

AESTHETIC INSIGHT: THE AESTHETIC VALUE OF DAMAGED ENVIRONMENTS

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In this article I start by assuming that positive aesthetic experiences of damaged nature are possible and I argue for the idea that the aesthetic pleasure derived from that contemplation might reveal something of the environment's overall character. I hope to show that positive aesthetic experiences sometimes help to promote emotional attitudes that can lead to insight into the configuration of other non-aesthetic attitudes. In order to do so, I critically appeal to some of the thoughts Kant articulated about the notion of aesthetic experience and its relationship to cognition and morality. I think that the sort of experience I am after in this article cannot be easily accommodated within a Kantian framework and that the possibility of positive aesthetic experience of damaged nature will show that the relationships between the aesthetic and the cognitive or the moral are more complex and enriching than they have so far been acknowledged to be.

I. DAMAGED NATURE CAN SOMETIMES PROVIDE POSITIVE AESTHETIC EXPERIENCES

In this article I am interested in the aesthetic character that damaged or ecologically distorted environments – such as contaminated rivers or lakes, carved mountains, or spoiled valleys – might possess when their appearance is the result, directly or indirectly, of human activities. A good example is provided by the environments in Mazarrón or La Unión (southeast Spain), where some of the hills are partly covered by the remains of the materials that have been taken out of the mine (figs. 1–4). In this sense I will not focus upon naturally burned woods or natural alterations to an eco-system. The reason for concentrating on natural environments damaged by human action is that with respect to these cases there might be moral considerations about the propriety of experiencing aesthetic pleasure which, apparently, render that sort of pleasure problematic. In fact, it seems more or less a matter of agreement – or common sense – that damaged nature cannot afford positive aesthetic experiences at all.¹ But I will not argue

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¹ For a defence of this idea, see Cheryl Foster, 'Aesthetic Disillusionment: Environment, Ethics, Art', *Environmental Values* 1 (1992): 205–15; Marcia M. Eaton, 'The Beauty That Requires Health', in *Nature, Aesthetics, and Environmentalism: From Beauty to Duty*, ed. Allen Carlson and Sheila Lintott (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 339–62;

here for the possibility of taking warranted aesthetic pleasure out of the contemplation of damaged natural landscapes.² Rather, I will start from the possibility that this can be so in some cases. If some damaged environments afford aesthetic pleasure,³ I would like to explore what sort of significance, if any, these experiences have in a broader sense.

This search is motivated by a twofold concern: in the first place, it is a concern about some of the connections between the experience of beauty and other moral or cognitive experiences Kant introduced in the *Critique of Judgement*.⁴ In this respect, I wish to explore how some Kantian claims about the experience of beauty as a symbol of morality fare against the possibility that I will be contemplating.

In the second place, it is a concern about how the aesthetic pleasure provided by some damaged landscapes or environments can affect or determine our overall attitude to those landscapes and environments. In this sense, I am interested in the possible relationships between the aesthetic value that one may find in the landscapes and other attitudes that we might develop to them. Briefly, I wish to consider the possibility that the aesthetic worth found in some paradigmatic damaged landscapes contributes to the development and the consolidation of some cognitive or moral attitudes. Both of these considerations spread from a general concern with the possible relationships that can be reasonably established between the aesthetic and other realms and from an attempt to account for how our aesthetic attitudes might transform other significant non-aesthetic attitudes.

II. THE AESTHETIC, MORALITY, AND COGNITION

Although Kant's project in the *Critique of Judgement* can be rightly described as one in which the autonomy of the judgement of taste is central, several remarks in his work tie the nature of the aesthetic experience to the cognitive and moral spheres. Some of these connections become evident in what has become a sort

Joan Nassauer, 'Cultural Sustainability', in Carlson and Lintott, *Nature, Aesthetics, and Environmentalism*, 363–79; Sheila Lintott, 'Toward Ecofriendly Aesthetics', in Carlson and Lintott, *Nature, Aesthetics, and Environmentalism*, 380–96.

² For a defence of this claim, see Robert Stecker, 'Epistemic Norms, Moral Norms, and Nature Appreciation', *Environmental Ethics* 34 (2012): 247–64, and María José Alcaraz León, 'Morally Wrong Beauty as a Source of Value', *Nordic Journal of Aesthetics*, nos. 40–41 (2010–11): 37–52.

³ Although it is fair to object that some of the cases I concentrate on could better be described in terms of an experience of the sublime, I would maintain that not all remarkable aesthetic experiences of damaged environments fall within the scope of the sublime. Some are, as I will try to show, better characterized as beautiful. In this sense, although I think an analysis of some damaged environments might require reference to the sublime, I will concentrate upon those where the aesthetic experience falls within the scope of the beautiful.

⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).



Figure 1. La Unión, southeast Spain. Photo: José Carlos Níguez Carbonell



Figure 2. Mazarrón Mines, southeast Spain. Photo: José Carlos Níguez Carbonell

of Kantian motto, that is, that the experience of beauty is a symbol of morality, or in the Kantian idea that the aesthetic experience somehow indicates the *a priori* principle of the finality of nature necessary for the possibility of knowledge of nature. The significance of the aesthetic judgement – as a paradigmatic kind of exercise of the faculty of judgement in general – has also been thought of in



Figure 3. El Gorguel, La Unión, southeast Spain. Photo: José Carlos Níguez Carbonell



Figure 4. La Unión Mines, southeast Spain. Photo: José Carlos Níguez Carbonell

relation to the importance that the mere exercise of aesthetic judgement might have in constituting a self-image as an autonomous being capable of taking her judgement at face value.⁵ So it can hardly be denied that aesthetic experience

⁵ Eileen John, 'Beauty, Interest, and Autonomy', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 70 (2012): 193–202.

and judgement play an important role not only in providing a particular way of experiencing nature, but also in revealing some aspects or conditions that go beyond the aesthetic, and that, consequently, reveal some structural links between the different realms: cognitive, practical, and aesthetic. I am not so much interested in exploring the plausibility of these connections in general as in assessing whether the examples of beautiful damaged nature which I have been exploring might cast new light on these thoughts or introduce some tensions that could be inadequately solved within a Kantian framework.

II.1. SETTING THE CASE: CAN DAMAGED NATURE BE EXPERIENCED AS FREELY BEAUTIFUL WITHIN A KANTIAN FRAMEWORK?

Before exploring the possible tensions that the case I am interested in could generate, I will try to motivate the idea that this sort of landscape or environment could in fact be the object of a judgement of free beauty within a Kantian framework. In order to do so, I will try to defend that, given a particular reading of Kant's aesthetics, an awareness that the landscape is damaged or altered does not deprive the aesthetic judgement of its free character. That is, positive aesthetic judgements of damaged environments may still count as judgements of free beauty when we are aware of the environments' damaged condition.

The aim of this section is not so much to attribute to Kant the discussion of this possibility but to show that, on some reading of Kant's *Critique of Judgement*, it is possible to conceive a damaged landscape as beautiful and to consider this judgement to be one of free beauty rather than of dependent beauty. In order to do so, we need to argue, first, that damaged or altered environments can still be the proper object for aesthetic judgements about nature – as opposed to aesthetic judgements that may have artworks or artefacts as their objects, and, second, that aesthetic judgement can be characterized as a judgement of free beauty rather than of dependent beauty.

II.1.1. DAMAGED ENVIRONMENTS CAN BE AESTHETICALLY JUDGED AS NATURE

Although damaged or ecologically altered landscapes are not examples of pristine nature, they can, I would argue, still be appreciated as nature. The fact that an environment has been modified by human activities is not enough to regard it as an artefact rather than as a *natural* environment. If we think, for example, of a prairie with some grazing cows, we readily see that in spite of its modified character, the environment is still perceived as natural, and would presumably be thus perceived also by Kant.

Thus, the fact the natural environment is not pristine cannot be considered a sufficient reason for arguing that the aesthetic judgement is not one about nature

– as opposed to art or artefacts. Briefly put, it is reasonable to argue that although transformed by human activities, the formal aspects that derive from these activities are not produced intentionally, but coincidentally.⁶ Moreover, it is probably a mistake to identify judgements of free beauty with judgements whose content is pristine nature. For Kant argued that aesthetic judgements about horses fell within the realm of dependent beauty;⁷ pristine nature can therefore be subject to judgements both of free and of dependent beauty. And, hence, judgements of free beauty are not exclusive to aesthetic evaluations of pristine nature.

II.1.2. THE THOUGHT THAT THE ENVIRONMENT IS ALTERED DOES NOT THREATEN THE NONCONCEPTUAL CHARACTER OF THE AESTHETIC JUDGEMENT

Still, it could be said that although the appreciation of these environments is not tied to the recognition of an intention relevant to explain the form appreciated, we still need to bring into view the idea that the landscape is damaged and, to that extent, the thought of that damaged condition renders the judgement one of dependent beauty rather than of free beauty. To this, one could reasonably reply that, at least within a particular reading of Kant's view of the nonconceptual and disinterested character of aesthetic judgements (a reading that has been defended, for example, by Malcolm Budd⁸), Kant's notion of a judgement of free beauty is not at odds with the possibility that thoughts about the object judged enter into the experience. The requirement of the nonconceptual character of the aesthetic judgement only demands that it is not exclusively based upon those thoughts and concepts. But it is perfectly all right to aesthetically experience the environment while entertaining certain thoughts about it, provided that the aesthetic judgement is not exclusively dependent upon these thoughts.

If this reading of Kant's view of the nonconceptual character of the aesthetic judgement is compelling, it is possible to describe positive judgements of damaged environments as judgements of free beauty even when the thought of their damaged condition enters the aesthetic experience.

There might be some modified environments, such as gardens or parks, where the intention to give some particular form – and therefore also the concepts relevant to characterizing that intention – is relevant to their appreciation, and therefore renders the judgement a judgement of dependent beauty. We thus see, first, that we can legitimately treat aesthetic judgements about damaged environments as judgements of free natural beauty (we are still appreciating

⁶ For more on this point, see the end of section II.2.

⁷ Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, 114–15 (AA 5:230).

⁸ Malcolm Budd, 'The Pure Judgement of Taste as an Aesthetic Reflective Judgement', in *Aesthetic Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 105–21.

nature and not art, despite its modified condition), and, second, that the fact that some thoughts about the damaged condition of the landscape penetrate our perception of the environment does not deprive these judgements of their free aesthetic character, for the role these thoughts play does not determine the resulting pleasure or displeasure upon which the judgement is based.

Having said this, it seems possible to conceive that within a Kantian framework – at least within the kind described above – there could be cases where a damaged environment is the object of a positive aesthetic judgement. What I wish to explore in the following section is how this possibility fits with another famous Kantian notion: the idea that beauty can be a symbol of morality. It may be the case that, for Kant, there is no possible judgement that is both a judgement of a beautiful damaged environment and a judgement that symbolizes morality. But I think it is worth exploring the possible tensions that may arise within a Kantian framework when the possibility of positive aesthetic judgements of damaged or deteriorated natural environments is contemplated in conjunction with Kant's idea of beauty as a symbol of morality.

II.2. BEAUTY, KNOWABILITY, AND MORALITY: KANT'S IDEA OF BEAUTY AS A SYMBOL OF MORALITY

I will mainly focus on Kant's ideas about the moral significance of the aesthetic experience, and will endeavour to assess the implications that may arise in relation to this Kantian idea when we experience damaged environments of the kind I mentioned at the beginning of this article.

Following Guyer's analysis,⁹ there are at least three possible ways in which aesthetic experience relates to morality. First, aesthetic experiences are thought possibly to contribute to the cultivation of moral feelings. Second, aesthetic objects can be contemplated as sensible representations of moral ideas. And, third, aesthetic experience can be a symbol of morality in the sense of sustaining, in the free exercise of our faculties, a disposition to love something for its own sake¹⁰ or to 'find a free satisfaction in the objects of the senses even without any sensible charm'.¹¹ In this

⁹ Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Experience of Freedom: Essays on Aesthetics and Morality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), esp. chaps. 1, 7, 9, 10.

¹⁰ '[T]he disposition of sensibility [...] to love something without regard to use [...] much advances morality, or at least prepares [us] for it.' Kant's *Metaphysics of Morals* (AA 6:443) quoted in Paul Guyer, 'Feeling and Freedom: Kant on Aesthetics and Morality', in *Kant and the Experience of Freedom*, 33.

¹¹ Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 228 (AA 5:354). Here, in § 59, 'On Beauty as a Symbol of Morality', Kant points to the faculty of taste as the faculty that 'makes possible the transition from sensible charm to the habitual moral interest without too violent a leap by representing the imagination even in its freedom as purposively determinable for the understanding and teaching us to find a free satisfaction in the objects of the senses even without any sensible charm'.

third sense, the pleasure or liking that belongs to the aesthetic experience becomes a sort of bridge between the realms of sense and those of moral interest.

The first and the third remarks bear some relation to each other within Kant's thought. If experiencing something as beautiful prepares us to love it for its own sake and not for any interest that we might have in the object, there seems to be in aesthetic appreciation an attitude similar to the one required in moral judgement, and hence it is fair to say that aesthetic experience can promote sentiments that contribute to the realization of moral duty. Nevertheless, Kant does not believe that these sentiments are necessary for moral action; the only relevant attitude in this respect is that of the subject's assuming her duty on the basis of the recognition of the categorical imperative. Whether this recognition is accompanied by the sentiments or attitudes that would drive its realization can be of pragmatic interest, but is not a logical necessity. In this sense, therefore, although aesthetic experiences might have a role in the development of the right attitudes and sentiments for moral duty and action, they fall short of constituting a necessary component for them. Among the duties that Kant assumes moral subjects have in relation to their own moral dimension, however, there is the duty to seek and promote the right sentiments towards moral ends.¹² This involves a sort of duty to improve one's own sensibility, a process that Kant thought to be specially linked to the structure of aesthetic appreciation. Thus the very freedom that underlies the autonomy of the judgement of taste and makes it a symbol of morality can be connected back to the improvement of our moral, sentimental profile.

We can, I think, now perceive some tension between the idea that our sentiment of beauty can prepare us to love something and the cases in which the experience of beauty can have as its object the sort of damaged landscape I discuss at the beginning of this article. Even if it is not logically impossible for our aesthetic attitude to promote that sentiment in these cases, our moral concerns about the processes that have led to that particular appearance might introduce some tensions related to the way in which aesthetic experience provides us with grounds to love something for its own sake. In short, if here, as in other less problematic cases, the experience of beauty amounts to the disposition to love the object of our experience for its own sake, there seems to be a tension in the experience of taking the attitude of loving something that we know is, in part, the result of damage. It is fair to say that there is no tension at all within that sort

¹² 'It is therefore an indirect duty to cultivate the compassionate natural (aesthetic) feelings in us, and to make use of them as so many means to sympathy based on moral principles and the Feeling appropriate to them.' Kant's *Metaphysics of Morals* (AA 6:457) quoted in Paul Guyer, 'Duty and Inclination', in *Kant and the Experience of Freedom*, 388.

of experience, and that the regrettable ecological state of a landscape does not at all diminish its capacity to inspire the sort of experience Kant is describing.

Although what I have said so far does not, strictly speaking, challenge the coherence of Kant's thought under the assumption that damaged landscapes might be beautiful, I will introduce a couple of comments that might point in that direction. The first relates to another Kantian idea, which stems partly from the considerations we have discussed so far – namely, that we have a duty to take care of nature as part of our duty to ourselves as members of humankind. This duty towards nature is based not on its possible utility for us but on our own duty to seek our moral character and dispositions and promote them. As we have just seen, there is in Kant's thought a connection between the exercise of aesthetic judgement and the sentiment of loving something for its own sake, which in turn contributes to the role of aesthetic experience in the conformation of the sentiments that can improve our disposition to act morally. This idea is crucial to why disregarding nature and destroying it can reasonably be considered contrary to our duty to encourage and improve our sensibility through experiences that paradigmatically promote proper sentiments.¹³ In destroying nature we weaken our disposition to love something for its own sake and hamper the development of the sensibility necessary to develop our moral sensibility so that it is in tune with our moral principles. In the light of this new connection between the experience of beauty and the duty not to destroy it, it might become more evident that, at least within the Kantian framework, my examples either cannot be experienced as beautiful or, if they can, the connections that Kant has traced so far between aesthetic and moral experience seems to be such that the destruction of nature has a place, oddly enough, within the structure that leads to the improvement of our sensibility.

There is a possible argument against the way in which I have tried to point out some of the consequences of appreciating damaged environments within a Kantian framework. The argument is based upon the possibility of enjoying representations of ugly or terrifying contents.¹⁴ Following a tradition that goes back to Aristotle, Kant concedes that one may have aesthetic pleasure of representations of morally dubious objects or actions. If this is so, there should

¹³ 'A propensity to wanton destruction of what is *beautiful* in inanimate nature (*spiritus destructionis*) is opposed to man's duty to himself; for it weakens or uproots that Feeling in man which, though not of itself moral, is still a disposition of sensibility that greatly promotes morality or at least prepares the way for it: the disposition, namely, to love something [...] even apart of any intention or use.' Kant's *Metaphysics of Morals* (AA 6:443) quoted in Paul Guyer, 'Duties Regarding Nature', *Kant and the Experience of Freedom*, 307.

¹⁴ For this argument, I am indebted to an anonymous referee.

be no problem for a Kantian appreciator to enjoy beautiful damaged environments, however damaged, for we could say that they are simply another instance of a beautiful representation of a morally wrong action. If this is the right interpretation and if the case that I am exploring in this article is analogous to aesthetically enjoying representations with morally dubious contents, I should say more about why I think the positive aesthetic experience of damaged environments should be problematic within a Kantian framework. But I see no worrisome analogy here. I do not think that describing beautiful damaged environments in terms of the representation of a morally wrong action or object is adequate. Although beautiful damaged environments are the result of human actions, they do not represent them. They are not beautiful representations of those actions, because they are not, strictly speaking, representations of any kind. Beautiful damaged environments resist an analysis in terms of beautiful representations of dubious contents because they do not beautifully represent the actions that have caused their appearance; they lack, in this sense, representational content. The analogy with the beautiful representations of morally dubious contents therefore breaks down; and the question of whether some Kantian claims about the relationships between the moral and the aesthetic are compatible with experiencing aesthetic pleasure in damaged natural environments remains open.

I wish now to explore a second, related thought, which might be relevant to explaining the difficulties that I believe examples of damaged nature might pose for a Kantian aesthetic. This second thought consists in the exploration of two Kantian ideas together in order to show in which sense the experience of beauty can be considered to express a sense of accordance between our cognitive and moral reason and nature. As we saw at the beginning of this section, Kant aims to connect the experience of beauty with the cognitive and the moral, albeit while preserving the autonomy of aesthetic judgement. On the one hand, and in relation to cognition, Kant thinks that precisely because the experience of beauty is one in which pleasure arises independently of any concept and exclusively out of contemplation of the mere form of the object, the experience of beauty in nature provides a kind of experience of the knowability of nature in general.¹⁵ The knowability of nature or its amenability to our cognitive faculties is made manifest in the experience of beauty because the felt pleasure that constitutes it indicates that the mere form of the object fits our cognitive capacities even

¹⁵ 'Judgement presupposes a system of nature even in terms of empirical laws, and it does so *a priori* and hence by means of a transcendental principle.' 'First Introduction to the *Critique of the Power of Judgement*' (AA 20:212n), quoted in Henry E. Allison, *Kant's Theory of Taste: A Reading of the 'Critique of the Aesthetic Judgment'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 33.

though no cognitive judgement is made in this process. In this sense, the experience of natural beauty presents nature as generally fitting in with our cognitive faculties and hence as something which is not alien to our cognitive aims.

On the other hand, we have already seen that Kant's thought includes a conception of the moral significance of the aesthetic experience that feeds a plausible role of the aesthetic within the moral. Moreover, Kant's notion that the experience of nature as beautiful might also be a symbol of the idea that nature is not contrary to the realization of our moral ends, in other words, that the realization of our freedom can be reconciled with nature. Here, as well as in the previous notion, the idea is that natural beauty is a kind of experience that provides some hint or sign that nature is not hostile to our moral ends.

Thus, when one considers the experience of beauty in relation both to the possibility of cognition in general and to the possibility of the realization of our moral ends in nature, aesthetic experience seems to symbolize, and hence to make possible, the sought connections between freedom and nature, rationality and contingency. These ideas not only reveal Kant's deep interest in connecting the different realms of the experience demarcated in the previous *Critiques*, but also contribute to the sort of picture in which, I think, the beauty of damaged landscapes can be problematic. Although strictly speaking one cannot experience the knowability of nature or the amenability of nature to our moral ends, the fact that aesthetic experience is related to these ideas motivates further comprehension of the experience of beauty as one in which one finds oneself in a state that could be metaphorically described as being 'at home' in nature¹⁶ – both morally and cognitively speaking, in the sense that nature presents itself as amenable to our cognition and our practical interests. If the interweaving of these two ideas connects the experience of natural beauty with the feeling of being at home in it, the examples I have been trying to analyse seem to pose a sort of paradox. For they would promote the feeling of being at home – insofar as they sometimes typically afford positive aesthetic experiences – while reclaiming awareness of the destroyed character of the landscape or environment thus experienced. Again, one could say this need not be regarded as impossible within Kant's framework. But it seems to me that the deepness and significance that Kant seeks to attribute to the aesthetic experience in its capacity to indicate some ultimate harmony between our different attitudes and forms of experience loses part of its appeal when we consider these cases. For what they make evident is that the experience of natural beauty might well take place with

¹⁶ Karsten Harries, 'What Need Is There for an Environmental Aesthetics?', *Nordic Journal of Aesthetics*, nos. 40–41 (2010–11): 7–22. I thank Kalle Poulakka for pointing out this idea's relevance to my topic.

objects, landscapes, or environments whose transformation cannot be described in positive ways.

I think the difficulty that the examples of beautiful damaged nature might pose to a Kantian perspective reveal to some extent that the connections traced within his view might not be stated innocuously and, in particular, that the autonomy of the judgement of taste might impose some restrictions on their soundness.

A further thought may be considered before concluding that things like beautiful but contaminated rivers or remarkable but deeply polluted environments do indeed pose a problem for a Kantian approach to natural beauty. It can reasonably be argued that these are no longer cases of natural beauty for they are no longer natural insofar as human action or activity is directly responsible for that appearance.¹⁷ In fact, it could be argued that the aesthetic appreciation of damaged environments is more akin to artistic appreciation than to nature's appreciation. On this interpretation, beautiful damaged environments no longer threaten the idea of considering the experience of natural beauty a symbol of the feeling of being at home in nature. After all, damaged environments, however beautiful, are no longer natural.

I think that two readings of this idea are possible. The first concludes that aesthetic appreciation of damaged environments is more like artistic appreciation insofar as the object of appreciation has been partly produced by human activity. The second plays with the idea that damaged environments are no longer natural and therefore pose no problem for Kantian aesthetics. Concerning the first reading, it should be possible, even within Kantian aesthetics, to distinguish between an intentionally transformed environment – for example, a garden – and an environment that has been partly transformed by some intentional activity such as mining, fishing, or farming. Although it is true in the second case that the environment's appearance has changed due to human activity, that appearance has not been intentionally produced. It is a side effect of intentional activity, not the goal of that activity. If we accept this distinction, there should be no reason to treat damaged environments as if they were artistic products. The fact that they are the result of human activity does not make them works of art.

The second reading is more difficult to rebut. How to deal with mixed environments is a problem, especially given that very few, if any, pristine environments remain. But, if, as many scholars seem to agree, environmental aesthetics must assume that environments are mostly mixed and build the specificity of environmental aesthetic experience upon this fact, we should allow

¹⁷ For this argument, I thank an anonymous referee.

for these sorts of cases. After all, damaged environments are as mixed as other seemingly less transformed ones. In this sense, transformed environments, such as mining areas, can still be considered 'natural' environments and hence are subject to the analysis I have sought to encourage here.

In the final part of this article I explore another possible way of connecting the aesthetic experience of nature to additional non-aesthetic cognitive and moral concerns, which, I hope, avoids the impasse that a Kantian framework might lead to.

II.3. AESTHETIC INSIGHT

In the first section I allowed for the possibility of positive aesthetic experiences of damaged nature. Accordingly, one can experience aesthetic pleasure in the contemplation of damaged landscapes while perceiving them as what they are: damaged landscapes. Since it seems clear that these cases introduce considerations both from the aesthetic realm and from the moral and cognitive one, I now wish to see whether our positive experience has any further impact upon our cognitive or moral attitudes to those landscapes. In the previous section we considered a possible way to address the question by exploring some of the most appealing notions offered by Kant. But if my analysis is correct, Kant's account of the connections between aesthetics and cognition and aesthetics and morality seems inadequate to acknowledge the possibility of beautiful damaged nature properly.

I will now turn to the likely conditions in which those relationships can be fruitfully grasped. In the first place, regardless of the way in which one finally understands those relations, the aesthetic autonomy and the special character of aesthetic experiences must be accepted. Only under such a condition is it possible to avoid any account that subordinates aesthetic value to other moral or cognitive values in some respects. In fact, if one truly aims to explore the relationships between the aesthetic and the moral and the cognitive, one should respect the autonomy of each.

With this requirement in place, we may now ask what, if any, contribution our aesthetic experience of these particular landscapes makes to our general attitude to them. I will now explore the hypothesis that the aesthetic qualities and the aesthetic experience afforded by natural landscapes sometimes help to define more clearly our general attitudes to those landscapes. In other words, I suggest that sometimes our aesthetic experiences enrich our perceptual experience of those landscapes and qualify its character, casting them in a new light and enhancing their overall quality for us; this, in turn, could affect the ways we address these landscapes cognitively and morally. But how can aesthetic qualities

make such a contribution within the constraints of their autonomy? How can the beauty of a landscape contribute to my overall apprehension of a particular landscape or environment?

Given the theoretical framework necessary for guaranteeing aesthetic autonomy, it might seem that the question is demanding something unattainable. If aesthetic qualities are the qualities grasped in an aesthetic experience of the sort Kant defined, they completely lack cognitive or moral content and merely express the way in which a particular object, landscape, or environment might affect us in a disinterested way. This lack of cognitive content might seem an obstacle to conceiving any plausible contribution that aesthetic properties may be thought to make to our cognitive descriptions of the object of appreciation.

On the other hand, the pleasure or feeling experienced within the aesthetic experience differs from the pleasure of the morally good in that it is not responsive to the accordance of the form of the object to any concept of good, and hence one might similarly wonder how this pleasure may be indicative of, or contribute to, the apprehension of the morally good or bad character of the object. It does not seem plausible therefore to defend a view in which the aesthetic character of a landscape or environment directly contributes to the improvement of our cognitive approach to that landscape or environment, or to the moral considerations that might be correctly held regarding them. But I wish to explore the possibility of an indirect contribution in a way that I will try to clarify in what follows.

I think we can explore the way in which aesthetic qualities demand and promote some emotional attitudes in order to clarify what sort of contribution they can make. Generally, identifying an aesthetic property, both in nature and in art, involves an evaluative attitude, positive or negative. Such an attitude might provide a framework within which other qualities might become pronounced or more precisely perceived. Without directly determining the character of these ultimate qualities, an aesthetic attitude might induce particular states of attention and emotional attitudes that might contribute to the way in which one focuses on other non-aesthetic properties. One can, if one thinks of an example such as Ansel Adams's famous picture *Jeffrey Pine, Sentinel Dome* (1940),¹⁸ perhaps come to see the kind of contribution I am interested in here. Of course, one might think this is a complex example, for we are not directly experiencing nature through Adams's picture; rather, there might be some aesthetic properties that contribute

¹⁸ For this example, I am indebted to Francisca Pérez Carreño, 'Two Routes to Expression in Painting', in *Estética, cultura material e diálogos intersemióticos*, ed. Ana Gabriel Macedo, Vitor Moura, and Carlos Mendes de Sousa (Vila Nova de Famalicão, PT: Húmus, 2012), 199–218.

to the aesthetic appeal of this image because of its photographic nature. But, for the sake of argument, I wish to take this picture as if it were transparent – for, after all, except for the black-and-white tonality, it is possible that one can have a direct experience of a similar tree. It seems that some of the aesthetic and expressive qualities the tree possesses (for example, its distortion, its having been bent by the wind, which somehow conveys a sense of struggling to keep upright, and the twisted branches) affect us in a strong aesthetic way and these effects might, in turn, help us to focus in a special manner on the relationship between the form of the tree, its aesthetic character, and the way it has come to have that particular appearance.

Similarly, I wish to defend the idea that the beauty found in some damaged environments, including the various aesthetic properties that can be experienced in the contemplation of, say, a landscape severely transformed by mining work, prompts particular sorts of attention that might enhance our cognitive interest in it. The white, yellow, orange, and red colours in some of the hills of La Unión or Mazarrón, as well as the textures that can be perceived, are not only properties that trigger our aesthetic interest; they can also make us focus on the environment in a way that enhances our overall understanding of its appearance. The white traces that stand out on the surface of the hills are seen as the remains of materials that have been extracted by mining and spread by rainwater. Even if one is ignorant of precisely what materials have been extracted, focusing on the texture or the colour of those patches can convey a sense of their qualities and the way they might interact with other elements of the environment. Likewise, the orange and red of some of the patches and the small ponds that frequently occur in this area not only strike the viewer by their appearance, but may also trigger thoughts about the qualities of those waters and patches of earth. Red and orange frequently convey a sense of oxidation and the transformation of the materials; moreover, textures are also felt in a way that trigger thoughts about the acidic or rough composition of the materials. Those felt qualities are not merely contemplated for their beauty or aesthetic appeal; they also convey aspects of the environment which may guide our perceptual attention and enhance our awareness of it. An aesthetic quality can thus have some effect on our non-aesthetic attitudes, if its consideration somehow transforms or organizes the landscape such that overlooked cognitive properties – or unnoticed moral considerations related to the appearance of the landscape – become salient; and, in so doing, they prepare us to adopt new attitudes to that landscape. The (positive) aesthetic qualities that are experienced as salient in some cases of damaged nature might shape our overall emotional attitude to the damaged landscape and reveal aspects that might have been overseen were our contemplation not so inflected by our

aesthetic experience. In a sense, Kant's idea that the experience of beauty prepares us to adopt certain attitudes to the object of appreciation finds some echo in the view I wish to develop. But, in contrast to Kant, I do not think this attitude is morally oriented as such or can be reduced to the idea that experiencing something as beautiful prepares us to love it. Rather, the attitudes and sentiments flourishing within the aesthetic experience acquire moral and cognitive relevance in virtue of the way in which they re-organize and structure the object of our apprehension.

This picture of the relationships between the cognitive and the moral and the aesthetic is construed in such a way that it represents them as operating like feedback. On the one hand, knowledge about environmental deterioration as well as moral considerations about the human activities involved in such a deterioration are relevant to a proper grasp of the aesthetic character of the landscape. On the other hand, the aesthetic properties that constitute the aesthetic character of the object are characterized as affecting the way we gain an overall perception of that landscape or environment. It would be fair to talk here of a form of aesthetic insight resulting from the way the landscape becomes structured in our aesthetic experience that formerly overlooked properties which might become pronounced. Although the possibility that I am entertaining might be widely instantiated in ordinary aesthetic experiences, it is unnecessary, I think, to grant it the plausibility that our aesthetic experiences always play that role. Not all our aesthetic experiences restructure our perception in the way I am suggesting, but they might do so sometimes; and when this occurs, the aesthetic character revealed to us in the experience can be seen as opening a wider perceptual spectrum regarding the object of our apprehension.

I believe that some of our experiences of damaged landscapes or environments are of this kind and the pleasure and the emotional attitudes that are derived from their contemplation allow us to pay more attention and discover aspects that go beyond the aesthetic.

III. CONCLUSION

In this article I have argued for the idea that our aesthetic experiences of natural environments might contribute to a broader understanding, both cognitive and moral, of these environments. In my view, an account of the ways in which our aesthetic experience relates to other non-aesthetic attitudes to the environments should be conceived in a way that allows for the possibility of an aesthetic contribution to other non-aesthetic attitudes without undermining the fundamental autonomy of the former. In order to give credibility to this idea, I have first critically

examined the way in which Kant conceived the relationships between the aesthetic, the cognitive, and the moral; second, I have tried to offer an explanation of how this contribution might take place by appealing to the attitudes and perceptual attention that aesthetic experiences may provide. In this sense, I have introduced the notion of 'aesthetic insight' as a way of referring to how aesthetic experiences might promote a deeper understanding, both cognitively and morally, of the natural environments we experience. Even though this role might be a modest one, I believe its potential to inform our attitudes and sentiments should not be disregarded.

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