

AESTHETIC APPRECIATION OF NATURE*

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I

CONTEMPORARY WRITINGS on aesthetics attend almost exclusively to the arts and very rarely to natural beauty.¹ Aesthetics is even defined by some mid-century writers as 'the philosophy of art', 'the philosophy of criticism'. Two much-quoted anthologies of aesthetics (Elton's in this country, Vivas and Krieger's in America) contain no study of natural beauty.² Why is this so?

For part of the answer we have to look not to philosophers' theories but to some general shifts in aesthetic taste itself. Despite appearances to the contrary (the cult of the open air, caravans, camps, excursions in the family car) serious aesthetic concern with nature is today rather an unusual phenomenon. If we regard the Wordsworthian vision as the great peak in the recent history of the subject, then we have to say that the ground declined very sharply indeed from that extraordinary summit, and that today we survey it from far below. The Wordsworthian nature was man's aesthetic and moral educator: whereas the characteristic image of twentieth-century man, as we all know, is that of a 'stranger' encompassed by a nature which is indifferent, unmeaning and 'absurd'.

The work of the sciences too has tended to produce some bewilderment and loss of nerve over the aesthetic interpretation of nature. Microscope and telescope have added vastly to our perceptual data; the forms of the ordinary landscape, ordinarily interpreted, are shown up as only a selection from countless different scales. 'What is nature?' The question can no longer be answered in terms of macroscopic, readily-discriminable, 'labelled' objects.

* A substantially longer version of this study is to appear in a volume to be published in Italian (publisher Lerici) introducing current trends in English-speaking philosophy.

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On the theoretical level there are other and distinctive reasons for the neglect of natural beauty in aesthetics itself, especially in an aesthetics that seeks to make itself increasingly rigorous. Certain important features of aesthetic experience are quite unobtainable in nature—a landscape does not minutely control the spectator's response to it as does a successful work of art: it is an unframed ordinary object, in contrast to the framed, 'esoteric', 'illusory' or 'virtual' character of the art-object. And so the artefact tends to be taken as the aesthetic object *par excellence*, and the proper focus of study.

Linguistic or conceptual analysts have been understandably tempted to apply their techniques first and foremost to the arguments and manifestoes lying to hand in the writings of art critics. In the case of natural beauty, however, such a critical literature scarcely exists. The philosopher must first work out his own systematic account of the aesthetic enjoyment of nature. And this he has so far been slow—or reluctant—to do.

Having drawn attention to a neglected topic, I now want to argue that the neglect is a very bad thing: bad because aesthetics is thereby steered off from examining an important and richly complex set of relevant data; and bad because when a set of experiences is ignored in a theory relevant to them, they tend to be made less readily available as experiences. If we cannot find sensible-sounding language in which to describe them, the experiences are felt, in an embarrassed way, as off-the-map—and since off the map, seldom visited. This is specially unfortunate if for other reasons the experiences are already hard to achieve.

What, then, can contemporary aesthetics do about the topic of natural beauty?

II

If I am right that systematic description is one main lack here, I ought to supply some account of the varieties of aesthetic experience of nature. But their variety is immense, and mere cataloguing would be tedious. I shall select a few samples both interesting in themselves and useful for subsequent arguments.

We have already remarked that art-objects have a number of general characteristics not shared by objects in nature. It would be useful if we could show (and I think we can) that the absence of certain of these features is not merely privative in its effect, but can contribute valuably to the aesthetic experience of nature.

A good specimen is the degree to which the spectator can be involved in the natural aesthetic situation itself. *On occasion* he may confront natural objects as a static, disengaged observer; but far more typically

the objects envelop him on all sides. In a forest, trees surround him; he is ringed by hills, or he stands in the midst of a plain. If there is movement in the scene, the spectator may himself be in motion and his motion may be an important element in his aesthetic experience. Think, for instance, of a glider-pilot, delighting in a sense of buoyancy, in the balancing of the air-currents that hold him aloft. This sort of involvement is well expressed by Barbara Hepworth: 'What a different shape and "being" one becomes lying on the sand with the sea almost above from when standing against the wind on a sheer high cliff with seabirds circling patterns below one.'⁸ We have here not only a mutual involvement of spectator and object, but also a reflexive effect by which the spectator experiences *himself* in an unusual and vivid way: and this difference is not merely noted but dwelt upon aesthetically.

If this study were on a larger scale, we should have to analyse in detail the various senses of 'aesthetic detachment' and 'involvement' that are relevant here. This could prove a more slippery investigation than in the case of art-appreciation; but a rewarding one. The spectator is, of course, aesthetically detached in the sense that he is not *using* nature, manipulating it or calculating how to manipulate it. He is both actor and spectator, ingredient in the landscape and lingering upon the sensations of being thus ingredient, playing actively with nature and letting nature as it were play with him and his awareness of himself.

Secondly: though by no means all art-objects have frames or pedestals, a great many of them share a common character in being set apart from their environment in a distinctive way. We might use the word 'frame' in an extended sense to cover not only the physical boundaries of pictures but all the various devices employed in different arts to prevent the art-object being mistaken for a natural object or for an artefact without aesthetic interest. Such devices are best thought of as aids to the recognition of the formal completeness of the art-objects themselves, their ability to sustain aesthetic interest.

In contrast natural objects are 'frameless'. This is in some ways a disadvantage aesthetically: but there are some compensations. Whatever lies beyond the frame of an art-object cannot normally become part of the aesthetic experience relevant to it. A chance train-whistle cannot be integrated into the music of a string quartet; it merely interferes with its appreciation. But where there is no frame, and where nature is our aesthetic object, a sound or a visible intrusion from beyond the original boundaries of our attention can challenge us to integrate it in our overall experience, to modify that experience so as to make room for it. This, of course, *need* not occur: we may shut it out by effort of will if it seems quite unassimilable. At any rate our creativity is set a task: and

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when things go well with us we experience a sudden expansion of imagination that can be memorable in its own right.

And, when there came a pause
Of silence such as baffled his best skill:
Then sometimes, in that silence, while he hung
Listening, a gentle shock of mild surprise
Has carried far into his heart the voice
Of mountain-torrents . . .

If the absence of 'frame' precludes full determinateness and stability in the natural aesthetic object, it at least offers in return such unpredictable perceptual surprises; and their mere possibility imparts to the contemplation of nature a sense of adventurous openness. In a painting the frame ensures that each element of the work is determined in its perceived qualities (including emotional qualities) by a limited context. Obviously this is one kind of determinateness that cannot be achieved with natural objects. The aesthetic impact made upon us by, say, a tree is part-determined by the context we include in our view of it. A tree growing on a steep hill-slope, bent far over by the winds, may strike us as tenacious, grim, strained. But from a greater distance, when the view includes numerous similar trees on the hillside, the striking thing may be a delightful stippled patterned slope, with quite different emotional quality—quixotic or cheery. Any aesthetic quality in nature is always provisional, correctible by reference to a different, perhaps wider context or to a narrower one realized in greater detail. In positive terms this provisional character of aesthetic qualities in nature creates a restlessness, an alertness, a search for ever new standpoints and more comprehensive unities.

Lastly: we can distinguish between the particular aesthetic impact of an object, whether natural or artefact, and certain general 'background' experiences common to a great many aesthetic situations and of aesthetic value in themselves. With an art-object there is the exhilarating activity of coming to grasp its intelligibility as a perceptual whole. We find built-in guides to interpretation and contextual controls for our response. We are aware of these features as having been expressly put there by its creator. Now I think that we can locate a nearly parallel but interestingly different background experience when our object is not an artefact but a natural one. Again it is a kind of exhilaration, a delight in the fact that the forms of the natural world *offer scope* for the exercise of imagination, that leaf pattern chimes with vein pattern, cloud form with mountain form and mountain form with human form. Indeed, when nature is pronounced to be 'beautiful'—not in the narrower sense of that word, which contrasts 'beautiful' with 'picturesque' or 'comic',

but in the wide sense equivalent to 'aesthetically interesting' and 'aesthetically excellent'—an important part of our meaning is just this, that nature's forms do provide this scope for imaginative play. For that is surely not analytically true: it might have been otherwise.

I have been arguing that certain important differences between natural objects and art-objects furnish grounds for distinctive and valuable types of aesthetic experience of nature. These are types of experience that art cannot provide to the same extent as nature, or cannot provide at all. Supposing that a person's aesthetic education fails to reckon with these differences, supposing it instils in him the attitudes, the tactics of approach, the expectations proper to the appreciation of art-works only, such a person will either pay very little aesthetic heed to natural objects or else will heed them in the wrong way. He will look—and of course look in vain—for what can be found and enjoyed only in art. Furthermore, one cannot be at all certain that he will seriously ask himself whether there might be other tactics more proper and more fruitful for the aesthetic appreciation of nature.

III

Accounts of the aesthetic appreciation of nature have sometimes focused upon the contemplating of single natural objects in their individuality and uniqueness. They have centred upon the formal organization of such objects or their colours and textures. Other writers, with greater metaphysical daring, or rashness, have spoken of the aesthetic enjoyment of nature as leading to the disclosure of 'unity' in nature, or as tending towards an ideal of 'oneness with nature'. The formulations vary greatly and substantially among themselves: but the vocabulary of unity, oneness as the key aesthetic principle, is the recurrent theme.⁴

There are strong influences in contemporary British philosophy that prompt one to have the fullest sympathy with a particularist approach to natural beauty—as the contemplating of individual objects with their aesthetically interesting perceptual qualities; and to have very little sympathy for the more grandiose language of 'oneness with' or 'in' nature. None the less, it seems to me that we do not have here one good and one bad aesthetic approach, the first sane and the second absurd. Rather we have two well-separated landmarks between which lies a range of aesthetic possibilities: and in the mapping of this range those landmarks will play a valuable role.

We must begin by frankly denying the universal aesthetic need for unity, unity of form, quality, structure, or of anything else. We can take pleasure in sheer plurality, in the stars of the night sky, in a birdsong

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without beginning, middle or end. And yet to make 'unity' in some sense one's key concept need not be simply wrong-headed or obscurantist. I want to argue that there are certain incompletenesses in the experience of the isolated particular that produce a *nisus* towards the other pole, the pole of unity. But there is not a single type of unification or union: *several* notions are to be distinguished within the ideal.

We have already noted the *nisus* towards more and more comprehensive or adequate survey of the context that determines the perceived qualities of a natural object or scene. Our motives are, in part, the desire for a certain integrity or 'truth' in our aesthetic experience of nature: and of this more shortly. We know also that in all aesthetic experience it is contextual complexity that, more than any other single factor, makes possible the minute discrimination of emotional qualities; and such discrimination is accorded high aesthetic value. It is largely the pursuit of such value that moves us to accept what I called 'the challenge to integrate'—to take notice of and to accept as aesthetically relevant some shape or sound that initially lies outside the limit of our attention.

The expansion of context does not have to be a spatial expansion. What else can it be? Supposing 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 that I bring to bear upon the scene my knowledge that this is a tidal basin, the tide being out. I see myself now as virtually walking on what is for half the day sea-bed. The wild glad emptiness may be tempered by a disturbing weirdness. Thus, in addition to spatial extension (or sometimes instead of it), we may aim at enriching the interpretative element of our experience, taking this not as theoretical 'knowledge-about' the object or scene, but as helping to determine the aesthetic impact it makes upon us. 'Unity' here plays a purely 'regulative' role. Nature is not a 'given whole', nor indeed is knowledge about it. And in any case there are psychological limits to the expansion process; a degree of complexity is reached beyond which there will be no increase in discrimination of perceptual or emotional qualities.

A second movement away from contemplation of uninterpreted particulars is sometimes known as the 'humanizing' or the 'spiritualizing' of nature. I shall merely note its existence and relevance here, for there have been a good many accounts of it in the history of aesthetics. Coleridge said that: 'Art is . . . the power of humanizing nature, of infusing the thoughts and passions of man into every thing which is the object of his contemplation.'⁵ And Hegel, that the aim of art is 'to strip the outer world of its stubborn foreignness'.⁶ What is here said about art is no less true of aesthetic experience of nature itself. Imaginative activity is working for a *rapprochement* between the spectator and his aesthetic

object: unity is again a regulative notion, a symbol of the unattainable complete transmutation of brute external nature into a mirror of the mind.

By developing and qualifying the 'humanization' ideal we can come to see yet a third aspect of the *nisus* towards unity. A person who contemplates natural objects aesthetically may sometimes find their emotional quality is describable in the vocabulary of ordinary human moods and feeling—melancholy, exuberance, placidity. But not always. A particular emotional quality can be roughly *analogous* to a nameable human emotion—let us say, desolation: but the precise quality of desolation revealed in some waste or desert in nature may be quite distinctive in timbre and intensity. Aesthetic experience of nature may be experience of a range of emotion that the human scene by itself, untutored and un-supplemented, could not evoke. In Barbara Hepworth's remark, once more, to be one with nature in her sense was to realize vividly one's place in the landscape, as a form among its forms. And this is not to have nature's 'foreignness' or otherness overcome, but rather to allow that otherness free play in modifying one's everyday sense of one's own being. In this domain, again, we need not confine ourselves to the contemplating of uninterpreted particulars. In a leaf-pattern I may 'see' also blood-vessel patterns, or the patterns of branching, forked lightning: or all of these. In a spiral nebula pattern I may see the pattern of swirling waters or whirling dust. I may be aware of a network of affinities, analogous forms, spanning the inorganic or the organic world or both. My experience has a quality of *multum in parvo*. If, with Mr. Eliot, one sees 'The dance along the artery/The circulation of the lymph' as 'figured in the drift of stars', something of the aesthetic qualities of the latter (as we perceive them) may come to be transferred to the former. This is not necessarily a humanizing of nature; it may be more like a 'naturizing' of the human observer.

A fourth class of approaches to ideals of 'unity' is concerned with what we have called the 'background' quality of emotions and attitudes, common to a great many individual experiences. Here the background is a sense of reconciliation, suspension of conflict, and of being in that sense at one with the aesthetic object. This particular sort of 'at-one-ness' could hardly be present in art-experience, since it requires that the aesthetic object should be at the same time some part of the natural environment. This is the same environment from which we wrest our food, from which we have to protect ourselves in order to live, and which refuses to sustain our individual lives beyond a limited term. To attain, and sustain, the relevant detachment from such an environment in order to savour it aesthetically is in itself a fair achievement, an achievement

which suffuses the aesthetic experiences themselves with that sense of reconciliation. The objects of nature may look to us as if their *raison d'être* were precisely that we should celebrate their beauty. As Rilke put it: 'Everything beckons to us to perceive it.'⁷ Or the dominant stance may be that of benediction: the Ancient Mariner 'blesses' the water-snakes at his moment of reconciliation.

This fourth type of unity-ideal could arise in the contemplation of what is itself quite *un*-unified in the other senses, the night sky again, or a mass of hills with no detectable pattern to unite them. It is more strictly a concomitant, or a by-product, of an aesthetic experience that we are already enjoying, an experience in which there may have been no synoptic grasping of patterns, relating of forms or any other sort of unifying.

I suspect that someone who tried to construct a comprehensive aesthetic theory with 'unity' as its sole key concept would obtain his comprehensiveness only by equivocating or punning over the meaning of the key expression, only by sliding and slithering from one of its many senses to another. When one sense is not applicable, another may well be. The fourth sense in particular can be relevant to vivid aesthetic experience of any natural objects whatever.

So much the worse, we may conclude, for such a theory *qua* monolithic. But to say that is not to imply that our study has yielded only negative results. This is one of several areas in aesthetics where we have to resist the temptation to work with a single supreme concept and must replace it by a *cluster* of related key concepts. In searching out the relevant key concepts, the displaced pseudo-concept may yet be a useful guide—as it is in the present case. It is not, however, adequate for all explanatory purposes.

We began our study by referring to the contemplation of uninterpreted individual natural objects in their particularity. This was not a mere starting-point to be left behind in our pursuit of the 'unities'. On the contrary, aesthetic experience remains tethered to that concern with the particular even if on a long rope. The rope is there, although the development and vitality of that experience demand that it be stretched to the full. The pull of the rope is felt when the expanding and complicating of our synopses reaches the point beyond which we shall have not more but less fine discrimination of perceptual quality. It is felt again when we risk the blurring and negating of natural forms as we really perceive them in an anxious attempt to limit our experience of nature to the savouring of stereotyped and well-domesticated emotional qualities. It is even relevant to our fourth type of unity-ideal: for the sense of reconciliation is not an independent and autonomous aesthetic ex-

perience, but hangs entirely upon the occurrence of particular experiences of particular aesthetically interesting natural objects.

IV

Although recent aesthetics has been little concerned with natural beauty as such, yet at crucial points in its analyses of *art*-experience it has frequently made comparisons between our aesthetic approach to art-objects and to objects in nature. In the light of our reflections so far we may wish to ask at this point whether the comparing has been fairly done. We have room to examine one example only.

An important part of current controversy is the assessment of the Expression Theory. The Expression Theory saw the artefact as the middle link in a communication from artist to spectator. Its critics see the artefact first and foremost as an object with certain properties, properties which are, or should be, aesthetically interesting and which in their totality control the spectator's response. This is an aesthetic approach that reduces the gulf between art-object and natural object. Both are to be approached primarily as individual, self-contained entities, exciting to contemplate by virtue of their perceived qualities. But how far can we accept this comparison? Critics of the critics have pointed out some deficiencies. They have insisted upon the irreducible relevance of linguistic and cultural context to the interpretation of a poem. Identical words might constitute *two* poems, not one, if we read them in two different historical contexts.⁸

We could extend this criticism as follows. Suppose we have two perceptually identical objects, one an artefact and the other natural. They might be a 'carved stone' of Arp and a naturally smoothed stone; a carving in wood and a piece of fallen timber. Or they might be identical in pattern, though not in material; for example, a rock face with a particular texture and marking and an abstract expressionist painting with the same texture and the same markings. If we made the most of the *rapprochement*, we should have to say that we had in each of these cases essentially *one* aesthetic object. Yet this would be a misleading conclusion. If we knew them for what they are—as artefact or natural object—we should certainly attend and respond differently to them. As we look at the rock face we may realize imaginatively the geological turmoils that produced its pattern. The realizing of these need not be a piece of extra-aesthetic reflection; it may determine for us how we see and respond to the object itself. If we interpreted and responded to the abstract painting in the same way, our interpretation would this time be merely whimsical. If we arbitrarily restricted aesthetic experience of

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both nature and art to the contemplating of uninterpreted shapes and patterns, we could, of course, have the *rapprochement*. But we have seen good reason for refusing so to restrict it in the case of nature-experience, whatever be the case with art.

Take another instance. Through the eyepiece of a telescope I see the spiral nebula in Andromeda. I look next at an abstract painting in a circular frame that contains the identical visual pattern. My responses are not alike, even if each is indisputably aesthetic. My awareness that the first shapes are of enormous and remote masses of matter in motion imparts to my response a strangeness and solemnity that are not generated by the pattern alone. The abstract pattern may indeed impress by reminding me of various wheeling and swirling patterns in nature. But there is a difference between taking the pattern as that sort of reminder and on the other hand brooding on this impressive instantiation of it in the nebula.

A more lighthearted but helpful way of bringing out these points is to suppose ourselves confronted by a small object which, for all we know, may be natural or may be an artefact. We are set the task of regarding it aesthetically. I suppose that we might cast upon it an uneasy and embarrassed eye. How shall we approach it? Shall we, for instance, see in its smoothness the slow mindless grinding of centuries of tides, or the swifter and mindful operations of the sculptor's tools? Certainly, we can enjoy something of its purely formal qualities on either reckoning; but even the savouring of these is affected by non-formal factors that diverge according to the judgement we make about its origin. To sum up: the swing, in some recent aesthetics, from 'intention' to 'object' has been healthful on the whole, delivering aesthetics and criticism from a great deal of misdirected labour. But it has countered the paradoxes of expressionism with paradoxes of its own. Differences between object and object need to be reaffirmed: indiscernibly different poems or carvings become discernibly different when we reckon with their aesthetically different cultural contexts; and the contextual controls that determine how we contemplate an object in nature are different from those that shape our experience of art. In other words, we have here a central current issue in aesthetics that cannot be properly tackled without a full-scale discussion of natural beauty.

V

That, however, is not the only current issue about which the same can be said. It can be said also (and this introduces our final topic) about the analysis of such expressions as 'true', 'false', 'profound', 'shallow',

'superficial', as terms of aesthetic appraisal. These have been studied in their application to art-objects but scarcely at all in connection with nature. It might indeed be contested whether they have *any* meaningful use in the latter connection.

I think it can be shown that they have. We can best approach the topic by way of some analysis of an expression which we have used already but not explained. It is a sense of the word 'realize'. Here are some examples of the use. 'I had long known that the earth was not flat, but I never before *realized* its curvature till I watched that ship disappear on the horizon.' Here 'realize' involves making, or becoming, vivid to perception or to the imagination. Auxiliary imagings may attend my realizing of the earth's curvature, the image of my arms stretched out, fingers reaching round the sphere; and the realization of loneliness may involve imagining myself shouting but being unheard, needing help but getting none.

In some cases to realize something is simply to know or understand, where 'know' and 'understand' are analysable in dispositional terms. But our present sense of 'realize' has an essential episodic component: it is a coming-to-be-aware. In the aesthetic setting it is an experience accompanying and arising out of perceptions—perceptions upon which we dwell and linger. I am gazing, say, at a cumulus cloud when I realize its height. I do not discard, or pass beyond, the experience, as if I were judging the height of the cloud in flight-navigation (or the loneliness of the moor in planning a murder). This sort of realizing is obviously one of our chief activities in the aesthetic experiencing of nature. It has been central in earlier illustrations, the contemplation of the rock face, the spiral nebula, the ocean-smoothed stone.

But my suggestion that realizing is 'episodic', occurrent, may properly be challenged. Suppose that I am busy realizing the utter loneliness of the moor, when suddenly I discover that behind sundry bits of cover are a great many soldiers taking part in a field-exercise. Could I, without illogic, maintain that I had been realizing what is not in fact the case? Hardly. 'Realize' contains a built-in reference to truth. It has episodic components, but it cannot be exhaustively analysed in that way. I cannot be said to have realized the strength and hardness of a tall tree-trunk if, when I then approach it, it crumbles rotten at a touch. But surely I was doing *something*: my experience did occur; and nothing that subsequently occurs can alter it.

Now this experience was, of course, the aesthetic contemplation of apparent properties. That they turn out not to be also real properties may disturb the spectator, or it may not. For some people aesthetic experience is interested not at all in reality—only in looks, seemings: indifference to truth may be part of their definition of the aesthetic. If

the soldiers appear or the tree crumbles, the aesthetic value of the prior experiences is (to those people) not in the least affected. Others take a different view. One could agree that a large range of aesthetic experience is not concerned about truth but yet attach a peculiar importance to the range that is. I am not sure that the gulf between this and the contrasted view is wholly bridgeable by argument: but some reflections can be offered along the following lines.

If we want our aesthetic experiences to be repeatable and to have stability, we shall try to ensure that new information or subsequent experimentation will not reveal the 'seemings' as illusions. If I know that the tree is rotten, I shall not be able again to savour its seeming-strength. I could, no doubt, savour its 'deceptively strong appearance'; but that would be a quite different experience from the first.

Suppose the outline of our cumulus cloud resembles that of a basket of washing, and we amuse ourselves in dwelling upon this resemblance. Suppose that on another occasion we do not dwell on such freakish aspects, but try instead to realize the inner turbulence of the cloud, the winds sweeping up within and around it, determining its structure and visible form. Should we not be ready to say that this latter experience was less superficial than the other, that it was truer to nature, and for that reason more worth having? If there can be a passage, in art, from easy beauty to difficult and more serious beauty, there can also be such passages in aesthetic contemplation of nature.

Were there not a strong *nisus* in that direction, how could we account for the sense of bewilderment people express over how to bring their aesthetic view of nature into accord with the discoveries of recent science? Because of these discoveries (as Sir Kenneth Clark puts it): 'the snug, sensible nature which we can see with our own eyes has ceased to satisfy our imaginations'.⁹ If the aesthetic enjoyment of nature were no more than the contemplation of particular shapes and colours and movements, these discoveries could not possibly disturb it. But they do: they set the imagination a task in 'realizing'.

An objector may still insist that reference to truth is aesthetically irrelevant. To him the only relevant factors are the savouring of perceptual qualities and formal organization. But a formalist might at least be reminded that a major element in his own enjoyment is the synoptic grasping of complexities. A particular colour-patch may be seen as part of an object, as modifying the colour of adjacent patches, and as contributing to the total perceived pattern—all simultaneously. One could argue that the striving to 'realize' should be taken as adding to our powers of synopsis and that for the *exclusion* of it no good reason could be given.

But a more searching anxiety might be expressed. Sometimes indeed such realizations may enhance an aesthetic experience, but may they not sometimes destroy it? When I see the full moon rising behind the silhouetted branches of winter trees I may judge that the scene is more beautiful if I think of the moon simply as a silvery flat disc at no great distance from the trees on the skyline. Ought I to be realizing the moon's actual shape, size and distance? Why spoil my enjoyment? There may be cases where I have to choose between an aesthetic experience available only if I inhibit my realizing and on the other hand a different aesthetic experience available if I do some realizing. In our example, the first experience is of beauty (in the narrow sense); and we could not count on the alternative experience being also one of beauty, in the same sense. It might, of course, be still aesthetically exciting: that is, of beauty in the widest sense. But, the objector might press, even that cannot be guaranteed in all cases. And this is exactly the difficulty we feel about the bearing of present-day science on our vision of the natural world. Sometimes our attempts at realizing are aesthetically bleak and unrewarding; or they may fail altogether, as perhaps with some cosmologies and cosmogonies. Compromises, the balancing of one aesthetic requirement against another, may well be inevitable. One may say in a particular case: 'this is the nearest I can come to making imaginatively vivid what I know about that object. My realizing is still not quite adequate to my knowledge; but if I were to go any further in that direction, I should lose touch altogether with the sights, sounds and movements of the visible world seen from the human point of view. And that would impoverish, not enrich, my total aesthetic experience.' What we should be feeling again is the tug of the rope that tethers aesthetic experience to the perception of the particular object and its perceived individuality.

To be able to say anything more confident about this problem one would need to hold a metaphysical and religious view of nature and science which denied that the imaginative assimilating of scientific knowledge could ultimately lead to aesthetic impoverishment. That possibility we can only take note of in this essay without being able to explore it.

We may recall at the same time, and in conclusion, that some important accounts of natural beauty have, historically, been closely allied with various sorts of nature-mysticism. I have argued that there are in fact not one but several unity-ideals; that it is most unlikely that any single aesthetic experience can fully and simultaneously realize them all; and I believe that with certain of them the notion of full attainment makes dubious sense. Yet the idea of their ever more intense and com-

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prehensive attainment is not without value, and the link with nature-mystical experiences need not be severed.¹⁰

Very tentatively, I suspect that no more materials are required than those with which we are already furnished in order to render available certain limited varieties of mystical experience, and logically to map them. Those materials provide us, not with affirmations about a transcendent being or realm, but with a *focus imaginarius* that can play a regulative and practical role in the aesthetic contemplation of nature. It sees that contemplation as grounded, first and last, in particular perceptions, but as reaching out so as to relate the forms of the objects perceived to the pervasive and basic forms of nature; relating it also to the observer's own stance and setting, as himself one item in nature—a nature with whose forces he feels in harmony through the very success of this contemplative activity itself.

But even if something of the intensity and momentousness of mystical experience can be reached along such lines, this would be a mysticism without the God of theism. And surely the absence of belief in transcendence would make this quite different from a mysticism that centres upon it. Different, indeed, in the quality of available experience and in expectations aroused both for the here-and-now and the hereafter: but not so radically different as to make 'mysticism' a misnomer. Belief in a transcendent being means that, for the believer, the 'focus' is not imaginary but actual—in God; and it is doubtless psychologically easier to work towards a goal one believes to be fully realizable than towards a focus one suspects to be imaginary. Rather similarly, in ethics a student may experience a check to his practical moral confidence when he discovers that 'oughts' cannot be grounded in 'is's'. Yet it is seldom that he indulges for this reason in a permanent moral sulk. Perhaps, if I am right, it is no more reasonable to indulge in a nature-mystical sulk. But I begin to moralize: a sign that this paper has come to its proper end.

REFERENCES

¹ By 'nature' I shall simply mean all objects that are not human artefacts. I am ignoring the many possible disputes over natural objects that have received a marked, though limited, transformation at man's hands.

² W. Elton (ed.), *Aesthetics and Language* (1954): Vivas and Krieger (eds.), *The Problems of Aesthetics* (1953). Compare

also H. Osborne's *Theory of Beauty* (1952), which likewise confines its investigation to art-experience. M. C. Beardsley's *Aesthetics* (1958) is subtitled *Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism*.

Mr. Osborne defines beauty as the 'characteristic and peculiar excellence of works of art'. Professor Beardsley's opening sentence reads: 'There would

be no problems of aesthetics, in the sense in which I propose to mark out this field of study, if no one ever talked about works of art.'

³ *Barbara Hepworth. Carvings and Drawings* (1952), chap. 4.

⁴ (a) Graham Hough's *Image and Experience* (1960) contains some suggestive reflections stemming from his discussion of Ruskin and Roger Fry. 'By intense contemplation of . . . experiences of form and space we become conscious of the unity between ourselves and the natural world' (p. 175). 'It is Ruskin's special distinction to show . . . how the experience of the senses can lead directly to that unified apprehension of nature, and of ourselves as a part of nature, which can fairly constantly be recognized, under various mythological disguises, not only as that which gives value to aesthetic experience, but also as one of the major consolations of philosophy' (p. 176).

(b) The nature-mystical interpretation of unity-with-nature is briefly stated by Evelyn Underhill in her *Mysticism*. In moments of intense love for the natural world 'hunts of a marvellous truth, a unity whose note is ineffable peace, shine in created things' (4th ed., 1912, p. 87).

W. T. Stace, listing the common characteristics of 'extrovertive mysticism' (to which nature-mysticism belongs), includes the following: 'The One is . . . perceived through the physical senses, in or through the multiplicity of objects.' 'The One [is apprehended more concretely] as being an inner subjectivity

in all things, described variously as life, or consciousness, or a living Presence.' He adds: 'There are underground connections between the mystical and the aesthetic . . . which are at present obscure and unexplained.' (*Mysticism and Philosophy*, 1960, pp. 79, 81.)

(c) Coleridge wrote: 'The groundwork . . . of all true philosophy is the full apprehension of the difference between the contemplation of reason, namely that intuition of things which arises when we possess ourselves as one with the whole . . . and that which presents itself when . . . we think of ourselves as separated beings, and place nature in antithesis to the mind, as object to subject, thing to thought, death to life.' (*The Friend*, Bohn Ed., p. 366.)

These brief quotations, culled in near-random fashion from very diverse historical contexts, may suffice to show at least the existence of some of the tendencies with which we shall be concerned.

⁵ *Biographia Literaria*, vol. II, 'On Poesy or Art'.

⁶ *Introduction to Hegel's Philosophy of Fine Art* (trans. Bosanquet, 1886), p. 59.

⁷ *Later Poems* (ed. Leishman), p. 128.

⁸ See H. S. Eveling, 'Composition and Criticism', *Proc. Arist. Soc.*, 1958-9.

⁹ *Landscape into Art* (1949), Pelican Books, 1956, p. 150. Sir Kenneth Clark is writing of art and artists, but his points are no less relevant to a contemplation of nature that never passes into the constructing of art objects.

¹⁰ Compare, once again, Graham Hough, *Image and Experience* (1960), pp. 174 f.