

INDETERMINACY AND RECIPROCITY: CONTRASTS AND CONNECTIONS BETWEEN NATURAL AND ARTISTIC BEAUTY

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ABSTRACT

This article offers a vindication of the indeterminacy of natural beauty, first through a dissolution of the antinomy between a critical and a positive aesthetics of nature, then through a resolution of the frame problem. These arguments are developed, finally, through a defence of the reciprocity thesis prominent in post-Kantian aesthetics, which claims that there is a conceptual connection between the aesthetic appreciation of art and that of nature. I am concerned to defend indeterminacy against objections from environmental aesthetics and aesthetic realism, and to give qualified support to Adorno's historicist position in *Aesthetic Theory*. Underlying my approach is a Kantian emphasis on the ubiquity of the aesthetic and the democracy of taste.

1. "Aesthetic" as a term of art

My aim in this article is to offer a vindication of the indeterminacy of natural beauty, first through a dissolution of the antinomy between a critical and a positive aesthetics of nature, then through a resolution of the frame problem. These arguments are developed, finally, through a defence of the reciprocity thesis prominent in post-Kantian aesthetics, which claims that there is a conceptual connection between the aesthetic appreciation of art and that of nature. "Natural beauty" refers to humanly-untouched nature and its flora and fauna, of which human beauty is a special case; intensively cultivated landscapes, where nature is not completely subdued, should also be considered. I am concerned to defend indeterminacy against objections from environmental aesthetics and aesthetic realism, and to give qualified support to Adorno's historicist position in *Aesthetic Theory*. Underlying my approach is a Kantian emphasis on the ubiquity of the aesthetic and the democracy of taste in the face of postmodern critiques.

I begin with data concerning the aesthetics of nature that should be universally accepted. These consist in two related formal contrasts between the aesthetic appreciation of nature and art. The first follows from the tautology that, at least in limiting cases of untouched nature, the natural aesthetic object has no human creator distinct from the observer. In contrast to artworks, natural objects are not intended, and cannot have as part of their purpose, to delight aesthetically - even if, as Kant famously affirmed in his doctrine of purposiveness without a purpose, they may appear to. Hence there is in nature no analogue of an understanding of artistic purpose, and with the decline of religious belief, no creator to invest a natural object with meaning. The second, related, datum is that, in nature, unlike art, there is no determinate aesthetic object; appreciators of nature have the freedom to decide on the frame or focus of attention. Interpretation of this datum - the extent to which appreciators play a genuinely creative role in fashioning an aesthetic object from indeterminate natural material - is disputed, however. This is the so-called frame problem. Under the heading of the indeterminacy of natural beauty may also be included the indefinite potential of every natural scene or object to exhibit beauty, the indeterminacy of meaning of natural beauty, and the freedom of the viewer to choose the mode of attention or appreciation. The first of these - the potential to exhibit beauty - is considered in the next section.

A major source of disagreement regarding the aesthetics of nature results from opposed positions on the nature of aesthetic judgment itself. "Aesthetic" is, I would argue, a term of art in two senses. It is a quasi-technical term - like, for instance, "self-consciousness" and perhaps "perception" - which has

evolved within a philosophical sub-discipline, and whose definition is not completely answerable to intuition or ordinary language. Nonetheless, the term unifies a set of attitudes which are ordinary and unmythical, involving quickening faculties or heightened experience, which Kant described as disinterested but which may more precisely be characterised as devoid of practical interest. Aesthetic judgments are irreducibly perceptual, as shown by the Acquaintance Principle, that judgments of aesthetic value must be based on first-hand experience of their objects.¹ Here I also assume the ubiquity of aesthetic judgment: one can make aesthetic judgments about anything, natural, artefactual or artwork.² There is a further sense in which "aesthetic" is a term of art, and which particularly concerns this article: that it makes essential reference to art, though not art alone – it involves an interdependence or reciprocity between the appreciation of art and nature. The reciprocity thesis, asserted by Kant and defended by Adorno, is not simply that aesthetic judgments are applicable to both art and nature, though this is certainly the case. The thesis makes the stronger claim that the capacities to make aesthetic judgments of art and nature are inextricably intertwined. Kant suggests this when he writes that "Nature proved beautiful when it wore the appearance of art [i.e. appears designed]; and art can only be termed beautiful, where we are conscious of it being art, while yet it has the appearance of nature".³ Most importantly, for Kant, art will have the look of nature when it is created by a genius. Kant's version of the reciprocity thesis asserted the superior moral effects of natural over artistic beauty; his position was reversed by Hegel, who limited the term "aesthetics" to the study of artistic beauty and rejected reciprocity. On the latter's view, nature requires human intervention, through artistic forms, to be worthy of appreciation. The persistence of this Hegelian reversal makes it hard for present readers to understand Kant's position; indeed, some have taken Hegel's view to an extreme, questioning whether nature can elicit aesthetic judgments at all.⁴ Despite post-Hegelian relative neglect, however, I believe that natural beauty raises some of the deepest questions in aesthetics.

2. Positive versus critical aesthetics

Positive aesthetics says that only positive aesthetic judgments can be made about nature, and rests on the view that all nature is at least potentially beautiful; critical aesthetics, in contrast, argues that negative aesthetic judgments concerning nature are possible.⁵ The discussion of natural beauty in Adorno's Aesthetic Theory is helpful in offering considerations in favour of both positive and critical aesthetics of nature. Adorno writes that the concept of natural beauty has an "essential indeterminateness... manifest in the fact that every part of nature, as well as everything made by man that has congealed into nature, is able to become beautiful, luminous from within". However, he continues, it is equally true "that the landscape of Tuscany is more beautiful than the surroundings of Gelsenkirchen".⁶ For Adorno, the positive or egalitarian view is only apparently sophisticated: "Goethe still wanted to distinguish between objects that were worthy of being painted and those that were not...[but] the classifying narrowness of Goethe's judgments of nature is nevertheless superior to the sophisticated levelling maxim that everything is equally beautiful".⁷ He regards comparative judgments as essential though invidious: "Although what is beautiful and what is not cannot be categorically distinguished in nature, the consciousness that

¹ This principle is elaborated and defended in Hamilton (forthcoming).

² Defended for instance by Stolnitz (1961), pp. 40-2; Cooper (1998); and Carlson (2000) p. 76. According to Levinson in Kelly ed. (1998), p. 248, the origins of this standpoint are found in Schopenhauer's aestheticisation of the world.

³ Kant (1987), sec 45. The moral roots of the superiority of natural beauty for Kant are explored at length in Guyer (1993), and in Allison (2001), Ch. 10.

⁴ For instance Gordon Graham (2000), pp. 174, 170. Such arguments are countered in Cooper (1998); Hegel's view is discussed by Janaway (1997), p. 157.

⁵ Budd (2002), p. 97, also makes this distinction, but unlike him, I define positive aesthetics in terms of the potentially beautiful.

⁶ Adorno (1997), pp. 70, 72. If nature is too completely subdued in Gelsenkirchen - the Ruhr industrial region - then boring Bedfordshire could be substituted.

⁷ Adorno (1997), p. 72.

immerses itself lovingly in something beautiful is compelled to make this distinction".⁸ However, Adorno argues, the inegalitarian view readily falls into the conventional and clichéd: "thoughts on [natural beauty], virtually the topic itself, have...a dull, pedantic, antiquarian quality...Whoever declaims on natural beauty verges on poetastery. Only the pedant presumes to distinguish the beautiful from the ugly in nature". Yet "without such distinction the concept of natural beauty would be empty".⁹

Adorno presents what may be termed the antinomy of natural beauty: Everything in nature is, or can appear (equally) beautiful; yet some natural objects or scenes are less beautiful than others, and may not be beautiful at all.¹⁰ As an unreconstructed practitioner of what Adorno dismisses as Identity Thinking, I will attempt to resolve the antinomy. There are two ways of doing so. The first distinguishes a stronger reading of the positive or egalitarian position from a weaker reconciling version, by discerning an ambiguity in the scope of "possibly":

(1) "Possibly everything in nature can appear beautiful" = It is possible for everything (simultaneously) to appear beautiful.

(2) "Everything in nature can possibly appear beautiful" = For any given thing, it is possible for it to be (regarded as, appear) beautiful.

One way of taking the second and weaker reading allows that different people, or peoples, find different things beautiful. On this reading, any individual or culture can make comparisons with objects which are not beautiful, but not all cultures share the same ranking. For any individual object, it is possible that there is a culture which aesthetically values it, and one which devalues it. Thus African communities where maggots are eaten are unlikely to share the Westerner's "yuk" reaction to them, but if cows are sacred to them, they will find eating beef disgusting. It is less important to decide whether a positive aesthetics could include comparative judgments of the beautiful - the significance of ranking judgments is overrated.

A resolution with which Adorno might sympathise - provided it was not advertised as a resolution - construes "everything in nature can appear beautiful" as "everything in nature can appear beautiful when represented in art". Thus a rotting elk carcass could have positive aesthetic value - though not perhaps beauty - through being used or represented in an artwork, one by Damien Hirst for instance. A reconciling reading of positive aesthetics is the only plausible one, I believe. The issues involved in defence of this claim may be presented under four headings:¹¹

(1) Proponents of positive aesthetics try to explain away the obvious fact that there are negative aesthetic attitudes towards nature by arguing that these are products of enculturation. Saito for instance refers to the culturally conditioned negative reactions through which, in the West, snakes and bats are associated with evil; and to the way in which the extension of "weed" is culturally and historically relative. On this view, young children's fascination with snakes and creepy crawlies is natural, while their later squeamishness is not.¹² I would reply, with Adorno, that "cultural conditioning" is the inescapable historical mediation of the aesthetics of nature, and that there is no distinctive case for the cultural conditioning of negative attitudes alone. Indeed it is possible that some negative aesthetic attitudes have a basis in hardwired or instinctual reactions. Perhaps the smell of putrefaction is something that humans are innately conditioned to recoil from - a survival mechanism which stops us from eating harmful food.

(2) The most important argument in favour of positive aesthetics is the positivist defence: scientific explanation locates order, regularity, harmony and balance in the natural world, and these qualities are also the ones which we find aesthetically good. So as the natural world is progressively explained by

⁸Adorno (1997), p. 70.

⁹Adorno (1997), pp. 62, 70.

¹⁰ According to Levinson op.cit., Schopenhauer presents a similar antinomy.

¹¹ There is a further heading - the defence of positive aesthetics found in Kant's doctrine of purposiveness without a purpose. But I leave consideration of that deep issue for another occasion.

¹²Saito (1998).

science, it appears aesthetically good.¹³ Now one might question whether scientific explanation does always locate order and regularity. More important, it is simply not the case that an attribution of order implies a judgment of the aesthetically good. Holmes Rolston's response to the elk carcass infested with maggots, where he urges us to thrill over ecosystems, at whose production Nature seldom fails, and claims that nature's landscapes almost without fail have an essential beauty, is confused.¹⁴ It is true that there is no conceptual reason why a rotting elk carcass could not be beautiful, and a culture that seeks out maggots as nutritious may not find infested elk carcasses revolting. But the acquisition of ecological knowledge is not guaranteed to make the scene aesthetically pleasurable, just as the acquisition of art-historical knowledge cannot of itself generate a positive regard for a painting that one has previously despised. One overcomes an aversion to the music of Schoenberg not by learning about twelve-tone theory, but by repeated listening; and it is unlikely that repeated viewing of the elk carcass will have a similar effect. It is also worth noting that one could hardly propose viewing human injury and death as part of a thrilling ecosystem; this will not make the mutilated remains of a victim of a volcanic eruption aesthetically pleasurable to witness.¹⁵

"Aesthetically positive" must at least mean "affording aesthetic pleasure". The problem cases for positive aesthetics are those which, if they yield aesthetic pleasure, do not yield the right kind. Grisly scenes can evoke a visceral excitement, which is why people stare at road accidents or, in many cases, go to boxing matches. This ghoulish reaction might be an aesthetic one, but it cannot be what positive aesthetics requires. Similarly with the range of reactions to a dissected corpse - from a fascination with death to necrophilia or revulsion. A grisly representation in an artwork may in contrast evoke an appropriate positive reaction - a work by Damien Hirst, for instance, or more modestly the dead lion still found on tins of Tate and Lyle Golden Syrup, accompanied by the motto "Out of the strong came forth sweetness". The existence of modernist art does not provide support for the view that the aesthetically positive does not have to be pleasurable. Although it is sometimes argued that modernism has abolished beauty and aesthetic pleasure, the claim concerning beauty is exaggerated - indeed similar claims could be made about appalling scenes in Greek or Shakespearean tragedy - and that concerning pleasure is completely false. In David Cronenberg's film *Crash*, the characters apparently take an aesthetic delight in disability; in contrast to a desire to re-witness an actual car-crash, it is not necessarily ghoulish to re-view the film - though there might be better things one could do with one's time.

(3) It was conceded earlier that there could be no conceptual reason, in a particular case, why some object or scene may not be regarded as beautiful or aesthetically positive. Indeed, to say otherwise would be to endorse the existence of *a priori* principles of taste rejected by Kant. There is, however, a conceptual reason why one cannot regard everything in nature as simultaneously beautiful - the contrast argument suggested by Adorno. The argument takes both a conceptual and a psychological form. The conceptual form poses the challenge: if everything in nature is beautiful, what claim can be made by "X is beautiful", and how could its content be acquired? Since one might argue - especially if the reciprocity thesis is correct - that human artefacts supply the required contrast of the aesthetically negative, the upshot on this issue seems to be inconclusive, however.

(4) Proponents of positive aesthetics will argue that a critical aesthetics of nature is untenable, because no sense can be made of the idea of nature criticism. One could argue that negative and comparative aesthetic judgments of nature do not require the possibility of critical justification, but this seems unconvincing. Conversely, environmental aesthetics might be considered as one way - a misguided one, I would argue - of vindicating the idea of nature criticism consistently with positive aesthetics. For most writers, however, the aesthetics of nature is positive, while the aesthetics of art is critical.¹⁶ Certainly a

¹³ Carlson (2000), pp. 91, 93-5.

¹⁴ Rolston (1975).

¹⁵ Budd also offers arguments against (2), in his (2002), pp. 97-106.

¹⁶ See Carlson (2000), p. 75. Dewey refers to "natural criticism" in the chapter on "Criticism and Perception" in his (1934), p. 298, though his subsequent focus is solely on artistic criticism.

positive aesthetics of art is unlikely to have proponents. Many artworks fail as art, and criticism should articulate why, given a finite life and a multitude of artworks to experience, there are better things for art-lovers to do than contemplate Michael Creed's tedious 2001 Turner Prize entry "The lights going on and off", or listen to the turgid minimalist compositions of Michael Nyman. But what is the plausibility of the converse position, a critical aesthetics of nature? Could nature appreciation recognise its aesthetic failures, and nature criticism help to articulate why they are failures? Like art, nature also contains longueurs, where there is apparently less to hold the interest - but ugliness is harder to find. Cockroaches and maggots are repulsive, but it is harder to view a non-industrial landscape as ugly. One can say of an artwork - Rolf Harris's recent Van Gogh-style self-portrait for instance, if artwork it is - that the artist's sense of colour is poor because the colours selected are harsh and gaudy. One would not say that a combination of colours in nature is in poor taste, but might they still be harsh and gaudy? Examples would be hard to find.

My conclusion, therefore, is that the first and stronger reading of positive aesthetics is incorrect. There is a critical aesthetics of nature in the sense, as Ronald Hepburn argues, of a distinction between serious and trivial appreciation of nature. Hepburn's account offers the beginnings of an account of nature criticism, even though he does not use the term.¹⁷ For him, trivialised appreciation includes the scenery-cult, excessive observational detachment, and a sentimental neglect of nature red in tooth and claw. Serious appreciation, in contrast, involves the imagination, not in the inconsequential sense of seeing human forms in clouds, but of making some truth vivid to perception.¹⁸ "I had long known that the earth was not flat, but I had never before realised its curvature till I watched that ship disappear on the horizon"; "I had seen from the map that this was a deserted moor, but not till I stood in the middle of it did I realise its desolation" - I shout and no one hears. Hepburn allows that scientific explanations may enhance aesthetic appreciation only when they do not transcend perception - for instance when one comes to see a U-shaped valley in Scotland or the Lake District as having glacial origins. Most important for present purposes, however, Hepburn's position is not overly prescriptive, and allows for an indeterminacy in the appreciation of natural beauty consistent with the weak interpretation of positive aesthetics - that anything in nature may be potentially beautiful.

Although the preceding discussion has claimed that the aesthetics of nature and art share common features, it has not asserted an intimate connection between them. Indeed, it may be felt that in viewing "nature criticism" as an autonomous practice, the true nature of the reciprocity of the aesthetics of nature and art has been obscured. On this view, the true practice of "nature criticism" is found in the work of the artist who uses nature as raw material. What this reciprocity thesis involves will now be outlined - initially in response to the frame problem, which seems to mark a fundamental distinction between artistic and natural aesthetics, and then directly. Again the claim that natural beauty exhibits indeterminacy will be vindicated.

3. The frame problem

I claimed earlier that one of the few formal data of the aesthetics of nature - something agreed by all, or almost all, parties - is the freedom of the viewer to decide on the frame or focus of attention. It would be absurd to suggest the same thesis for artworks, which even in the case of environmental artworks or Land Art, are discrete and clearly bounded. Insofar as postmodernists, such as John Cage perhaps, create artworks with indeterminate boundaries, to that extent the concept of the artwork is undermined - which was precisely Cage's intention.¹⁹ Artworks imply a clear, unambiguous focus of attention, and are

¹⁷See for instance his (1993).

¹⁸Hepburn (1993) pp. 70-71; (1988a) pp. 27-30.

¹⁹I am thinking for instance of "4' 33'''".

intended to be experienced from a certain point or points in order to obtain their full effect. In the High Renaissance period, a painting might be placed behind a screen with viewing holes for the viewer to gain the correct perspective; a Mozart or Beethoven symphony is meant to be listened to from a relatively limited range of positions in front of the orchestra. Viewers have freedom to focus on different parts of the artwork; but they cannot construct its boundaries or its primary focus.

In the case of nature, in contrast, the boundary between the object of appreciation and its environment is decided by the viewer. It follows that appreciators play a creative role in fashioning the aesthetic object or its properties - that is, in determining an essentially indeterminate natural beauty. Hence Santayana's description of the "promiscuous natural landscape" as "an indeterminate object: it almost always contains enough diversity to allow the eye a great liberty in selecting, emphasizing, and grouping its elements". He emphasises the creative role of the viewer: "A landscape to be seen has to be composed...[Its] beauty [is] dependent on reverie, fancy, and objectified emotion."²⁰ The implication is rejected by aesthetic realism, the view that nature possesses mind-independent aesthetic properties, which is assumed by environmental aesthetics but also by some of its critics. Zangwill, for instance, argues with Carlson that the true object of aesthetic appreciation is independent of the framing or composition of the natural scene by the viewer or participant.²¹

The existence of natural frames or focusses offers only limited support to aesthetic realism. These are features which, though they are selected for viewing, have "natural closure": caves, copses, grottoes, clearings, arbours, valleys, and so on. More often, there are arrays which are salient for human perception and which thus have a natural focus - moving water, bright illumination, etc.²² In fact, since the boundaries of attention in the case of nature are likely to be vague and of lesser importance, the issue is one of focus more than framing - particularly in the case of the illimitable sublime. In any case the existence of natural frames constitutes a very limited truth in aesthetic realism, since it is always open to the viewer to amalgamate or ignore them. A full-blown aesthetic realist position seems imponderable. Nature does not dictate a correct frame for its sights or sounds, and one should accept that the viewer makes a larger contribution in determining natural beauty than artistic beauty. Thus there really is no frame problem as ordinarily conceived.²³

Aesthetic realists maintain that serious appreciation of nature involves the tracking of determinate aesthetic properties. But again, the indeterminacy of natural beauty suggests that the real problem is not "which sights or sounds should I pay attention to and for how long, and what are their boundaries?", but rather, "what is a trivial and what is a serious appreciation of natural beauty?" In "determining an indeterminate natural beauty", whether in viewing a natural scene or, for instance, composing a photograph of it, one is implicitly rejecting certain aspects of the scene and ways of framing it. This activity requires exercise of critical and incipiently artistic capacities - hence Bosanquet's claim that nature is the province of beauty in which everyone is their own artist, a claim which constitutes one interpretation of the reciprocity thesis.²⁴

4. The reciprocity thesis

The thesis is prominent in various forms in post-Kantian aesthetics. Its essential claim is that there is a mutual dependence between the aesthetic appreciation of art and that of nature. Although Kant evaluates natural beauty above artistic beauty, he may still be said to assert a reciprocity thesis, in contrast to Hegel,

²⁰Santayana (1961), p. 99.

²¹Zangwill (2001).

²²As Carroll (1993) points out, p. 251. Some of these "natural" frames seem to be the product of human intervention in the landscape, however.

²³This is recognised in the case of natural sounds by Fisher (1998), though he still misguidedly regards framing as a "problem".

²⁴Bosanquet (1904), pp. 3-4.

whose reversal of Kant's evaluation results in the total subordination of natural beauty. Adorno may be regarded as subscribing to the reciprocity thesis in at least one of its forms, while proponents of environmental aesthetics such as Carlson reject most interpretations of it. Here are some interpretations of reciprocity:

(1) Artworks aim to present themselves as natural. Any reference to the organic unity of the artwork endorses at least a weak form of the reciprocity thesis. Art is perceived as in some way a natural or spontaneous creation, perhaps made in imitation of a natural process, and appearing uncontrived though it obviously is not. Kant's account of genius trades on this notion, which derives from organisms not landscape, and concerns the aesthetic of creation centrally, rather than appreciation.

(2) The aesthetic appreciation of nature appears historically with its artistic representation. This is a conceptual and not just an empirical claim, which acknowledges the following truths. To appreciate nature, in the sense of scenery as opposed to flora and fauna, is to regard it as landscape. Landscape is both land and art - the dissolving of the two together.²⁵ It is land viewed as aesthetic amenity as opposed to property. The Adornian thesis that the development of landscape painting goes together with the recognition of land as landscape is a plausible one.²⁶ In his account of the dialectic of the Enlightenment, Adorno argues that aesthetic attitudes to nature can develop only in an historical epoch in which nature is subdued, that is from the 16th and 17th centuries onwards: "Times in which nature confronts man overpoweringly allow no room for natural beauty; as is well known, agricultural occupations, in which nature as it appears is an immediate object of action, allow little appreciation for landscape."²⁷ For Adorno, to see land as landscape one must be an outsider, not a feudal worker on the land; thus landscape painting develops with the destruction of the primal relationship with nature that occurs with the rise of capitalism and science. Before the late 15th and early 16th centuries, landscape in painting always served as a backdrop to a dramatic historical or human event. Landscapes were divertissements.²⁸ Then in Italy and the Netherlands, landscape began to be emancipated as an artistic genre, free of an explicit human subject, though with a human narrative often still present as for instance in the paintings of Caspar David Friedrich. With further emancipation, landscape could itself become the dramatic focus, as for instance in Turner's "Snow Storm" of 1842.

Opposed to this historicist interpretation of the reciprocity thesis is what may be termed naturalism: the view that there is a primitive, spontaneous expression of wonder or delight in nature which is not associated with the appearance of art - an almost instinctive human response which cultural influences colour and modify but do not originate. This seems correct, and it implies that while aesthetic appreciation is historically mediated, Adorno is wrong to insist that the mediation is total. It may be argued that while the meaning implicit in aesthetic responses to nature is historically determined, aesthetic response is not entirely a matter of meanings. The example of mental illness offers a useful comparison. Its universality suggests that it has a neuro-physiological basis, though the particular forms which it takes and the meanings which it exhibits are culturally mediated; for instance, schizophrenic thought-insertion by TV set is a culturally relative symptom. The comparison suggests a middle way between Adorno's historicism and the unreflective naturalism which he criticised. It allows that there could be a society whose members showed no wonder at the starry heavens above, or who failed to take delight in birdsong; thus although it appears almost universal, there is nothing absurd in supposing that delight in birdsong is as culturally-specific as aesthetic appreciation of mountains.²⁹ Perhaps in the

²⁵Mitchell comments that landscape "is both a represented and a presented space, both a frame and what a frame contains..." (quoted Andrews (1997), p. 15).

²⁶An example is the situation of the Renaissance Villa Medici at Fiesole discussed in Ackerman (1990).

²⁷Adorno (1997), p. 65.

²⁸Andrews (1999), p. 30.

²⁹Schafer writes that "no sound has attached itself so affectionately to the human imagination... In tests in many countries we have asked listeners to identify the most pleasant sounds of their environment; bird-song appears repeatedly at or near the top of their list" (Schaffer (1994), p. 29). Petrarch in the 14th century seems to have been the first to write enthusiastically about the beauty of mountains.

Middle Ages birdsong was used to locate birds for hunting and eating, with no delight taken in it. Thus the middle way between historicism and naturalism, which I wish to endorse, says that any society must have some objects of aesthetic delight; which objects these are will be historically determined.

I would however argue that the instinctive human response to nature is also expressed in the production of artworks, with a small "a" – crafted artefacts involving what Pye terms "useless work".³⁰ Thus evidence that the members of the primitive society have an aesthetic attitude towards sunsets may include the fact that they produce artworks, perhaps paintings of natural scenes. Could one imagine a tribe who appreciated a beautiful sunset yet made no attempt to beautify their environment, e.g. functional or craft objects? It would be implausible to say that tribespeople apparently issuing gasps of delight at a sunset are appreciating its beauty, if they did not have any concern with producing beautiful craft objects.

(3) Any natural scene or object can yield aesthetic pleasure - if not perhaps beauty - through being represented in an artwork.

(4) The aesthetic appreciation of nature is essentially artistic.

Earlier it was argued that one possible resolution of the antinomy of natural beauty construes the claim of positive aesthetics as "everything in nature can appear beautiful when represented in art"; it was claimed that this resolution constitutes the limited truth in positive aesthetics. The claim constitutes an interpretation of the reciprocity thesis. Interpretation (4) is more contentious. It is most congenial to discredited Idealist and intellectualist accounts of art such as Collingwood's or indeed Croce's, but it remains of wider appeal - to those sympathetic to a positive aesthetics of nature, and to postmodern proponents of the ubiquity of art. Andrews first grants the possibility of nature criticism, but then endorses a version of (4): "In judging what is a 'good view' we are preferring one aspect of the countryside to another... The process of marking off one particular tract of land as aesthetically superior to, or more interesting than, its neighbours is already converting that view into the terms of art; it is what we do as we aim the camera viewfinder".³¹

Reciprocal and Hegelian interpretations of (4) should be distinguished, as should democratic and elitist ones. The reciprocal standpoint is democratic; the Hegelian standpoint has democratic and elitist versions. Bosanquet's initial statement appears to be democratic: "Nature for aesthetic theory means that province of beauty in which every man is his own artist". This claim will appeal to the postmodern sensibility according to which anything can be art and anyone can be an artist. But Bosanquet is not an aesthetic democrat. He defends the Hegelian view that aesthetically, nature is primarily material for art, and that fine art is the main and perhaps sole representative of "the world of beauty". He now treats artists as an elite: "Just as in speaking generally of the real world we practically mean the world as known to science, so in speaking generally of the beautiful in the world we practically mean the beautiful as revealed by art. In both cases we rely upon the recorded perceptions of those who perceive best, both because they are the best perceptions and because they are recorded."³² Bosanquet's view would be favoured by those who contrast a positive aesthetics of nature with a critical aesthetics of art, and certainly artists may see more in a natural scene than those without artistic expertise or experience. But his position is pre-Kantian in the way in which it defers to aesthetic experts, and implies a cognitivist account of aesthetic judgment. Although I may be advised to take a special interest in them, I do not need to rely exclusively or heavily on "the recorded perceptions of those who perceive best" - I can experience and explore the beauty of nature for myself. Thus the elitist as opposed to democratic interpretation of (4) should be rejected.³³

Versions (2)-(4) of the reciprocity thesis would I think be rejected by environmental aesthetics. It is interesting to note that Bosanquet argues that "Even such an analysis of natural beauty in the light of

³⁰ Pye (1978), pp. 12-13, 34.

³¹ Andrews (1999) p. 3.

³² Bosanquet (1904), pp. 3-4.

³³ The contrast is discussed in Hamilton (2006) and (forthcoming).

physical fact as has been attempted by Ruskin in the Modern Painters is chiefly directed to showing how great artists have extended the boundaries of so-called natural beauty, by their superior insight into the expressive capabilities of natural scenes and objects."³⁴ In Modern Painters, a defence of J.M.W. Turner against his critics, Ruskin rejects the academic tradition of generalising and idealising landscape which he found exemplified by Claude and Gainsborough. This tradition, he argues, does not attend to the true character of the chosen landscape, either natural or historical, but rather assembles a random and incoherent group of the artist's studies from nature. In a more forceful statement of earlier criticisms by Constable and Goethe, Ruskin urges that "every class of rock, earth, and cloud, must be known by the painter, with geologic and meteorologic accuracy".³⁵ His programme echoes the tradition of anatomical studies associated with figure painting. There is a very partial justification of environmental aesthetics in Ruskin's analysis – an analysis which assumes the view, unfashionable since modernism, that the artist must have scientific knowledge. But as Bosanquet notes, this scientific concern is subordinated to artistic objectives.

Jason Gaiger has interestingly linked the Kantian recognition of the autonomy of the aesthetic subject, and the view that aesthetic properties are dependent on the spectator, with the rise in status of landscape painting as an artform in which the spectator has to impose organisation. This approach offers a distinct gloss on the connection between the indeterminacy of nature, and the reciprocity thesis. The claim is that in the case of human beauty, organisation is given, but organisation of a landscape has to be imposed; so landscape comes to be seen as an ambitious form of painting. In the classical tradition of history painting, standards of organisation are given by the Bible or mythology – the freedom of the artist is more restricted. It is true that if one is depicting a human figure, one is constrained not to give it three arms, just as when one is depicting a landscape, one cannot show trees growing out of the sky, and so on. Nonetheless, there is a determinacy in an organism which is lacking in an aggregate of things; there is no "natural grouping" of lakes and trees and hills. The key contrast is between the subjectivity of aesthetic experience, and the classical conception with normative criteria. It is consistent with Hegel's exclusion from his aesthetics of the entire sphere of natural beauty that he should consider landscape painting wholly in terms of its capacity for representing the mood or feeling of the artist.³⁶

I have given in this final section several versions of the reciprocity thesis, all of which seem to be plausible. It may be that the reciprocity of the aesthetics of nature and art exemplifies the reciprocity of art and the aesthetic itself - but that is material for another occasion.

³⁴Bosanquet (1904), pp. 3-4.

³⁵His view is discussed by Andrews (1999), pp. 184, 186; Ruskin (1906), Volume I, p. xxxviii, "Preface to the Second Edition".

³⁶Gaiger (forthcoming).

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