

Objectivity in Environmental Aesthetics and Protection of the Environment

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(To appear in Allen Carlson and Sheila Lintott, eds., *Beauty to Duty: From Aesthetics to Environmentalism*, Columbia Univ. Press, 2007)

The sunset opposite Nanaimo 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)

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)

I. Introduction

The beauty of the environment is a significant motive for environmental protection. Whether it be the preservation of wilderness areas, the protection of the rural countryside from sprawl, or opposition to cutting a neighborhood tree, concern for environmental beauty figures prominently. I believe that aesthetic considerations can play a significant role so in the justification for environmental protection as well. I will call such aesthetic defenses of the environment "aesthetic protectionism." Environmental degradation is a serious a problem in large part because it involves the destruction of substantial aesthetic value. If wilderness, the rural country side, and neighborhood trees were of low aesthetic value (or of negative aesthetic value), both the practice of--and justification for--environmental protection would be seriously weakened.

There are many reasons to resist making aesthetics central to a defense of the environment. Many consider natural beauty to be a weak and trivial value when compared to utilitarian values used to protect the environment (e.g., health and recreation) or to exploit it (e.g., jobs and growth). Gary Varner suggests that natural beauty is at best a tie-breaker:

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.¹

Others have argued that since natural beauty counts for little in assessing how we should treat humans, we should be skeptical about thinking it amounts to much in determining how we should treat the environment.² Many think that aesthetic value is anthropocentric and instrumental (i.e., it reduces to pleasurable experiences for humans) and they believe the best defenses of nature should be intrinsic.

Perhaps the most important worry about aesthetic defenses of environment--and the focus of this essay--is the common assumption that beauty is in the eye of the beholder and that therefore aesthetic responses are subjective and relative. If judgments of environmental beauty lack objective grounding, they would seem to be a poor basis for justifying environmental protection. One legal analysis early in the environmental movement articulates 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.³

One of the first philosophers to note this problem argues 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."⁴

Even if one rejects the view that aesthetic judgments in general are subjective and relative, one might claim that they are in the case of judgments about environmental beauty. A view common in the philosophy of art is that while there is substantial objectivity in art, the aesthetic appreciation of nature is either thoroughly relative or much less constrained than the aesthetic appreciation of art.⁵ Consider a forceful statement of this view from one of the most highly regarded introductory aesthetic textbooks:⁶

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 . . .

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

In the almost fifty-year-long dispute about protecting Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge from oil development--although there are clearly other issues at stake--the aesthetic value of the refuge has played a central part of the debate. Former U.S. Interior Secretary Gail Norton thinks of the refuge as a "Godforsaken mosquito-infested swamp shrouded in frozen darkness half the year," while former U.S. President Jimmy Carter judges it a place of "solitude, unmatched beauty, and grandeur." If these aesthetic judgments are mere matters of personal taste, 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 the rural character of its environs argues that great aesthetic value is lost when tranquil tree-lined roads, punctuated by farmhouses, small fields, and ponds--symbolic of human harmony with nature--get replaced with 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. The developers, on the other hand, argue that great aesthetic value is gained when monotonous weed-infested, dirt roads are replaced with useful and well-built stores that 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 to these environments, the appeal to aesthetic considerations would seem to be of little use in environmental decision-making.

This essay explores the debate about objectivity and relativity in environmental aesthetics. It examines arguments for relativism put forward by John Fisher and Malcolm Budd, assess their merits, and explores their implications for aesthetic protectionism. The essay also considers the views of three diverse thinkers in environmental aesthetics that provide (in very different ways) for significant dimensions of objectivity: Allen Carlson, Noel Carroll, and Emily Brady. My purpose in assessing the debate between relativity and objectivity in environmental aesthetics is to determine to what extent this debate matters for aesthetic protectionism. Does environmental aesthetic relativism really undermine the use of environmental beauty for environmental protection? Is the objectivity provided by the objectivists such that it will allow aesthetics to play a useful role in environmental protection? I assess Marcia Eaton's suggestion that a Carlson-type cognitive view is necessary if environmental aesthetics is to "contribute to preserving sustainable landscapes" and criticize her assumption that the protection of nature will necessarily be better served by aesthetic responses based on knowledge of--rather than ignorance about--nature.⁷ I propose that we adopt a "constrained pluralism" in environmental aesthetics that falls between the extremes of subjectivity and objectivity and advocate accepting a plurality of better and worse aesthetic responses to environment.

II. Objectivity as Constrained Pluralism: Better and Worse Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature

Allen Carlson's views have been central to this debate.⁸ Carlson provides for objectivity in 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 science is our best guide to the nature of the natural world and thus an aesthetic response to nature should be guided by knowledge of science or natural history more generally (much as an aesthetic response to art should be guided by knowledge of art history). Because science is objective, an environmental aesthetic informed by science will also be objective.

Many resist Carlson's scientific monism finding it implausible that acceptable nature appreciation must be guided by science rather than by other sorts of cognitive, emotional, or imaginative resources. Rejecting scientific monism need not lead to the view that anything goes

in the aesthetic appreciation of nature. To deny there is only one correct type of response to an environmental aesthetic object--or to nature more generally--is not to embrace the idea that any aesthetic response (or type of aesthetic response) is as good as any other. Carlson's science-based appreciation of nature is not the only position that allows for a measure of objectivity, nor--as we shall see--is aesthetic protectionism always best served by a scientifically-informed aesthetic response.

Carlson frequently characterizes his view by saying the "*appropriate*" or "*correct*" or "*true*" aesthetic appreciation of nature must be guided by science. Aesthetic responses to nature uninformed by science or natural history are thus "inappropriate," "incorrect," or even "false."⁹ I believe it is unhelpful to confine our assessment of aesthetic responses to nature to language such as "correct or incorrect," "true or false," or even "appropriate or inappropriate." We need multiple criteria for assessing better and worse in aesthetic responses to nature, criteria that are contextually sensitive and not rigidly hierarchical. For example, a scientifically-uniformed aesthetic response is not always unacceptable: A child or a uneducated adult may not know that a glacier is a river of ice, but there is nothing *incorrect*, *false*, or even *inappropriate* about their being wowed by the sight of a calving glacier. Yet informed responses are often better responses. Knowledge 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 about objectivity in environmental aesthetic appreciation is a "constrained pluralism" according to which there are a plurality of better and worse aesthetic responses to environment, with the distinction between better and worse being made in a variety of ways (and not simply as correct/incorrect, true/false, appropriate/inappropriate, science-based/not based on science).¹⁰ Constrained pluralism falls between a naive monism that insists on uniquely correct and appropriate aesthetic responses to environment and an "anything-goes subjectivism" that allows for any aesthetic response to environment to be as good as any other.¹¹ We shall see that such a view has significant resources for objectivity that are useful for aesthetic protectionism.

Virtually everyone working in environmental aesthetics distinguishes between better and worse responses to environment.¹² This is true of thinkers with drastically divergent approaches to aesthetics, from science-based (cognitive) theories like Allen Carlson's to emotional-arousal

theorists like Noel Carroll, and imagination-based theorists like Emily Brady. Ronald Hepburn has a sophisticated discussion of how one 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.¹³ Hepburn’s preferred distinction is between “trivial and serious” aesthetic appreciation of nature, but I think it preferable to appeal to a great variety of distinctions between better and worse ways to appreciate environment.¹⁴

Consider the distinction between deep versus shallow or superficial responses. In his critique of Carlson’s scientific monism, Noel Carroll suggests that depth in aesthetic response might involve either the length of time a response can continue or the intensity of the involvement at a time.¹⁵ The so-called “scenery cult” is excellent example of a shallow type of nature appreciation. There is a well-developed literature criticizing the inability of many to appreciate unscenic nature as a kind of aesthetic vice.¹⁶ For too many, nature appreciation is limited to the appreciation of nature’s dramatic landscapes. Nature appreciation involves driving through a National Park, stopping only at scenic viewpoints for snap shots and the gift shop for picture postcards of the scenery. This is a lazy type of nature appreciation interested only in “easy beauty,” the “picturesque,” and in visual appreciation rather than deeper, multi-sensuous engagement. This suggests additionally that better aesthetic responses are multi-sensuous rather than ocular-centric.¹⁷ They are lively and active (perceptually and otherwise), rather than feeble and passive.¹⁸ Contrast appreciating a mountain lake by gazing at it from the shoreline with appreciation of the lake while swimming in it. Or compare watching through a window or appreciating a storm while being outside in the midst of it.¹⁹

Discriminating responses are better than indiscriminating ones. Attentive responses are better than inattentive ones, or responses that are inappropriately attentive (e.g., one is so focused on finding a particular flower that one misses the aesthetic qualities of the forest at large). Mature responses are better than immature ones; unbiased responses are better than biased. 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 better than confused ones. Thoughtful and reflective responses are better than unthinking ones, such as the stereotyped response to deer as cute and Bambi-like. Knowledgeable responses are better than ones that distort, ignore or suppress important truths about the objects of appreciation.²⁰ Consider, for

example, the romanticized appreciation of wolves that ignores their predatory lifestyle. Or consider English poet John Donne's aesthetic judgment about mountains, based on the 17th century view that God originally made the world a smooth sphere but then warped it in punishment for human sins: "Warts, and pock-holes on the face of th'earth."²¹

While some aesthetic judgments about nature are indeed true or false, correct or incorrect, appropriate or not, many aesthetic responses to nature are better or worse than others on very different grounds. Thus we should not choose between the view that there is one and only one true type of aesthetic appreciation of the environment (as if this was necessary for aesthetic protectionism) and the view that any type of aesthetic response and judgment about the environment is acceptable, but rather develop a view that allows for a plurality of responses to nature some of which are better or worse than each other. We should seek to determine whether such a critical pluralism provides sufficient objectivity in the aesthetic appreciation of nature to make it a worthwhile and significant enterprise and allow for a viable aesthetic protectionism.²²

III. Arguments for Relativity in Environmental Aesthetics

I now consider views of some who have doubts about the objectivity of environmental appreciation and who present arguments for relativity in environmental aesthetics. The main argument put forward is that nature appreciation lacks the kind of objectivity found in art appreciation and that the appreciation of art is far more constrained than is the appreciation of nature. I examine this claim and explore whether this alleged relative-deficiency in objectivity is a problem for aesthetic protectionism.

John Fisher has a carefully crafted and thoughtful paper where he defends the value of aesthetically appreciating the sounds of nature while arguing that such appreciation is highly relative and far more so than the appreciation of music.²³ Although Fisher does not argue that one 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 think his arguments have applicability only to the appreciation of nature's sounds. In fact, Malcolm Budd has presented similar arguments for the relativity of environmental aesthetics responses in general.²⁴

Fisher distinguishes between two dimensions of objectivity: What he considers the obvious requirement that all aesthetic appreciation--including nature appreciation--be guided by the aesthetic object ("the guidance by the object requirement") and the "agreement criterion,"

according to which aesthetic judgments should be potentially universal in the sense that proper aesthetic judgments are true and require agreement from other perceivers who are sensitive, rational and appropriately placed (p. 171-72). Fisher rejects this agreement requirement. He argues that agreement does not follow from the guidance by object criterion, because an aesthetic response can be guided by an object's characteristics while being underdetermined by them. Although he thinks this underdetermination is also true of the appreciation art objects, aesthetic judgments of nature's sounds "will be many times more underdetermined than are typical judgments of art or musical works" (p. 177).²⁵

Malcolm Budd agrees that there is a freedom and relativity in aesthetic appreciation of nature that is not present with art: "The aesthetic appreciation of nature is thereby endowed with a freedom denied to artistic appreciation" (p. 108). 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 . . ." (p. 177). 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 such design places on art appreciation (p. 108). For example, Cubist paintings are not intended to be judged in terms of their representational accuracy and to so judge them is a mistake. In contrast, nature does not intend for you to appreciate it one way or another.

That art objects have been designed for aesthetic appreciation by artists may well put constraints on proper appreciation of those objects that are lacking in the appreciation of aesthetic objects not so designed. The truth of this claim, however, depends on one's theory of art. It is not clear that formalists would assent to it and the claim puts weight on 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 appropriate aesthetic response but also opens up avenues for new interpretations and types of appreciative responses. There may well be a greater multiplicity in appropriate appreciative responses to Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* that there was to that toilet when it was sitting in a warehouse. Or consider the difference between appreciating a moose and 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 multiple meanings some of which the painting would not have). Interpretation and evaluation of a moose painting involves issues of artistic intent and style and cultural context of the painting that constrains but also complicates its appreciation. The lack of artistic intent behind the object of nature appreciation removes a type of complexity and this might actually limit the multiplicity of appropriate responses to it.²⁶

Both Fisher and Budd note the relative lack of framing in nature when compared to art. Nature does not come with a frame around it (as does a painting and artworks more generally), and thus there are a vast multiplicity of different and legitimate ways to frame it. Unlike art, where the artist (or the art category) frames the aesthetic object, how to frame the aesthetic experience of nature is up to us. For example, one doesn't look at the backside of a painting or knock it to see how it sounds, but these are perfectly permissible approaches to appreciating a natural object like a tree. Budd argues that--in contrast with art appreciation--there is no proper level of observation for nature. One can look at nature through a telescope or a microscope, or with one's unaided eye. He also argues that there are no proper or optimum conditions for observation: One can observe nature when it is foggy or clear, bright or dark, from near or far. He also claims 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 argues, we are free to frame nature appreciation as we please. Thus "there is no such thing as the appropriate aesthetic appreciation of nature" (p. 109) (as there is with art) 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,"²⁷ and 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" (p. 147).²⁸

While there is clearly something right about these claims, there is equally clearly something problematic as well. Budd overstates the freedom involved. There are constraints on how we frame the appreciation of natural objects. Once one has settled on a particular natural object as the object of aesthetic attention, many other framing choices are ruled out. One should not appreciate trout in a mountain stream with a telescope or a microscope; so there are better and worse levels of observation in particular cases. Aesthetically appreciating a cliff is not best done from an airplane six miles high or in one's mobile home on a pitch black night; thus there are

better and worse conditions of observation. Are we really free to use any sense modality in appreciating 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.”²⁹

Fisher claims that how one frames 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” (p. 173). Fisher argues--again in contrast with musical appreciation--that the appreciation of natural sounds lacks institutional conventions that determine and guide appropriate appreciation. So it is not just that there is no artist to frame the aesthetic object, but there are also no social conventions that 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 is] would not be a plausible claim about acts of listening to nature in our society” (p. 174). There are no nature (natural sound) critics in the mold of art (music) critics.³⁰ Thus Fisher argues that *what* we should listen to in nature, for *how long*, and in *what way* is pretty much up to us. Fisher illustrates framing relativity 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? (P. 173)

“Nature does not dictate an *intrinsically* correct way to frame its sounds in the way that a composer does” (p. 173) and “there is a large multiplicity of structures and relations that we might hear and all seem equally legitimate” (P. 176).

I think Fisher and Budd have made a good case for framing pluralism concerning 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 it is highly implausible to insist that there is only one correct way to frame and aesthetically appreciate nature.

Does such a plurality of appropriate aesthetic responses to the environment present a problem for aesthetic protectionism? One might think not: 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 instead I focus on the smell of the mountain's spruce trees after the rain or savor the taste of its wild huckleberries does not seem a threat to aesthetic protectionism. If the multiplicity of acceptable ways to appreciating nature were virtually all aesthetically positive and of greater value than what would replace them as a result of environmental degradation, then pluralism would not compromise aesthetic protectionism at all. Further, that there are a multiplicity of acceptable ways to frame and appreciate nature is compatible with there also being a multiplicity of incorrect ways to do this (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 framing freedom apply to whether or not human-made sounds or other human effects should be part of into one's appreciation of a natural environment? Should human intrusions be included in environmental appreciative judgments? 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 airplane flights be allowed 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 appropriate and is it a compatible use 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 the engine noise degrades the natural tranquility and substantially lessens the aesthetic value of these areas. But if framing of sounds is arbitrary, then anti-environmentalists can argue that such intrusive human sounds should 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 ridge tops. 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 evaluation of these environments that suppresses 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 as one assess the overall aesthetic value of these environments. To ignore them would be like standing in the Snake River Valley of Wyoming and refusing to look up to the West. This would not be an acceptable attempt to aesthetically appreciate Grand Teton National Park. Aesthetic judgments about environments that frame out human intrusions similarly distort. A developer who insists that putting a sky scraper in the Snake River Valley will not detract from the aesthetic beauty of the valley and neighboring Teton Park because "one can simply frame it out" is relying on a mistaken conception of how free framing choices in environmental appreciation can legitimately be. Do Fisher's and Budd's accounts of framing freedom and relativity justify this anti-environmentalists 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. Noel Carroll uses these ideas to explain how "being moved by nature" (i.e., an aesthetic emotional-arousal to nature) can solve the problem of aesthetic focus.³¹

Certain natural expanses have natural frames or what I prefer to call nature closure: caves, coves, 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.

The loud roar of engines or a towering skyscraper rising from a valley and blocking the view of a mountain will naturally draw out 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 frame them out 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 a worrying argument developed by Stan Godlovitch against privileging human scales when aesthetically appreciating nature.³² Godlovitch argues that typical, human aesthetic responses to nature are "sensorily parochial" and that the temporal and spatial scale-dependence of our aesthetic responses to nature are arbitrary. Godlovitch would have us aesthetically appreciate all of nature, great and small, and all natural processes, long and short, presumably equally. Thus he argues that smashing ice blocks heaved up by a river should be seen as no less aesthetically offensive than bulldozing the Navaho Sandstone Castles of Monument Valley, Arizona. True, the ice melts each spring and comes back the following winter, but those monuments will also 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."³³

Such a view seems clearly problematic for aesthetic protectionism. If environmental aesthetics is to be useful in environmental policy, it must be able to help us distinguish between more or less aesthetically positive environments or natural objects. It certainly cannot sanction the idea that as much aesthetic value is lost by crushing ice blocks in a river as destroying thousand-foot-tall sandstone monuments. Note that the "equal beauty thesis" (i.e., all of nature is equally beautiful)--although it is an objectivist claim--is a problem from the perspective of aesthetic protectionism. That an environmental aesthetic is objective is no guarantee that it will be

useful in environmental policy disputes and it does not insure that it will be helpful to the cause of aesthetic protectionism.

Godlovitch is right that our aesthetic experiences and judgments are scale-dependent (just as Budd and Fisher are right that what aesthetic properties we experience and what aesthetic judgments they support depends on how we frame our acts of nature appreciation). Hepburn illustrates the point thus: “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.”³⁴ But this should not make us think that the aesthetic qualities we enjoy in the mountain are not appropriately appreciable. Clear-cuts are a paradigm of environmental, aesthetic disvalue, but if one scales up, they are 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 the 200 year time scale.

The response to Godlovitch is that given the kind of creatures human beings 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 they are inappropriate given the perspective we are taking (or that—given this perspective—any aesthetic response is as good as any other). Nor should we accept the idea that any perspective is as appropriate as any other. Some framing of environmental appreciation is awkward, forced, and myopic. And given the kinds 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

Perhaps the kind of aesthetic relativity that is most worrying to aesthetic protectionism is not simply framing relativity, but a relativity that affects evaluation or judgments of aesthetic value (the two may well be related). Perhaps it is inappropriate to suppress the whine of the snowmobile, the buzz of the helicopter, and the silhouette of the Teton Valley ski scraper from one’s environmental aesthetic evaluation. But motor enthusiasts might simply claim that they find these sounds appealing and developers might claim to enjoy the sight of a large building

silhouetted against the Grand Tetons, and they both might argue that environmentalists' intuitions about the negative aesthetic character of these humanizations are just one aesthetic response, no more or less appropriate than are the aesthetic responses of those who enjoy these human effects. Here is how a "wise-use" activist put the point:

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.³⁵

Fisher gives an example that suggests he finds such relativity about the aesthetic value of natural sounds to be correct, at least in some cases: "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" (p. 171).³⁶ He also provides evidence that suggests differences between city-dwellers and others concerning how favorably or unfavorably they respond to animal sounds (p. 178, note 24). A forceful case for the relativity of judgments of aesthetic value of nature is 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.³⁷

I do not deny the possibility of *some* (perhaps even significant) relativity in aesthetic value judgments about nature. There are differences in circumstances, contexts, and perspectives that would 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 snow mobile 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 that is threatened by a proposed ban on snowmobiles in national parks. Clear cuts may not appear to be eyesores to those who hunt the deer feeding off the new growth or to the logger who cut the trees.

I suspect that the right course here is to accept some plurality in environmental aesthetic evaluations. Perhaps even some conflicting evaluations should be seen as acceptable. Nonetheless, we should resist anything-goes relativity about 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 squeeze them up.³⁸ Along with a plurality of acceptable environmental aesthetic evaluations, we also should embrace a multiplicity 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 the informed swamp connoisseur (who is aware of the ecological services wetlands provide and knows that because of moving water, the bugs are not bad at all). The developer whose stereotyped view of swamps leads him to think a racetrack is a compatible use next to a swamp nature preserve need not be taken seriously because his evaluation is founded on a misunderstanding of swamps.

IV. Resources for Objectivity and Aesthetic Protectionism

I now turn from a discussion of doubts about objectivity in environmental appreciation to an examination of the ideas of environmental aestheticians who suggest factors that help with such objectivity and provide possible resources for aesthetic protectionism. The most important of these factors are (1) cognitive factors, (2) objectivity in emotional responses to nature, and (3) disinterestedness of aesthetic responses. Many diverse thinkers working in the field of environmental aesthetics provide for significant dimensions of objectivity. One expects accounts of objectivity from cognitivists like Allen Carlson who bases appropriate nature appreciation on the understanding of natural history. But one finds it as well in the work of Noel Carroll who sees emotional response as key to an important type of nature appreciation and in the writings of Emily Brady for whom imagination, not knowledge, is central to the appreciation of 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. Allen Carlson’s scientific cognitivist account of environmental aesthetic appreciation provides significant resources for objectivity and his views are overall 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”³⁹--provides strong grounds for aesthetic protectionism, if we reject a similar positive aesthetics thesis for the human-shaped environment (and it is plausible that we should). Carlson’s reliance on functionality for the aesthetic assessment of humanized environments suggests that unsustainable human environments will have negative aesthetic value.⁴⁰ Because the functionality of an environment is a significantly objective matter, his account of the aesthetic appreciation of human environments--although not based on natural science--has a significant dimension of objectivity to it as well.⁴¹

Not everyone agrees that cognitive factors are all that 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,”⁴² Fisher says: “Knowledge will certainly affect our experience and bring out features otherwise missed, but I do not think it can dictate frame or significance” (p. 179, fn 32.). In a similar vein, Budd argues 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” (p. 108).

I believe that 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 significantly influence appropriate frame and judgments of significance in many cases. Consider an example: While kayaking through a southern swamp and we have a choice between listening to the sound of a woodpecker or an alligator. Knowledge that it is the call of an Ivory-Billed Woodpecker, a bird thought extinct and whose existence has not been documented for forty years, suggests our focus should be on the sound of hammering on a tree rather than a gator bellowing. Here, both frame and significance are--if not “dictated”--at least highly suggested by this bit of knowledge. Such environmental knowledge enhances and deepens one’s aesthetic response in this case. Lacking such information about the environment can impoverish our response to it.

Sometimes there are correct and incorrect categories with which to appreciate natural objects and they help distinguish appropriate from inappropriate aesthetic responses. Carlson has persuasive examples that show correct categorization can--contrary to Budd's claims--determine 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? Which aesthetic adjectives are appropriate depends on placing the environmental object in its correct category.⁴³ So too with perceptually indistinguishable environmental objects, one of which is a human-made and the other 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 revolting mine runoff? So sometimes correct information and categorization does and should affect environmental aesthetic assessment.⁴⁴

Both Noel Carroll and Stan Godlovitch reject the idea that aesthetic appreciation necessarily becomes inappropriate when it is based on false belief or mistaken scientific information. Godlovitch says: "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."⁴⁵ Carroll gives an example of what he takes to be an appropriate aesthetic response to a natural object even when one has 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."⁴⁶ I accept Carroll's example as an appropriate aesthetic response, but I think the response remains appropriate only because the false belief does not influence the aesthetic response. Were it to have a bearing on the response, I think we would and should view it as an inappropriate response, at least to the extent the two are related. Thus although false beliefs about natural objects do not necessarily disqualify an aesthetic response to those objects, such responses are undermined when those false beliefs affect that response. Once again we see that knowledge and correct categorization of environmental objects can constrain the plurality of appropriate aesthetic responses.

At the most general level, I think knowledge of environmental degradation overall should

inform environmental aesthetic appreciation. For example, judgment about whether the trans-Alaska pipeline enhances or detracts from Alaska's beauty needs to 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 need not be received as appalling. But in today's world, at least for those informed and properly appreciative of the massive human impact on the planet, the appropriate response to these human intrusions in nature should not be positive. A positive aesthetic response to roadside litter, spewing sewage pipes, and fish belly-up in the creeks manifests ignorance not only about the specific harms involved and the environmental vices manifested, but also about the overall environmental degradation humans are causing.

These points depend on rejecting formalistic and other narrow conceptions of aesthetic experience and judgment that isolate aesthetic appreciation. I reject such an aesthetic apartheid: Aesthetics is not separate from the rest of life, and this means that there is no strict separation of aesthetics, ethics, and cognition.⁴⁷

A second resource for constraining environmental aesthetic pluralism is objectivity concerning emotional responses to nature. Noel Carroll provides a sketch of an argument for such emotional objectivity.⁴⁸ Although Carroll thinks Carlson's scientific-knowledge based environmental aesthetics is one type of appropriate appreciation of nature, he criticizes Carlson for claiming it is the only type and offers his "being moved by nature" as an additional and distinct mode of legitimate appreciation. Carroll argues that the visceral, minimally intellectual, 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 knowledge of natural-history or science. Carroll acknowledges strong objectivity in Carlson's environmental aesthetics and desires it for his own view: "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."⁴⁹

Carroll argues that emotional arousal can be objective. On his account, emotional states can be appropriate or not, and appropriateness is the truth (objectivity) of emotions. Emotions are cognitive in the sense that they are underpinned by beliefs, thoughts, and patterns of attention and

they are directed at objects. Emotions are appropriately directed at some objects and not toward others: Fear of oncoming tank is appropriate, while fear of chicken soup is not (unless one thinks it dangerous). Emotions that are objective are those where the emotion is appropriate for its object and the beliefs underlying the emotion are ones reasonable for others to share. So, for example, being excited by the grandeur of something (e.g., the Tetons) that one believes is of large scale is appropriate, and if this belief in its large scale is reasonable for others to hold, it is an objective emotional arousal (and not subjective, distorted, or wayward). The person who is not excited by the grandeur of the Tetons--but who acknowledges they are large scale--has an inappropriate emotional response. If the person denies the Tetons are of a large scale because they are tiny compared to the Galaxy, then this person has the wrong comparison class. Thus, Carroll argues that objectivity in environmental aesthetics is possible with an emotional arousal account of environmental aesthetics as well as with a scientific-knowledge based account.

I think Carroll is right that emotional reactions to nature can be more or less appropriate, perceptive, or 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 positively respond to human intrusions into wild nature. There are better and worse emotional responses to environment. As was suggested above, those well-informed about the massive and harmful human impact on the planet's relatively natural areas and who have the welfare of humans or nonhumans at heart, will react to environmental degradation with dismay. They will not find the hum of snowmobiles to be soothing. The sounds of chainsaws will alarm them. Belching smokestacks will disgust them. And pollution sunsets will not strike them as beautiful. In general, environmental degradation will strike them as aesthetically unappealing. If some find it appealing, this is likely to manifest ignorance about the human impact on the planet, a skewed emotional constitution, or such strong self-interest as to blind aesthetic responses (or to disqualify it--see below). I think Carroll's account provides us with some of the tools needed to justify the claim that there are better and worse emotional-aesthetic responses to nature.

Emily Brady has developed an imagination-based environmental aesthetic that--perhaps surprisingly--provides for objectivity in environmental appreciation, helps constrain the range of

legitimate pluralism in environmental aesthetics, and provides resources for the goal of aesthetic protectionism.⁵⁰ Brady's focus is on the importance of imagination in aesthetic appreciation of nature and she makes her case using many examples, including this one:⁵¹

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 circumferences 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.

Brady is worried about imagination's reputation for being subjective and arbitrary. Many will think that "imagination inevitably leads to an experience that is too unpredictable, too arbitrary and prone to fantasy to guide appropriate aesthetic appreciation of nature."⁵² For Brady, not every imaginative response to nature is appropriate and she attempts to "clip the wings of imagination" in hopes of retaining sufficient objectivity for environmental aesthetics to be useful in environmental policy disputes. She aims to prevent 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 fails to direct appropriate appreciation. She rules out other imaginings because they are irrelevant: One is awe struck by dramatic sheer drop to the sea of an English high cliff and this aesthetic response can be intensified by imagining the feeling of jumping off the cliff and the fear of someone contemplating jumping. Imagining the possible motives for that jump, such as financial difficulties, is, however, irrelevant 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 one strays from an aesthetic focus in appreciation of a seascape by fantasizing about how many sea shells one 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 as they violate the disinterestedness requirement of aesthetic response.⁵³

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

helpfully broadens the conception of objectivity in environmental aesthetics beyond scientific cognitivism and its focus on true and correct aesthetic judgments. Brady does a reasonable job of rebutting the presumption that an imagination-based aesthetics of nature will be purely subjective and arbitrary. She goes some of the way toward rebutting 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."⁵⁴

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. On Brady's account, disinterestedness requires a freeing of the mind from self-interested and instrumental attention toward 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-interest 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 a (disinterested) aesthetic response. 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, on Brady's interpretation of disinterestedness, will not count as properly aesthetic. A "developer's aesthetic" that prefers Wal-Marts, shopping malls, and strip highways, to forests, wetlands and the rural countryside, may not be a legitimate aesthetic after all.⁵⁵

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 environmental aesthetic response depending on its implications for environmental protection. Eaton clearly thinks that environmental aesthetics is crucial to environmental protection. She argues: "Ecologists internationally recognize that in the absence of a change in aesthetic preferences, sound environmental practices have little chance of being widely adopted."⁵⁶ 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.”⁵⁷ Presumably her view is that they would not find these lawns so aesthetically appealing once 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, and this has led to a decrease in--even marginalization of--fire-adapted species and a tinder box in our national forests.

Eaton thinks that if one’s 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.”⁵⁸ Positive aesthetic responses to environments lead to care for them, but, Eaton argues, unless those responses are guided by environmental knowledge, the care may not be of the right sort. She criticizes Emily Brady’s reliance on imagination as the key to environmental aesthetics, because, unless such imagination (and the fiction that results from it) are informed and guided by environmental knowledge, the effect of such an environmental aesthetic on nature can be devastating. She the cites the Disney classic *Bambi* for encouraging a sentimental image of all deer as sweet, innocent and gentle, and argues that this image ignores the ecological devastation they can cause and has made it hard for forest managers to convince the public of the need to reduce deer populations. Stories about monsters in swamps have contributed to our negative aesthetic response to them 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.”⁵⁹ “For only with knowledge will sustainable practices develop.”⁶⁰ 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.

Now while I agree there are significant positive resources in Carlson's environmental aesthetic for aesthetic protectionism, I think Eaton is too quick in her assessment that we must embrace Carlson's view and in 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 will lead to sustainable care is insufficiently appreciative of the value for aesthetic protectionism of these alternative accounts. It 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 believe in a delicate balance of nature, in tight integration of natural systems, and the dependence of stability on biodiversity. These ideas have been seriously challenged in contemporary ecological research and are at best significantly overstated.⁶¹ Nonetheless such mistaken scientific beliefs seem beneficial for environmental protection and policy. If one believes that driving a species extinct will lead to ecological collapse, then one will preserve species. If nature is seen to be a delicate balance easily upset by human intrusion, then human will be inclined to keep their disruptions out of nature. Aesthetic responses based on ecological ignorance and myth may sometimes be the best for aesthetic protectionism. Thus insuring that one's aesthetic responses to nature are informed by scientific facts will not necessarily contribute to aesthetic protectionism.

V. Conclusions

Environmental aesthetics should play an important role in environmental protection. Environmental aesthetic relativity and subjectivity--although presenting significant worries for aesthetic protectionism--do not cripple such a project. 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 the best. Legitimate pluralism about environmental beauty does not prevent distinguishing between better and worse aesthetic responses. Work in the field of environmental aesthetics contains numerous

resources for objectivity that hold promise for justifying a significant role in environmental protection for judgments about environmental beauty. A knowledge-based environmental aesthetic can be useful for aesthetic protectionism, but it is not the only environmental aesthetic useful in this way, and it does not guarantee beneficial environmental results.⁶²

Notes

¹ Gary Varner, *In Nature's Interests* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 22.

² "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?" J. Robert Loftis, "Three Problems for the Aesthetic Foundations of Environmental Ethics," *Philosophy in the Contemporary World* 10, 2 (2003): 43.

³ Buford, "Beyond the Eye of the Beholder: Aesthetics and Objectivity," *Michigan Law Review* 73, 7 (1973): 1438, 1442.

⁴ Janna Thompson, "Aesthetics and the Value of Nature," *Environmental Ethics* 17, 3 (1995): 293.

⁵ Philosophers who take this view include Malcolm Budd, *The Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature: Essays on the Aesthetics of Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); John Fisher "What The Hills Are Alive With--In Defense of the Sounds of Nature," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 56, 2 (1998): 167-179; and Kendall Walton, "Categories of Art," *Philosophical Review* 79, 3 (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* 46,1 (2006): 35, footnote 49

⁶ John Fisher, *Reflecting on Art* (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing, 1993), p. 338-39. Fisher is here arguing for the importance of the artist in understanding expression in art

and only for the relativity of nature's expressive properties as an aside.

⁷ See Marcia Eaton, "The Beauty that Requires Health," in J. Nassauer, ed., *Placing Nature: Culture and Landscape Ecology* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1997): pp. 86-106 and "Fact and Fiction in the Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 56, 2 (1998): 149-56.

⁸ Allen Carlson, *Aesthetics and the Environment* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

⁹ 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 to 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." Parsons, "Freedom and Objectivity in the Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature," pp. 34, 35, footnote 49.

¹⁰ 'Objectivity' is a super-charged 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 matter and this 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. This is the type of objectivity that Emily Brady strives for in her account of aesthetic appreciation of nature. See her *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), chapter 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.

¹¹ Compare Brady's notion of "critical pluralism" in *ibid.*, pp. 79-81.

¹² Perhaps the philosopher who comes closest to not making this distinction is Thomas Heyd, who Carlson characterizes as a "post modernist" about 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, 2 (2001): 125-137.

¹³ Ronald Hepburn, "Trivial and Serious in Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature," in Salim Kemal and Ivan Gaskell, eds., *Landscape, Natural Beauty and the Arts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 65-80. Like Carlson, Brady, and Eaton, Hepburn sees the need to distinguish better and worse in order to allow aesthetics a role in environmental policy. "When we seek to defend areas of 'outstanding natural beauty' against depredations, 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).

¹⁴ Emily 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 any worse an aesthetic response than is a geological focus on the type of rock that constitutes the hill. Brady, *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment*, p. 167-68.

¹⁵ Noel Carroll, "On Being Moved by Nature: Between Religion and Natural History," in Salim Kemal and Ivan Gaskell, eds., *Landscape, Natural Beauty and the Arts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 259.

¹⁶ See, for example, J. Baird Callicott, "The Land Aesthetic," in Callicott, ed., *A Companion to A Sand County Almanac* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), pp. 157-171;

Yuriko Saito, "The Aesthetics of Unscenic Nature," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 56, 2 (1998): 102-111; and Allen Carlson, *Aesthetics and the Environment*, chapter 3.

¹⁷ See Brady, *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment*, pp. 123-128.

¹⁸ Holmes Rolston argues that the best aesthetic responses to nature must involve "participatory experience" (in addition to being scientifically informed). See "Does an Aesthetics Appreciation of Landscapes Need To Be Science-Based?" *British Journal of Aesthetics* 35, 4 (1995): 374-385.

¹⁹ John Muir once enjoyed a windstorm by climbing to the top of a 100-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." From chapter 10 of Muir's *The Mountains of California* (1894).

²⁰ Hepburn, "Trivial and Serious," p. 69.

²¹ Quoted in Rolston's "Does Aesthetic Appreciation of Landscapes Need to be Science-Based?" p. 375.

²² 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.

²³ Fisher, "What The Hills Are Alive With." Page numbers in the text are to this article. 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 below).

²⁴ Budd, *The Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature*. Page references in the text are to this book.

²⁵ Interestingly, in "The Value of Natural Sounds," *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 33, 3 (1999): 26-42, Fisher acknowledges widespread agreement that natural sounds are preferable to non-musical human-caused sounds and provides an argument justifying this preference.

²⁶ Similarly, a sand sculpture produced by an artist would have multiple meanings that the same pattern produced by nature would not have.

²⁷ Malcolm Budd, "Objectivity and the Aesthetic Value of Nature: Reply to Parsons," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 46, 3 (2006): 268.

²⁸ Budd's language, and the interpretation of his views given here, might suggest 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 (as the kind of natural thing it is), 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 one is appreciating can lead to a "malfounded" 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).

²⁹ Parsons, “Freedom and Objectivity in the Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature,” p. 31.

³⁰ I am not convinced that nature appreciation lacks significant conventions that specify better aesthetic appreciation. Many explore natural areas with naturalists or nature guides of various sorts and most would agree that doing so improves the aesthetic appreciation involved.

³¹ 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 aesthetic focus.

³² Stan Godlovitch, "Icebreakers: Environmentalism and Natural Aesthetics," *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 11, 1 (1994): 15-30.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

³⁴ Hepburn, “Trivial and Serious,” p. 77. In contrast with my arguments, Hepburn refuses to privilege some perspectives.

³⁵ Quoted by Todd Wilkinson in “Who Really Belongs to Their ‘Silent Majority?’” *Bozeman Daily Chronicle*, 8/5/2002, p. A4.

³⁶ Fisher’s relativism is also manifest in his endorsement of John Cage’s claim that “What is more angry than the flash of lightening and the sound of thunder. These responses to nature are mine and will not necessarily correspond to another’s” (p. 178, note 24). Note that Fisher is not a pure relativist. As mentioned above, 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. That he accepts the guidance by object requirement is another way Fisher moves away from an anything-goes relativism. Presumably ways of listening to nature’s sounds that are not guided by the object are inappropriate on his account. (It is not clear, however, what such a requirement rules out.) Another constraint 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 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” (i.e., environmental sounds), this does not “make responsible criticism and discourse about the objects of appreciation impossible” (p. 177). Fisher needs to do more to explain why his brand of relativism does not undermine criticism and to assess to what extent his views are compatible with aesthetic protectionism.

³⁷ J. A. Walter, "You'll Love the Rockies," *Landscape* 17, 2 (1983): 43-47.

³⁸ 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 Saito's "Appreciating Nature on Its Own Terms," *Environmental Ethics* 20, 2 (1998): 135-49.

³⁹ Allen Carlson, “Hargrove, Positive Aesthetics, and Indifferent Creativity,” *Philosophy and Geography* 5, 2 (2002): 233, note 27 (emphasis added).

⁴⁰ Carlson argues that the nature of human-shaped environments is determined by what they are intended to accomplish and thus knowledge of their function is essential to their proper aesthetic appreciation. See *Aesthetics and the Environment*, pp. 134-35.

⁴¹ 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, 1 (2005): 57-76

⁴² As quoted in Fisher, “What The Hills Are Alive With,” p. 179, fn 32.

⁴³ 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 descriptions” (*The Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature*, p. 12). I do not see how this point can be made compatible with Budd's claim (quoted above) that categories of nature do not partially determine the

aesthetic properties of natural items, unless he held that there were 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” (*The Aesthetics of Nature*, p. 123), he also argues that misidentification of natural aesthetic objects can lead to appreciations that are “malformed” and result in “aesthetic deprivations” (*The Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature*, p. 23).

⁴⁴ Fisher accepts that knowledge of whether a sound is natural or human-caused can justifiably affect our assessment of it. See “The Value of Natural Sounds.”

⁴⁵ “Icebreakers,” p. 22-23.

⁴⁶ “On Being Moved By Nature,” p. 258.

⁴⁷ For a (modest) defense of this interpenetration of aesthetics and ethics and its relevance for environmental protectionism, see Hettinger, “Allen Carlson's Environmental Aesthetics and the Protection of the Environment,” especially pp. 71-76.

⁴⁸ Carroll, “On Being Moved by Nature,” pp. 257-58.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 257.

⁵⁰ Brady, *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment* and also Emily Brady, “Imagination and the Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 56, 2 (1998): 139-147.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 143

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 144.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

⁵⁴ Eaton, “Fact and Fiction in the Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature,” p. 152.

⁵⁵ The power of this argument depends on not only being able to show 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 frequently can be made. While the environments that environmentalists find attractive are often ones that are best suited for the types of uses they prefer (e.g., hiking, bird watching), these activities allow for a type of aesthetic appreciation of environment for its own sake that is much less likely to occur with the types of uses anti-environmentalists prefer. I thank Christopher Preston for making me think more about this objection.

⁵⁶ Marcia Eaton, “Professional Aesthetics and Environmental Reform,” *Aesthetics online*, <http://www.aesthetics-online.org/ideas/eaton.html>, paragraph two.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Marcia Eaton, “The Beauty that Requires Health,” p. 88.

⁵⁹ Marcia Eaton, “Fact and Fiction,” p. 154.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

⁶¹ See Donald Worster, “The Ecology of Order and Chaos,” *Environmental History Review* 14, 1/2 (1990): 1-18. See also Ned Hettinger and William Throop, “Refocusing Ecocentrism: De-emphasizing Stability and Defending Wildness,” *Environmental Ethics* 21, 1 (1999): 3-21.

⁶² 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 helpful comments and suggestions.