

Nature, Aesthetics,   
and Environmentalism

*From Beauty to Duty*

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## Objectivity in Environmental Aesthetics and Protection of the Environment

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The sunset opposite Nanaimo is glorious. To the east the water was a rose lavender, the sky at the horizon blue, eight or ten degrees above a red purple. In the west gold and purple on horizontal bars of cloud, shading off into lilac. Islands dark purple.

—John Muir, *Journal* (June 1, 1899, excursion to Alaska)<sup>1</sup>

Nobody of any real culture . . . ever talks nowadays about the beauty of a sunset. Sunsets are quite old-fashioned. They belong to the time when Turner was the last note in art. To admire them is a distinct sign of provincialism of temperament. Upon the other hand they go on. Yesterday evening Mrs. Arundel insisted on my going to the window, and looking at the glorious sky, as she called it. Of course I had to look at it . . . . And what was it? It was simply a very second-rate Turner, a Turner of a bad period, with all the painter's worst faults exaggerated and over-emphasized.

—Oscar Wilde, *The Decay of Lying: An Observation* (1889)<sup>2</sup>

### *Introduction*

The beauty of the environment provides significant motivation for protecting it. Whether it is preserving wilderness areas, protecting the rural countryside from sprawl, or opposing the cutting down of a neighborhood tree, environmental beauty is a prominent concern. I believe that aesthetic considerations can help justify environmental protection as well. I call such aesthetic defenses of the environment *aesthetic pro-*

*tectionism*. Environmental degradation is a serious problem in large part because it involves the destruction of substantial aesthetic value. Indeed, if wilderness, the rural countryside, and neighborhood trees had little aesthetic value (or negative aesthetic value), both the practice of—and justification for—environmental protection would be seriously weakened.

There are many reasons not to make aesthetics central to defending the environment. Many consider natural beauty to be a weak and trivial value compared

with the utilitarian values used either to protect the environment (for example, health and recreation) or to exploit it (for example, jobs and growth). Gary Varner suggests that natural beauty is at best a tiebreaker:

An attempt to justify a ban on logging in the Pacific Northwest's remaining old-growth forests solely in terms of these forests' special beauty would be on very shaky ground if the ban would cause economic dislocation of thousands of loggers and mill workers. . . . It is only in this context (i.e., other things being equal) that aesthetic considerations seem compelling.<sup>3</sup>

Others have argued that because natural beauty counts for little when determining how we should treat humans, we should be skeptical that it amounts to much in determining how we should treat the environment.<sup>4</sup> Many people think that aesthetic value is anthropocentric and instrumental (that is, a value reducible to pleasurable experiences for humans) and that the best defenses of nature should be intrinsic.

Perhaps the most important worry about aesthetic defenses of the environment—and the focus of this essay—is the common assumption that beauty is in the eye of the beholder and therefore that aesthetic responses are subjective and relative. If judgments of environmental beauty lack objective grounding, they seemingly provide a poor basis for justifying environmental protection. One legal analysis early in the environmental movement describes this concern well:

[There is a] common judicial belief that aesthetic evaluations and standards are a

matter of individual taste, which varies from person to person, and are thus too subjective to be applied in any but an arbitrary and capricious manner. . . . One person's judgment on aesthetic matters is as good as another's . . . no aesthetic judgment is more or less reasonable than any other. . . . Any aesthetic regulation would simply impose one person's taste on another who legitimately holds a different viewpoint.<sup>5</sup>

One of the first philosophers to note this problem contended that

If beauty in nature or art is merely in the eye of the beholder, then no general moral obligation arises out of aesthetic judgments. . . . A judgment of value that is merely personal and subjective gives us no way of arguing that everyone ought to learn to appreciate something, or at least regard it as worthy of preservation.<sup>6</sup>

Even if we reject the view that aesthetic judgments are generally subjective and relative, we may think that judgments about *environmental* beauty are subjective and relative. A common view in the philosophy of art is that even though art is substantially objective, the aesthetic appreciation of nature is either thoroughly relative or much less constrained than the aesthetic appreciation of art.<sup>7</sup> Consider the following statement of this view from a highly regarded introductory aesthetic textbook:

A great mountain (Mt. Fuji, Grand Teton) would probably strike us as noble and strong, or expressive of nobility and strength, but it is perfectly conceivable that it might strike an observer from an alien culture as comical or agonized. In the case of a natural object, such as a mountain,

such relativity of perception is no real problem, because the mountain itself isn't really noble or comical. We can only say that there are different ways to regard the mountain. . . . It is harder to swallow such relativism when it comes to the expressive properties of artworks. . . . What I am suggesting is that the emotional qualities that artworks express are not dispensable facts about them, although the emotional qualities *are* dispensable facts about natural objects. . . . Edvard Munch's *The Scream* is truly frightening. . . . The fact that *The Scream* might strike a viewer from another culture as cheerful . . . should not make us think that *The Scream* is a cheerful painting. . . . There is no real fact of the matter about whether Mount Fuji is noble or whether it is comical.<sup>8</sup>

Although in this passage John Fisher limits his comments to the expressive features of natural objects, others have extended this claim of subjectivity and relativity to other aesthetic properties of nature and to judgments about natural beauty in general. Such relativism seems to be problematic for those hoping to use the environment's aesthetic value to support environmental protection.

In the almost fifty-year-long dispute over protecting Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge from oil development—although there clearly are other issues at stake—the aesthetic value of the refuge has figured prominently. Former U.S. Interior Secretary Gail Norton regards the refuge as a “Godforsaken mosquito-infested swamp shrouded in frozen darkness half the year,” whereas former U.S. President Jimmy Carter judges it to be a place of “solitude, unmatched beauty, and grandeur.” If these aesthetic judgments are merely

matters of personal taste, one neither better nor worse than the other, then the aesthetic character of the refuge cannot play a legitimate role in determining its fate.

Or consider this example: A community wanting to preserve its rural character argues that great aesthetic value will be lost when its tranquil tree-lined roads, interspersed with farmhouses, small fields, and ponds—symbolic of human harmony with nature—are replaced with an aggressive, cluttered, and gaudy strip-highway sprawl of auto dealers, gas stations, and parking lots, so symbolic of our society's careless exploitation and disregard of the natural world. In response, the developers maintain that the elimination of the monotonous weed-infested dirt roads and their replacement with useful and well-built stores will offer great aesthetic value and express and reward hard work, determination, and entrepreneurial ingenuity. Environmental aesthetics needs some type of objectivity if it is to help us adjudicate between developers who like strip malls and environmentalists who do not. Without some ability to distinguish between better and worse aesthetic responses, the appeal to aesthetic considerations has little use in environmental decision making.

In this essay I explore the debate between objectivity and relativity in environmental aesthetics. I examine arguments for relativism offered by John Fisher and Malcolm Budd and assess the implications of these arguments for aesthetic protectionism. This essay also considers diverse arguments for objectivity proposed by Allen Carlson, Noël Carroll, and Emily Brady. My purpose in examining the debate between relativity and objectivity in environmental aesthetics is to determine

the extent to which this debate matters to aesthetic protectionism. Does environmental aesthetic relativism really undermine the use of environmental beauty for environmental protection? Does the objectivity provided by the objectivists allow aesthetics to be useful to debates over environmental protection? I look at Marcia Eaton's suggestion that a cognitive view like Allen Carlson's is necessary if environmental aesthetics is to "contribute to preserving sustainable landscapes" and criticize her assumption that nature will necessarily be better protected by aesthetic responses based on a knowledge of—rather than an ignorance of—nature.<sup>9</sup> I propose that we adopt a "constrained pluralism" in environmental aesthetics that falls between the extremes of subjectivity and objectivity and argue that there is a multiplicity of better and worse aesthetic responses to the environment.

*Objectivity as Constrained Pluralism:  
Better and Worse Aesthetic Responses  
to Nature*

Carlson's views have been central to the debate over aesthetic responses to nature.<sup>10</sup> He brings objectivity to environmental aesthetics by arguing that environmental aesthetic appreciation (and judgment) should respond to what the aesthetic object is rather than what it is not. He argues that because science is our best guide to the nature of the natural world, an aesthetic response to nature should be guided by a knowledge of science or natural history more generally (much as an aesthetic response to art should be guided by a knowledge of art history). Because science is objective, an environmental aesthetic in-

formed by science will be objective as well.

Many people disagree with Carlson's scientific monism and argue that acceptable nature appreciation can be guided by emotional, imaginative, or other cognitive resources besides science. Rejecting scientific monism need not mean that nature can be aesthetically appreciated in any arbitrary way one wants. To deny that there is only one correct type of response to an environmental aesthetic object—or to nature more generally—is not to accept that all aesthetic responses (or types of aesthetic response) are equally good. Carlson's science-based appreciation of nature is not the only position that allows for objectivity, nor—as we shall see—is aesthetic protectionism always best served by a scientifically informed aesthetic response.

Carlson frequently insists that the "appropriate" or "correct" or "true" aesthetic appreciation of nature must be guided by science. Therefore, aesthetic responses to nature not informed by science or natural history must be "inappropriate," "incorrect," or even "false."<sup>11</sup> But I believe that it is not helpful to confine our assessment of aesthetic responses to nature to choices like "correct or incorrect," "true or false," or even "appropriate or inappropriate." We need many more criteria to determine better and worse in aesthetic responses to nature, criteria that are contextually sensitive and not rigidly hierarchical. Consider that a scientifically uniformed aesthetic response may in fact be acceptable. For example, even though a child or an uneducated adult may not know that a glacier is a river of ice, there is nothing incorrect, false, or even inappropriate about their being impressed by the sight of a calving glacier. Nonetheless, informed responses often are better responses. Knowl-

edge about the nature of glaciers can broaden our response to them. For example, we might begin to listen for and hear the groaning of the ice as it scrapes down the valley.

I believe the most plausible position on objectivity in environmental aesthetic appreciation is a "constrained pluralism" that permits many better and worse aesthetic responses to environment and that distinguishes between better and worse in a variety of ways (and not simply as correct or incorrect, true or false, based on science or not based on science, or appropriate or inappropriate).<sup>12</sup> Constrained pluralism falls between a naive monism that insists on uniquely correct and appropriate aesthetic responses to the environment and an "anything-goes subjectivism" that regards all aesthetic responses to the environment to be equally valid.<sup>13</sup> We shall see that such a view has sufficient objectivity to be useful to aesthetic protectionism.

To my knowledge, everyone working in environmental aesthetics distinguishes between better and worse responses to environment,<sup>14</sup> including thinkers with drastically divergent approaches to aesthetics from science-based (cognitive) theorists like Carlson to emotional-arousal theorists like Carroll and imagination-based theorists like Brady. Ronald Hepburn has discussed how we might think about better and worse aesthetic responses to nature without being constrained by naive realist-sounding phrases like "the correct or true way" to appreciate nature.<sup>15</sup> Hepburn focuses on the difference between a "trivial and serious" aesthetic appreciation of nature, but I think it important to appeal to additional distinctions between better and worse ways to appreciate environments.<sup>16</sup>

Consider the difference between deep versus shallow or superficial responses: In his critique of Carlson's scientific monism, Carroll suggests that depth in an aesthetic response might include either the length of time that a response can continue or the intensity of the response's involvement at one time.<sup>17</sup> The so-called scenery cult is an excellent example of a shallow appreciation of nature. A well-developed literature criticizes the inability of many people to appreciate unscenic nature as being an aesthetic vice.<sup>18</sup> For too many people, nature appreciation is limited to appreciating nature's dramatic landscapes. For them, nature appreciation means driving through a national park, stopping only at scenic viewpoints for snapshots and gift shops for picture postcards of the scenery. This is a lazy type of nature appreciation interested only in "easy beauty" and the "picturesque" and in visual appreciation rather than a deeper, multisensuous engagement. This critique suggests that the better aesthetic responses involve more senses than just sight.<sup>19</sup> Better responses are lively and active (perceptually and otherwise), rather than feeble and passive.<sup>20</sup> Contrast appreciating a mountain lake by gazing at it from the shoreline with appreciating the lake while swimming in it. Or compare watching through a window with experiencing a storm while being outside in the midst of it.<sup>21</sup>

Discriminating responses are better than indiscriminating ones. Attentive responses are better than inattentive ones or inappropriately attentive responses (for example, those people who are so focused on finding a particular flower that they miss the aesthetic qualities of the forest at large). Mature responses are better than immature ones; unbiased responses are

better than biased ones. Consider the self-indulgent response that appreciates a rainbow as "placed here just for me!" Patient and careful responses are better than hasty ones; perceptive responses are better than confused ones. Thoughtful and reflective responses are better than unthinking ones, such as the stereotypical response to deer as cute and reminiscent of Bambi. Knowledgeable responses are better than ones that distort, ignore, or suppress important truths about the objects of appreciation.<sup>22</sup> Consider, for example, the romanticized appreciation of wolves that ignores their predatory lifestyle. Or consider the aesthetic judgment of the English poet John Donne about mountains, based on the seventeenth-century view that God originally made the world a smooth sphere but then deformed it in punishment for human sins: "Warts, and pock-holes on the face of th'earth."<sup>23</sup>

Some aesthetic judgments of nature are indeed true or false, correct or incorrect, appropriate or not, but many aesthetic responses to nature are better or worse than others on very different grounds. Accordingly, we should not assume that there is only one legitimate type of aesthetic appreciation of the environment (as if this were necessary for aesthetic protectionism). Nor should we feel forced into the belief that any type of aesthetic response to and judgment about the environment is acceptable. Instead, we should be open to a plurality of types of response to nature, some of which are better or worse than others. It is my contention that such a critical pluralism is sufficiently objective to make the aesthetic appreciation of nature a serious and worthwhile activity and one that enables viable aesthetic protectionism.<sup>24</sup>

### *Arguments for Relativity in Environmental Aesthetics*

Next I consider the views of those who doubt the objectivity of environmental appreciation and argue for relativity in environmental aesthetics. Their principal argument is that nature appreciation lacks the kind of objectivity found in art appreciation and that the appreciation of art is far more constrained than the appreciation of nature. I examine whether this alleged deficiency in objectivity exists and consider whether it is a problem for aesthetic protectionism.

John Fisher defends the value of aesthetically appreciating the sounds of nature while arguing that such appreciation is far more relative than the appreciation of music.<sup>25</sup> Although he does not argue that we can generalize his analysis of the relativity of aesthetic judgments about nature's sounds to judgments about other natural features, I see little reason to believe that his arguments apply only to the appreciation of nature's sounds. In fact, Malcolm Budd presents similar arguments for the relativity of environmental aesthetics responses in general.<sup>26</sup>

Fisher distinguishes between two dimensions of objectivity. The first is that all aesthetic appreciation, including nature appreciation, should be guided by the aesthetic object ("guidance-by-object requirement") and the second is the "agreement criterion," according to which aesthetic judgments are universal in that proper aesthetic judgments are true and require agreement from other perceivers who are sensitive, rational, and appropriately placed.<sup>27</sup> Fisher accepts the first and rejects the second and argues that agreement does not follow from the guidance-by-object criterion because an aesthetic

response can be guided by an object's characteristics at the same time it is underdetermined by them. Although he thinks this underdetermination is also true of the appreciation of art objects, aesthetic judgments of nature's sounds "will be many times more underdetermined than are typical judgments of art or musical works."<sup>28</sup>

Malcolm Budd agrees that an aesthetic appreciation of nature has a freedom and relativity that an appreciation of art does not have: "The aesthetic appreciation of nature is thereby endowed with a freedom denied to artistic appreciation."<sup>29</sup> Fisher notes that unlike artworks (including music), natural sounds are not intentional objects created to be appreciated in certain ways. This fact leads him to conclude that "the person who listens to nature is simply free of the criteria that govern appreciation of music and that function to rule out many possible ways of listening."<sup>30</sup> Budd makes the same claim about the appreciation of nature in general: Nature appreciation, he argues, is looser than art appreciation because nature was not designed for the purpose of aesthetic appreciation, and thus its appreciation is released from the kinds of constraints that such design places on art appreciation.<sup>31</sup> For example, cubist paintings are not intended to be judged in terms of their representational accuracy, and to judge them in this way is a mistake. In contrast, nature does not intend us to appreciate it in one way or another.

That artists design art objects for aesthetic appreciation may well constrain the proper appreciation of artworks in ways that nature appreciation is not constrained. The truth of this claim, however, depends on accepting particular theories of art. It is not clear that formalists would

assent to it, and the claim assumes a significance for artists' intentions that anti-intentionalists may reject. Even if we grant the claim (as I do), it is arguable that intentional design not only constrains the appropriate aesthetic response but also opens avenues for new interpretations and types of appreciative responses. There may well be a greater number of appropriate appreciative responses to Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* than there were to that toilet when it was sitting in a warehouse. Or consider the difference between appreciating a moose and appreciating a painting of a moose. The painting of a moose would have all sorts of meanings that a moose itself does not (of course, the moose in nature also has meanings that the painting would not have). The interpretation and evaluation of a moose painting involve issues of artistic intent and style, and the cultural context of the painting both constrains and complicates its appreciation. The lack of artistic intent regarding the object of nature appreciation removes some of its complexity, which may actually limit the number of appropriate responses to it.<sup>32</sup>

Both Fisher and Budd note the relative lack of framing in nature compared with art. Nature does not come with a frame around it (as does a painting and artworks more generally), and there are many different and legitimate ways to frame it. Unlike art, in which the artist (or the art category) frames the aesthetic object, the appreciator chooses how to frame the aesthetic experience of nature. For example, we do not look at the back of a painting or tap it to see how it sounds, even though these are permissible approaches to appreciating a natural object like a tree. Budd argues that—in contrast to art appreciation—there is no proper level of



observation for nature. We can look at nature through a telescope or a microscope or with our unaided eyes. He also argues that there are no proper or optimal conditions for observation: we can observe nature when it is foggy or clear, bright or dark, from near or far. Budd also claims that we may use any sense modality or mode of perception: We can choose to look, hear, touch, taste, or smell natural objects. In general, Budd contends, we are free to frame nature as we please. Thus "there is no such thing as the appropriate aesthetic appreciation of nature" (as there is with art).<sup>33</sup> This is because "the range of its aesthetic properties or aesthetically relevant appearances . . . [are] typically indefinite and open-ended in a manner uncharacteristic of works of art."<sup>34</sup> Budd concludes that the attempt to find a model of nature appreciation that tells us "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" is "a chimerical quest."<sup>35</sup>

Although these claims have some validity, they clearly are problematic as well. Budd overstates the freedom involved because he overlooks constraints on how we may frame the appreciation of natural objects. Once we settle on a particular natural object as the object of our aesthetic attention, we rule out many other framing choices. For example, we should not appreciate trout swimming in a mountain stream with a telescope or a microscope; there are better and worse levels of observation in such cases. Aesthetically appreciating a cliff is not best done from an airplane six miles high or from a mobile home on a pitch black night; there are better and worse conditions of observation. Are we really free to use any of our senses to appreciate a mountain? Glenn

Parsons notes that "smell, touch and taste require close proximity and mountains are generally not the sort of things we can feel or taste; at best one can feel or taste one small part of a mountain."<sup>36</sup>

Fisher claims that how we frame nature is partially arbitrary: "One can, of course, choose principles of framing, but I do not see how they could fail to be partially arbitrary, even if natural in one respect or another."<sup>37</sup> Fisher argues—again in contrast to musical appreciation—that the appreciation of natural sounds lacks institutional conventions that determine and guide appropriate appreciation. So besides there being no artist to frame the aesthetic object, there also are no social conventions to help frame the appreciation of nature (natural sounds) as there are for artworks (music).

I see no way to raise the status of my framing to that required to make my judgments objective without claiming that we have conventions—not just typical or understandable responses—for listening to the sounds of nature. . . . [This] would not be a plausible claim about acts of listening to nature in our society.<sup>38</sup>

There are no nature (natural sound) critics in the mold of art (music) critics.<sup>39</sup> Thus Fisher argues that *what* we should listen to in nature, for *how long*, and in *what way* are generally choices we can make freely. He illustrates framing relatively with the following examples:

Suppose you are sitting in a hot tub in a city in the Arizona desert listening to the sounds around you. Do you just listen to the Western Warblers and the wind in the fruit and palm trees or do you (should you) also notice the sounds of hot tub jets and

popping bubbles making a pleasant hissing on the water? Do you add or ignore the sounds of ventilator fans spinning hot air from the attics and occasional jet planes overhead? At Niagara Falls do I strain to hear birds in the forest over the constant roar of the water. . . . In the Tuscan countryside do I ignore the high pitched whining of mosquitoes? Shall I just focus on the loons from across the lake in Minnesota or shall I strain to hear others from more distant parts, and do they go together with the chattering of squirrels and the buzzing of flies?<sup>40</sup>

“Nature does not dictate an *intrinsically* correct way to frame its sounds in the way that a composer does,” and “there is a large multiplicity of structures and relations that we might hear and all seem equally legitimate.”<sup>41</sup>

I think Fisher and Budd have made a good case for framing pluralism in regard to aesthetic responses to environmental sounds and beauty more generally. The aesthetic appreciator clearly has great freedom (and, in many ways, greater freedom than with artworks) in framing the experience of nature’s sounds and its other aesthetic objects, and this results in a multiplicity of appropriate appreciative acts and judgments. Fisher and Budd are right that there is not only one correct way to frame and aesthetically appreciate nature.

Does this plurality of appropriate aesthetic responses to the environment present a problem for aesthetic protectionism? We might not think so, as the aesthetic freedom to focus on one loon or forty—or to listen to the wind in the trees alone or along with the warblers—would seem to have little relevance to using environmental beauty for policy. Whether I look at

mountain through the fog in the early morning light or during the middle of the afternoon on a perfectly clear day or whether I concentrate on the smell of the mountain’s spruce trees after the rain or savor the taste of its wild huckleberries does not seem to threaten aesthetic protectionism. If all the many acceptable ways to appreciate nature were aesthetically positive and of greater value than what would replace them as a result of environmental degradation, then pluralism would not compromise aesthetic protectionism. Furthermore, acknowledging the multiplicity of acceptable ways to frame and appreciate nature is compatible with judging there to be a multiplicity of incorrect ways to do this as well (and both Fisher and Budd give us some grounds for making such judgments).

Nonetheless, certain kinds of pluralism in environmental aesthetic response can be a serious problem for aesthetic protectionism. Let us start with framing relativity: Just how arbitrary is the framing choice supposed to be? Specifically, does the freedom to frame apply to whether or not human sounds or other human effects should be part of our appreciation of a natural environment? Should human intrusions be included in our appreciation of the environment? If there are no better or worse ways to frame these aesthetic responses, then we have a problem with using typical environmentalist judgments about natural beauty to protect the environment.

Consider the following environmental policy disputes: Should airplanes be allowed to fly over the Grand Canyon? Should helicopters be allowed to transport hikers into remote areas of Alaska’s Denali National Park? Is snowmobiling in Yellowstone in the winter acceptable, and

is it compatible with cross-country skiing? Should a developer be allowed to put an automobile racetrack next to a cypress-swamp nature preserve? In each of these cases, environmentalists have argued that engine noises degrade the natural tranquillity and substantially lessen the area's aesthetic value. But if the framing of sounds is arbitrary, then antienvironmentalists can insist that such intrusive human sounds be framed out of the experience. The developer can ask those listening for owls in the swamp to ignore the sounds of the nearby Friday-night races. Yellowstone skiers can be asked to frame out the stench and whine of snowmobiles. Hikers in the national parks can simply ignore the buzz of aircraft overhead. A similar argument can be made concerning other human intrusions into nature. The developer can ask those hiking in the forest to ignore the trophy homes on the ridgetops. And if there are no better or worse ways to frame these aesthetic experiences, why shouldn't they?

One response is to claim that we may be unable to frame out these human intrusions, at least not without special psychological training. But the deeper claim is that we should not frame them out, at least not in our overall assessment of the aesthetic value of these environments. Such an assessment must include these sounds, smells, and sights. An aesthetic response to and an evaluation of environments that suppress these sensual properties is aesthetically impoverished. To use some of the earlier distinctions, such a response would be superficial, inattentive, biased, and/or distorted. In these cases, it is fitting and natural to include—and even focus on—these human-caused sensual intrusions in our assessment of the

overall aesthetic value of these environments. To ignore them would be like standing in Wyoming's Snake River valley and refusing to look to the west. This would not be an acceptable way to aesthetically appreciate Grand Teton National Park. Aesthetic judgments about environments that frame out human intrusions are similarly distorting. A developer who insists that putting a skyscraper in the Snake River valley will not detract from the aesthetic beauty of the valley and the neighboring Grand Teton National Park because "one can simply frame it out" is relying on a mistaken conception of the freedom of framing choices in environmental appreciation. Do Fisher's and Budd's accounts of framing freedom and relativity justify this antienvironmentalist argument? I hope not.

What accounts for the intuitively plausible judgment that such a framing choice is not legitimate? One possibility is to appeal to the ideas of natural salience and natural framing. Carroll uses these ideas to explain how "being moved by nature" (that is, an aesthetic-emotional arousal to nature) can solve the problem of aesthetic focus.

Certain natural expanses have natural frames or what I prefer to call natural closure: caves, copses, grottoes, clearings, arbors, valleys, etc. And other natural expanses, though lacking frames, have features that are naturally salient for human organisms—i.e., they have features such as moving water, bright illumination, etc. that draw our attention instinctually toward them.<sup>42</sup>

The loud roar of engines or a towering skyscraper rising from a valley and blocking the view of a mountain will

naturally draw our aesthetic attention, and it is awkward and forced to appreciate these environments while trying to ignore these human intrusions or to leave them out of our overall aesthetic assessments. The suggestion to remove them is similar to a symphony companion saying, "Don't worry about that foul smell or the machine-gun fire outside, just listen to the music."

These ideas of natural salience and framing also provide a way to respond to Stan Godlovitch's argument against giving the human scale a special place when aesthetically appreciating nature.<sup>43</sup> Godlovitch contends that typical, human aesthetic responses to nature are "sensorily parochial" and that the temporal and spatial scale-dependencies of our aesthetic responses to nature are arbitrary. He would have us aesthetically appreciate, presumably equally, all of nature, great and small, and all natural processes, long and short. Thus he argues that smashing ice blocks heaved up by a river is no less aesthetically offensive than bulldozing the Navaho sandstone castles of Monument Valley, Arizona. True, the ice melts each spring and reforms the following winter, but those monuments also will crumble and rise up again. "If we were giants, crushing a rock monument . . . would be no more aesthetically offensive than flattening the odd sand castle is to us now. If our lives were measured in seconds, shattering ice blocks would count as momentarily coarse as using Bryce Canyon as a landfill pit."<sup>44</sup>

Such a view is clearly problematic for aesthetic protectionism. If environmental aesthetics is to be useful in environmental policy, it must be able to help us identify more or less aesthetically positive environments or natural objects. It certainly

cannot agree that as much aesthetic value is lost by crushing ice blocks in a river as by destroying thousand-foot-tall sandstone monuments. Note that the "equal beauty thesis" (that is, all of nature is equally beautiful)—although it is an objectivist claim—is a problem from the perspective of aesthetic protectionism. The fact that an environmental aesthetic is objective does not guarantee that it will be useful in environmental policy disputes, and it does not ensure that it will be helpful to aesthetic protectionism.

Godlovitch is right that our aesthetic experiences and judgments depend on scale (just as Budd and Fisher are right that what aesthetic properties we experience and what aesthetic judgments they support depend on how we frame our acts of nature appreciation). Hepburn illustrates this point: "The mountain that we appreciate for its majesty and stability is, on a different time-scale, as fluid as the ripples on the lake at its foot."<sup>45</sup> But this should not make us think that the (scale-dependent) aesthetic qualities we enjoy in the mountain cannot be appropriately appreciated. Clear-cuts are a paradigm of environmental, aesthetic disvalue, but on a longer time scale, they are merely temporary blips in an ongoing and aesthetically exciting process of forest recovery. But this should not lead us to agree with the forest-industry executive that they are not ugly because we should adopt a time scale of two hundred years.

My response to Godlovitch is that given the kind of creatures that we are and the temporal and spatial scales on which we operate, some dimensions of our framing choices are not arbitrary, and certain scales are more or less natural and appropriate. Simply because aesthetic qualities can be made to vanish and aesthetic

judgments undermined by taking a different perspective does not mean that these qualities do not exist and these judgments are inappropriate given the perspective we are taking. Nor should we believe that all perspectives are equally appropriate. Some framing of environmental appreciation is awkward, forced, and myopic. Given the kind of beings we are and the legitimate purposes of aesthetic appreciation, some perspectives, scales, and framing choices—including Godlovitch’s “any scale at all” and the anti-environmentalists’ demand to frame out human intrusions and to appreciate nature from irrelevant or distorted scales—are not acceptable

The kind of aesthetic relativity that is most worrying to aesthetic protectionism may not be framing relativity but a relativity that affects our evaluation or judgment of aesthetic value. Perhaps it is inappropriate to suppress the whine of the snowmobile, the buzz of the helicopter, and the silhouette of the Teton valley skyscraper from our environmental aesthetic evaluation. But motor enthusiasts may claim that they find these sounds appealing, and developers may claim to enjoy the sight of a large building silhouetted against the Grand Tetons, and they both may insist that environmentalists’ intuitions about the negative aesthetic character of these humanizations are just one aesthetic response, no more or less appropriate than the aesthetic responses of those who enjoy these human effects. Here is how a “wise-use” activist explained it:

To elevate “natural quiet” to the status of a physical resource is ludicrous. Other sounds in the rest of the public land can be appreciated, and must be acknowledged as a

positive part of the experience. For example, I appreciate the sound of a chain saw. To hear a chain saw in the distance as I’m hiking along a trail warms my heart.<sup>46</sup>

Fisher admits that he sometimes finds such relativity regarding the aesthetic value of natural sounds to be correct: “I may find the ‘coo coo’ sounds of a flock of doves to be extremely harmonious and to express a soothing calm. A friend may find the same sound insistently obtrusive.”<sup>47</sup> He also provides evidence that suggests differences between city dwellers and others concerning how favorably or unfavorably they respond to animal sounds.<sup>48</sup> A good case for the relativity of judgments of nature’s aesthetic value can be found in J. A. Walter’s “You’ll Love the Rockies,” an account in which this English visitor to the American West justifies his “disappointment” with the Colorado Rockies.<sup>49</sup>

I do not deny the possibility of *some* (perhaps even significant) relativity in aesthetic value judgments about nature. Differences in circumstances, contexts, and perspectives will motivate and perhaps justify conflicting judgments about aesthetic properties and value. Perhaps the Grand Tetons will appear puny rather than majestic to someone who grew up in the Himalayas or comical to one contemplating the meaning of the French word *teton*. The sound of an approaching snowmobile may well be soothing (rather than obnoxious) if one is lying hypothermic in the snow waiting for help or if one is the owner of a snowmobile rental business threatened by a proposed ban on snowmobiles in national parks. Clear-cuts may not be eyesores to those who hunt the deer feeding off the new growth or to the loggers who cut the trees.

I suspect that the right course here is to accept some plurality in environmental aesthetic evaluations and perhaps even some conflicting evaluations. Nonetheless, we should resist an anything-goes relativity concerning such evaluative responses. Finding criteria for evaluating better and worse evaluative responses should be our goal. For example, standing before the Grand Tetons for the first time and being amused by the thought that they look like breasts—although not “incorrect,” “false,” or even necessarily “inappropriate”—is a worse response than, for example, being awed by their soaring height from the valley floor and imagining the geologic pressure necessary to create them.<sup>50</sup> Along with multiple acceptable environmental aesthetic evaluations, we should acknowledge a number of unacceptable evaluative responses. The negative aesthetic value judgment about swamps as bug-infested wastelands is a stereotyped and ignorant aesthetic response that would be rejected by someone who knows something about swamps and is aware of the ecological services of wetlands and that because the water is moving, the bugs are not bad at all. Developers whose stereotypical view of swamps leads them to believe that putting a racetrack next to a swamp nature preserve is unproblematic need not be taken seriously because their evaluation is founded on a misunderstanding of swamps.

#### *Resources for Objectivity and Aesthetic Protectionism*

I turn now from discussing doubts about objectivity in environmental appreciation to examining environmental aestheticians' ideas that help with such objectiv-

ity and provide possible resources for aesthetic protectionism. The most important of these ideas are (1) cognitive factors, (2) objectivity in emotional responses to nature, and (3) the disinterestedness of aesthetic responses. We expect accounts of objectivity from cognitivists like Carlson who base an appropriate appreciation of nature on an understanding of natural history. But we find such accounts as well in the work of Carroll, who sees emotional responses as important to nature appreciation and in the writings of Brady, for whom imagination, not knowledge, is central to appreciating nature.

Cognitive factors, such as information about the objects of aesthetic attention and knowledge of appropriate categorization, are the most obvious resource for constraining the plurality of environmental aesthetic responses and helping us distinguish between better and worse responses. Carlson's scientific cognitivist account of environmental aesthetic appreciation provides significant resources for objectivity, and his views overall are quite promising for aesthetic protectionism. Carlson's positive aesthetics for pristine nature—“each natural thing, either with appropriate appreciation or at many, if not almost all, levels and conditions of observation, has *substantial* positive aesthetic value and little, if any negative aesthetic value”<sup>51</sup>—provides strong grounds for aesthetic protectionism if we reject a similar positive aesthetics thesis for environments shaped by humans (and it is plausible that we should). Carlson's reliance on functionality for the aesthetic assessment of humanized environments suggests that unsustainable human environments have a negative aesthetic value.<sup>52</sup> Because an environment's function is objective to a considerable extent, his

account of the aesthetic appreciation of human environments—although not based on natural science—has a dimension of objectivity as well.<sup>53</sup>

Not everyone agrees that cognitive factors are helpful in securing objectivity. Fisher argues that knowledge (at least of sounds) cannot play a significant constraining role. In response to Carlson's suggestion that "knowledge of the nature of the particular environments yields the appropriate boundaries of appreciations, the particular foci of aesthetic significance, and the relevant acts of aspection for that type of environment,"<sup>54</sup> Fisher maintains, "Knowledge will certainly affect our experience and bring out features otherwise missed, but I do not think it can dictate frame or significance."<sup>55</sup> In a similar vein, Budd contends that "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."<sup>56</sup>

I believe that in many cases, environmental knowledge, including knowledge about the types of environmental items we are attempting to appreciate and knowledge of the environment more generally (including the extent of environmental degradation), does and should influence appropriate frames and judgments. Consider an example: While kayaking through a southern swamp, we can choose between listening to the sound of a woodpecker or that of an alligator. The possibility that one sound might be the call of an ivory-billed woodpecker, a bird thought extinct and whose existence has not been documented for forty years, suggests that we should concentrate on the woodpecker hammering on a tree rather than the alligator bellowing. Here, both frame and significance—if not "dic-

tated"—are at least highly suggested by this bit of knowledge. In this case, having environmental knowledge enhances and deepens our aesthetic response, and lacking such information can impoverish it.

Sometimes identifying correct and incorrect categories with which to appreciate natural objects can help differentiate between appropriate and inappropriate aesthetic responses. Carlson uses examples to show that the correct categorization can—contrary to Budd's claims—determine the appropriate aesthetic properties of natural items: Is that a cute woodchuck or a massive, awe-inspiring rat? Is that an awkward deer or a graceful moose? Is that whale a clumsy fish or an impressive mammal? Deciding which aesthetic adjectives are appropriate depends on placing the environmental object in its correct category.<sup>57</sup> So, too, with perceptually indistinguishable environmental objects, one of which was manufactured by humans and the other of which is natural: Is that a beautiful full moon rising over the hillside or an obnoxious satellite dish? Is that lime green creek an amazing work of nature or the revolting runoff from a mine? Sometimes the correct information and categorization does and should affect environmental aesthetic assessment.<sup>58</sup>

Both Carroll and Godlovitch reject the idea that aesthetic appreciation becomes inappropriate when it is based on false beliefs or mistaken scientific information. As Godlovitch stated, "Suppose your appreciation of some natural phenomenon rested upon what turned out to be a false scientific theory. What do you suppose would happen? Would your appreciation be dimmed? Would you marvel the less? I certainly hope not."<sup>59</sup> Carroll gives an example of what he takes to be an appropriate aesthetic response to a natural object

even when one holds false beliefs about it: "We may be excited by the grandeur of a blue whale. I may be moved by its size, its force, and the amount of water it displaces, etc., but I may think that it is a fish. Nevertheless my being moved by the grandeur of the blue whale is not inappropriate."<sup>60</sup> I accept Carroll's example as an appropriate aesthetic response, but I think that the response remains appropriate only because the false belief does not influence it. If the false belief did influence the response, I think we would and should view the response as inappropriate, at least to the extent that the false belief and the response are related. Therefore, although false beliefs about natural objects do not necessarily disqualify an aesthetic response to them, such responses are undermined by the false beliefs that affect them. Once again, we see that knowledge and the correct categorization of environmental objects can narrow the number of appropriate aesthetic responses.

At the broadest level, I think a general knowledge of environmental degradation should inform environmental aesthetic appreciation. For example, a judgment about whether the trans-Alaska pipeline enhances or detracts from Alaska's beauty should be informed by knowledge of the environmental and social impacts of our society's oil addiction. In a world where human dominance over nature was not so extensive, perhaps the sounds of chainsaws and other engine noises in wild areas should not be received as appalling. But in today's world, at least for those of us informed and properly appreciative of the massive human impact on the planet, the appropriate response to these human intrusions into nature should not be positive. A positive aesthetic response to roadside litter, spewing sewage pipes, and

fish floating belly-up in the creeks shows ignorance not only of the specific harms and the environmental vices manifested but also of the overall environmental degradation that humans are causing.

These conclusions depend on rejecting formalist and other narrow conceptions of aesthetic experience and judgment that isolate aesthetic appreciation. I reject such an aesthetic apartheid: Aesthetics is part of life, which means that aesthetics, ethics, and cognition cannot be strictly separated.<sup>61</sup>

A second resource for constraining environmental aesthetic pluralism is objectivity concerning emotional responses to nature. Carroll sketches an argument for such emotional objectivity.<sup>62</sup> Although he regards Carlson's environmental aesthetics based on scientific knowledge as one type of appropriate appreciation of nature, he criticizes Carlson's claim that it is the only type and offers his own "being moved by nature" as an additional and distinct mode of legitimate appreciation. Carroll argues that the visceral, minimally intellectual, and emotional arousal of standing under a waterfall and being excited by its grandeur is an important and appropriate type of aesthetic response to nature that is not based on a knowledge of natural history or science. Carroll agrees with Carlson on the need for objectivity in environmental aesthetics: "Any competing picture of nature appreciation, if it is to be taken seriously, must have a comparable means to those of the natural environmental model for solving the problem of the objectivity of nature appreciation."<sup>63</sup>

Carroll argues that emotional arousal can be objective because emotional states may or may not be appropriate, and appropriateness is the truth (objectivity) of



emotions. Emotions are cognitive in that they are underpinned by beliefs, thoughts, and patterns of attention and are directed at objects. But emotions are appropriately directed at some objects and not others: The fear of an oncoming tank is appropriate, but the fear of chicken soup is not (unless one thinks it dangerous). Objective emotions are those that are appropriate to their objects and whose underlying beliefs are reasonable for others to share. For example, being excited by the grandeur of something like the Tetons because they are huge is appropriate, and if this belief in their enormity is reasonable for others to hold, it is an objective emotional arousal (and not subjective, distorted, or wayward). The emotional response of people who are not excited by the grandeur of the Tetons—but who acknowledge that they are huge—is inappropriate. If they deny the Tetons are huge because they are smaller than the Milky Way, then they have the wrong comparison class. Thus Carroll maintains that objectivity in environmental aesthetics is possible whether it is based on emotional arousal or scientific knowledge.

I think Carroll is right that emotional reactions to nature can be more or less appropriate, perceptive, wayward, or sometimes even downright inappropriate. Just it is inappropriate to be amused when a dog is hit by a car or to dance gaily to somber music, so it is inappropriate to be bored by a thundering waterfall crashing down on one's head or to respond positively to human intrusions into wild nature. As I suggested earlier, those people who are well informed about humans' massive and harmful impact on the planet's relatively natural areas and who have at heart the welfare of humans or nonhu-

mans react to environmental degradation with dismay. They do not find the hum of snowmobiles to be soothing. The sounds of chainsaws alarm them. Belching smokestacks disgust them, and colorful sunsets caused by pollution do not strike them as beautiful. In general, environmental degradation is not aesthetically appealing to them. Those people who do find it appealing are likely to be ignorant of the human impact on the planet, have a skewed emotional constitution, or have such strong self-interest as to blind their aesthetic response (or to disqualify it). I think Carroll's account gives us some of the tools needed to justify the claim that there are better and worse emotional aesthetic responses to nature.

Emily Brady's imagination-based environmental aesthetic, perhaps surprisingly, provides for objectivity in environmental appreciation, helps constrain the range of legitimate pluralism in environmental aesthetics, and offers resources for aesthetic protectionism.<sup>64</sup> She focuses on the importance of imagination in aesthetic appreciation of nature and makes her case using many examples, such as this one:

In contemplating the bark of a locust tree, visually, I see the deep clefts between the thick ridges of the bark. Images of mountains and valleys come to mind, and I think of the age of the tree given the thickness of the ridges and how they are spaced apart. I walk around the tree, feeling the wide circumference of the bark. The image of a seasoned old man comes to mind, with deep wrinkles from age. These imaginings lead to an aesthetic judgment of the tree as stalwart, and I respect it as I might a wise old sage.<sup>65</sup>

Brady is worried about imagination's reputation of being subjective and arbitrary. Many people believe that "imagination inevitably leads to an experience that is too unpredictable, too arbitrary and prone to fantasy to guide appropriate aesthetic appreciation of nature."<sup>66</sup> For Brady, not every imaginative response to nature is appropriate, and she attempts to "clip the wings of imagination" in hopes of retaining enough objectivity for environmental aesthetics to be useful to policy disputes. She rejects shallow, naive, and sentimental imagining responses that impoverish rather than enrich appreciation. Imagining a lamb dressed up in baby clothes might underline the aesthetic truth of innocence, but it is sentimental and shallow and thus is not appropriate. Brady rules out other imaginings because they are irrelevant: We can be awestruck by an English cliff's dramatic drop to the sea, and this aesthetic response can be intensified by imagining the feeling of jumping off the cliff and the fear of someone contemplating jumping. But imagining the possible motives for jumping, such as financial difficulties, is not relevant to the aesthetic appreciation of that cliff and hence is not appropriate to its appreciation. Brady also counsels us to avoid imagination that instrumentalizes nature, as when straying from an aesthetic focus in appreciation of a seascape by fantasizing about how many seashells we could collect if the waves were not so big. She argues that an aesthetic response must free the mind from self-interested and instrumental concerns, and thus imaginings and other thoughts that instrumentalize nature are not aesthetically appropriate because they violate the

disinterestedness requirement of the aesthetic response.<sup>67</sup>

Brady's imagination-based theory of the aesthetic appreciation of nature is useful for aesthetic protectionism in a number of ways. Her "critical pluralism," with its interpretation of aesthetic objectivity as involving judgments that are reasonable, justifiable, and communicable, broadens the concept of objectivity in environmental aesthetics beyond scientific cognitivism and its focus on true and correct aesthetic judgments. Brady plausibly rebuts the presumption that an imagination-based aesthetics of nature is purely subjective and arbitrary. She also partly rebuts Marcia Eaton's objection that there is no way of distinguishing appropriate from inappropriate imaginings "without relying on the kind of cognitive model that Carlson insists upon."<sup>68</sup>

Perhaps what is most useful for aesthetic protectionism is Brady's insistence that aesthetic appreciation be disinterested, for it provides a mechanism for discounting positive aesthetic responses to environmental degradation. She believes that disinterestedness requires freeing the mind from self-interested and instrumental attention to the aesthetic object. For example, if we react favorably to a play because we stand to make a lot of money from it, this is not an aesthetic response to the play, for it is not properly disinterested. I submit that positive responses to environmental degradation are often self-interested and thus not properly aesthetic. Clear-cuts may appear attractive to loggers or forestry executives. Snowmobiles in the wilderness may sound harmonious to someone for whom it means more business or perhaps soothing to a person lying hurt and in need of evacuation. But such

responses are so infused with self-interest as to be disqualified from being (disinterested) aesthetic responses. Many of the positive aesthetic responses to environmental degradation are likely to be based on an instrumental and self-interested view of nature and thus, in Brady's interpretation of disinterestedness, do not count as properly aesthetic. A "developer's aesthetic" that prefers Wal-Mart's, shopping malls, and strip highways to forests, wetlands, and the rural countryside may not be a legitimate aesthetic after all.<sup>69</sup>

I conclude this essay by assessing some of Marcia Eaton's claims about the superiority of cognitive approaches to environmental aesthetics for aesthetic protectionism. Eaton seems to have an instrumental view of environmental aesthetic appreciation that justifies an environmental aesthetic response to the extent that it has positive implications for environmental protection. Eaton clearly thinks that environmental aesthetics is crucial to environmental protection. "Ecologists internationally recognize that in the absence of a change in aesthetic preferences, sound environmental practices have little chance of being widely adopted."<sup>70</sup> She provides the following example: "As long as people want large, green, closely mowed yards no matter what the climate or soil or water conditions, they will continue to use polluting gasoline mowers and a toxic cocktail of fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides."<sup>71</sup> Presumably she believes that they would not find these lawns so aesthetically appealing if they considered their ecological consequences. Eaton identifies numerous other flawed environmental policies that are based on ecologically ignorant appreciative responses. For example, she thinks it is partly because blackened forests strike

people as ugly that we have had a policy to protect forests from fires, which has led to a decrease in—even a marginalization of—fire-adapted species and made our national forests into tinderboxes ready to explode.

Eaton believes that if our goal for environmental aesthetics is "environmental sustainability" (and that is her goal), then Carlson's theory is what is needed: "The philosopher Allen Carlson has suggested a model of nature appreciation that is, in my opinion, the best so far presented if one's goal is to produce, protect or preserve environments that are both beautiful and healthy."<sup>72</sup> Positive aesthetic responses to environments lead to care for them, but, Eaton insists, unless those responses are guided by environmental knowledge, the care may not be of the right sort. She criticizes Brady's reliance on imagination as the key to environmental aesthetics because unless such imagination (and the fiction that results from it) is informed and guided by environmental knowledge, the effect on nature of such an environmental aesthetic may be devastating. She then cites the Disney movie *Bambi* for encouraging a sentimental image of all deer as sweet, innocent, and gentle and notes that this image ignores the ecological devastation that deer can cause and has made it hard for forest managers to convince the public of the need to reduce deer populations. Stories about swamp monsters have contributed to our negative aesthetic response to swamps and consequently to the massive loss of wetlands in this country. "As we have seen, fiction can sentimentalize and demonize, with serious harm resulting. If sustainable environments are our goal, then

fiction must be at the service of fact.”<sup>73</sup> “For only with knowledge will sustainable practices develop.”<sup>74</sup> Thus for Eaton, an account of environmental aesthetics like Carlson’s—one solidly based on scientific knowledge—is what we must seek if environmental aesthetics is to ground aesthetic protectionism.

I agree that Carlson’s environmental aesthetic offers positive resources for aesthetic protectionism, but I think Eaton is too quick to conclude that we must embrace Carlson’s view. I also question her assumption that ecological knowledge always serves environmental goals. We have found resources for objectivity in environmental aesthetics that are useful for aesthetic protectionism not only in Carlson’s knowledge-based account but also in Carroll’s emotion-based account and in Brady’s imagination-based account. Eaton’s view that only an environmental aesthetic informed by environmental knowledge can lead to sustainable care is insufficiently appreciative of these alternative accounts’ value to aesthetic protectionism. Eaton also fails to realize that a cognitive approach to environmental aesthetics can be a double-edged sword: Insisting that aesthetic responses to nature be informed by correct environmental knowledge can also lead to environmentally harmful behavior. Some popular—but fallacious—ecological ideas are environmentally beneficial. Many people believe in a delicate balance of nature, a tight integration of natural systems, and the dependence of stability on biodiversity. But these ideas have been seriously challenged in contemporary ecological research and are at best significantly overstated.<sup>75</sup> Nonetheless, such mistaken scientific beliefs seem beneficial to envi-

ronmental protection and policy. If we believe that driving a species to extinction will lead to ecological collapse, then we will preserve that species. If we see nature as a delicate balance easily upset by human intrusion, then we will be inclined to avoid disrupting nature. Aesthetic responses based on ecological ignorance and myth may sometimes be the best for environmental protection, so ensuring that our aesthetic responses to nature are informed by scientific facts may not necessarily contribute to aesthetic protectionism.

### *Conclusions*

Environmental aesthetics is important to environmental protection. Although they present significant worries for aesthetic protectionism, environmental aesthetic relativity and subjectivity do not cripple it. I have argued that we need to develop and justify accounts of better and worse aesthetic responses to the environment that avoid both an anything-goes relativism and the idea that only one type of environmental aesthetic response is acceptable. Legitimate pluralism regarding environmental beauty does not prevent distinguishing between better and worse aesthetic responses. Environmental aesthetics contains numerous resources for objectivity that hold promise for justifying a significant role for judgments of natural beauty in environmental protection. A knowledge-based environmental aesthetic can be useful to aesthetic protectionism, but it is not the only useful environmental aesthetic, and it does not guarantee beneficial environmental results.<sup>76</sup>

## NOTES

1. John Muir, in *John of the Mountains: The Unpublished Journals of John Muir*, ed. Linnie Marsh Wolfe (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1938).
2. Oscar Wilde, *The Decay of Lying: An Observation* (1889), in Oscar Wilde, *Intentions* (1891).
3. Gary Varner, *In Nature's Interests* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 22.
4. "But if a doctor cannot make a decision regarding who gets a heart based on aesthetics, how can environmentalists ask thousands of loggers to give up their jobs and way of life on the basis of aesthetics?" See J. Robert Loftis, "Three Problems for the Aesthetic Foundations of Environmental Ethics," *Philosophy in the Contemporary World* 10 (2003):43.
5. Samuel Buford, "Beyond the Eye of the Beholder: Aesthetics and Objectivity," *Michigan Law Review* 73 (1973):1438, 1442.
6. Janna Thompson, "Aesthetics and the Value of Nature," *Environmental Ethics* 17 (1995): 293 (*editors' note*: see selection 15 of this volume).
7. Philosophers who take this view include Malcolm Budd, *The Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature: Essays on the Aesthetics of Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) (*editors' note*: see selection 17 of this volume for Budd's view); John Fisher, "What the Hills Are Alive With—In Defense of the Sounds of Nature," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 56 (1998):167–79; and Kendall Walton, "Categories of Art," *Philosophical Review* 79 (1970):334–67. Interestingly, one philosopher who responds to this literature and defends objectivity in environmental aesthetics argues for the reverse claim: "The objectivity applicable to disputes about natural beauty may be said to be, if anything, more robust than that characteristic of art." See Glenn Parsons, "Freedom and Objectivity in the Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 46 (2006):35, n. 49.
8. John Fisher, *Reflecting on Art* (Mountain View, Calif.: Mayfield, 1993), pp. 338–39 (*emphasis in original*). Fisher is arguing here for the importance of the artist in understanding expression in art and for the relativity of nature's expressive properties only as an aside.
9. See Marcia Muelder Eaton, "The Beauty That Requires Health," in *Placing Nature: Culture and Landscape Ecology*, ed. J. I. Nassauer (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1997) (*editors' note*: see selection 20 of this volume); and "Fact and Fiction in the Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 56 (1998):149–56.
10. Allen Carlson, *Aesthetics and the Environment: The Appreciation of Nature, Art and Architecture* (New York: Routledge, 2000) (*editors' note*: for Carlson's view, see selection 8 of this volume).
11. Sometimes Carlson uses the language of "depth" versus "superficiality." This is how Glenn Parsons attempts to fill out Carlson's theory: "The aesthetic appreciation of something is deeper and more appropriate the more informed it is by knowledge of what that thing is. It follows from this that appreciation that does not involve scientific knowledge of natural things . . . is less deep and appropriate appreciation." Aesthetic responses to natural objects that are not informed by science are limited to the perception of "aesthetic properties that are peripheral to aesthetic appreciation and therefore less important in assessments of aesthetic value" and character. These properties are "somewhat superficial" when compared with the "more central" aesthetic properties available when appreciation is informed by scientific knowledge about the natural object. Appreciation so informed will allow us to "apprehend aesthetic properties

that are manifest in *all*, or virtually all, of the perceptual appearances of that object." See Parsons, "Freedom and Objectivity in the Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature," pp. 34, 35, n. 49 (emphasis in original).

12. "Objectivity" is a supercharged concept in philosophy that can mean many different things. Perhaps at its most basic it means "letting the object be one's guide, rather than the subject." It can mean that there are right and wrong answers to questions about a subject, which fits with Carlson's "true/false, correct/incorrect" language. It can also mean that some judgments are more or less rational and justifiable than others, which is the type of objectivity that Brady strives for in her account of aesthetic appreciation of nature. See Emily Brady, *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), chap. 7. In this section, I sketch examples of (and criteria for) objectivity in the broad sense of their being distinctions between better and worse aesthetic responses to nature. This includes both Carlson's and Brady's types of objectivity and more.

13. Compare Brady's notion of "critical pluralism" in *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment*, pp. 79–81.

14. Perhaps the philosopher who comes closest to not making this distinction is Thomas Heyd, whom Carlson characterizes as a "postmodernist" regarding aesthetic appreciation, a position that puts no limits on aesthetic relevance. But even Heyd accepts some limits: Information is relevant to the aesthetic appreciation of nature only if it sustains aesthetic attention and does not thwart it. See Thomas Heyd, "Aesthetic Appreciation and the Many Stories About Nature," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 41 (2001):125–37.

15. Ronald Hepburn, "Trivial and Serious in Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature," in *Landscape, Natural Beauty and the Arts*, ed. Salim Kemal and Ivan Gaskell (Cambridge:

Cambridge University Press, 1993). Like Carlson, Brady, and Eaton, Hepburn sees the need to distinguish better and worse in order to give aesthetics a role in environmental policy. "When we seek to defend areas of 'outstanding natural beauty' against depletions, it matters greatly what account we can give of the appreciation of that beauty. . . . We must be able to show that more is involved in such appreciation than the pleasant, unfocused enjoyment of a picnic place or a fleeting and distanced impression of countryside through a touring-coach window, or the obligatory visits to standard . . . snapshot-points" (p. 65).

16. Brady wonders why serious responses are necessarily better aesthetic responses than more playful ones. She asks why seeing a hill as like a giant's head and thus focusing on its huge, looming, and distinctive shape is a worse aesthetic response than a geological focus on the type of rock that constitutes the hill. See Brady, *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment*, pp. 167–68.

17. Noël Carroll, "On Being Moved by Nature: Between Religion and Natural History," in Kemal and Gaskell, eds., *Landscape, Natural Beauty and the Arts*, p. 259 (editors' note: see selection 11 of this volume).

18. See, for example, J. Baird Callicott, "The Land Aesthetic," in *A Companion to A Sand County Almanac*, ed. J. Baird Callicott (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), pp. 157–71 (editors' note: for an updated version of this essay, see selection 7 of this volume); Yuriko Saito, "The Aesthetics of Unscenic Nature," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 56 (1998):102–11 (editors' note: see selection 14 of this volume); and Carlson, *Aesthetics and the Environment*, chap. 3.

19. See Brady, *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment*, pp. 123–28.

20. Holmes Rolston argues that the best aesthetic responses to nature must involve

“participatory experience” (in addition to being scientifically informed). See Holmes Rolston III, “Does Aesthetic Appreciation of Landscapes Need to Be Science-Based?” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 35 (1995): 374–85.

21. John Muir once enjoyed a windstorm by climbing to the top of a one-hundred-foot-tall Douglas fir tree: “One of the most beautiful and exhilarating storms I ever enjoyed in the Sierra occurred in December, 1874. . . . When the storm began to sound, I lost no time in pushing out into the woods to enjoy it. For on such occasions Nature has always something rare to show us, and the danger to life and limb is hardly greater than one would experience crouching deprecatingly beneath a roof. . . . Toward midday. . . I gained the summit of the highest ridge in the neighborhood; and then it occurred to me that it would be a fine thing to climb one of the trees to obtain a wider outlook. . . . I made choice of the tallest of a group of Douglas Spruces . . . they were about 100 feet high, and their lithe, brushy tops were rocking and swirling in wild ecstasy . . . never before did I enjoy so noble an exhilaration of motion . . . while I clung with muscles firm braced, like a bobolink on a reed. In its widest sweeps my tree-top described an arc of from twenty to thirty degrees, but I felt . . . safe, and free to take the wind into my pulses and enjoy the excited forest from my superb outlook.” This quotation is from chap. 10 of Muir’s *The Mountains of California* (1894).

22. Hepburn, “Trivial and Serious,” p. 69.

23. Quoted in Rolston’s “Does Aesthetic Appreciation of Landscapes Need to Be Science-Based?” p. 375.

24. One significant worry is that this pluralism, although “critical,” might allow for conflicting aesthetic judgments about nature in cases that make a difference to environmental policy.

25. Fisher, “What the Hills Are Alive With.” Despite arguing for a great freedom from constraints in the appreciation of natural sounds, Fisher concludes that nature’s sounds “merit serious aesthetic attention both theoretically and experientially” (p. 177). He says little if anything about the implications of his views for aesthetic protectionism. Fisher’s main concern in this paper is to show that judgments about natural sounds can be aesthetic even though they do not satisfy the agreement requirement (discussed later).

26. Budd, *The Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature*, chaps. 3 and 4.

27. Fisher, “What the Hills Are Alive With,” pp. 171–72.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 177. Interestingly, in “The Value of Natural Sounds,” *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 33 (1999):26–42, Fisher acknowledges widespread agreement that natural sounds are preferable to nonmusical human-caused sounds and provides an argument justifying this preference.

29. Budd, *The Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature*. p. 108.

30. Fisher, “What the Hills Are Alive With,” p. 177.

31. Budd, *The Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature*, p. 108.

32. Similarly, a sand sculpture produced by an artist would have many meanings that the same pattern produced by nature would not have.

33. Budd, *The Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature*, p. 109.

34. Malcolm Budd, “Objectivity and the Aesthetic Value of Nature: Reply to Parsons,” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 46 (2006):268.

35. Budd, *The Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature*, p. 147. Budd’s language, and the interpretation of his views given here, might suggest that he rejects any sort of objectivity about nature appreciation. This is not the case by any means. Budd argues for better and worse

in nature appreciation in a number of ways. A major part of his view is that one should appreciate nature as nature, and this rules out both narrowly formalistic appreciations of nature and appreciating nature as if it were art (see pp. 1–23). Budd also argues that sometimes mistaken beliefs about the kind of natural thing that one is appreciating can lead to a “mal-founded” appreciation and can result in “aesthetic deprivation” whereby one misses “something aesthetically valuable” (p. 23). In his reply to Parson’s critique in “Freedom and Objectivity in the Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature,” Budd says, “Even if, as I hold, the idea of the aesthetic value of a gazelle is indeterminate, I regard its bounding movements in flight as being ‘objectively’ graceful” (“Objectivity in the Aesthetic Value of Nature,” p. 268). And in the preface to his book he says, “The view I recommend . . . [allows] that aesthetic judgments about nature can be plainly true” (p. x).

36. Parsons, “Freedom and Objectivity in the Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature,” p. 31.

37. Fisher, “What the Hills Are Alive With,” p. 173.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 174.

39. I am not convinced that nature appreciation lacks significant conventions that specify better aesthetic appreciation. Many people explore natural areas with naturalists or nature guides of various sorts, and most would agree that doing so improves the aesthetic appreciation involved.

40. Fisher, “What the Hills Are Alive With,” p. 173.

41. *Ibid.*, pp. 173, 176 (emphasis in original).

42. Carroll, “On Being Moved by Nature,” p. 251. Carroll argues this framing happens without using the type of scientific information that Carlson claims is needed to fix the aesthetic focus.

43. Stan Godlovitch, “Icebreakers: Environmentalism and Natural Aesthetics,” *Jour-*

*nal of Applied Philosophy* 11 (1994):15–30 (editors’ note: see selection 9 of this volume).

44. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

45. Hepburn, “Trivial and Serious,” p. 77. In contrast to my arguments, Hepburn refuses to favor some perspectives over others.

46. Quoted by Todd Wilkinson in “Who Really Belongs to Their ‘Silent Majority?’” *Bozeman Daily Chronicle*, October 5, 2002, p. A4.

47. Fisher, “What the Hills Are Alive With,” p. 171. Fisher’s relativism also is manifest in his endorsement of John Cage’s claim that “what is more angry than the flash of lightning and the sound of thunder. These responses to nature are mine and will not necessarily correspond to another’s” (p. 178, n. 24). Note that Fisher is not a pure relativist. As mentioned earlier, in “The Value of Natural Sounds,” he accepts and attempts to justify the common idea that natural sounds are generally of greater aesthetic value than (non-musical) human-caused sounds. Accepting the guidance-by-object requirement is another way that Fisher moves away from an anything-goes relativism. Presumably to him, ways of listening to nature’s sounds that are not guided by the object are inappropriate. (It is not clear, however, what such a requirement rules out.) Another constraint that Fisher accepts is that we should not listen to nature in the same way we listen to music, for music is an intentional object and Fisher thinks that that should have a dramatic impact on how we appreciate it (p. 176). He also states that although aesthetic objects (whether art or nature) underdetermine judgments about them, “this does not mean that any critical or interpretive judgment is properly assertable” (p. 172). He concludes his article by claiming that although “there are few constraints on appreciation of such sounds” (that is, environmental sounds), this does not “make responsible criticism and discourse about the objects of



appreciation impossible" (p. 177). Fisher needs to explain further why his brand of relativism does not undermine criticism and to determine how compatible his views are with aesthetic protectionism.

48. Fisher, "What the Hills Are Alive With," p. 178, n. 24.

49. J. A. Walter, "You'll Love the Rockies," *Landscape* 17 (1983):43-47.

50. Perhaps such a judgment can be justified by Budd's requirement to appreciate nature as nature or Yuriko Saito's requirement to appreciate nature on its own terms and to let nature "speak for itself." See Yuriko Saito, "Appreciating Nature on Its Own Terms," *Environmental Ethics* 20 (1998):135-49 (editors' note: see selection 10 of this volume).

51. Allen Carlson, "Hargrove, Positive Aesthetics, and Indifferent Creativity," *Philosophy and Geography* 5 (2002):233, n. 27 (emphasis added).

52. Carlson argues that the nature of human-shaped environments is determined by what they are intended to accomplish and thus that knowledge of their function is essential to their proper aesthetic appreciation. See *Aesthetics and the Environment*, pp. 134-35.

53. For an elaboration of the points in this paragraph, see Ned Hettinger, "Allen Carlson's Environmental Aesthetics and the Protection of the Environment," *Environmental Ethics* 27 (2005):57-76.

54. As quoted in Fisher, "What the Hills Are Alive With," p. 179, n. 32.

55. *Ibid.*

56. Budd, *The Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature*, p. 108.

57. In other places in his writing, Budd seems to understand this point quite well: "Your experience of an item is sensitive to what you experience it as . . . so qualities of an item available under one description might not be available under another description"

(*The Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature*, p. 12). I do not see how this point can be made compatible with Budd's claim (quoted earlier) that categories of nature do not partially determine the aesthetic properties of natural items, unless he believes that there are no correct categories under which to experience natural objects. Although Budd often seems to accept this "category relative" approach to nature appreciation, according to which "the correctness or otherwise of aesthetic judgments about nature, unlike those about art, be understood as relative to whatever category someone happens to perceive something natural as falling under" (p. 123), he also argues that the misidentification of natural aesthetic objects can lead to appreciations that are "malfounded" and result in "aesthetic deprivations" (p. 23).

58. Fisher accepts that knowledge of whether a sound is natural or caused by humans can justifiably affect our assessment of it. See Fisher, "The Value of Natural Sounds."

59. Godlovitch, "Icebreakers," pp. 22-23.

60. Carroll, "On Being Moved by Nature," p. 258.

61. For a (modest) defense of this interpretation of aesthetics and ethics and its relevance to environmental protectionism, see Hettinger, "Allen Carlson's Environmental Aesthetics and the Protection of the Environment," esp. pp. 71-76.

62. Carroll, "On Being Moved by Nature," pp. 257-58.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 257.

64. Brady, *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment*; and also Emily Brady, "Imagination and the Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 56 (1998):139-47.

65. *Ibid.*, p. 143.

66. *Ibid.*, p. 144.

67. *Ibid.*, p. 145.

68. Eaton, "Fact and Fiction in the Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature," p. 152.

69. The power of this argument depends on being able to show not only that the anti-environmental "aesthetic" really is infused with significant self-interest but also that the environmental aesthetics is not so infused. I am hopeful that this argument can frequently be made. While the environments that environmentalists find attractive are often those best suited for the types of uses they prefer (for example, hiking and bird watching), these activities allow for aesthetic appreciation of environment for its own sake that is much less likely to occur with the types of uses that antienvironmentalists prefer. I thank Christopher Preston for making me think more about this objection.

70. Marcia Eaton, "Professional Aesthetics and Environmental Reform," *Aesthetics on-*

*line*, <http://www.aesthetics-online.org/ideas/eaton.html>, para. 2.

71. *Ibid.*

72. Eaton, "The Beauty That Requires Health," p. 88.

73. Eaton, "Fact and Fiction," p. 154.

74. *Ibid.*, p. 155.

75. See Donald Worster, "The Ecology of Order and Chaos," *Environmental History Review* 14 (1990):1–18. See also Ned Hettinger and William Throop, "Refocusing Ecocentrism: De-emphasizing Stability and Defending Wildness," *Environmental Ethics* 21 (1999):3–21.

76. Versions of this essay were presented at the University of Montana, the College of Charleston, and a meeting of the International Society for Environmental Ethics. I thank John Fisher and Dan Sturgis for their helpful comments and suggestions.