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AESTHETIC APPRECIATION AND THE MANY STORIES ABOUT NATURE

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

In this paper I show that there are important problems with Carlson's claim that natural science (and its predecessors and analogues³) does or should provide the primary account or story informing our aesthetic appreciation of nature.⁴ I propose that there are good reasons for believing that aesthetic appreciation does and should benefit from a great many diverse stories, as gathered by people from a great variety of walks of life and cultures.⁵

¹ See, for example, the special issue on environmental aesthetics of *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 56, no. 2 (Spring 1998), edited by Arnold Berleant and Allen Carlson, and the 'Symposium: Natural Aesthetics', edited by Stan Godlovitch, *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, vol. 33, no. 3 (Fall 1999).

² See Allen Carlson, *Aesthetics and the Environment* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000).

³ In the following I will focus on the role that Carlson grants scientific knowledge, largely leaving aside the function of 'its predecessors and analogues' since Carlson only grants the latter a 'second best' role in appropriate aesthetic appreciation of nature. In any case, as is well known, what is 'common sense' to people from one society may not make any sense at all to people from another; hence, it cannot be a very fruitful way to describe the knowledge conducive to adequate aesthetic appreciation.

⁴ I here adopt Carlson's use of the term 'story' as a neutral way of making reference to the diverse accounts that might guide our aesthetic appreciation. This is not to denote any prejudice either in favour of 'stories' in the literary sense or against unadorned-prose scientific reporting.

⁵ In this paper I focus on Carlson's 'Appreciating Art and Appreciating Nature', in Salim Kemal and Ivan Gaskell (eds), *Landscape, Natural Beauty and the Arts* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1975), pp. 199-227, reprinted in Carlson's *Aesthetics and the Environment*, pp. 102-125. Other recent discussions of aesthetic appreciation of nature include Noël Carroll's 'On Being Moved by Nature: Between Religion and Natural History', also in Kemal and Gaskell, and Malcolm Budd, 'The Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, vol. 36 (1996), pp. 207-222. Carroll shares my concern with alternative (natural science-independent) bases for the appreciation of nature by developing an account that focuses on our capacity to become emotionally moved by nature. Budd's discussion is directed primarily at an analysis of what is meant by the aesthetic appreciation of nature, while leaving open the cognitive basis on

CARLSON'S CASE FOR THE PRIORITY OF THE SCIENTIFIC STORY

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

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

In the case of these avant-garde and anti-art works our appreciation is guided by knowledge of 'the story' behind the artwork, that is, by an account of how the artist has chosen particular technique or circumstance to generate the order appreciable in the work. Carlson proposes that in the case of nature we analogously do and should look for the story behind its generation, and that the proper story in this case is provided by natural science (or, less ideally, by its common-sense predecessors and analogues). He concludes that, consequently, for proper aesthetic appreciation of nature we should have scientific knowledge of its aetiology.

In the following section I identify problems with three aspects of Carlson's proposal. First, I question the supposition that knowing the aetiology either of an artwork or of an aspect of nature is necessary or sufficient for its respective aesthetic appreciation. Secondly, I point out that in many cases scientific knowledge may be neutral, or even harmful, to our aesthetic appreciation of nature, because it directs our attention to the theoretical level and the general case, diverting us from the personal level and the particular case that we actually need to engage. Thirdly, I note that importing the categories of science into aesthetic appreciation of nature may constitute a hindrance to our capacity to discover, through aesthetic appreciation, what nature is.

which one may come to this appreciation. Since these papers are only peripherally relevant to my concerns I will not discuss them here further.

⁶ See e.g. Allen Carlson, 'Nature, Aesthetic Appreciation, and Knowledge', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 53 (1995), p. 396 and *passim*.

PROBLEMS REGARDING AETIOLOGY, THEORY, AND CATEGORIES

Aetiologies and Aesthetic Appreciation

Directing ourselves, first of all, to Carlson's analysis of our intercourse with artworks, we may ask whether, generally speaking, art history indeed is the basis for their proper aesthetic appreciation. Even if art history may be a useful tool for individuals who frequent art museums, since it provides the viewer with more or less ready-made categories into which one can place the works on display, aesthetic appreciation neither requires nor is exhausted by art-historical classification.

If appreciation is a form of 'sizing up', as Carlson suggests, then in appreciation we should like to ask whether a particular piece has certain strengths due to the organization of its parts that other works do not, whether it is innovative in important respects, what gives it its aesthetic appeal and power in the context of the artist's *oeuvre*, and so on. No potted art history, however, would be able to supply these tools for appreciation, which, arguably, can only be acquired through lengthy, searching exposure to many works; continuous conversation with others about suitable criteria for evaluation; personal reflection on the significance of the work's style, execution, and personal impact; and so on.

The insufficiency of art history in proper aesthetic appreciation of artworks is particularly evident once we move into the contemporary art scene, for which no art-historical guide is available. In these latter circumstances it should quickly become evident that art history can only provide criteria for conservatism in art; truly innovative works fall precisely outside the ken of criteria developed with the aid of art history. This was also true, for example, of avant-garde and anti-art works that do not have (what Carlson calls) a design.

On Carlson's account, art history is to help us in aesthetic appreciation by providing us with aetiologies, and therefore providing those works with a framework of some sort. That is, knowing of the aims of the avant-garde and anti-art movements may help us to understand why their products fit so strangely next to their predecessors in art history. But, from a more fundamental perspective, aetiologies by themselves would be supremely useless; the fundamental feature in aesthetic appreciation surely is attentive experience of the thing to be appreciated, and such experience may not be necessarily furthered through aetiology.

For instance, even if through knowledge of their aetiologies we may be able to make sense of the peculiar look of Pollock's paintings or of odd juxtapositions in surrealist chance poetry, these works insofar as aesthetically appreciable, really want to be attentively heard and seen, respectively. To worry about how they came about is like reading the label of origin on a bottle of wine, or the biographical note on the wall next to a painting in an art museum: it puts things in context, but surely is secondary to experiencing the thing (the wine or the sculpture) properly.

If we now consider the case of nature, we may note that having knowledge of the aetiology of some natural object, site, or event similarly may be a convenient way to put things into a comprehensible framework. Knowing that arbutus trees (*Arbutus menziesii*), endemic to the Northwest Pacific Coast, are related to the heather bush (*Erica*) through their common family (Ericaceae) may give me a sense of how diversity in environments can engender diversity in speciation, but surely is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for their proper aesthetic appreciation. In other words, I may be able quite thoroughly to enjoy a local stand of arbutus and garry oak trees (*Quercus garryana*) located in a camas (*Camassia quamash*) meadow without needing to know their evolutionary history, their taxonomic nomenclature, or even their individual developmental story.

In fact, my appreciation of their special virtues, such as the sensuously skin-like, red-green trunks of the arbutus trees or the weathered-looking, deeply corrugated trunks of the garry oak trees, may be hampered if I am preoccupied with either their ontogeny or their phylogeny. Just as the aesthetic appreciation of the painting or the wine primarily require that I attend to what I am now presented with (certain paint marks on a flat surface, and certain flavours, colours, and odours in the vinous liquid, respectively), so the aesthetic appreciation of the stand of trees demands that I focus mainly on what now is present to me while attending to the trees.

Abstract Theory versus the Concrete Particular

More generally, even if in some circumstances scientific knowledge may be helpful in the aesthetic appreciation of nature, in others it may be neutral or even harmful. While walking to the bottom of the Grand Canyon from its rim, knowledge of geology may be helpful to our aesthetic appreciation if it makes us focus with attention on the various visible strata uncovered by the river's action throughout the ages. Such knowledge may serve a similar function to the role played by knowledge of the manner in which layering of paint on a canvas generates certain distinguishable colouring effects in a de Kooning painting, or of the manner in which layering of plot lines in a novel generates certain noticeable dramatic effects. But in some other circumstances scientific knowledge will be quite irrelevant or even harmful.

For instance, to know that water has been chemically identified as made up of molecules composed of two positively charged hydrogen atoms and one negatively charged oxygen atom probably has no impact on my aesthetic appreciation of great expanses and depths of the stuff, while I sit at the Vancouver Island shores of the Juan de Fuca Strait gazing across to the Olympic Mountains. And, if my cognizance of geology, chemistry, or botany were to lead me to really focus on, for example, seeking appropriate scientific classifications for the Olympic Mountains, the watery expanse, or the arbutus tree I sit beneath, diverting my attention from the natural objects and sites concretely at hand, such

knowledge should be considered harmful to my aesthetic appreciation of the natural environment in which I am immersed.

The trouble with using scientific knowledge as a guide in these circumstances may be partly due to the fact that scientific knowledge characteristically draws our attention to the theoretical level, pretending to encompass all things of a certain kind. So, what we learn about arbutus trees from natural science is (supposed to be) true of arbutus trees in general. This perspective may draw me away from taking note of the concrete character of the particular thing I seek to appreciate aesthetically: it is myself standing in front of this arbutus tree who now experiences it as sensuous and sinuous.⁷ And it is on the basis of that very particular concrete experience that I come to an appreciation of this tree here. Only subsequently may it be relevant that some of the features found in this particular tree similarly are represented in other arbutus trees.

Categories and Discovery

There is another problem with Carlson's proposal. Carlson claims that we need the categories derived from science, and its common-sense predecessors and analogues, in order properly to perceive and appreciate nature. Part of Carlson's emphasis on the importance of science for aesthetic appreciation derives from his conviction that science 'is the paradigm of that which reveals objects for what they are and with the properties they have'.⁸ What Carlson seems to overlook is that aesthetic appreciation is also a *sui generis* way of coming to know what things are. In other words, it is a form of discovery that can break the mould of previously taken-for-granted categories and beliefs. And, insofar as it is discovery of what nature is that we aim at in aesthetic appreciation, it may be counter-productive overly to rely on any set categories, be they scientific or other.

In the following section I propose that we do not limit our possibilities of discovery of nature to the categories of natural science and its predecessors and analogues, but that we consider a diversity of stories or accounts as our guides in its aesthetic appreciation.

THE MANY STORIES AND OUR APPRECIATIVE CAPACITIES

Carlson quite correctly points out that aesthetic appreciation requires engagement. As just discussed, we may ask, though, if theoretical knowledge, as offered by science, for example, is or should be a primary component of such

⁷ Also see Holmes Rolston III, 'Does Aesthetic Appreciation of Landscapes Need to be Science-Based?', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, vol. 35 (1995), pp. 374-386, who agrees that there is an important 'participatory' element in aesthetic appreciation of at least one part of nature, landscapes, but falls in with Carlson in attributing to science the role of primary guide. He, like Carlson, overlooks the possible irrelevance or counterproductivity that a fixation on science in aesthetic appreciation may entail.

⁸ Carlson, 'Appreciating Art and Appreciating Nature', p. 219.

engagement and, hence, appreciation. Clearly, certain objects of aesthetic appreciation, such as Rembrandt's miniature etchings, primarily call for sensitive sensory attention more than any particular knowledge. Similarly, some works, such as musical works intended to evoke places or seasons, and all literary creations, probably require generous doses of imagination more than anything else. So, if aesthetic appreciation entails meaningfully engaging a natural object, site, or event then some other ingredients besides theoretical knowledge, namely a keen capacity for sensory attention and an unprejudiced, agile imagination, may be of great importance.

It is well known that perceptual attention is prone to fatigue. For most individuals it becomes very difficult to spend more than a few seconds looking at a painting, even if they expressly go to a gallery to view it. Furthermore, the number of people who complain of boredom or sleepiness even while listening to concerts of compositions that they claim to value is considerable. There are very few among us, excepting the most experienced connoisseurs perhaps, who are able to maintain their attention on the bouquet of a particular wine after the first few sips have been considered. All this poses a problem for aesthetic appreciation, both in the case of art and in the case of nature, since to make appropriate aesthetic assessments we likely require greater endurance than we can ordinarily offer.

I propose that we may be able to extend our 'aesthetic endurance' by enriching our aesthetic horizons, by increasing the contrast in our perceptual experience, and, generally, by enhancing the possibilities for the play of the imagination. One way of doing this is through coming to know a diversity of stories. In the following I discuss three sorts of stories, artistic and non-artistic, verbal and non-verbal.

Artistic Stories and Aesthetic Community

Nature is a term that covers a great deal,⁹ but even if we restrict ourselves to landscapes there are countless accounts or stories that can and do guide us in our aesthetic appreciation of nature. We may consider, for example, the impact of the stories about the Canadian West told by Rudy Wiebe, or the story of Peter Handke's visit to Mont Ste Victoire.¹⁰ Visiting the Canadian West after reading Wiebe, we may be able to find aesthetic pleasure in travelling across the otherwise perhaps alien land, with its seemingly endless expanses of prairie grass and its so-called badlands. Visiting Mont Ste Victoire after reading Handke's account, itself inspired by Paul Cézanne's countless painted renderings of the mountain,

⁹ See Budd for a listing.

¹⁰ See e.g. Rudy Wiebe, *The Temptations of Big Bear* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1976) and *The Angel of the Tar Sands and Other Stories* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1982); Peter Handke, 'The Lesson of Sainte Victoire', in *Slow Homecoming*, translated by Ralph Manheim (London: Methuen, 1985).

we may feel the invitation to scrutinize this mountain with some of the aesthetic enthusiasm for its craggy rocks that both of these artists felt for it.

The artistic stories of our artists carry out an important service since aesthetic appreciation of nature often is much more accessible to the rest of us ordinary people if mediated by the stories of capable and experienced aesthetic appreciators. Their accounts are also, often strikingly, more capable of inspiring aesthetic appreciation than some of the relevant 'scientific stories'. Compare, for example, the following summary geological description of the island of Santorini with the account of the same place given by the contemporary Greek poet George Seferis.

Santorini, also anciently called Thera, is a volcanic island in the Aegean Sea which exploded at some point in time in the Minoan period. Some have identified it with Homer's 'Phaiakian land', which to Odysseus 'looked like a shield lying on the misty face of the water'.¹¹ As a preface to his poem 'Santorini' Seferis quotes *Guide to Greece*: 'Thera geologically consists of pumice and china clay, and in its gulf . . . islands have appeared and disappeared'. This gives us a capsule account of the scientific information on this extraordinary island.¹² Seferis' preface continues quoting *Guide to Greece*, which says that Santorini 'was the center of an ancient cult in which lyric dances of solemn and austere rhythm, called *gymnopaïdia*, were performed'.¹³ Seferis's poem 'Santorini' expresses his aesthetic appreciation for the island in the context of his appreciation for this ancient rhythm.

Santorini

Lean if you can toward the dark sea, forgetting
the sound of a flute above bare feet
which trod in your sleep in that other sunken life.

Write if you can on your last sherd
the day, the name, the place,
and throw it into the sea to sink.

We found ourselves naked on the pumice
seeing the islands breaking the surface,
seeing the red islands sinking
in their sleep, in our sleep. . . .¹⁴

A visitor to the flat surface on the promontory-peninsula on Santorini where the

¹¹ Homer, *The Odyssey*, book 5, lines 280-281.

¹² Of course, there is a lot more that could be said about Santorini from the standpoint of natural science.

¹³ George Seferis, *Gymnopaïdia*, in *Mythistorima and Gymnopaïdia*, translated by Mary Cooper Walton (Athens: Lycabettus Press, 1977), p. 61.

¹⁴ Seferis, 'Santorini' in *Gymnopaïdia*, p. 63.

gymnopaïdia dances possibly were performed will see a large expanse of sea below and surrounding her on all sides, except on the side that connects the peninsula to the rest of the half-volcano that remains since the island exploded. If she is knowledgeable in geology she might discover that it is a volcanic island consisting of pumice and china clay; this bit of knowledge may help her classify this part of nature of the island Santorini. I submit, however, that if she knows Seferis's poem she will be much better equipped to appreciate aesthetically her natural surrounds.¹⁵

With regard to the stories of natural science Carlson says that 'They illuminate nature as ordered and in doing so give it meaning, significance, and beauty—qualities those giving the stories find aesthetically appealing'.¹⁶ I propose that having Seferis's poem in mind while exploring Santorini is a fruitful way to 'illuminate nature' so that we can perceive it as having 'meaning, significance, and beauty': the sea may now be noticed as being dark and deep, echoing the Homeric 'wine-dark seas'; the contrast between the worn character of the rocks on the ancient square, carrying the imprint of many generations of feet, and the sharp, rough rocks on the steep cliffs off the promontory may now be appreciated more readily; the precarious condition and ephemeral character of the small islands jutting out on the inside of the ancient caldera may now be recalled.

Moreover, the poet's perspective may provide us not only with a viewpoint to his appreciation of nature, but also with a perspective on the appreciation of nature that the *gymnopaïdia* dancers and their contemporaries may have had. He places us in a state of contemplation that may recreate some of their perceptions for us. Stories such as the one contained in Seferis's poem widen our aesthetic horizon such that we enter into aesthetic community with aesthetic appreciators spanning time, and possibly reaching across cultures. In this way such stories may facilitate our later-coming aesthetic appreciation of nature.

Non-artistic Stories and Perceptual Salience

There are many non-artistic accounts, originating in our various societies' interactions with non-human nature, that may guide us in our aesthetic appreciation.¹⁷ We may consider, for example, the Dreaming of the Aboriginal Peoples of Australia. The Dreaming is an account of the supernatural beings that inhabited and still are present in the Aboriginal Peoples' lands. These beings do not have an existence separate from nature but interpenetrate it. One anthropologist puts it this way:

¹⁵ Furthermore, if the visitor knew Éric Satie's musical piece *Gymnopédies* there would be a further level of appreciation added to her experience, which, albeit quite indirectly, might guide her to appreciate the natural features of the island in still another way.

¹⁶ Carlson, 'Appreciating Art and Appreciating Nature', p. 221.

¹⁷ My distinction between artistic and non-artistic stories is pragmatic. It is based on whether the 'story-tellers' applied the techniques and conceptions characteristic of artistic productions.

the isomorphic fit between the natural and supernatural means that all nature is coded and charged by the sacred, while the sacred is everywhere within the physical landscape. Myths and mythic trackings cross over numerous tribal boundaries and over thousands of kilometres, and every particular form and feature of the terrain has a well-developed 'story' behind it.¹⁸

This means that a stretch of land, which to an uninstructed person may appear nearly indistinguishable from the next, may contain great numbers of perceptually salient features in the eyes of a person knowledgeable of the Dreaming. We may take note, for example, of the Tjati (Red Lizard) story from Uluru (Ayers Rock):

Tjati is a small, red lizard who lives on the mulga flats. In the creation period he travelled to Uluru past Atila. When Tjati threw his kali, a curved throwing stick, it embedded itself in the rock face of Uluru. Tjati scooped with his hands into the rock face to retrieve the kali, leaving a series of bowl-shaped hollows at Walaritja. Unable to recover his weapon, Tjati finally died in a cave at Kantju, where his other implements and bodily remains survive as large boulders on the cave floor.¹⁹

This story illustrates well the details in the landscape that may become perceptually salient through knowledge of it, much in analogy to the manner in which a rock face might become perceptually salient for someone knowledgeable of the geological story concerning its different strata. Salience is important to aesthetic appreciation insofar as it makes objects, sites or events perceptible and, hence, makes appreciation possible. That is, if aesthetic appreciation depends on our capacity to *take note* of a thing, to make a thing the object of our sensory attention and of our imaginative play, then stories such as this one may be of great value because, in contrast to scientific classification, which, due to its abstractness, draws us *away* from the present thing, such stories, because of their concreteness, draw us *into* the object, site, or event.

Non-verbally Expressed Stories and the Play of the Imagination

Besides verbally expressed artistic and non-artistic stories we may take note of various other cultural resources that 'tell' stories in a non-verbal fashion. Among the cultural resources that may 'tell' stories we can list paintings, engravings, sculptures; architectural, musical, film and dance creations; fine wines, fine foods; as well as dendroglyphs, monuments such as tombs and ceremonial buildings, stone arrangements, and so on. Any cultural resource can serve the function of leading a person to reflect on the aesthetic appreciation of its makers;

¹⁸ Aram A. Yengoyan, 'Economy, Society and Myth in Aboriginal Australia', in W. H. Edwards (ed.), *Traditional Aboriginal Society* (Melbourne: MacMillan, 1987), pp. 203–224 at p. 215.

¹⁹ Paul S. Taçon, 'The Power of Place: Cross-cultural Responses to Natural and Cultural Landscapes of Stone and Earth', in Joan M. Vastokas (ed.), *Perspectives on Canadian Landscape: Minority Traditions* (North York, Ont.: Roberts Centre for Canadian Studies, 1991), p. 20.

in this way contemporary appreciators, once again, may come into a wider aesthetic community.

Some of those cultural goods, moreover, may make *explicit* reference to the natural world, as is the case with many paintings and sculptures featuring images of landscapes, animals, or plants. In this way those who 'read' the stories contained in the objects come to be reminded of the natural environment that surrounds them, and may be enticed to fixate on that environment a little longer, thereby aiding in the aesthetic appreciation of those things.²⁰

Some cultural resources, however, may only *implicitly* 'tell' stories that may guide us in our aesthetic appreciation of the natural world. For instance, finding rock art (petroglyphs and pictographs), dendroglyphs, or ancient tombs at some relatively remote location may lead to us to wonder what plants and animals the people who were there used for food, what pool or creek they used to supply themselves with water, what overhangs they used as shelters, and so on.

Furthermore, we may wonder whether any landmarks or species or natural phenomena near such sited cultural resources may have been perceptually salient in such a way as to have been an object of aesthetic appreciation to our predecessors at such locations. Sometimes the arrangement of sites supply possible answers to such questions. I encountered a particularly striking example a few years ago while visiting two dolmens (megalithic, table-like structures) in Antequera, Spain. From the deepest part of the interior space of one of the dolmens one has a view through the opening that perfectly frames a mountain with a shape of a head in profile, leading me to attend imaginatively to this feature in the land in a way I certainly would not have otherwise.

In sum, diverse stories, verbal and non-verbal, artistic and non-artistic, may in various ways stimulate the play of the imagination, which itself may facilitate our capacity to attend perceptually to the natural world, which in turn may lead to enhanced aesthetic appreciation of it.

OBJECTIONS

I consider three sorts of objections to my proposal that in aesthetic appreciation we do and should heed a great variety of stories. The first is that such stories, if non-scientific and divergent from 'common sense', tend to be either merely subjective or perhaps outright false, and therefore problematic. The second is that, in contrast to natural science, the type of stories I promote as guides to aesthetic appreciation are 'cultural' and, hence, inapplicable to the appreciation of nature. The third is that these stories are driven by particular values, and hence distort the pure aesthetic appreciation of nature.

²⁰ Also see Robert Stecker, 'The Correct and the Appropriate in the Appreciation of Nature', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, vol. 37 (1997), pp. 397-402, who argues that landscape paintings, for example, may be a resource and not a distraction from landscape appreciation because of our tendency for tacking back and forth between art and nature.

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Carlson mostly finds it inappropriate that aesthetic appreciation be guided by literary or personal accounts, for the reason that such accounts may only reflect a 'subjective' perspective and not an 'objective' point of view. Furthermore, Carlson dismisses traditional stories about nature that do not originate in natural science because he supposes that we do not find references to gods, heroes, and other 'mythic' beings credible.²¹

It is, however, beside the point whether a story focuses on a personal, 'subjective' experience if it leads to aesthetic appreciation of nature. Similarly it is irrelevant whether we (or any other people) find the existence of gods, heroes, or traditional culture figures credible if our purpose is to account for the aesthetic appreciation of nature. In other words, whether the entities referred to are credible is irrelevant if it turns out that such stories do in fact guide and mediate the aesthetic appreciation of nature—and, as we already saw, there is evidence of this.

At this point Carlson may claim that, no matter what may have guided aesthetic appreciation in the past, appropriate aesthetic appreciation should be guided by objective, true accounts, and that therefore literary, personal, or 'mythic' accounts are problematic. In reply we may note that, although some accounts, such as those that make the Earth out to be the ruined refuge of 'fallen angels' and sinful human beings, in fact can subvert the full flourishing of aesthetic appreciation, other accounts, such as the ones mentioned earlier, may enhance it (for the reasons given). Consequently, stories need to be considered on a case-by-case basis for the degree to which they highlight or obscure aesthetically appreciable features of nature. That is, we may want to consider stories from a functional point of view by asking whether the account under consideration will illuminate the object of aesthetic consideration in a new and fruitful way. If yes, then we have no good reason to dismiss such a story as inappropriate.

The second objection I want to consider arises from the observation that, in contrast to the stories of science, such stories as I propose as legitimate aids in aesthetic appreciation are 'cultural' and maybe appropriate to the appreciation of culturally moulded items, such as certain agriculturally modified landscapes, but are irrelevant to a proper appreciation of 'pure nature'. In other words, the objection proposes that in appreciating parts of nature, such as the Australian bush, stories, like those traditionally passed on by the Aboriginal Peoples, are inappropriate to its aesthetic appreciation because these stories concern the cultural overlay rather than nature itself.

This objection suffers from a curious sort of myopia, since it overlooks that the 'stories of science' are also deeply cultural since they arise from very particular cultural conditions (as were given in Modern Europe) and serve very specific cultural goals (namely predictive and retrodictive explanation). The cultural

²¹ Also see Marcia Muelder Eaton, 'Fact and Fiction in the Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 56 (1998), pp. 127-137, who, in agreement with Carlson, finds 'myths and legends' problematic because she supposes them false.

specificity of science, as currently practised, becomes evident as soon as one realizes that not all societies are, or have been, engaged in the project of developing science as we know it. Consequently, whether non-scientific stories should guide aesthetic appreciation needs to be determined once again on functional criteria: if they enrich our capacities to appreciate the natural environment (pure or modified) aesthetically then they are relevant. *My own reply aff.*

The last objection I would like to consider takes note that the production of the sort of stories that I mentioned usually are driven by certain values. Stories such as Handke's about Mont Ste Victoire seek to give us a literary understanding of what it is like to be a twentieth-century person who lives in a world richly 'previewed' by his predecessors. Stories such as that contained in the poem 'Santorini' seek to bring about a lyric understanding of its subject matter. Traditional ('mythic') stories, such as that contained in the account of Tjati, seek to explain how people fit into the land. In each case there is a purpose and a set of values driving the account, while science supposedly is exempt from this weakness since it only 'tells it like it is'.

The illusion that science is not driven by values, though, can only be upheld by those so deeply involved in its world picture that they lack the capacity for critical scrutiny of what science is. Science, just as any other human activity, is guided by certain values (its ability to furnish predictive and retrodictive explanation) which, in the case of science, are seldom questioned; science's values, however, do not become any less controlling of its point of view for that.²² And if so, then, with regard to the aesthetic appreciation of nature, the only question, once again, is functional. Concerning any one story we need to ask: will this story lead to an enhancement of our capacity for aesthetic appreciation or not?

CONCLUSION

In his *Aesthetics and the Environment* Carlson makes clear that, among other things, he is concerned with showing that 'the postmodernist' option, that is, the notion that anything may be considered aesthetically relevant if it draws attention to an aesthetic property, should be rejected.²³ If his proposal is understood as a claim to the effect that science, and its common-sense predecessors and analogues, are necessary for aesthetic appreciation of nature, then it would not be possible for many people, who lack what we call science or common sense, to aesthetically appreciate nature. It seems evident, however, that many people, including the Australian Aboriginal People, who literally see expressions of Ancestral Beings in their landmarks, may still be able to appreciate those parts of nature aesthetically.

If Carlson's proposal, in contrast, is taken as advice on how we should aes-

²² This is not to say that science cannot teach us things that we want and need to know, but only that it is illusory to suppose that the activity of science is not value-laden in its own way.

²³ See especially Carlson, *Aesthetics and the Environment*, ch. 8 and pp. 218-219.

thetically appreciate nature, then his arguments would considerably limit, and at times hamper, our aesthetic appreciation of nature. My argument has been to the effect that aesthetic appreciation of nature is and should be guided by a great variety of stories from a diversity of walks of life and cultures because this enriches our capacity to appreciate nature aesthetically. While considering objections to my own proposal I have granted that there may be some stories that in fact will diminish our capacity to so appreciate nature, but that those stories have to be identified case by case.

In general, it cannot be our aim, however, to restrict our aesthetic appreciation, without further justification, by the narrow parameters that Carlson proposes. It seems to me, rather, that the wider the reach of aesthetic appreciation of nature the better, for its own sake both insofar as it tends to be a pleasurable activity and insofar as it is a way to generate interest in the protection of what little relatively undisturbed nature there still remains in the contemporary world.²⁴

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