

UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

# The Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature

*Essays on the Aesthetics of Nature*

Malcolm Budd

JUN 16 2003

CLARENDON PRESS • OXFORD

of locomotion. For example, only sentient creatures can be seen as looking at or otherwise perceiving the world, and in particular as being aware of the presence of another creature, and so as exploring, hunting, diving, disputing a territory, or engaging in courtship rituals; and there are styles of movement that are specific to sentient creatures, as with the graceful movements of a gazelle, and styles of movement that only sentient creatures of a certain kind are capable of, as with the various forms of the flight of birds. These open the possibility of a distinctive kind of aesthetic delight—at the cavoring of an otter or a school of dolphins at play or the exploratory behaviour of a fox cub or the outstanding aerial manoeuvrability of dragonflies (enhanced by their gossamer, jewel-like wings and brightly-coloured bodies), for instance. Furthermore, the parts of both sentient and insentient living things, animals and plants, for example, have natural functions, and a sentient creature has a style of life determined by its nature. In each kind of case, there is a possible source of aesthetic delight focused on the idea of suitability: the parts of these living things can be seen as manifestly or strikingly suitable to discharging their functions, especially in the given environment and climate, and the creature can be seen as perfectly suited to its style of life. As David Hume (1961: §VI, pt. II) wrote: 'It is evident, that one considerable source of *beauty* in all animals is the advantage which they reap from the particular structure of their limbs and members, suitably to the particular manner of life, to which they are by nature destined'—as with 'the structure... of the woodpecker, with its feet, tail, beak, and tongue, so admirably adapted to catch insects under the bark of trees' (Darwin 1929: 2). The well-known opening lines of Hopkins's 'The Windhover', which seek to capture a falcon's manner of flight and an observer's emotional response to the enviable ability that enables the falcon to flourish in the element in which it must live, provide a vivid illustration:

I caught this morning morning's minion, king-  
dom of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon, in his riding  
Of the rolling level underneath him steady air, and striding  
High there, how he rung upon the rein of a wimpling wing  
In his ecstasy! then off, off forth on swing,  
As a skate's heel sweeps smooth on a bow-bend: the hurl and gliding  
Rebuffed the big wind. My heart in hiding  
Stirred for a bird,—the achieve of, the mastery of the thing!

As these examples show, there is no inherent difficulty in the concept of the aesthetic appreciation of nature: whichever conception of a response to nature as nature is preferred, the idea of the aesthetic appreciation of nature as nature is coherent and it is possible for the aesthetic appreciation of nature to be solidly founded on characteristics that accrue to items in virtue of their being natural items of certain kinds.

Start reading

### 1.7. KNOWLEDGE OF NATURE

A further clarification of the idea of the aesthetic appreciation of nature is achieved by the resolution of a number of interlinked issues about the identification of natural things, ignorance of their nature, mistakes about them, and the relevance of 'scientific' understanding. What kind of understanding of nature does a correct and full aesthetic appreciation of it require? Do we need the knowledge of the natural scientist—the naturalist, the geologist, the biologist, and the ecologist?<sup>19</sup> Does experiencing something with 'scientific' understanding of it deepen or enhance the aesthetic appreciation of it? Does it matter aesthetically whether you correctly experience something as being a certain type of natural phenomenon or of natural kind K? Does it matter whether you mis-experience something as being of a certain natural kind?<sup>20</sup> Does it matter whether you are not mistaken about but ignorant of the natural kind you are appreciating?<sup>21</sup>

Clearly, the mere ability to identify things as being of certain types on the basis of their appearance, to classify them (either under 'everyday' or 'technical' categories), to give names to them—to

<sup>19</sup> As Allen Carlson has argued: see, for example, Carlson (1979d).

<sup>20</sup> The question concerns the misidentification of the natural kind to which the object belongs, not the misidentification of a natural object as a work of art or vice versa. This other question (along with much else, especially significant differences between the aesthetic appreciation of nature and artistic appreciation, about which I have said nothing in this essay) is well dealt with in Hepburn's seminal (1966). There are further kinds of misunderstanding of the natural world that affect the aesthetic appreciation of nature, but these are also not my concern here.

<sup>21</sup> Ignorance about the natural kind you are appreciating can be more or less extreme: you might see a flower, but not as a flower, only as a coloured three-dimensional natural object of some kind jutting from the earth; or you might see an arm jilily as a flower of some kind, but one that you do not recognize.

clouds, for example—does not thereby endow the subject with an enhanced appreciation of nature, although it may be the result of or encourage or facilitate a heightened or finer or richer awareness of natural features.<sup>22</sup> But there are cases where knowledge of the nature of a phenomenon—not merely the ability to identify that type—can transform one's aesthetic experience of nature. People have thicker or thinner conceptions of the nature of the phenomena which they see or otherwise perceive under concepts of those phenomena: children have exceptionally thin conceptions, adults have conceptions of greater and varying thickness. The thicker the conception, the greater the material available to transform the subject's aesthetic experience of nature. It follows that people can recruit to their perceptions of natural phenomena different levels of understanding, superficial or deep. If you have the right kind of understanding of nature, you can recruit to your perceptual experience of nature relevant thoughts, emotions, and images unavailable to those who lack that understanding—as when you see a 'shooting star' as the glow of a meteor burning in the earth's atmosphere, or a gigantic crater as having been produced by the impact of a meteorite, or a canyon as having been cut by a swift-flowing river, or a mountain as a massive block of rock thrust up by enormous pressures beneath the earth's surface, or—an extreme case—the Himalayas as the product of a collision between the Indian subcontinent and the main bulk of Asia, or obsidian as a coal-black volcanic glass composed of fast-cooled lava, or stalactites, stalagmites, and helictites as formed by minerals deposited by dripping water, or broomrape as a parasite that feeds on other plants. And the transformation your experience undergoes when relevant knowledge is enlisted carries with it the possibility of varieties of aesthetic appreciation of nature and species of aesthetic emotional responses otherwise unavailable.<sup>23</sup>

Consider the aesthetic appreciation of clouds or sky-scapes. Just as lightning is not merely an optical (and acoustical) phenomenon, but a violent, sometimes dangerous, discharge of electricity, so

<sup>22</sup> But unless you see O as being of natural kind K, you cannot experience it as being, or not being, an especially beautiful specimen of that kind.

<sup>23</sup> The transformation of perception effected by knowledge of the nature of an object of aesthetic appreciation will by no means always result in an intensification of aesthetic delight. On the contrary, it can diminish or erase it, as might happen when a plant is seen as poisonous; or the beautiful appearance of a turquoise sea anemone might recede or disappear when its protuberances are seen as tentacles with the power to paralyse small prey and its greenish centre is seen as its mouth.

clouds are not merely optical phenomena, but aggregations of microscopic droplets of water suspended in the atmosphere. Their two- or three-dimensional apparent shapes and their colouration may be and often are beautiful, but their aesthetic appreciation is not confined to these directly visible aspects. For, given that clouds are three-dimensional masses, composed of minute droplets of water, formed by, at the mercy of, and bringing about processes in the atmosphere, that they float, are at rest, meet, are being torn apart or expanding rapidly, and so on, they possess more aspects open to aesthetic appreciation than their shapes and colours. The transformations in the sky's appearance brought about by changes in the clouds, which at times enact spectacular dramas, are seen by the informed watcher as the expression of various natural forces at work in the atmosphere and are appreciated aesthetically as such. If when looking at a cloud you identify its type as cumulonimbus, your aesthetic experience is not thereby transformed. But if, in virtue of additional knowledge, you see the anvil top and ragged base of a cumulonimbus as a *thunder cloud*, your impression of the cloud might change, for you might now have a sense of *power* in the cloud and see it as shaped by powerful forces at work in it; and this sense of power will inform your experience and change the nature of your aesthetic response.<sup>24</sup> Or consider the experience of looking at the Milky Way. As a child, you might experience it just as a white streak with a somewhat milky appearance running across the night sky. You might then come to see it as being the appearance of an exceptional congregation of stars in that region of the night sky, but possess no greater understanding of it. Finally, when you realize the truth about what you are seeing and why you are seeing it, your experience can assume quite a different nature: you now experience the Milky Way as the view into the heart of our galaxy, and by the use of your imagination you 'see' yourself as located on a small planet of a minor star on one of the spiralling arms near the edge of the galaxy into whose heart you are looking. A correct understanding of what is visible in the night sky thus makes possible a transformation of your experience from a condition in which you are struck by a milky path running across the sky to one in which your

<sup>24</sup> This is a prime example of what Hepburn (1966) calls 'realizing'—making vivid to perception or imagination the nature of an object of perception (the tremendous height and inner turbulence of a cumulonimbus cloud, for example). He rightly identifies this as one of the chief activities in the aesthetic appreciation of nature.

position in the universe—your position and that of everyone else you care about—is manifest to you in a manner that encourages an awareness of the minute stage on which the history of humanity unfolds, the peripheral status of what happens on the earth even in our own galaxy, the awesome immensity of the multitude of stars that compose that galaxy, and the realization that you are forever isolated from whatever civilizations, perhaps countless many, are present elsewhere in space and that you must remain ignorant of their different natures and histories, no matter how fascinating these might be. Such thoughts, harnessed to your perceptual experience, constitute an important change in your perspective, and are likely to produce one of those peculiar combinations of mental states that have been called experiences of the sublime—in this case a feeling of wonder combined with an experience of vulnerability woven together with a sense of the relative insignificance of your individual self, a mental state with both a positive and a negative side, a duality that has often been thought of as the hallmark of an experience of the sublime.<sup>25</sup>

But this is not to say that knowledge of the nature of a phenomenon always endows the subject with the ability to transform her perception of the world and facilitate an enhancement of aesthetic appreciation. Many of us know the explanation of rainbows, but not so many of us know the explanation of supernumerary bows. In either case, it seems that possession of the explanation does not make possible an aesthetic experience of its object that is otherwise unavailable. Most of us know that water is  $H_2O$ , but this knowledge does not enable an enhanced aesthetic appreciation of water, in dew, mist, rain, snow, rivers, or waterfalls, for example. For knowledge of the nature of a natural phenomenon to be able to effect a transformation of the subject's aesthetic experience of it, the knowledge must be such that it can permeate or inform the perception of the phenomenon, so that what the subject sees it *as* is different from how it is seen by someone who lacks the requisite knowledge. We do not see water or copper differently from one who is ignorant of their nature: we do not see water as  $H_2O$  or copper as possessing atomic number 29, for the knowledge we bring to our perception is not such as to integrate with the perception in such a manner as to generate a new perceptual-cum-imaginative content of experience.

<sup>25</sup> See Essay 2, 111, §17.

If you mis-experience an item as being of natural kind K through misperception, then of course your aesthetic appreciation of it is mal-founded. But to mis-experience an item as being of a certain natural kind is not of any aesthetic significance if, first, there's no error in perception, and, second, the mistake is merely a matter of getting the *name* wrong, as when I can see a flower perfectly clearly, mistakenly take it to be an orchid (when in fact it is a fritillary) and have no further knowledge of or belief about either kind. Suppose, however, that you do have some relevant knowledge of two natural kinds and you misidentify the natural kind to which an item belongs, the mistake not being founded on misperception. In such a case, the item will usually possess many aspects that you can respond to aesthetically without error *as* aspects of a natural thing, although you are mistaken about what kind of thing it is.<sup>26</sup> But if you aesthetically appreciate a natural object as an instance of natural kind K and it is not of kind K, then your appreciation is, in that respect, mal-founded, and an awareness of your mistake undermines *that* aspect of your appreciation. For it is no longer available to you with respect to that object and you must reject as mistaken the enjoyment or excitement you felt that arose from that misapprehension. Furthermore, your misidentification might in any case result in aesthetic deprivation, for the correct identification of the type of natural object before you might enable an additional element of aesthetic appreciation of nature as nature: perceiving the thing under its true kind might allow not only the appreciation of all that the mistaken identification allows that is not mal-founded, but something aesthetically valuable in addition.

<sup>26</sup> As Noël Carroll (1993) has emphasized, and has illustrated with someone's taking a whale to be a fish, rather than a mammal.

STOP

and the furtherance of morality are as readily available to the aesthetic appreciation of nature as what nature actually is. Indeed, they are more naturally available to this conception. For only so does nature actually *exhibit* beauty and the question arise as to the importance of our caring that it does. If we regard nature as if it were what we know it not to be, and are free to select problem and style as we choose, so that with enough imagination we can see anything as beautiful (or, instead, as lacking beauty), we have no reason to care what nature is actually like and so no reason to love it for what it is. And, finally, the experience of nature as if it were art offers no benefits substantial enough to outweigh the advantages of the aesthetic experience of nature as what it actually is, so that it would be better to experience it in the first rather than the second manner. Accordingly, it is not mandatory to judge a natural item aesthetically as if it were a work of art, and given that nature is not art, to judge it as if it were art is to misjudge it.

Now any version of the claim that the aesthetic appreciation of nature consists in nature's being regarded as if it were art must, whatever conception of artistic value it embraces, represent the aesthetic appreciation of nature as being informed by concepts integral to artistic appreciation but which are known not to be applicable to nature. It therefore faces the same insuperable obstacle presented to Savile's account of aesthetic judgements of natural beauty. Furthermore, it will be vulnerable to a crucial objection—one that I have not yet brought against Savile's version<sup>2</sup>—namely, that it is untrue to the phenomenology of the aesthetic experience of nature. For the aesthetic experience of nature is not impregnated with those notions essential to the appreciation of art: the satisfaction we experience when we find a tree, a bird, a landscape or sky-scene beautiful is not that of seeing an object as an excellent solution to a problem within a set of aesthetic constraints constitutive of a style, nor does it answer to any viable alternative conception of artistic value. On the contrary, the (non-theistic) aesthetic appreciation of nature is saturated with an unbracketed consciousness, clear or dim, of nature's not being art.

<sup>2</sup> I leave aside Savile's commitment to the view that 'beautiful' is always used as an attributive adjective, never predicatively. The reason he gives in support of this view is that an item can be beautiful as an F and yet not beautiful as a G. But this does not imply that 'beautiful' is never used predicatively. See Frank Sibley's (2001a) for the definitive treatment of the issue.

### 3.3. APPRECIATING NATURE AS WHAT NATURE ACTUALLY IS

Given the unacceptability of the view that the aesthetic appreciation of natural items should be thought of as the appreciation of them under concepts of art, the obvious alternative is that they should be appreciated under concepts of the natural things or phenomena that they are. And this alternative conception of the aesthetic appreciation of natural items will have a special aesthetic significance in so far as two theses of Kendall Walton (Walton 1970) about the connection between the aesthetic properties of works of art and the categories of art to which they belong hold equally for the connection between the aesthetic properties of natural items and categories of nature. Applied to nature these theses become: (i) (the psychological thesis) What aesthetic properties a natural item *appears* to possess—what aesthetic properties the item is perceived or experienced as possessing—is a function of the category or categories of nature under which it is experienced (i.e. what sort of natural thing it is perceived as being); and (ii) (the philosophical thesis) What aesthetic properties the item *really* possesses is determined by the right categories of nature to experience the item as falling under—it really possesses those aesthetic properties it appears to possess when perceived in its *correct* categories of nature (by an aesthetically sensitive and properly informed observer who employs the relevant knowledge of what items in that category are standardly like to so perceive it).

But it is compatible with the requirement that the aesthetic appreciation of nature is the aesthetic appreciation of nature as nature (as what nature actually is) that natural items should be appreciated aesthetically under no concepts at all (except that of nature itself); that is, not as instances of the kinds they exemplify, but only with respect to their sensible qualities, the way in which they compose their items' perceptual forms, and the aesthetic properties they possess in virtue of these qualities and forms.<sup>3</sup> Now although we

<sup>3</sup> As Allen Carlson has argued (Carlson 1979b), it is only a framed view of the natural environment, not the environment itself, that possesses formal qualities, although I am unpersuaded by the stronger claim he favours, that, *when appreciated aesthetically in the appropriate mode*, it is not possible to see a section of it as having any formal qualities. See Essay 4, §3. But, in any case, what is true of the aesthetic appreciation of the natural environment is not thereby true of the aesthetic appreciation of nature.

rarely, if ever, aesthetically appreciate a natural item merely as being natural, and to do so would be to engage in a diminished form of aesthetic appreciation of nature, we often delight aesthetically in natural items that we perceive only under highly general concepts (*flower*), not as instances of the specific kinds they exemplify (*orchid*), or under one concept (*flower*), but not another coextensive concept that expresses a deeper understanding of the nature or function of the kind (*sexual organ of plant*). This brings out a lack of clarity in the idea of appreciating a natural thing as the natural thing it is, for any natural thing falls under more or less specific concepts of nature, and can be appreciated under concepts that express a greater or lesser understanding of it. And it also brings out a problem for Walton's philosophical thesis transferred to nature.<sup>4</sup> The problem is: What determines which concept or concepts of nature are the correct concept or concepts under which a natural item is to be perceived? For what is at issue is not just whether a natural item falls under a certain concept of nature, but which of those concepts it falls under 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. A non-category-relative interpretation of judgements of the aesthetic properties of natural items requires that a natural thing should not fall under different concepts of nature which are such that, when perceived under these concepts—the correct concepts to perceive it under—it is properly experienced as possessing incompatible aesthetic properties. Since the same natural item falls under a variety of concepts of nature, the successful transference of the non-psychological thesis to nature stands in need of a criterion of correctness that will deliver the required result. And there is an additional difficulty about the aesthetic properties and aesthetic value of

<sup>4</sup> There is no difficulty in transferring the psychological thesis from art to nature (although I believe that, in virtue of natural items not being the products of artists, it holds only in an impoverished form): just as 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 a certain category of art, so the perceived aesthetic character of a natural thing is a function of which of its non-aesthetic perceptual features are standard, variable, or contra-standard for one who perceives it under a certain category of nature. See Essay 4, §6. Carlson (1981) tries to show that both the psychological and the philosophical thesis can be transferred to nature.

natural things, considered as the kinds of natural things they are, which concerns how they should be appreciated aesthetically and what is relevant to their aesthetic appreciation. For there is an important disanalogy between the constraints imposed on aesthetic appreciation by, on the one hand, the fact that an item is to be appreciated as the work of art it is, and, on the other, the fact that it is to be appreciated as the natural item it is. This difference assumes crucial significance in an assessment of the doctrine of positive aesthetics with respect to nature.

Stop reading

### 3.4. POSITIVE AESTHETICS WITH RESPECT TO NATURE

Positive aesthetics with respect to nature maintains that there is the following vital difference between the aesthetic appreciation of virgin nature and the appreciation of art (or nature affected by humanity): whereas the aesthetics of untouched nature is positive, involving only the acceptance and aesthetic appreciation of whatever exists in nature, the aesthetics of art is critical in the sense that it allows for negative aesthetic judgement. And, so positive aesthetics claims, the reason for this difference, the reason that negative aesthetic criticism is out of place in the aesthetic appreciation of nature, is that *the natural world untouched by humanity is essentially aesthetically good*.<sup>5</sup> But this doctrine needs to be made more precise. First, there is the question of its scope. It could be taken to apply to (i) nature taken as a whole, (ii) the earth's (or any other planet's) biosphere, (iii) each ecosystem, (iv) each kind of natural (or perhaps organic) item, (v) each particular natural (organic) thing, (vi) each natural event (or connected sequence of events). Second, there is the question of its strength. The claim that nature unmodified by humanity is essentially aesthetically good might be understood to allow that pristine nature possesses some negative aesthetic qualities (but qualities that are

<sup>5</sup> In his (1984) Allen Carlson decisively criticizes three possible justifications of positive aesthetics before presenting what he takes to be a more plausible justification of the doctrine. This is the first of the arguments I examine below. Stan Godlovitch distinguishes and examines various interpretations of positive aesthetics in his (1998a). Note that, taken strictly, nature unaffected by humanity now includes relatively little, if anything, within the biosphere.

as perceived by humans, are different from their appearance to those creatures that inhabit the system and are capable of perceiving them, and mean nothing to those living things that cannot perceive them but form an integral part of the system.

The idea that each ecosystem (or other natural system) has a positive overall aesthetic value implies nothing about the aesthetic values of the natural items it contains considered in themselves—in particular, that these are always positive. But the aesthetic significance of such values not always being positive would be undermined if, from the aesthetic point of view, any natural item in an ecosystem should properly be considered not in itself, but in relation to the ecosystem of which it forms a part<sup>14</sup> (or the natural environment of its creation).<sup>15</sup> However, there is nothing in the notion of aesthetic appreciation that licenses this requirement: the idea of the aesthetic appreciation of nature as nature—as what nature actually is—does not imply that every natural fact about a natural item, and in particular its role in an ecosystem, is relevant to the aesthetic appreciation of that item (as being natural) and so must be taken into account if the aesthetic appreciation of that natural item is not to be defective or shallow. It is true that just as the appreciation of a work of art requires that its parts be considered aesthetically in the context of the entire work, so the aesthetic appreciation of an ecosystem requires that any natural item in it be considered aesthetically in the light of its role in that system. But this does not yield the desired conclusion, which is an unconditional, not a conditional, requirement.

Start reading

### 3.5. FREEDOM AND RELATIVITY IN THE AESTHETIC APPRECIATION OF NATURE

What, then, is the aesthetic value of nature? I shall restrict myself to natural items, rather than sequences of events, and focus primarily

<sup>14</sup> Every item must be seen not in framed isolation but framed by its environment, and this frame in turn becomes part of the bigger picture we have to appreciate—not a “frame” but a dramatic play” (Rolsion III 1988: 239). As Yuriko Saito points out (Saito 1998), the natural consequence of this line of thought is that the proper object of aesthetic appreciation is the entire global ecosphere (if not some larger portion of nature).

<sup>15</sup> A highly implausible requirement imposed on organic and inorganic items alike by Allen Carlson's natural-environment model (Carlson 1979a). See Essay 4, §9.

on vision, while recognizing that the other senses play a significant role in the aesthetic experience of nature.<sup>16</sup> If the aesthetic appreciation of nature is appreciation of the aesthetic properties and aesthetic value of a natural item *qua* the natural thing it is, the question is what aesthetic properties and value natural items possess. Here I need to make good a claim about the aesthetic properties and values of natural items that I made earlier but did not elaborate.

First, it is necessary to clarify Walton's thesis about the relation between the aesthetic properties of a work of art and the categories of art to which it belongs. For it is not accurately represented by the formulation that a work really possesses those aesthetic properties it appears to possess when perceived in its correct categories of art by a duly sensitive observer. This would not be sufficient because, first, the work might not be in its optimal condition, and, second, the conditions of observation might not be appropriate. Accordingly, the thesis is that a work's real aesthetic properties are those manifest to a duly sensitive and well-informed observer who perceives the work in its correct artistic categories under the right conditions at the right time.

Now one issue that a defence of positive aesthetics should engage with is that of the proper level of observation at which a natural item's aesthetic qualities are supposed to appear to the informed observer. A grain of sand, observed with the naked eye, lacks as great an aesthetic appeal as many other natural things; but a microscope enables us, if not ‘To see a world in a grain of sand’ (William Blake, ‘Auguries of Innocence’), at least to see its microstructure (at a certain level), and this is likely to have a greater aesthetic appeal than its appearance to the naked eye. Similarly, a drop of water from a lake contains a multitude of organisms visible under a microscope, which possess aesthetic properties of various kinds and constitute a possible source of aesthetic value. Positive aesthetics with respect to nature would be more plausible if it were to maintain that each natural thing, at some level of observation, has a positive aesthetic value. But level of observation is just one of many factors that affect a natural thing's aesthetic appeal and manifest aesthetic qualities: other relevant factors include the observer's distance from the

<sup>16</sup> If aesthetic value is aesthetic value *for human beings*, various restrictions on the scope of the doctrine of positive aesthetics would be needed to avoid possible counterexamples drawn from the other senses—smells or tastes that all human beings find physically nauseating, for example.

object, the observer's point of view, and the nature of the light that illuminates the object. Furthermore, not only do the appearances of natural things vary under different conditions of observation, but natural things themselves undergo changes that cause them to display different aesthetic qualities at different times and make them more or less aesthetically appealing.<sup>17</sup> So the manifest aesthetic qualities of a natural item are relative to conditions both of observation and time.

The transference to nature of Walton's thesis about the aesthetic properties that works of art really possess must accommodate a crucial difference between the appreciation of art and the aesthetic appreciation of nature, which is linked with a disanalogy between the way in which categories of art and categories of nature function in the determination of the aesthetic properties and value of those items that belong to them. Whereas works of art are either immutable (if they are types), or, if subject to change, standardly have an optimal condition—at least, according to the intention of their creator—in which their aesthetic properties are manifest, not only is nature always changing but it has no optimal condition in which its aesthetic properties are manifest, and whereas certain observational manners and conditions are in general either privileged or ruled out for works of art, this is not so for natural things. Categories of nature do not function to partially determine the real aesthetic properties of natural items as categories of art do those of works of art. That natural items are not designed for the purpose of aesthetic appreciation releases them from the constraints governing the artistic appreciation of works of art: categories of art prescribe the appropriate manner of artistic appreciation as categories of nature do not prescribe the appropriate manner of aesthetic appreciation of nature. The aesthetic appreciation of nature is thereby endowed with a freedom denied to artistic appreciation: in a section of the natural world we are free to frame elements as we please, to adopt any position or move in any way, at any time of the day or night, in any atmospheric conditions, and to use any sense modality, without thereby incurring the charge of misunderstanding. No visible aspect, quality, or structure of a natural item, of its exterior or interior, perceived from any direction or distance, with or without optical

<sup>17</sup> In fact, the transient character of a natural phenomenon or a natural object's power of endurance or its longevity can itself be an aspect of its aesthetic appeal.

instruments, is deemed irrelevant to the aesthetic appreciation of that item by the requirement that it must be appreciated as the kind of natural item it is. And the same is true, *mutatis mutandis*, for the other sense modalities, in so far as the perception of taste, smell, felt texture, movement, pressure, and heat falls within the bounds of the aesthetic. The fact that an object is to be appreciated as a painting means that its weight is irrelevant, as are its smell, taste, and felt warmth or coldness; but the fact that an object is to be appreciated aesthetically as a river or as a tree in itself rules out no mode of perception nor any perceptual aspect of the object. In short, whereas categories of art disqualify certain sense modalities—internal structure, appearance under various conditions and from various distances, and so on—categories of nature do not.

If appropriate aesthetic appreciation is 'that appreciation of an object which reveals what aesthetic qualities and value it has' (Carlson 1984: 25), then in general there is no such thing as the appropriate aesthetic appreciation of nature. In the sense in which there is such a thing as the aesthetic qualities and value of a work of art, there is no such thing as the aesthetic qualities and value of nature. Of course, the truth-value of an aesthetic judgement about a natural item can be understood (as it usually is) as relative to a particular temporal slice of or stage in the item's natural history, a sensory mode, a level and manner of observation, and a perceptual aspect. But if not, the idea of the aesthetic value of a natural item is ill-defined. What are the aesthetic qualities and aesthetic value of a particular galaxy *qua* galaxy, a planet *qua* planet, a mountain *qua* mountain, a cloud *qua* cloud, a river *qua* river, a mango *qua* mango?<sup>18</sup> Perhaps the only viable conception of the aesthetic value of a natural item *qua* the natural item it is represents this value as being a function of the totality of positive and negative aesthetic qualities possessed by the item as an instance of its kind. If so, the multifaceted indefiniteness of this function underscores the problematic character of a positive aesthetics of nature.

<sup>18</sup> Is the appearance of a planet's star at sunrise and sunset an aspect of the aesthetic value of the planet *qua* planet—or perhaps of the star *qua* star? Are the reflections of trees on the bank an aspect of a river's aesthetic value *qua* river?



any version of the view that the aesthetic appreciation of nature consists in regarding nature as if it were art will be defective. First, the claim that this is in fact how we *do* appreciate nature when we appreciate nature aesthetically is vulnerable to the charge that it is untrue to the phenomenology of the aesthetic experience of nature—at least, to the character of my own and many others' experience. For me, the aesthetic appreciation of nature is impregnated with an unclouded awareness that nature is not of humanity's making but a product of natural forces and processes, and that what confronts me includes an astonishing profusion of forms and ways of life remarkably different from our own. Second, there could not be 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.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the claim that this is how we *must* appreciate nature in order to appreciate nature aesthetically since there is no alternative is manifestly false. And the claim that this is how we *should* appreciate nature aesthetically if we are to derive the greatest aesthetic satisfaction from or find the greatest aesthetic value in nature stands unsupported without some kind of measure that decides in favour of this attitude to nature rather than any alternatives.

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*.<sup>5</sup> (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.) This conception of the aesthetic appreciation of nature does not imply that

cultures hear natural sounds differently. Just as there can be no musically naive response to musical works *qua* music, there can be no naive aesthetic response to natural sounds.<sup>6</sup> But the claim is too strong. Even in the case of birdsong, which is what Davies has principally in mind, our musical experience does not need to mould our perception on pain of our failing to respond aesthetically to the sounds.

<sup>4</sup> See Essay 3, §2.

<sup>5</sup> See Essay 1.

each natural item should be appreciated under a concept of the kind of natural item it is. In fact, that thesis, if it is understood to imply that such appreciation is necessary to discern the item's true aesthetic properties, faces considerable difficulties, some of which will emerge later. Apart from any other considerations, in the case of various natural items it is hard to see what would be involved in and gained by appreciating them under a concept of the kind of natural item they are. Nevertheless, for an important class of natural items, namely forms of life, not only is it easy to see what would be involved in and gained by appreciating them under concepts of the natural items they are, but this policy recommends itself.<sup>6</sup>

Another thesis might be thought to be an immediate implication of the conception of the aesthetic appreciation of nature as the aesthetic appreciation of nature *as* nature. Given that the natural world has not been designed to be an object of aesthetic interest, then if the natural world is to be appreciated *as what it is*, it must be recognized as having been formed by, and to be the continuing locus of, physical, chemical, geological, ecological, meteorological, and evolutionary processes, all of which take place in complete indifference to the aesthetic beholder. It might appear to follow from this that any instance of the aesthetic appreciation of nature as nature that is not superficial must be informed by an understanding of the natural processes that have brought about and that are at work in the object of appreciation, and that the fuller the understanding the deeper the appreciation. But this conclusion will follow only if *aesthetic* appreciation of nature must be superficial unless knowledge of an item's origin and the forces responsible for its appearance inform a person's observation of the item, and only if aesthetic appreciation is deeper the more it is penetrated by and the product of such knowledge. And that condition is questionable.<sup>7</sup>

Start reading

#### 4.6. 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

<sup>6</sup> See Essay 1, §6.

<sup>7</sup> See §8.

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 he opposes 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 that item. His argument turns on ideas developed 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* or *correct* categories to experience the item as belonging to. 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. Walton's best-known illustration of his claim that what aesthetic properties a work seems to possess is (partly) dependent on which of its features are standard, which variable, and which contra-standard for the perceiver (and so dependent on which categories the person experiences the work under) is of an imaginary society that does not have an established medium of painting, but does produce a kind of work of art called 'guernicas', a 'guernica' being like a version of Picasso's painting *Guernica* done in bas-relief; that is, it is a surface with the colours and shapes of Picasso's painting but moulded to protrude from the wall like a relief map of some terrain, 'guernicas' being distinguished from one another by the different geometrical natures of their surfaces. Picasso's *Guernica*, when seen as a painting, is seen as dynamic, violent, disturbing, but when

seen as a 'guernica' would be seen differently—as cold and lifeless, or serene and restful, or bland, dull, boring, or whatever.

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, (i), does so transfer. That is, it is at least sometimes true that what aesthetic properties a natural item appears to possess is 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, cute, and Clydesdale horses are perceived as majestic, 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: 295)

(Note, though, 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, (ii)? 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 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 of nature 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 those concepts discloses the aesthetic properties it really possesses and thereby makes possible a proper assessment of its aesthetic value. A crucial fact is that, unlike art, which of the categories a natural item belongs to are the correct categories to aesthetically appreciate it under is not determined by the idea of appreciating it *as nature*. 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, 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, a view embraced by many who have been entranced by the variety and profusion, the apparently omnipresent beauty, of the natural world.

Stop reading

#### 4.7. POSITIVE AESTHETICS<sup>8</sup>

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.<sup>9</sup> 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, for example, 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 1998a,b).

It would be a very small step from the proposition that no natural item, or combination of items, untouched by humanity possesses negative aesthetic qualities to the conclusion that every natural item, or array of such items, unaffected by humanity has a positive overall aesthetic value—a step vanishingly small given the kind of freedom that characterizes the aesthetic appreciation of nature.<sup>10</sup> 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, mere pastiche, for example—the premise 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

<sup>8</sup> For a fuller treatment of the doctrine of positive aesthetics see Essay 3, §4.

<sup>9</sup> As noted in Essay 3 n. 5, pristine nature, understood as nature unaffected by humanity, now includes relatively little, perhaps nothing at all, within the biosphere. But in some cases the effects of humanity are minimal, and the effects of humanity can disappear entirely, as when a piece of land reverts to its former, perhaps natural, state, displaying the same diversity and proportion of flora as in the surrounding area, so that a portion of nature once affected by humanity might at a later date properly be thought of as pristine again.

<sup>10</sup> See §8.

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. But a member of a species can be a defective instance of that species, malformed, 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. Hence, an adherent of the view that a natural thing cannot possess a negative aesthetic quality would need to show that none of the ways in which organisms can be defective instances of their kinds could be manifest in their appearance in such a manner as to display a negative aesthetic quality. It does not seem possible to establish this.

If the possibility that nothing in virgin 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, 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 (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 (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 most ambitious version of positive aesthetics is correct.<sup>11</sup> 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 which 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 covering such different phenomena as mere visual appearances, items defined as what they are by the use made of them, and ones defined 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 pristine nature was *not* flawlessly 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.

Start reading

#### 4.8. FREEDOM, RELATIVITY, OBJECTIVITY, AND POSITIVE AESTHETICS<sup>12</sup>

I can now make good my claim (§6) 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 indicate the consequences this has for the idea of a natural item's aesthetic properties and value

<sup>11</sup> See Essay 3, §4.

<sup>12</sup> Compare Essay 3, §5.

and so for the viability of the transference to nature of Walton's philosophical thesis and for the plausibility of the doctrine of positive aesthetics with respect to nature.

The various art forms are sometimes divided into those for which the members are abstract 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 natural things. First, lacking the immutability of abstract 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 both an optimal condition, according to their creator's intention, in which their aesthetic properties are manifest and a dilapidated condition in which their true aesthetic properties are no longer displayed. 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, (ii) renders certain modes of perception and engagement with the work inappropriate, and (iii) indicates how the appropriate mode (or modes) of perception should be employed—at what it should (or should not) be directed and under what conditions—a natural thing's natural category 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 employed, power of magnification or amplification, and so on, none of these being optimal or mandatory, so that the range of its

aesthetic properties or aesthetically relevant appearances is typically open-ended in a manner uncharacteristic of works of art. The lack of constraints imposed by categories of nature on the aesthetic appreciation of items in its domain endows the aesthetic appreciation of nature with a distinctive kind of freedom.

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, often being plagued in particular by irresolvable uncertainty as to the relevance or irrelevance to its own aesthetic value of one or another aspect of the world in which the thing is involved.<sup>13</sup> (To employ a conception of the aesthetic value of a natural item *qua* the natural item it is as the sum of its positive and negative aesthetic qualities considered as an instance of its kind would be to use a notion that is multiply indefinite and renders the aesthetic value of everything in nature uncertain, as is especially obvious in the case of such natural items as mountains, rivers, or storms, for example.) 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.

Stop reading

#### 4.9. MODELS OF NATURE APPRECIATION

Carlson has suggested that we need 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

<sup>13</sup> 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.

proper aesthetic attitude towards nature is one of aloofness receives no support from the idea that such an attitude matches or mirrors nature's aloofness, that is distance, from us. And the putative ultimate mysteriousness of nature is not in itself sufficient to warrant the claim that the proper aesthetic attitude towards nature is one of aloofness: not only are there more fitting attitudes towards ineradicable mysteriousness, in fact there is a curious mismatch between aloofness and mysteriousness, since the attitude in no way constitutes a suitable response to its object.<sup>23</sup>

This leaves two matters unattended to: the intrinsic non-moral worth attributed by acentric environmentalism to all of nature indiscriminately, and the alleged arbitrariness of an anthropocentric natural aesthetic. They can be dealt with very briefly. First, what is wrong with wanton environmental destruction as such, which means even when no habitat is jeopardized, is just that it is wanton, expressing nothing better than delight in destruction. So wanton environmental destruction does not need to be thought of as being aesthetically offensive and acentric environmentalism does not need to locate an intrinsic non-moral worth in nature. And, second, since Godlovich's argument concerning the alleged arbitrariness of a centric natural aesthetic hinges on just this mistaken claim—'If we were giants, crushing a rock monument, even a stony moon, would be no more aesthetically offensive than flattening the odd sand castle is to us now'—it falls with it.

Start reading

#### 4.10. A CHIMERICAL QUEST

If none of the proposed models of the appropriate aesthetic appreciation of nature is adequate, what should take their place? Given the role that such a model is intended to perform, the correct answer

<sup>23</sup> Carlson, who regards Godlovich's position as more a religion of nature worship than a model of [at least a dimension of] the appropriate aesthetic appreciation of nature (Carlson 1995), himself embraces the conclusion that, because nature is 'distinct from and beyond humankind, something essentially alien', 'Our appreciative response is to a mystery we will seemingly never fully comprehend... in appreciating nature we are aware that the object is alien, a mystery, and therefore ultimately beyond our appreciation and beyond our understanding, our judgment, our mastery' (Carlson 1993).

is, I believe, 'Nothing': the fact that the aesthetic appreciation of nature is endowed with a freedom denied to the appreciation of art 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. In the case of art, Carlson writes: 'We know what to appreciate in that we can distinguish a work and its parts from that which is not it nor a part of it... And... we can distinguish its aesthetically relevant aspects from its aspects without such relevance'. And we know how to appreciate a work of art in that we know whether to look or listen, from what distance, whether to remain in one spot or to move around, and so on. The assumption underlying the search for a model of the aesthetic appreciation of nature is that some counterpart of our knowledge of art is needed that in the case of nature (or the natural environment) will answer the what and how questions about nature that we know so well how to answer in the case of a work of art. But, first, there is no counterpart problem about what to appreciate in nature: in general we need no special knowledge to be able to distinguish a natural item and its parts from any other natural thing and no aspect of a natural item that is capable of being appreciated aesthetically is properly deemed an aesthetically irrelevant aspect of the item; and we are free to consider any natural item either in itself or in the context of a larger ensemble (the ecosystem to which it belongs, for example), or to focus not on an individual natural item but on an array or a group of natural items (a sky-scape, or a flock, for instance). And, second, there are no constraints imposed on manner of appreciation—what actions to perform and mode of perception to engage in—in virtue of the natural category an item belongs to that parallel the constraints imposed by categories of art. Accordingly, there is no such thing as the appropriate foci of aesthetic significance in the natural environment or the appropriate boundaries of the setting. The answer to the question, 'In the case of nature (i) what is to be aesthetically appreciated and (ii) how is it to be aesthetically appreciated?' is just this: (i) Whatever is available in nature for aesthetic appreciation (as nature), (ii) in whatever manner or manners it is possible to appreciate it aesthetically (as nature). The mistaken search for a model of the correct or appropriate aesthetic appreciation of nature reflects a lack of recognition of

the freedom that is integral to the aesthetic appreciation of nature, a freedom which means that much more is up to the aesthetic observer of nature than of art, a freedom which is one aspect of nature's distinctive aesthetic appeal.

Done

## REFERENCES

- ALLISON, HENRY (2001). *Kant's Theory of Taste*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- ARISTOTLE (2001). *On the Parts of Animals*, trans. James G. Lennox. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- BEARDSLEY, MONROE C. (1970). 'The Aesthetic Point of View', in Howard Kiefer and Milton Munitz (eds.), *Perspectives in Education, Religion, and the Arts*. Albany: SUNY Press, 219–37. Repr. in Beardsley's *The Aesthetic Point of View*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1982, 15–34.
- BEISER, FREDERICK (1998). 'Schiller, Johann Christoph Friedrich von', in Michael Kelly (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*. New York: Oxford University Press, iv, 224–9.
- BRLEANT, ARNOLD (1993). 'The Aesthetics of Art and Nature', in Salim Kemal and Ivan Gaskell (eds.), *Landscape, Natural Beauty and the Arts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 228–43.
- BRADLEY, A. C. (1909). 'The Sublime', in his *Oxford Lectures on Poetry*. London: Macmillan, 37–65.
- BUDD, MALCOLM (2001a). 'Wollheim on Correspondence, Projective Properties and Expressive Perception', in Rob van Gerwen (ed.), *Richard Wollheim on the Art of Painting: Art as Representation and Expression*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 101–11.
- (2001b). 'The Pure Judgement of Taste as an Aesthetic Reflective Judgement'. *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 41/3 (July 2001), 247–60.
- BURKE, EDMUND (1958). *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. J. T. Boulton. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- CARLSON, ALLEN (1976). 'Environmental Aesthetics and the Dilemma of Aesthetic Education'. *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 10/2, 69–82.
- (1977). 'On the Possibility of Quantifying Scenic Beauty'. *Landscape Planning*, 4/2 131–72.
- (1979a). 'Appreciation and the Natural Environment'. *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 37/3, 267–75.
- (1979b). 'Formal Qualities in the Natural Environment'. *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 13/3, 99–114.
- (1981). 'Nature, Aesthetic Judgment, and Objectivity'. *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 40/1, 15–27.
- (1984). 'Nature and Positive Aesthetics'. *Environmental Ethics*, 6: 5–34.