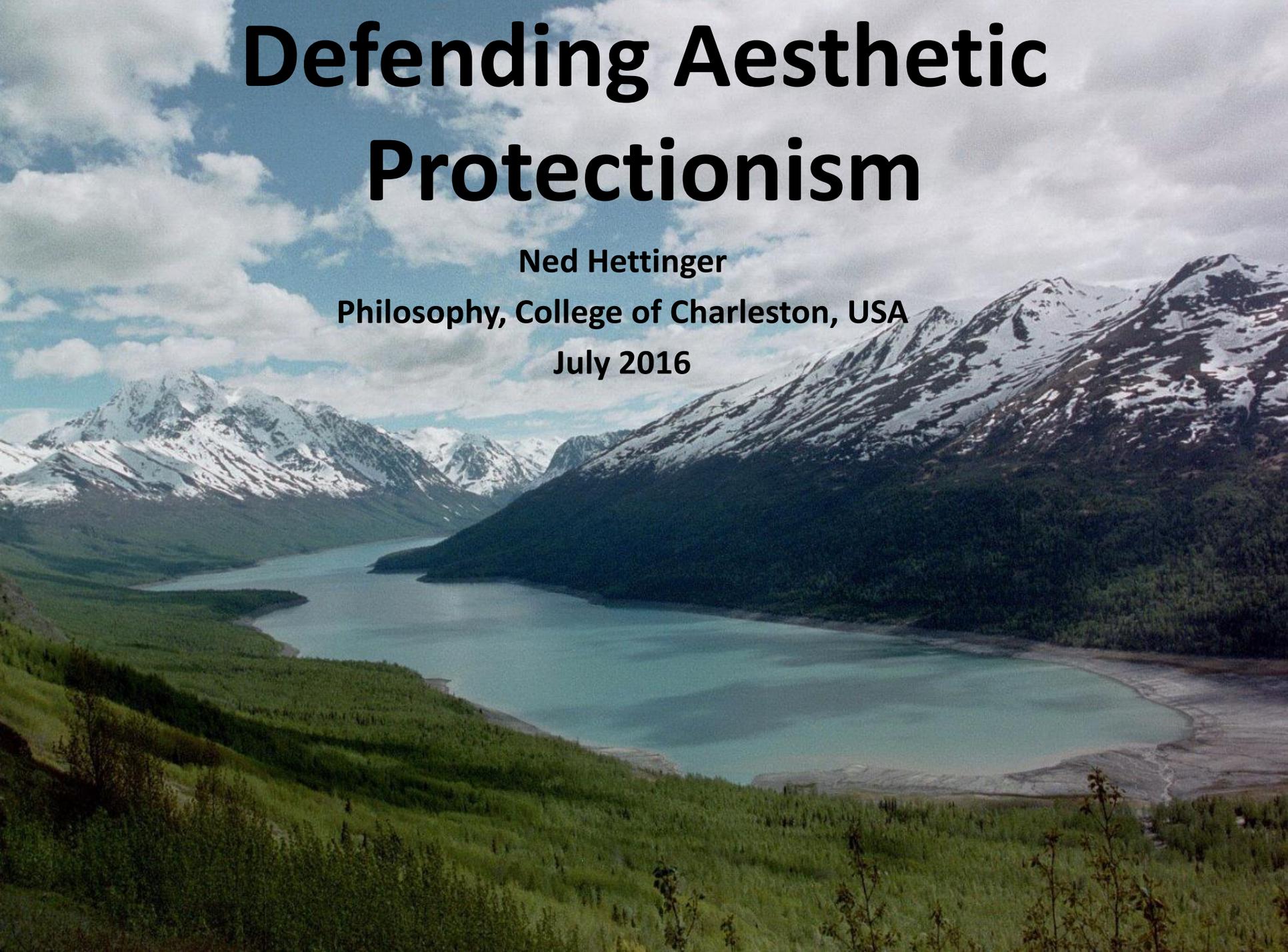


Defending Aesthetic Protectionism

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Environmental beauty is widespread and spectacular



Including the
beauty of
humanized
environments







Environmental degradation typically creates aesthetic disvalue









Protecting environmental beauty will typically protect the environment

“The Power of the Aesthetic”

Aesthetics considerations are hugely influential in determining environmental practices

Both environmentally friendly



And environmentally harmful



What is Aesthetic Protectionism? (=AP)

- Aesthetics not simply an important motivator for env. protection
- Nor is the “real power” of aesthetics to act as an strategic “umbrella” under which more decisive economic, legal and scientific considerations can be raised



Kathy Robinson and Kevin Elliott,
“Environmental Aesthetics and Public
Env. Philosophy” (2011)

- AP = Aesthetic considerations provide significant justifications for environmental protection in own right

Many think aesthetics is superficial and offers little env. protection

- Gary Varner thinks one is on “very shaky ground” trying to use environmental beauty to justify serious economic dislocation:
Aesthetics is at best a tie breaker



In Nature's Interests (1998)

- Rob Loftis claims:
“Aesthetic considerations are weak and cannot motivate the kind of substantial measures environmentalists routinely recommend”
- Just as public policy toward humans should not be based on human beauty, so environmental policy should not be based on environmental beauty



“Three Problems for the Aesthetic Foundations of Environmental Ethics” (2003)

Aesthetic reasons not trivial in any domain, especially env. protection

- Aesthetic concerns can trump moral concerns, as when Churchill moved art out of London in WWII or when Gauguin left his family for art
- Env. beauty, like human beauty, is not skin deep and includes aesthetic character, sense of place values, & expressive qualities, and it requires cognitive, affective and imaginative engagement



- The view that aesthetics is insignificant stems from superficial account of aesthetics (as mere formal & sensuous pleasure)
- Given the multi-faceted nature of the environment's aesthetic merits, dismissing aesthetics as insignificant to environmental protection is quite implausibl.

Environments' expressive qualities are especially important

- Sublime landscapes get much of their aesthetic merit from their ability to highlight human insignificance and engender humility
- Suburban sprawl gets its aesthetic demerit from its ability to express insensitivity, homogeneity, waste, and unsustainability



Protecting nature for its beauty is not simply anthropocentric

- Protecting nature's beauty does provide benefits to humans
 - Via enjoyment of scenery
 - But also more deeply because aesthetic sense of place is constitutive of human well being (Robinson & Elliot, 2011)



- While it is crucial to acknowledge the nature provides to us, valuing the environment solely as a means to human benefits evidences a species self-centeredness

- Aes rationales for env. protection should transcend anthropocentrism
- They should take the protection of env. beauty as an end and not mere means
- Involve a direct concern for environmental beauty
- Note: Although aes valuing involves human attitudes that does not mean it is directed at humans

Anthropogenic, not anthropocentric



Respect for nature and a virtuous human relation to nature requires aesthetic protectionism

- Ignoring environmental beauty is a tragic human failing (a vice)
- Failing to appreciate and protect environmental beauty is a kind of disrespect for nature
- Like failing to appreciate and protect a person's aesthetic merits



Some argue that much in nature lacks aesthetic merit, so AP offers little env. protection

- We need to protect ugly and uncharismatic nature



- Not just beautiful nature



- But knowledge tends to undermine negative aes in nature: Most all superficially unattractive env. objects become aes meritorious
- E.g., Hideous vampire bat becomes a marvelous sonar flying machine



- While there is some ugliness in nature

– Diseased/dying organisms, scabs



- These are not things we want to preserve or protect
- Nor should we protect ugly human environments



Some might think that AP requires dubious aes objectivity

- According to subjective-relativism, there are no better/worse aes responses, particularly about environments



- Some find swamps holy places, others see them as bug-infested wastelands
- For some, mega-malls symbolize a booming economy and express rising material comfort, for others, they express over-indulgence and unsustainability



- Robinson & Elliot's intriguing response is that worries about objectivity are a red herring:
“Nobody cared whether the public’s aesthetic judgments were objective or not”

- Correct: Objectivity is not needed if appeal to aes is a strategy to raise more important non-aes factors or if perceived—and not actual--aesthetic value grounds a sense of place tied to human well being
- But if an environment’s aes merits are to be good reasons to protect it—end of story—then claim that an environment is beautiful cannot be a subjective preference no better or worse than the claim it is aesthetically worthless

Constrained, pluralistic, & epistemic objectivity

- Allows for better/worse aes responses along a variety of dimensions
- Cognitive defects undermine the loathing of swamps as mosquito-infested wastelands, for many swamps have moving water, not the stagnant water mosquitos prefer, and swamps filter pollution, control flooding, & provide wildlife habitat
- An appreciation for the severity of environmental problems should inform our aesthetic response to environment
- Affective responses and expressive properties attributions have rational constraints as well
 - Wonder is appropriately aimed at the ten foot wingspan of a condor and not at luxury swimming pool on 20th floor of a hotel
- Pluralism allows for diverging meritorious aesthetic responses, but that does not mean we give up on assessment
- Gas stations may express both freedom and unsustainability, but they can't express community concern for cyclists , pedestrians, or the natural world



Problem of beautiful but harmful env. Undercut by aes & ethical interaction



Purple Loosestrife
(Invasive exotic)



Edward Burtynsky
photo of toxic river



Preferences for green, velvety-smooth, water & chemical intensive, habitat-destroying golf courses

- Just as a multicolored patch on a young girl's face loses its aes appeal when we realize it is the result of abuse

(Example from
Matthews, 2002)



- So invasive exotics, toxic rivers, golf courses, and pollution sunsets manifest at best a kind of sick beauty once appreciated in light of their env. harmful nature

Ethics is relevant only when it concerns identity/content of aes object

- Aesthetics has some autonomy from ethics
- That someone committed suicide jumping off a cliff or that a beach was Osama Bin Ladin's favorite are not relevant to the cliff's or beach's identity or nature
- Thus these ethically charged facts are not relevant to the aesthetic appreciation of those environments
- In contrast, the fact that some environments are laced with chemical poisons or consist of pollution particles or exotic plants is part of the identity of these entities
- So our aesthetic responses to them should factor in these moral dimensions of their nature
- This explains and justifies the sinister look of coal-fired power-plant towers, while the formally-similar towers of a solar-wind energy project look benign



Defending Aes Protectionism (Summary)



- Aes considerations are tremendously influential in determining env. practices (both friendly & harmful)
- AP claims env. aes merit provides significant justification for env. protection (and is not only a good strategic appeal)
- Only a superficial account env. aes merit sees it as a weak/inappropriate basis for env. protection
- Expressive properties of natural and humanized environments are telling
- AP is not anthropocentric and is required by respect for nature
- Knowledge-infused aes appreciation of environments finds the vast majority of natural entities to be aes positive and provides a basis for the critique of many human env.
- A constrained, pluralistic, and epistemic account of env. aes objectivity is plausible and needed
- Aes & ethical interaction undercuts positive aes responses to the environmentally harmful
- Aesthetic autonomy achieved by limiting the relevance of ethics to where it concerns identity/content of the aes object

Aes merit has an important place among the other compelling reasons for env protection

Resume: La defense du Esthetique (=Est) Protectionnisme (=EP)

- Est considerations sont extrêmement influent dans la détermination env. pratiques (à la fois amicales et nuisibles)
- EP prétend env. mérite est fournit une justification importante pour env. la protection (et est non seulement un bon attrait stratégique)
- Seul un compte superficiel env. mérite voit comme une faible base / inappropriée pour env. protection
- Propriétés expressive des milieux naturels et humanisés sont particulièrement important
- EP est pas anthropocentrique et est tenu par le respect de la nature
- Connaissance infusé appréciation aes des environnements trouve la grande majorité des entités naturelles soit est positive et fournit une base pour la critique de beaucoup env. humaine
- Une contrainte, pluraliste et compte épistémique d'env. l'objectivité aes est plausible et nécessaire
- Est & interaction éthique des contre-dépouilles aes réponses positives à l'nocif pour l'environnement
- L'autonomie esthétique réalisé en limitant la pertinence de l'éthique à l'endroit où elle concerne l'identité/contenu de l'objets est

Est mérite a une place importante parmi les autres raisons impérieuses de protection env