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ENVIRONMENTAL AESTHETICS: OVERCOMING COGNITIVE AND NON-COGNITIVE  
APPROACHES

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## ABSTRACT

In this paper I explore how we may bridge the gap between the cognitive and non-cognitive approaches in environmental aesthetics in the most profitable way. To do this I begin with a short survey of recent literature on cognitive and non-cognitive approaches. Then I explore integrative approaches which combine the cognitive and non-cognitive. Finally, I explain how John Dewey's writings on qualitative experience present the most coherent approach to avoiding subject-object dualities. His integrative approach is not only an alternative but a solution to the dualistic problems which beset environmental aesthetics.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

We are always in contact with nature. We always dwell *somewhere*. Our dwellings are a claim on nature. They stake out a space wherein we may live comfortably in a hostile world. Our modern remove from nature is only distance through disassociation, caused in large part by the extreme technological innovation of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

When we view nature on a weekend hike, to escape from the thrills of the city, we have a tendency to view it romantically. “At the back of the romantic appreciation of nature is the privilege and wealth of the city. In archaic time’s man’s enjoyment of nature was more direct and robust” (Tuan 1990: 103). As long as there have been major cities they have been contrasted to the quiet solemn of the countryside. “In Europe preference for the countryside as against the city found eloquent literary expression in three periods: the Hellenistic or Alexandrian age of Greece, the Roman Augustan age, and the period of modern Romanticism which began in the eighteenth century” (Ibid. 106). These epochs are the historical and literary predecessors of Romanticism as a discipline. From the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Romanticism dominated the aesthetic discourse of natural environments.

However, with the rise in status of the natural sciences (geology, botany, ecology) scientific inquiry quickly replaced Romanticism as the standard model of appreciation. It provided people with knowledge of the whatness and isness of the environment, something which Romanticism failed to offer. Scientific investigation became the standard model of appreciating the environment in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Armed with new methods of knowing, investigators robbed the environment of much of the wonder and mystery the Romantics claimed it possessed. This was

a lynch pin for the Romantic Movement as a respected mode of discourse in many ways. This epistemological split has generated two different schools of thought on aesthetically appreciating the environment. They generally fall into the camps of the cognitive (science) and the non-cognitive (Romanticism). The present disparity of opinion regarding the validity of both approaches demands attention.

The pluralism of theoretical approaches in environmental aesthetics is striking. The most important reason for this is the absence of agreed upon methods of investigation. There are many scholars who doubt that nature can be quantified. Equally important, there are scholars who doubt the theoretical significance that individual perception plays in this discourse. Even going back to Descartes and Spinoza we see that the non-cognitive role of experience is dismissed. They claimed “that emotion as well as sense is but confused thought which when it becomes clear and definite or reaches its goal is cognition” (Dewey 1958: 19). Though as Dewey wrote in *Experience and Nature* “aversion to Romanticism as a system is quite justifiable; but even an obnoxious system may hit upon a truth unknown by soberer schemes” (Dewey 1958: 117).

This topic is important because our theories orient us to nature and also to ourselves. The way we investigate nature is an existential stance. Should we view nature as below us, above us, or equals to us? The answer to this question influences the world where human habitation and industry intersects with nature. Avoiding subject-object dualities in our theories will help us see nature as one with the viewer. Appreciation happens at the place where subject and object meet and become intertwined. Once we discover the reciprocal relationship between human perceivers and non-human environments we can begin to see that doing damage to the environment is doing damage to ourselves. This is crucially important for conservation. Our theories are only

as strong as they operate in practice. A theory which bridges the gap between the cognitive and non-cognitive brings us face to face with our own mortality, and the fragility of our environment.

To accomplish this we must have reference to the American philosopher John Dewey. For Dewey, subject-object duality is a myth. We only come to differentiate between the two in reflection. At the present moment, we are enveloped in a world of absolute quality. Quality appears in experience through the interaction of subjects and objects. So to give priority to either the subject or the object in our aesthetic theory is to miss the mark. Priority must first be given to quality. The object does not just have such and such aesthetically pleasing properties. In fact, these qualities only appear when a subject views them and interacts with them. To give one side priority is to diminish the other. Dewey encourages us to see the intersection of the subject and object in its totality. Furthermore, the role that quality plays in theory and in practice is full of cognitive properties.

A possible critique of proposing quality as the middle term between the subject and object is that it is epistemologically bankrupt. However, as Dewey explains in *Qualitative Thought*, “there is, however, no inarticulate quality which is merely buzzing and blooming. It buzzes to some effect; it blooms to some fruitage. That is, the quality, although dumb, has as a part of its complex quality a movement or transition in some direction. It can, therefore, be intellectually symbolized and converted into an object of thought” (Dewey 1998: 201b).

In this paper I will explore how we may bridge the gap between Romanticism and science, subjectivism and objectivism, in the most profitable way. To do this I will begin with a short survey of cognitive and non-cognitive approaches. Then I will explore integrative approaches which combine the cognitive and non-cognitive. Finally, I will present John Dewey’s

approach to environmental aesthetics, which will deconstruct the relationship between individual and environment by bearing witness to the multi-layered world of quality.

## Chapter 2

### The Cognitive Approach

Science has transformed our civilization. It has been a visible part of Western society since its inception in ancient Greece. The adherence to its methods has brought man an endless variety of advances, material as well and mental. The cognitive approaches to environmental aesthetics are for the most part synonymous with scientific inquiry. The words “scientific research” are often seen as self-explanatory. However, to gain insight into what science actually does, we will have to take a moment to examine how it operates.

The goal of science is to arrive at stable, reliable truths that govern the way things in nature work. For example, chemistry, physics, and geology are all ways of discovering rules that tell us why certain phenomena behave the way they do so that we are able to employ them for some beneficial outcome or for better understanding. “A scientific theory includes equations and hypotheses exhibiting relations among states of affairs such as relations of “coexistence”, “succession”, and “interaction”. For example, causal hypotheses are about cause-effect relations between certain phenomena, i.e., they are expressions of succession relation” (Dogan 244). This relational quality of scientific theory was pointed out by John Dewey. He claimed in *Experience and Nature* that this fact made scientific knowledge instrumental. “An intellectual sign denotes that a thing is not taken immediately but is referred to something that may come in consequence of it. Intellectual meanings may themselves be appropriated, enjoyed and appreciated; but the character of intellectual meaning is instrumental” (Dewey 1958: 128).

The instrumentality of scientific inquiry sets it apart from other modes of discourse. Other modes such as the non-cognitive discussed in chapter 3 are more direct and descriptive, such



as the phenomenological approach. “Phenomenology is the study of human experience and of the way things present themselves to us in and through such experience. It attempts to restore the sense of philosophy one finds in Plato” (Sokolowski 2000: 2).

The cognitive approaches to environmental aesthetics take scientific character with the added purpose of using this information for aesthetic appreciation. According to Allen Carlson “the cognitive (conceptual or narrative) positions in environmental aesthetics are united by the idea that knowledge about the nature of an object of appreciation is central to its aesthetic appreciation” (Carlson 2009: 11). The most popular approach is termed “the Natural Environmental Model, or scientific cognitivism” (see e.g. Carlson 1979). This “approach holds that nature appreciation should be analogous...to art appreciation” (Carlson 2009: 11). In traditional aesthetics, in order to appreciate fine art one needs to know something about its “modes of creation.” Knowing such information leads the viewer to a proper judgment on a given work of art. These modes of creation may be the materials needed to create a piece of fine art, or the amount of skill needed to perform a given brush stroke. When properly accounted for, these factors inform the judgment of the observer. There is a correlation between technique and aesthetic appreciation. Similarly, in the cognitive approach to environmental aesthetics the modes of creation of a landscape lend themselves to aesthetic appreciation. This knowledge takes the form of geology, biology, botany, ecology, optics etc. Knowledge of the geological formation of a landscape takes the place of knowledge of artistic technique in this approach.

However, for some approaches knowledge of geology or botany is not entirely sufficient. “Several cognitive models emphasize different kinds of information, claiming that appreciating nature ‘on its own terms’ may well involve experiencing it in light of various cultural and historical traditions. Thus in appropriate aesthetic appreciation, local and regional narratives, folklore,

and even mythological stories about nature are endorsed either as complementary to or as alternative to scientific knowledge” (see e.g. Heyd 2001). These approaches are more rounded than purely scientific approaches. They allow the researcher to incorporate socio-cultural aspects of an environment into the process of evaluation.

The inclusion of historical and cultural traditions sets these approaches apart from scientific cognitivism. Also, “other cognitive or quasi-cognitive approaches to the aesthetic appreciation of environments differ from scientific cognitivism in regard to either the kind of cognitive resources taken to be relevant to such appreciation or the degree to which these resources are considered relevant” (Carlson 2009: 12). These minor differences make cognitive approaches distinct in the type of information they deem relevant, but they are fundamentally scientific in their approach.

That said, in all of the cognitive approaches, knowledge about the environment is central to its aesthetic appreciation. The accumulation of knowledge in relation to a specific object of appreciation is directly correlated to increased aesthetic appreciation. A novice hiker armed with a field book of temperate deciduous rainforests and an individual with a doctorate on temperate deciduous ecosystems will find the same environment in Western Washington pleasing to different degrees. The environment is the same qualitatively to each individual, but the knowledge base is entirely different. Therefore in the scientific cognitivism approach, the individual with the greater reservoir of knowledge will find an environment more aesthetically pleasing than the individual with the lesser.

But is knowledge everything when appreciating the environment? Can an environment be aesthetically pleasing only to those with knowledge of specific ecosystems? For many schol-

ars the answer is no. Instead they cross the theoretical chasm to explore non-cognitive approaches to environmental aesthetics.

## Chapter 3

### The Non-Cognitive Approach

The subject matter of all non-cognitive approaches is the “the contingent, uncertain, and incomplete” which we find when we appreciate the environment around us and contemplate the thoughts within us (Dewey 1958: 117). Therefore sensory perception and human emotion are given a larger stage in this approach. But according to Allen Carlson, “the word “noncognitive” should not be taken in its older philosophical sense, as meaning primarily or only “emotive.” Rather, it indicates simply that these views hold that something other than a cognitive component, such as scientific knowledge or cultural tradition, is the central feature of the aesthetic appreciation of environments” (Carlson 2009: 12). This understanding of the word non-cognitive in the context of environmental aesthetics is more nuanced than if it were simply labeled “subjective.”

“The leading noncognitive approach, called the Aesthetics of Engagement, rejects many of the traditional ideas about aesthetic appreciation not only for nature, but also for art” (see e.g. Berleant 1992). The Aesthetics of Engagement is at odds with the theory of disinterestedness as discussed in chapter 1. This approach claims that being disinterested in an environment as complex and dynamic as the one in which we are situated is anathema to aesthetic appreciation. “It wrongly abstracts both natural objects and appreciators from the environments in which they properly belong and in which appropriate appreciation is achieved” (Carlson 2009: 13). Disinterested appreciation forces the individual to retreat within, distancing both individual and environment. “The Aesthetic of Engagement stresses the contextual dimensions of nature and our multi-sensory experience of it. Viewing the environment as a seamless unity of places, organ-

isms, and perceptions, it challenges the importance of traditional dichotomies, such as that between subject and object. It beckons appreciators to immerse themselves in the natural environment and to reduce to as small a degree as possible the distance between themselves and the natural world. In short, appropriate aesthetic experience is held to involve the total immersion of the appreciator in the object of appreciation” (Ibid. 13).

Other non-cognitive approaches include the arousal model, the mystery model, the imagination model, and the metaphysical model. The arousal model says that “we may appreciate nature simply by opening ourselves to it and being emotionally aroused by it. On this view, a less intellectual, more visceral experience of nature constitutes a legitimate way of aesthetically appreciating it that does not require any knowledge gained from science or elsewhere” (see e.g. Carroll 1995). This is the most direct, sensory focused approach. Whereas the Aesthetics of Engagement has metaphysical characteristics, the arousal model operates on the plain of direct, unmediated experience. The degree to which an environment is pleasing or disturbing depends upon the amount of emotional arousal it affords the individual. There is no sense of methodology in this approach. It simply involves letting oneself go in the environment and appreciating the ebb and flow of this interaction. What dominates this approach is direct sensory immersion in a world of immediate qualities. Redness, roughness, and sharpness are all immediate qualities. This is what John Dewey calls “saturation.” It is “an immersion so complete that the qualities of the object and the emotions it arouses have no separate existence” (Dewey 1934: 276).

The mystery model differs from the arousal model, which holds that self and environment are joined at a fundamental level, by claiming that “nature itself is essentially alien, aloof, distant, and unknowable” (see e.g. Godlovitch 1994). Therefore, “an appropriate experience of nature incorporates a sense of being separate from it and not belonging to it—a sense of mystery

that involves a state of appreciative incomprehension” (Carlson 2009: 13). This position is diametrically opposed to cognitive approaches, specifically those which focus on scientific knowledge. The mystery model claims that no knowledge of the environment is possible given our detached position. No matter what scientific instruments are used to attempt to make nature salient to humans, it nevertheless remains distinct and foreign. We are irreconcilably set apart from nature, so the only way we can appreciate it is to appreciate this very fact at the outset. Once our separateness is accepted, then our experience with nature becomes one of constant mystery and excitement. The more unusual and mysterious our environment appears to us, the more it drives the process of aesthetic appreciation. According to Stephen Kaplan “A scene high in mystery is one in which one could learn more if one were to proceed farther into the scene. Thus one’s rate and direction of travel would serve to limit the rate at which new information must be dealt with. For a creature readily bored with the familiar and yet fearful of the strange, such an arrangement must be close to ideal” (Nasar 1988: 50).

The imagination model “distinguishes a number of kinds of imagination—associative, metaphorical, exploratory, projective, ampliative, and revelatory. It also responds to concerns that imagination introduces subjectivity, by appealing to factors such as guidance by the object of appreciation, the constraining role of disinterestedness, and the notion of “imagining well” (see e.g. Brady 1998). The imagination model takes a step toward objectivity but does not incorporate scientific knowledge. It allows the viewer associative and exploratory license to aesthetic appreciation. When viewing the landscape, any number of associations may present themselves to the viewer. These associations are gathered and employed in the appreciation, guided by a semblance of objectivity to orient the experience in structured manner. For example, exploratory imagination guides our experience of objects. “Exploratory imagination helps the percipient to

make an initial discovery of aesthetic qualities” (Brady 1998: 143). This aspect of our imagination is at the forefront of aesthetic appreciation for Brady. It connects our own aesthetic references to the objects actual features, thereby initiating an aesthetic experience guided by the imagination but beholden to the object.

In the metaphysical approach “the imagination interprets nature as revealing metaphysical insights about such things as the meaning of life, the human condition, or our place in the cosmos. Thus this position includes within appropriate aesthetic experience of nature those abstract meditations and ruminations about ultimate reality that our encounters with nature sometimes engender” (see e.g. Hepburn 1996). A vivid example of what may be included within this approach would be the work “What is Metaphysics” by Martin Heidegger. Heidegger asks us “why are there beings at all, and why not rather nothing?” (Heidegger 110). This question beckons us to explore our relationship to nature and to beings in general. This metaphysical question demands that we re-evaluate our most fundamental opinions on being. Such an approach is useful in environmental aesthetics because it instills in us a sense of wonder that there is anything at all, rather than nothing. When one holds themselves out into the nothing, (to ask why not rather nothing), the landscape transforms into a more meaningful place. The viewer can then receive insights on the nature of being, or the meaning of life from nature herself with the help of a discerning imagination.

Recently scholars have begun combining parts of the cognitive and non-cognitive approaches. This is not a surprising move given the historical break between the rational and the emotive, the subject and the object. Scholars are constantly trying to find middle ground between these two poles. Chapter 4 will explore this space.

## Chapter 4

### Attempts to Bridge the Gap

Recently, theorists have become dissatisfied with the subject-object duality of aesthetic theory and have been searching a way to escape this trap. Approaches which attempt to integrate the cognitive and non-cognitive are typically referred to as the integrative, interactionist, or participatory approaches. They combine aspects of the cognitive and non-cognitive in order to create a more complete approach to environmental aesthetics. Scholars such as Jay Appleton, Ronald Hepburn, and Barrie Greenbie have attempted to create a third way approach. One of the most popular and influential integrative approaches is Jay Appleton's "habitat theory."

This theory claims that the individual evaluates a landscape on the basis of the affordances it provides to the organism's survival. Habitat theory provides an evolutionary basis for the preferences of the individual in the environment. Appleton suggests that since humans evolved in a savannah-like environment with sparse foliage and open spaces they tend to prefer these aspects when viewed in the landscape. He claims that even though these features have ceased to be selected on the basis of their potential for survival to the organism, they remain pleasing to be viewed and evaluated. Appleton goes on to describe a closely connected concept, which he calls "prospect-refuge theory." According to this theory, a landscape is preferred if it provides the prospect of easily seeing predators while easily avoiding them; to see and not be seen simultaneously. The idea of prospect and refuge as being able to guide human behavior is very persuasive given our shared evolutionary history with other animals. Prospect and refuge would have been integral to the survival of early *Homo sapiens*, therefore it might still be relevant today in our assessments of landscape, whether we are conscious of it or not. Ronald Greenbie says of Ap-



pleton that “he does not suggest, of course, that the human aesthetic response to the landscape involves conscious perception of danger, rather those elements that once provided prospect and refuge now underscore our sense of pleasure in the landscape” (Greenbie 1982: 65).

Theories such as Appleton's avoid subject-object dualities. The division of the individual and the environment becomes arbitrary in prospect-refuge theory and habitat theory, in general. What ultimately matters are the affordances provided by the environment and the individual's willingness to capitalize on them. This theory operates in a realm where subject and object only exist through reflection.

Many of these integrative approaches deal directly with the problem of reconciling objective and subjective issues. Mark Fenton and Joseph Reser, for example, conclude in *The Assessment of Landscape Quality; an Integrative Approach*, that though quantifying the environment may be possible to a degree, a “complex behavioral product such as a... judgment” demands human perception be given a role (Fenton 1984: 109). The problem with objective quantification is that “those studies that attempt to relate perceived aesthetic quality to objective characteristics of the environment generally suffer from both the manner in which the physical variables are selected and the nature of the criteria used in selection” (Ibid. 112). So therefore “the investigator may need to resort to human judges to assess dimensions of the environment that have an objective referent in principle, but nevertheless are not susceptible to direct measurement via physical indices” (Ibid. 112).

In the effort to reconcile the cognitive and non-cognitive, these commentators see the interaction of the two as key to finding a complete approach. Their main point is that an aesthetic judgment needs to be based not only on objective references, but also on subjective grounds as

well. They cite a passage from LD Willard's *On Preserving Nature's Aesthetic Features*, which says "beauty emerges as a result of the interaction between a human experience (or even a non-human one) and the natural objects and events experienced, but that beauty is not located only in, or attributed solely to, either the former or the latter" (Ibid. 108-9). The apprehension and measuring of beauty is a task achieved through the interaction of man and environment.

Ronald Hepburn addresses the ground on which the cognitive and non-cognitive are used in aesthetic theory. He claims that "though we may draw upon scientific knowledge, we are not engaged in a scientific project: we are free also to encourage and foster emotional responses to the items or scenes of nature, responses in terms of human wants and fears, exultations and shrinkages of spirit" (Hepburn 1996: 30). Avoiding this "project minded" approach is vitally important for Hepburn. He goes on to say, "scientific understanding, as we incorporate it into an aesthetic experience, loses its evaluatively neutral character. It takes on emotional qualities that are dependent on our needs, anxieties, hopes and satisfactions" (ibid. 33). This supposed "neutral character" of "scientific understanding" in the context of environmental aesthetics is a myth according to this commentator. No honest inquirer is unaffected by the kaleidoscope of sunshine as it trickles through the forest canopy, or the crackling of twig and branch underfoot.

Hepburn stresses flexibility in our approaches toward appreciating the environment. There may be some pleasure attained from the scientific project itself, Hepburn does not deny this, but it is not chiefly a scientific project we are involved in when we are in nature. We are at once seamlessly woven into the tapestry of the phenomenological world that surrounds us and our own psychological states; with arbitrary lines only drawn for our own comfort and sanity. Hepburn claims that since the phenomenological cannot be excluded from nature, it remains a "proper object of aesthetic concern" (Ibid. 36).

This flexibility also extends to our notions of time and place in aesthetic appreciation. “As nature exists only in time and in constant change, we cannot exclude—as foreign to aesthetic experience of nature—imaginative realizations of earlier states of the object of experience, extensions of awareness back in time, whether recent or ‘deep’ in time” (Ibid. 30). He refers to a “transcendent present” which lends a distinct character to our movements in nature (Ibid. 31). As we orient ourselves in nature, past, future, and present exist simultaneously to color our perception. Hepburn also urges us to be “acentric” in our views toward nature, meaning “an aesthetic of nature which is...free of the anthropocentric and so enables us to ‘appreciate nature on its own terms’” (Ibid. 35-36). Only when we can turn our full attention to the transcendent present, can we begin to dissolve the dualities that have stifled aesthetic theory.

Barrie Greenbie postulates that the environment which we perceive is largely symbolic. He says “what we perceive as the environment is, in fact, a synthesis in which our current perceptions of what is actually out there are combined with a complex tapestry of associations based on our experience both of the physical world and of other people” (Greenbie 1982: 65). This approach is integrative because it combines the objective world of what “is out there” with complex social meanings and direct experience. This combination creates an environment in which the individual can pursue meaningful associations while orienting itself according to formal characteristics. He claims that “even if the fundamental symbolism of various landscape forms could be scientifically established, the responses of particular individuals and populations will often differ. They will depend not only on native culture and social class, but also on individual life experience, life style, and life situation at a given moment” (Ibid. 73). The symbolism we receive from nature, according to Greenbie, is determined by our social and economic conditions. Therefore, the symbolism which one person receives will differ from the next person.

This concept avoids dualities by referring to a common symbolic frame of mind while offering individual differences in a given population. It offers a new perspective on the nature of aesthetic appreciation.

Jay Appleton's habitat theory is clearly the leading integrative approach at this point in time. However, it does not directly attempt to solve the problem of body-mind in environmental aesthetics. Chapter 5 will address these issues with the help of the American philosopher John Dewey.

## Chapter 5

### Dewey's Approach

Integrative theories such as Greenbie's just discussed in Chapter 4 are an important bridge between the cognitive and non-cognitive. They give us a third approach that avoids dangerously polarizing dualities. However, they do not actively work to undermine the dualistic framework which haunts environmental aesthetics. They provide an alternative, not a solution. What I am looking for in this paper is the space wherein a possible solution to the problem of body-mind in environmental aesthetics may present itself. John Dewey's work on aesthetics provides such a space. His alternative to the problem provides a third way between that of the cognitive and non-cognitive. Dewey's approach works not only as an alternative, but also as a solution to the fundamental problem. It does this by examining the role of quality in our everyday experience. According to Dewey, what we see unfold when we examine the role of quality is that it absorbs both the cognitive and non-cognitive. The cognitive and non-cognitive components of experience are formed out of a reaction to quality.

To start off with, I will present Dewey's thoughts on the cognitive and non-cognitive in order to put him in context with the other scholars in this paper. Then I will give a brief summary of his theory of experience. For Dewey, the interaction of the live creature with its environment is where aesthetic quality emerges. Finally, I will document the three levels of qualitative experience: immediate quality, pervading quality, and the problematic quality. Dewey's thoughts on qualitative thought and experience appear primarily in *Qualitative Thought* (1998), *Art as Experience* (1934), and *Experience and Nature* (1958). These are the central works that I will reference throughout this chapter.

### The Cognitive Approaches

To begin with, Dewey takes issue with cognitive theories that exaggerate the cognitive component in experience. Scientific cognitivism, as discussed in Chapter 2 could be seen as falling within this category. Dewey claims they “isolate one strand in the total experience, a strand, moreover, that is what it is because of the entire pattern to which it contributes and in which it is absorbed. They take it to be the whole” (Dewey 1934: 290). In other words, cognitive approaches take one strand of experience and make it representative of the whole of experience. They place too much emphasis on one part of experience, and in doing so phase out other important components. Moreover, this cognitive part of experience is only what it is as a result of the totality of experience. For example, without qualitative considerations, science would not have any true reference to anything in experience. Science “never gets away from qualitative existence. Directly it always has its own qualitative background; indirectly, it has that of the world in which the ordinary experience of the common man is lived” (Dewey 1998: 205b).

For Dewey, cognitive relationships are created out of the most basic parts of experience, those which we share with other animals. Simple strivings such as those for food and shelter represent problematic situations. These are overcome through an interchange with the environment. The cognitive is a relationship between perceived outcome and actual outcome. “That a perception is *truly* cognitive means that its active use or treatment is followed by consequences which fit appropriately into the other consequences which follow independently of its being perceived” (Dewey 1958: 324-5). This active use of perception is the most basic form of the cognitive as it appears in every day experience. Although other animals lack the symbolic ingenuity that humans possess, their experience is continuous with ours in that they attempt to solve the problematic through active engagement with the environment. In the case of humans, symbols

are used to represent natural phenomena. These symbols can then be manipulated in ways that the physical environment cannot. This allows the cognitive component of human experience the space to be abstracted from the environment to extreme levels. However, cognitive relationships are always abstracted from normal experience, that continuous with other animals, and contain qualitative considerations.

### **The Non-Cognitive Approaches**

The non-cognitive components of experience for Dewey are just as meaningful as the cognitive ones. They are formed through interaction with the natural environment. For Dewey, emotions are not contained within some remote psychic realm of the individual. They are guided by the quality of the environment. The attempt to project emotions onto the environment is redundant because “nature is kind and hateful, bland and morose, irritating and comforting, long before she is mathematically qualified or even a congeries of “secondary” qualities like colors and shapes” (Dewey 1934: 16). Our environment is hateful or bland prior to our classification of it as such. Classifications do not change the situation as it exists in direct experience. According to Dewey, emotions reflect the quality of our present environment. Their foundation is found in qualitative experience:

The existence of unifying qualitiveness in the subject-matter defines the meaning of ‘feeling.’ The notion that ‘a feeling’ designates a ready-made independent psychical entity is a product of a reflection which presupposes the direct presence of quality as such. ‘Feeling’ and ‘felt’ are names for a relation of quality (Dewey 1998: 198a).

### **Every Day Experience**

John Dewey's philosophy presents a break from the integrative approaches discussed in Chapter 4. He deals directly with the problem of duality and offers a possible solution. Dewey's theory of experience is central to his philosophy. Experience for Dewey is not simply defined as the occurrence of events in an individual's life. The "self, organism, subject, mind—whatever term is used—denotes a factor which interacts causally with environing things to produce an experience" (Dewey 1934: 250). The causal interaction of individual and environment is a primordial relationship. "The career and destiny of a living being are bound up with its interchanges with its environment, not externally but in the most intimate way" (Ibid 13).

For Dewey, the rhythms of experience are important for understanding the aesthetic. In the interaction between man and his environment, "human energy gathers, is released, damned up, frustrated and victorious. There are rhythmic beats of want and fulfillment, pulses of doing and being withheld from doing" (Dewey 1934: 16). In nature, there is want of fulfillment and satisfaction once this desire has been met. "Every need is a lack of adequate adjustment to the environment, and also a demand to restore adjustment—and each recovery is enriched by resistance met and overcome" (Leddy 2011: 2.1). This adjustment to resistance constantly modifies our experience. In order for the live creature to find balance it must have the will to overcome resistance in the environment. This dance between the striving creature and its environment is the ground of the aesthetic in experience.

Once the live creature achieves balance in this relationship, the aesthetic can emerge. According to Dewey, "in a world of mere flux" and in "a world that is finished," aesthetic experience would not occur (Dewey 1934: 16-7). Luckily, our world is neither finished nor in a state of mere flux. It consists of "movement and culmination, of breaks and re-unions," making it possible for the live creature to come to balance with its environment after a stage of counterbal-



ance (Ibid 17). In this union of the organism and its environment, traditional dualities fade away. Dewey claims that “the uniquely distinguishing feature of esthetic experience is exactly the fact that no such distinction of self and object exists in it” (Dewey 1958: 249).

### **The Formation and Import of Qualitative Experience**

Dewey solves the problem of body-mind duality with his discussion of quality. He claims that the world of immediate quality in which we are immersed should be the driving force of our aesthetic appreciation. Qualitative experience unfolds from a very basic level to more complex ones. The first level is the immediate qualitative world in which we are surrounded at all times. This world of quality is direct. It is had immediately by the organism. The next level is the recognition of qualitative unity. This unity pervades every term within a given situation. The third level is the recognition of the problematic and the construction of cognitive relationships. On this level the organism goes beyond simply ascribing a qualitative unity to a situation to using this perceived quality and its characteristics for an active purpose.

### **Immediate Quality**

We are immersed in a world of immediate quality. Everywhere we look we see these qualities. The objects which surround us are categorized on the basis of certain characteristic qualities. When we see something that is familiar to us, it is because its immediate qualities fall into a category with which we are familiar. When we see a white-furred, four-legged animal with black spots, we know that it is a cow because these are the qualities of a cow. We have *a priori* images of a cow that allow us to place the vision of the cow in our immediate vision into that category. The existence of the cow in our immediate field of vision is not self-explanatory. We must first know the qualities that differentiate it from other similar animals, such as a steer.

We believe we know the objects of our experience directly because we have these categories established prior to their appearance. In our immediate experience, what is primarily known before reflection operates is that we see a plethora of immediate qualities.

Dewey claims that “all observed objects that are identified without reflection...exhibit an integral union of sense quality and meaning in a single firm texture...in all objects perceived for what they are without need for reflective inquiry, the quality is what it means, namely, the object to which it belongs” (Dewey 1934: 259). According to Dewey quality is “direct, immediate and undefinable” (Dewey 1958: 110). It is the brutal, pre-intellectual vision of the world.

However, this all-consuming qualitative theater is in a constant state of flux. For that reason, its import, especially when viewed from the perspective of science, remains dynamic. The scientist’s goal is to discover the stable, reliable factors which govern the contingent and changing qualities of our direct experience. One cannot control for these evanescent factors. They are accidental. “Thus the things that are most precious, that are final, being just the things that are unstable and most easily changing, seem to be different in kind from good, solid, old-fashioned substance” (Dewey 1958: 115).

This gets to the heart of the issue of body-mind duality. If the nature of quality is different in kind to that of substance, then where does one locate aesthetic appreciation? Is the well-spring of aesthetic appreciation contained within the subject experiencing immediate qualities, or is it contained within the objects which exhibit these qualities? The next two sections seek to answer these questions.

### **Pervading Quality**

The world of immediate quality is inescapable. If we pursue answers in this world we must either square it with subjects and objects (which is what the traditional theories have done) or we must stay in this world to see where it leads. John Dewey explores this thread and what he discovers is that this first level of immediate quality leads to the pervading quality and the problematic situation. These two realms present a robust view of qualitative experience while avoiding the dualistic problems which beset traditional theories.

When the live creature interacts with the environment a single quality emerges and designates it as that particular experience and not any other. This is the next level of qualitative experience, pervading quality. According to William Shea, “a quality gives meaning to and binds together all the details of a situation” (Shea 1980: 37). The binding together of a situation is what differentiates pervading quality from immediate quality. Immediate quality is brutally there, it speaks for itself. Pervading quality emerges as the common term which binds all elements of a situation together. Shea goes on to state that pervading quality “acts as the background, the thread, the clue to the meaning of what we think about and is the background to everything in the focus of consciousness” (Ibid 37). This pervading quality is referred to as tertiary quality by one commentator.

Customarily, there are two kinds of quality, primary and secondary. Primary qualities are the measurable facts associated with given objects, whereas secondary qualities are things such as smell and taste. However, according to Gail Kennedy there is a third category, tertiary quality. They are the pervading qualities of a situation. Rather than affecting “particular aspects of an experience—the apple is round and it is red—these tertiary qualities suffuse an *entire* experience, giving it a peculiar character” (Kennedy 1959: 803). Tertiary qualities operate in a realm beyond immediate qualitative appeal. They appear as distinct terms in the interaction between

the live creature and its environment. Immediate qualities still exist, but they are seen in a new light once the pervading quality of the situation is incorporated into the experience

Tertiary qualities also lend significance to experience. They demarcate a situation as that one and none other. “An experience has a unity that gives it its name, that meal, that storm, that rupture of friendship. The existence of this unity is constituted by a single quality that pervades the entire experience in spite of the variation of its constituent parts” (Dewey 1934: 37). Qualitative unity gives a singular flavor to experience. “It is these tertiary qualities which give the formal unity of *significance* to our experiences. Without them experience would dissolve into a hotchpotch of discrete feelings and perceptions, the ‘blooming, buzzing confusion’ of James’s infant” (Kennedy 1959: 804).

A corollary term to significance is feeling. Usually, when we identify something as significant it is because there is some emotive aspect that designated it as such. The birth a first-born child connotes an intense feeling, and for that reason it is significant. Your first dance in high school is significant because of the way it made you feel, before, during, and after. What identifies something as significant is the presence of emotion when that significant thing is experienced or reflected upon.

Things are significant because they make us feel a certain way. Feelings make things significant. So what generates feeling? Dewey claims that the environment generates feeling. This occurs because nature is hateful or bland prior to our distinction of it as such. The quality of a situation dictates aesthetic appreciation through its causal role in feeling. This is the role of quality in the non-cognitive realm.

Non-cognitive appreciation of the environment is controlled by the pervading quality of a situation not by our subjective whims. Subjective states are not inexplicable because they have direct reference to the environment. This level of aesthetic appreciation is subjective in that two people will react differently to the pervading quality of the same environment. However, these responses have objective referents. They are derived from the physical qualities of the environment.

Feeling is not an end in itself in this approach. It guides appreciation and makes active use of the qualitative characteristics of the environment. It cements a situation, gathers it together into a unified whole and makes it available for use as well as reflection:

Emotion is the moving and cementing force. It selects what is congruous and dyes what is selected with its color, thereby giving qualitative unity to materials externally disparate and dissimilar. It thus provides unity in and through the varied parts of an experience.

When the unity is of the sort already described, the experience has esthetic character even though it is not, dominantly, an esthetic experience (Dewey 1958: 42).

The emotive component appears in the interaction between the live creature and its environment when tertiary qualities emerge.

### **The Problematic Quality**

Dewey believes that the problematic itself is a pervading quality of a situation. The recognition of something amiss “marks the presence of something pervading all elements and considerations” (Dewey 1998: 198b). An example of a problematic is when the qualities of a situation signify something in need of repair, such as a sound signifying something being wrong with your car. The problematic goes one step beyond simply engaging with tertiary qualities; it

demands cognitive engagement by the live creature. Feeling may be a factor; however, the resolution of the problem is a more pressing consideration.

The problematic is different in kind from emotional states aroused by the pervading quality of a situation:

There is a difference between emotional and impulsive responses to what is indeterminate and the deliberate entertainment of doubt in a way that leads to inquiry. In this sense, intelligence may be defined as ‘a capacity to doubt.’ Wherever this capacity is exercised the situation is pervaded by a new quality—it is no longer one of mere confusion but is infused with an apprehension of alternative possibilities, it has now become a ‘problematic’ situation (Kennedy 1959: 805).

The problematic is something to be overcome in order to return to a determinate state of affairs. “A problem is an impasse, some impediment or obstruction of the creature’s way of life. It follows that he must act and act intelligently to solve his problem” (Ibid 808). A sense of doubt pervades all considerations and causes the live creature to seek answers. To do this requires action; an overcoming in order to make a precarious situation stable. This action can be considered cognitive in the sense that it requires intelligence to solve the problematic situation. “What Dewey is asserting is, ‘that action is involved in knowledge, not that knowledge is subordinated to action or ‘practice.’” (Ibid 808).

The action necessary to overcome the problematic creates cognitive relationships between the live creature and its environment. “That a perception is cognitive means, accordingly, that it is used; it is treated as a sign of conditions that implicate other as yet unperceived consequences in addition to the perception itself” (Dewey 1958: 323). The cognitive appears in the

intercourse of the live creature with its environment when that relationship has become problematic and is in need of resolution.

Immediate quality, pervading quality, and the problematic form the world of qualitative experience out of which cognitive and non-cognitive components emerge. Recognition of qualitative unity causes feeling while overcoming the problematic causes us to think cognitively about our environment. Quality envelopes the cognitive and non-cognitive:

Quality in sum, is an existential condition for any natural occurrence or event. The absence of quality would be chaos or nothing. Experience would be impossible without it. It is a condition for the many kinds of human cooperation with natural events, from physical action through the most abstruse theoretic reasoning. That is, it is a condition for the intelligibility of nature and the successful operation of human intelligence in nature (Shea 1980: 37).

Quality is what binds every situation together, and every viewer in the environment to that situation. “Qualities, for Dewey, are in and/or of neither the organism nor the environment. Instead, qualities are qualities of and within the experience-activity—the entire, unified situation or transaction which is the unity of organism and environment” (Stuhr 1979: 74). When we aesthetically appreciate nature we are neither scientists, nor merely emotional purists; we are engaged in qualitative experience. During reflection, when cognitive thought takes place, we are thinking qualitatively. On the opposite side of the coin, emotional arousal is also guided by quality. John Stuhr claims that “immediate and unifying quality defines the meaning of a feeling, which, thus, is the name for a particular relation of quality” (Ibid 76). In short, there is no escaping quality.

## Chapter 6

### Conclusion

Any approach to environmental aesthetics which ignores quality is negligent in its operations. The best judgments should reflect the interests of those who make them. The two major approaches to environmental aesthetics are on opposite sides of this spectrum. Purely rational, detached approaches do not reflect human needs, and purely emotional approaches fail to guide action and thought towards a consummation. According to Dewey the aesthetic is the consummatory, something that comes to a close and is in accord with the rhythms of nature. The most coherent approach to avoiding subject-object dualities is a qualitative approach. John Dewey provides the ground work for such an approach. From this foundation a robust approach must be constructed which satisfies human strivings while holding those strivings accountable to nature. William Shea says that “quality is experienced as the goal and point of human effort, for human effort exists for the possession and enjoyment of qualities” (Shea 1980: 38). Qualitative experience is the link between the cognitive and non-cognitive. It is also the link between aesthetic experience and ordinary experience. According to Shea “the qualities...enjoyed in aesthetic experience are the very ones which undergird, accompany, unify, and direct all human experience” (Ibid 39). When we connect aesthetic experience to ordinary experience and vice versa we can construct an aesthetic theory that is truly representative of human experience past, present and future.

When a viewer is aesthetically appreciating a landscape, she is appreciating quality. The appreciation lies not in the subject or in the object, but in quality, which emerges from their interaction. This paper is not a prescriptive account of what to do specifically in the environment



when appreciating it aesthetically. It is, however, an account of what sources we can utilize when appreciating the environment. Its purpose is to show what epistemological notions are to be avoided (relying on cognitive and non-cognitive approaches) and what notions are to be used (qualitative considerations). The specifics of such an approach will differ with each inquirer and each environment yet the structure of the approach remains the same. It is within a qualitative framework from which we should be aesthetically appreciating the environment. This method avoids body-mind duality while creating an organic harmony between investigator and environment. The outcome of using this method will hopefully provide more harmonious judgments and a healthier relationship between the human community and the environment. Environmental aesthetics seeks to establish methods by which we may come to know our environment while espousing its beauty. We can also hope that this process allows us to come to understand our place in nature and the factors that make this possible. When Dewey's thoughts on qualitative experience are taken into account, this goal is within reach.

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