling down is water, for example—is not common-sense knowledge of nature of the kind the natural environment model demands.) Moreover, so Carroll argues, this mode of aesthetic appreciation of nature is such that (a) it can yield the conclusion that aesthetic judgements about nature can be objectively correct—a conclusion that Carlson appears to believe can be yielded only by the natural environment model—because aesthetic judgements based on or expressive of emotional responses to *appropriate* natural objects possess objectivity; and (b) there is no good reason to accept that it must be a less deep appreciation of nature than one informed by natural history, if depth of response is a matter of intensity and 'thoroughgoingness' of involvement.

Carroll neglects to specify that, for an emotion appropriately aroused by nature to constitute aesthetic appreciation of nature, the emotional response must be an *aesthetic* response, and not every emotional response to nature is an aesthetic response, let alone an aesthetic response to nature as nature; moreover, not only does he not provide an account of what makes a response an aesthetic response, but some of his examples of emotional responses to nature are definitely not aesthetic responses. However, these defects are easily rectified.

Carlson (1995) does not press this point and adopts a different tack: prescinding from the question of what constitutes an aesthetic response to an item, he focuses on the notion of *appreciation*. (Carlson's 1995 account of appreciation is contested by Godlovitch 1997. Carlson 1997 effectively counters Godlovitch's critique.) Since the appreciation of an item requires some information about it (sizing it up), correct or appropriate appreciation of an item requires knowledge of that item. It follows that, if a certain piece, or number of pieces, of knowledge is required for appropriate appreciation of nature, then an emotional response not based on the

required knowledge is not an appreciative response. It is clear that the arousal model does not exclude whatever knowledge is required for appropriate appreciation of nature from being the basis of an emotional reaction to nature that constitutes aesthetic appreciation of nature. The question, therefore, is whether it incorrectly deems cases of emotional response to nature that are not based on the required knowledge as instances of appropriate appreciation of nature. This depends on what knowledge is required for aesthetic appreciation of nature. The natural environment model maintains that the required knowledge is 'that which is provided by the natural sciences and their commonsense predecessors and analogues', whereas the arousal model rejects such knowledge as being required for appropriate appreciation of nature.

Carlson here makes two moves. The first exploits a feature of one of Carroll's examples in an attempt to show that the arousal model *collapses into* the natural environment model. The example is one of being moved by the grandeur of a blue whale, 'its size, its force, the amount of water it displaces'. But knowledge of the amount of water a blue whale displaces—by which it is clear that Carroll means not exactly how much water, but only that the amount is large—is, 'if not exactly straightforwardly scientific, at least the product of the commonsense predecessors or analogues of science'; so that appreciation of the whale, grounded partly in the amount of water it displaces, is based on knowledge of the kind required by the natural environment model, 'even though that knowledge comes from the commonsense end of the spectrum ranging from science to its commonsense analogues'. Similarly, Carlson is inclined to regard the knowledge that what, in Carroll's waterfall example, is cascading down is water as the product of the common-sense predecessors and analogues of natural science. And, although he is prepared to concede that perhaps this is not 'systematic knowledge of nature's working', this is, for him, a negligible concession. For Carlson concludes that instances of appreciation of nature in accordance with the arousal model that are based on knowledge only of this kind are at best minimal, so that, as far as the knowledge element of appropriate appreciation of nature is concerned, there is no significant difference between the arousal and natural environment models, the first focusing on the most minimal, the second on the fuller and richer levels of such appreciation.

It will be clear that Carlson's response runs up against the problematic issue of the extent of aesthetically relevant knowledge of nature. And, since not every kind of appreciation is *aesthetic* appreciation, a response based on a deeper, as opposed to a shallower, appreciation (in the sense of understanding) of the nature of a natural item is not automatically indicative of a deeper, as opposed to a shallower, *aesthetic* response to that item, one that is the manifestation of a fuller and richer appreciation of that item *from the aesthetic point of view*. Without an account of what it is for appreciation to be specifically aesthetic, and a principled distinction

between knowledge that is relevant and knowledge that is not relevant to the aesthetic appreciation of a natural thing, Carlson cannot press home his critique of the arousal model.

8. OBJECTIVITY, POSITIVE AESTHETICS, AND MODELS OF NATURE APPRECIATION

I can now make good my claim (in Section 5) about the existence and significance of disanalogies between art and nature with respect to the constraints imposed on appropriate appreciation by the relevant categories to which the items belong, and to indicate the consequences this has for the idea of a natural item's aesthetic properties and value and so for the viability of the transference to nature of Walton's philosophical thesis, for the doctrine of positive aesthetics with respect to nature, and for the idea that a model of the aesthetic appreciation of nature is needed.

The various art forms are sometimes divided into those for which the members are immutable types (such as composed music) and those for which the members are spatio-temporal individuals (such as paintings). But some philosophers reject the distinction, maintaining that all works of art are types. Whichever position is to be preferred, individual natural items differ from works of art in ways that have far-reaching consequences for the aesthetic properties they can properly be deemed to possess, considered as the things they are, and for their overall aesthetic value as such natural things.

First, lacking the immutability of types, they are subject to change, and the changes they undergo will result in the possession of different aesthetic properties at different times; and, unlike what is characteristic of works of art that are mutable spatio-temporal individuals (if any are), they lack an optimal condition, according to their creator's intention, in which their aesthetic properties are manifest.

Second, the relation between the category of art that a work belongs to and the appropriate artistic appreciation of that work is very different from the relation between the category of nature that an item belongs to and the appropriate aesthetic appreciation of that item (as the natural item it is). For, whereas a work's artistic category (i) is definitive of the mode of perception required for the appreciation of the work, if there is a single mode, or of the various modes, if more than one is necessary, or of the order in which the work's contents should be assimilated, if no particular mode or set of modes is necessary, but only one capable of processing information in the right manner, as with the novel; (ii) deems certain modes of perception and engagement with the work inappropriate; and (iii) indicates how the appropriate mode or modes of perception should be employed, i.e. at what it should (or should not) be directed and under what conditions, a natural thing's

category of nature does none of these things. Accordingly, not only do a natural item's aesthetic properties change over time as it undergoes change, without any set constituting *the* aesthetic properties of the item *qua* the natural item it is, but its appearance is affected by climatic conditions, the observer's point of view, season, time of day, sense modality, power of magnification or amplification, and so on, none of these being optimal or mandatory, so that the range of its aesthetic properties is typically open-ended in a manner uncharacteristic of works of art.

It follows that the aesthetic appreciation of nature is endowed with a freedom denied to the appreciation of art, which renders the search for a model of the aesthetic appreciation of nature, in particular the natural environment, that will indicate what is to be appreciated and how it is to be appreciated—something we have a good grasp of in the case of works of art—a chimerical quest. Now, either the truth-value of a judgement about the aesthetic properties and value of a natural item is understood (as usually it is) in a relative manner—as relative to a particular stage in the item's natural history, a perceptual mode, a level and manner of observation, and a perceptual aspect—or it is not. If it is not, then in general there is no such thing as the appropriate aesthetic appreciation of nature, if by this is meant 'that appreciation of an object which reveals what aesthetic qualities and value it has' (Carlson 1984), and the idea of a natural item's aesthetic value, considered as the natural thing it is, is ill-defined, in particular often being plagued by irresolvable uncertainty as to the relevance or irrelevance of one or another aspect of the world in which the thing is involved to its own aesthetic value. (The artistic value of works of art that diverge from what is, or has been, characteristic of art is, to the extent that there is such a divergence, subject to the indefiniteness that characterizes the aesthetic value of nature.) Accordingly, through its uncritical use of the notion of a natural item's aesthetic value, the doctrine of a positive aesthetics of nature, advanced in a version that does not disallow the possession of negative aesthetic qualities by natural items, and understood as a thesis about instances of kinds of natural thing, must have an uncertain status.

See also: Beauty; Aesthetic Experience; Environmental Aesthetics.

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