

Animal Beauty, Ethics, and Environmental Preservation

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Introduction

Animal beauty seems a paradigm of aesthetic value. What could be more beautiful than a gazelle gracefully running across the African savannah? If the aesthetic appreciation of nature amounts to anything, it includes appreciating animals, wild and free, on the move. Although Yellowstone National Park is spectacularly beautiful without them, the return of wolves has dramatically increased the park's aesthetic appeal. Consider also the beauty of birds: The bright flash of a cardinal against the deep green cedars, or the charm of the male feeding his female companion.

Aesthetic protectionism holds that natural beauty is a major justification for environmental protection. Animal beauty is an important component of nature's positive aesthetic value and, as such, provides a strong rationale for environmental preservation. In a world without the splendid animal beauty we find in nature today, the justification for protecting the environment would be significantly weaker. This paper defends the significance of animal beauty for environmental protection by responding to two potential problems. These problems become important if one takes the moral status of animals seriously, as I do.

Many think human beauty is a trivial and even a morally objectionable basis on which to determine how we should value and treat people. Why think that using animals' beauty to determine how we should value and act towards them is any less trivial or objectionable? Just as we don't (or shouldn't) protect people based on how attractive they are, so too we should not decide which animals to protect based on how attractive they are. Implementation of the

Endangered Species Act is often criticized for protecting charismatic megafauna at the expense of the “creepy crawlies” who are left to extinction. Is it permissible to give preferential treatment to grizzly bears over bugs on aesthetic grounds?

The other problem I consider for using animals’ beauty in environmental preservation concerns the widespread suffering, death, and predation of wild animals. Shouldn’t this detract from our positive aesthetic response to wild animals, dramatically reduce the positive aesthetic value that animals’ lives contribute to natural beauty, and thus significantly weaken aesthetic protectionism? Although many environmentalists find the spectacle of predation to be the ultimate aesthetic experience of nature, there is arguably an obligation to avoid aesthetically valuing events that involve great suffering and death. Such concerns count against the policy of predator restoration and against environmental preservation more generally.

Part I: Beauty as an Objectionable Basis for the Treatment of Humans and Animals

No one will deny that physically attractive humans are treated better than those who are less physically attractive. They are more successful in virtually every area of human life, including finding jobs, receiving promotions, attracting friends and mates, getting elected to office, and so on. Equally uncontroversial is the idea that some of this preferential treatment is problematic. Robert Fudge suggests that “moral education” is needed to “correct for such biases” (2001, p. 276). Rob Loftis argues that the focus on human physical attractiveness is superficial and that when we “shower many rewards on people—models, movie stars—who are beautiful or who make themselves beautiful” we should “feel a little ashamed of it, thinking it a little silly and a waste of resources.” “Things we do to maintain our own beauty,” Loftis also argues, “are associated with disreputable traits like vanity” (2003, p. 43).

Explaining why it is wrong to assess and differentially treat people based on their aesthetic merit is not straightforward. If beauty is valuable it should count for something in our thinking and behavior.¹ Given that beauty is paradigmatically valuable, why is human beauty not also uncontroversially valuable? And if it is, then why is it troubling to use this valuable feature of humans to help us decide how to act towards them? People often choose a spouse or friends based in part on their beauty and this does not seem morally objectionable or superficial.

Aesthetic Merit and Moral Equality

The main moral objection to treating people differently based on their beauty is that such meritocratic treatment conflicts with widespread democratic egalitarian intuitions about the essential equality of all persons. This ideal requires that an unattractive person's interests count the same as the interests of a beauty queen. Loftis gives the following example:

If a doctor had to choose between giving one of two patients a heart, she could not justify her decision by saying that one of the patients was more beautiful than the other A doctor certainly could not let aesthetic characteristics outweigh nonaesthetic characteristics like the likelihood of survival past five years (2003, p. 43)

All persons, no matter their degree of aesthetic merit, have the same basic human rights, deserve equal consideration, and should have the same fundamental legal rights. Although more attractive people might in fact get fairer trials than do less attractive people, they should not.

Applying this idea to animals, we get the suggestion that the fundamental equality of animals makes it wrong to preserve attractive endangered species before less attractive ones. If a bird rescue operation chooses to rehabilitate hawks, eagles, and owls, but not vultures, and

¹ I use the term 'beauty' to refer to the entire range of aesthetically valuable characteristics which can include physical, behavioral, psychological, and contextual features of objects, among others. 'Beauty' is sometimes used more narrowly to refer to a particular type of aesthetic merit in contrast with others, as when beauty

does so on aesthetic grounds, it violates the requirement of equal consideration for all animals. Choosing a pet at the pound based on aesthetics would similarly be impermissible.²

The meaning of human equality and what it entails are not well understood.³ Animal equality and its implications are even less well understood. Those who have argued for equality between humans and animals do not claim that the same considerations about how we should treat humans necessarily apply to animals. For example, neither Peter Singer nor Tom Regan argues that equal consideration implies the equal value of typical human and sentient animal lives. Perhaps, aesthetic merit might play a legitimate role in assessing the value of animals that it doesn't with humans.

Those who reject egalitarianism between humans and animals might argue that animals who are roughly at the same level of sentience have equal moral status. If such status ruled out differential treatment because of aesthetic merit, then cows and bison would warrant equal consideration, despite the bison's (arguable) superiority on aesthetic grounds. Or consider the ongoing controversy between sea lions and salmon in the Pacific Northwest. Ignoring complications due to human responsibility for this conflict, if moral status is all that matters and level of sentience determines moral status, then sea lions should get preference over the salmon because of their greater degree of sentience. But if aesthetic value comes into play and is not automatically overridden by considerations of moral status, then it is arguable that the

is distinguished from the sublime.

² Perhaps one can justify the claim that it is only wrong to use aesthetics in public decision making and that it is permissible in private decision making. This would allow the use of aesthetic considerations to help choose friends and pets while prohibiting aesthetic merit to count in decisions about medical care, guilt or innocence, species preservation, or other such questions of public policy.

³ For example, does it rule out differential treatment based on moral merit, and if so, why is moral merit different than aesthetic merit? Further, many argue for the moral importance of partiality, which seems to fly in the face of the ideal of equal consideration.

spectacular life cycle of the salmon adds significantly to its aesthetic value and that this might tip the scale toward the salmon.

I leave the question of the scope of moral equality and what it implies about aesthetic discrimination unresolved. I now discuss considerations that help explain why discrimination may be less problematic when applied to animals than to humans.

Aesthetic Merit and Autonomy

Accepting the equality of persons (and animals) does not mean we must treat them identically. We frequently must treat people (and animals) differently: We have to decide who gets the heart and how to prioritize resources in protecting endangered species. What are legitimate grounds for differential treatment and is beauty among these?

One problem with using beauty in determining how we treat people is that a person's beauty is significantly beyond his or her control. There is a significant genetic component to human beauty and one should not further advantage those who got lucky in the genetic lottery and further disadvantage those who were not so lucky. Differential treatment of persons based on luck is unfair and seems an inappropriate basis for public policy (and perhaps private decisions as well).

James Rachels (1978) argues that, because we value human autonomy, it is morally problematic to treat people differentially on the basis of unalterable characteristics, such as race or genetically linked intelligence. In so far as our treatment of people is determined by characteristics they can't control, we restrict their ability to determine what happens to them. In contrast, if people are treated on the basis of features that *are* under their control, their autonomy is enhanced. Consider John Merrick, known as "the elephant man," who possessed grotesque

disfiguring abnormalities that others used as a basis for negative behavior toward him. Such a person is being held accountable for something he did not choose and cannot change and is thereby locked into a life of mistreatment with no way out. In contrast, if people's negative behavior toward someone is based on this person's deceptive actions (or other chosen characteristics), a change of behavior on the part of this person will result in better treatment from others. People's freedom is enhanced when we base our treatment of them on things they can control.

Differential treatment based on a person's uncontrollable characteristics does result in unfairness and in the reduction of autonomy. But applying these rationales to the assessment of aesthetically based, differential treatment of humans and animals is problematic. Not all beauty is beyond an individual's control. Further, it is questionable that animals have the kind of autonomy that could be promoted by basing our treatment of them on things they can change. Nor does it make sense to think it unfair to animals to base our treatment of them on factors they did not choose, for they are not morally responsible for their choices.

To what extent human beauty is beyond our control depends partly on how we understand human beauty. Even if we limit human beauty to physical attractiveness, much of this is within our control. Even ignoring that surgery allows us to alter many of our genetically based, physical characteristics, a great deal of our physical appearance is something we do control. Some people choose an appearance that repulses others: They are dirty, smelly and gluttonous. Others stay in shape, watch their diet, and choose cleanliness. When we base our treatment of people on a choice they have made about their physical appearance, this is neither

unfair nor undermines their ability to control their own lives.⁴ The unfairness and autonomy restricting rationales against aesthetic discrimination apply only to those dimensions of human beauty that are beyond a person's control.

It is not clear that these considerations apply to aesthetic discrimination in the case of animals, for animal choice is not something they are responsible for and the notion of animal autonomy is problematic. Animals do make choices in the sense that there are alternatives in their lives and they pick some over others, presumably because of the relative strength of their desires. Pets alter their behavior as a result of how we treat them. Perhaps a member of a wolf pack will (choose to?) stop attempting to mate with the alpha female after repeated beatings by the alpha male. Animals even make choices that alter their aesthetic merit. But these choices are not the sort for which they can be held morally accountable (that is, praised or blamed), and so the justification for treating humans differently based on their aesthetic choices does not apply to animals. But it also follows that it is not unfair to differentially treat animals based on factors they don't choose (and can't control), for the whole notion of responding to an animal's choices is problematic. The reason it is unfair to hold humans responsible for characteristics they did not choose is because they are beings who are responsible for their choices and fairness requires responding only to such choices. For beings who are not morally responsible for their choices, we do not treat them unfairly when we base our treatment of them on factors they did not choose. No one would think it unfair to trees to cut down the ugly ones before the beautiful ones. While animals clearly have a moral status superior to trees, the notion of fair treatment that relies on

⁴ Sometimes characteristics that result from past choices are no longer controllable and we do reduce a person's ability to control how others treat them when we respond to these features. We are, however, responding to his or her past choices and in this sense not violating autonomy.

responding to choices for which the individual is accountable does not apply to animals.

The diminution of autonomy argument against preferential treatment on aesthetic (or other uncontrollable) grounds is also problematic when applied to animals. Because of the limited nature of animal choice, decision-making, and autonomy, I do not think it makes sense to think we enhance an animal's autonomy (i.e., their control over their lives) by differentially treating them only on the basis of factors they can alter. If we shoot wolves or coyotes only if they are predated on our livestock, rather than simply because they are predators (something they can't change), are we enhancing their autonomy and control over their lives? I doubt wolves are sufficiently psychologically sophisticated for this claim to be plausible. Consider a pet in the pound who is not adopted because all prospective owners think she is ugly. Such a pet has no chance of getting out of that situation. On the other hand, a pet who is not adopted because she nips prospective owners might be able to alter that behavior. Could this animal change such behavior in order to get adopted (perhaps after watching which dogs get chosen and which do not)? To a significant extent this is an empirical matter, but I doubt that animals have the required cognitive ability to take control of their lives in this way.

To sum up: The unfairness and restricting autonomy arguments against aesthetic discrimination with humans are valid but only when restricted to unchosen aesthetic merit or demerit. Further, the application of these rationales to animals is significantly problematic because animals are not morally responsible for their choices and (probably) lack the sophistication to take control of their lives.

The Superficiality of Physical Appearance and Deeper, Inner Beauty

Another reason to resist the differential treatment of humans (and animals) on aesthetic

grounds is the notion that beauty is a trivial value. The commonplace—beauty is only skin deep—reflects this idea. Loftis' suggestion that people who care much about their appearance are vain also conveys the notion that beauty (especially human beauty) is a superficial value. On this view, focusing on people's appearance is a shallow approach to their value. So too, it might be argued, is an aesthetic approach to the value of animals. Just as we ought to assess people based on their behavior and character traits, rather than what they look like, so too we should go beyond animals' appearance in assessing their value.

Even worse than being superficial, judging people by their looks is often thought to be demeaning. Consider the degrading social practice of evaluating women based on their bodily appearance. Ranking women by how their bodies look is debasing and an affront to their dignity. Similarly, it might be argued, evaluating animals by their physical appearance is demeaning and debasing to them.

While an overly narrow focus on human physical beauty is clearly problematic, there is danger in overemphasizing the non-physical (e.g., psychological and intellectual) nature of humans. Just as we need to guard against the idea that people's bodies are all that matter about them, so too we need to guard against the idea that people's bodies don't matter at all. Humans, like animals, do have bodies and what they are like matters. The problem is with a *sole* focus or a disproportional focus on human's physical nature, and not with paying attention to people's physical beauty per se. Rolston, in discussing the beauty of his wife, puts it this way: "I would wrong her to value her only in so far as she is 'beautiful,' at least in the usual aesthetic sense. . . I would also fail her if I failed to enjoy her beauty. That might give me an entrance to her further merits. Mutatis mutandis, our relations with sandhill cranes and sequoia trees might be similar"

(2002, p. 129).

One explanation for why people think beauty is unimportant in the assessment and treatment of humans (and animals and the environment more generally) is that they accept an overly narrow conception of what is relevant to aesthetic merit. The problem is a superficial account of aesthetic value and not the triviality of beauty itself. The notion that human beauty is only skin deep is like the formalist presumption that beauty consists only in forms, lines and colors and that the sensuous surface of things exhausts their aesthetic content. But human beauty runs much deeper than mere physical appearance and so, in many ways, does animal beauty. Not all beauty is the easy beauty of a beauty queen, a panda bear, or a scenic overlook. As Aldo Leopold put it, “In country, as in people, a plain exterior often conceals hidden riches” (1966, p. 168). People have an “inner beauty” that is important to their aesthetic merits. There are wonderful people in whom we delight and whose behavior and compelling personalities move us greatly, though they are not particularly pretty to look at. The beauty queen, in contrast, may be boring, humorless and no fun at all.

To access these dimensions of a person’s beauty one must go beyond what they look like, beyond their sensuous surface, and learn something about them. This is also true with accessing the more difficult, deeper beauty of animals and other natural items. Bats might strike one as ugly, unappealing creatures before one learns something about their natural history, including “the ‘exquisite fashioning’ of their features for the task of sonar emission and detection” (Parsons, 2006, p. 35, quoting Richard Dawkins). Cows and bison might be thought to be roughly equal in aesthetic merit when judged in terms of their physical appearance. But when one considers differences in their origin, how they behave, and what they represent, that

judgment of aesthetic merit will alter radically. Leopold gives the following example:

Consider . . . a trout raised in a hatchery and newly liberated in an over-fished stream. The stream is no longer capable of natural trout production. Pollution has fouled its waters, or deforestation and trampling have warmed or silted them. No one would claim this trout has the same value as a wholly wild one caught out of some unmanaged stream in the high Rockies. Its esthetic connotations are inferior (1966, p. 260).

Similarly beauty in people is also affected by how they behave and what they represent.

The alleged superficiality of human beauty is based on two mistakes: The inappropriate downgrading of the importance of the physical in human life and an overly narrow conception of beauty that limits it to physical appearance. Human physical nature—including its aesthetic dimensions—is not an unimportant part of human life. Nonetheless, the beauty of humans goes well beyond the attractiveness of their physical nature. Recognizing this goes a long way toward answering those skeptics who think human beauty should be irrelevant in our assessment and treatment of them. As in humans, the physical attractiveness of animals is not an unimportant part of their value. We have seen as well that beauty of animals goes well beyond their physical attractiveness, and that fully appreciating that beauty requires understanding their behavior, their ecology, and what they represent.

While I have maintained a parallel in the defense of the importance of beauty of people and animals, I do think that, in certain respects, animals' beauty should count more in terms of how we value and treat them. Because animals lack the depth of the psychological "inner beauty" that counts with people, other dimensions of their beauty, especially their physical attractiveness, count relatively more. Animals cannot be funny (though they can be playful). Creativity in animals is limited in a way it is not with people. Although animals have personalities, the depth of their personalities and the aesthetic dimensions of those personalities

are severely limited compared to those features in humans: It would be a stretch to talk about the “compelling,” “boring,” “humorless” or “fascinating” personality of animals, while all of these assessments of human traits are relevant to a human’s aesthetic character and value. Thus a sole focus on the physical attractiveness (or unattractiveness) of an animal misses far less of that beings’ aesthetic value that does a similar, single-minded focus on a human’s physical attractiveness. For example, a sole focus on the aesthetics of the “elephant man’s” body misses the tremendous aesthetic merit in his personality. A similar single-minded focus on the physical appearance of a deformed frog does not miss aesthetic traits of his/her personality (though it might miss aesthetically stimulating elements of the frog’s behavior or ecology).

Furthermore, in the assessment of human value, beauty has many more competitors than it does in the assessment of animal value. Moral virtues are the clearest case here. Courage, generosity, compassion, honesty, and so on, are central to an evaluation of persons. While I don’t deny that animals have virtues and vices of various sorts, I am skeptical about the presence in animals of these moral virtues.

Additionally, the argument that a single-minded focus on physical attractiveness in humans is demeaning makes far less sense when applied to animals. “De-meaning” suggests ignoring the meaning and focusing on the physical at the expense of the psychological and intellectual. Its paradigm is the degrading ranking of women based on their bodily appearance or the demeaning fascination with unusual human bodies in “freak” shows. While there are meaning dimensions in our understanding and assessment of animals and non-physical (i.e., psychological and behavioral) dimensions to their lives, these character traits in animals are significantly limited when compared to the role they play in human lives. Thus a single-minded

focus on the bodies of animals and their physical attractiveness is far less problematic (if problematic at all) than with humans. In the case of animals, there is far less meaning to demean.

Consider some examples. Are bird watchers demeaning birds when they spend the morning, binoculars in hand, watching birds' bodies and admiring their beautiful physical characteristics? I grant that if they ignore the birds' ecology, cognitive ethology (if there is such), and behavior, they are missing much of value about the birds. But I don't think this counts as debased treatment of birds. Are national park visitors who stare at animals and focus on their physical appearance like college men who visit the quad to stare at the bodies of women? While there is something shallow about a single-minded concern with the physical appearance of animals while visiting a national park, such a focus is need not be demeaning to the animals. To some extent it is even a praiseworthy celebration of their value. Nor do I think dog shows are like wet tee shirt contests, degrading to both the spectators and the contestants. Although it has been argued that zoos and wildlife calendars are significantly like girlie shows and playboy magazines,⁵ I think the comparison misses important differences between the significance of the body in human and animal life.

Part II: Animal Beauty and the Ugliness of Animal Suffering, Death, and Predation

Let us assume that human and animal beauty (including physical, psychological, behavioral, and contextual beauty) is not a superficial value and that it is permissible and sometimes important to use this value for how we respond to and treat others. I have argued that this is particularly true in the case of animals. This suggests that animals' beauty can potentially

⁵ I believe this is a view taken by Ralph Acampora (2006).

play a important role in environmental policy. I now consider the possibility that there is significant animal ugliness in nature that rivals animal beauty. If this is true, rather than adding to an aesthetic defense of nature, animal aesthetics would play at best an ambiguous role in nature protection and may even count against it.

Ugliness in the Lives of Animals

One dimension of this negative aesthetics of animals concerns the alleged existence of ugly animals. Some genetically altered animals come to mind, such as the “Beltsville pigs” who were engineered to contain a gene for human growth hormone. These pigs had deformed bodies and skulls, swollen legs, ulcers, crossed eyes, and arthritis, among other ailments. On one account, animal beauty partially consists in “possessing parts with natural functions they are well suited to perform” (Budd, 2002, p. 103). This helps to explain the ugliness of these poor animals, many of whose parts were not well-suited to their natural functions. It also explains the ugliness of naturally deformed animals (such as, amphibians with missing or malformed limbs or digits).

These examples are of a very limited nature. To expand the scope of ugly animals to non-deformed animals, we might consider a list suggested (though not endorsed) by Yuriko Saito:

Some things in nature are so repulsive, annoying, or unattractive that we cannot bring ourselves to appreciate the positive aesthetic value of their story telling. Fleas, flies cockroaches and mosquitoes, no matter how interesting their anatomical structures and ecological roles may be, are simply pesky. . . Bats, snakes, slugs, worms, centipedes and spiders simply give us the creeps and cause us to shudder. . . Our negative reaction to these things outweighs their positive aesthetic value of embodying their interesting life story (1998, p. 106).

Further it is arguable that *all* animals have significant dimensions of ugliness in their lives.

They get dirty, become sick, decline, and die, in the process losing their attractive colors and gracefulness of movement.⁶ Rolston conveys the ugliness of diseased animals with this example: “Once as a college youth I killed an opossum that seemed sluggish and then did an autopsy. He was infested with a hundred worms! Grisly and pitiful, he seemed a sign of the whole wilderness, . . . too alien to value” (1986, p.128-29, quoted in Carlson 2007, p. 107).

Rolston also powerfully expresses the idea that seeing only beauty in animal is Pollyannaish:

The critic will complain against admirers of wildlife that they overlook as much as they see. The bison are shaggy, shedding, and dirty. That hawk has lost several flight feathers; that marmot is diseased and scarred. The elk look like the tag end of a rough winter. A half dozen juvenile eagles starve for every one that reaches maturity. Every wild life is marred by the rips and tears of time and eventually destroyed by them (1987, p. 192).

One might conclude from this that only animals in their prime or animals that live up to the ideal of their species are thoroughly beautiful. The presence of these dimensions in animals’ lives presents a formidable problem for positive aesthetics (viz., the idea that all of nature is beautiful) and constitutes a real worry for the view that the aesthetics of animals in nature is positive on balance.

I will focus on the aesthetics of animal suffering and death and particularly on the aesthetics of predation. I ask how the value dimensions of predation should affect our aesthetic response to it. Animals suffer and die in many ways in nature, including death by starvation, disease, cold, thirst, parasitism, and being outright killed by a predator. Predation appears to be different aesthetically from these other cases for no one goes out of their way to witness animals starving or dying of a disease. In contrast, people find predation events to be aesthetically

⁶ It is because of this that some have suggested limiting the claims of positive aesthetics to inorganic nature, for it is not subject to illness, decline and death.

stimulating, searching them out and valuing them as some of their most precious encounters with the natural world. Attendance in Yellowstone National Park has increased since wolves were brought back and seeing a wolf pack bring down an elk is a prize many seek.

It is arguable that this suffering, death and killing of animals by each other is something we should not aesthetically appreciate and even that the phenomena of predation is aesthetically negative. Because predation is a fundamental feature of the lives of many animals, this conclusion adds significant weight to the judgment that the aesthetics of animals (particularly sentient ones) may hinder the aesthetic defense of the environment. This conclusion also provides a rationale for condemning the widespread practice of aesthetically appreciating predation and it counts against a major goal of recent environmentalism: namely, predator restoration.

Environmental Aestheticians on Nature-Caused Suffering

Although environmental aestheticians have addressed the problem of suffering and death caused by nature, I do not believe they have a firm grip on its severity or a plausible response to it.⁷ Malcolm Budd raises this issue when he criticizes the claim that, because of their nature, ecosystems are positive aesthetically, and then asks how “this essence is supposed to guarantee a positive overall aesthetic value, especially in the light of there being a great deal of killing and suffering in most ecosystems” (2002, p. 104). In a paper that defends “the aesthetics of unscenic nature” but criticizes the doctrine of positive aesthetics, Yuriko Saito explicitly confronts the issue of nature-caused suffering but then sidesteps its most worrisome aspect. One of her reasons for rejecting the view that “everything in nature is aesthetically appreciable” (her

⁷ Rolston is an exception to this claim. See, for example, his *Disvalues in Nature* (1992).

specification of positive aesthetics) is the contention that one has a moral obligation not to appreciate natural disasters that cause great human suffering:

The same moral considerations that question the appropriateness of our aesthetic appreciation of the [atomic bomb] mushroom cloud, I believe, are also applicable to the possible aesthetic experience of natural disasters which cause people to suffer . . . our human-oriented moral sentiments do dictate that we not derive pleasure (including aesthetic pleasure) from other humans' misery, even if it is caused by nature taking its course. . . .[Natural disasters'] potential aesthetic value is held in check or is overridden by our moral concern for the pain, suffering and difficulties that these phenomena cause for human beings (1998, pp. 108-09).

Saito asks “whether there is any difference between the suffering and death of an elk and the suffering and death of people who are victims of some natural disaster. If the former can be a source of aesthetic appreciation when referred to a larger context, why not the latter” (1998, pp. 108-09)? She worries about the possibility of speciesism in “treating human suffering differently from animals' suffering” but then leaves animals out of her conclusion about the moral inappropriateness of aesthetically appreciating natural disasters that cause suffering. She provides no reason for this exclusion. Given that wild animals—unlike humans—are not insulated from the forces of nature that cause suffering and death, I think the problem of animal suffering and death in nature presents a more formidable challenge to the positive aesthetics of nature than does the problem of nature-caused human suffering.

Allen Carlson addresses the aesthetic relevance of suffering caused by nature when he responds to Saito's objection. He points out that positive aesthetics applies only to pristine nature (i.e., to nature in which humans are not involved) and thus the claim that we should not positively aesthetically appreciate a natural event's (harmful) interaction with humans leaves the doctrine untouched.. Carlson also seemingly embraces a more general response to objections to the aesthetic appreciation of natural events that cause humans and animals to suffer. In

defending Rolston's positive aesthetics from Saito's objection he writes:

On Rolston's view moral concerns "exceed nature," for "nature is nonmoral." A purely natural thing, such as the relationship between Rolston's opossum and its worms, is simply not a moral matter. The same seems to be even more clearly the case concerning Saito's earthquakes and hurricanes, even if humans happen to get in their way. (Carlson, 2007, p. 115)

Carlson's response to the suffering caused by nature is that nature is amoral and thus the assessment of nature's deeds is inappropriate. I find this an inadequate response to the problem that suffering in nature presents to positive aesthetics (including positive aesthetics concerning animals).

It is true that nature is not a moral agent and so it is a mistake to morally assess the behavior of hurricanes, worms in possums, or predators. Such entities are not morally responsible for the consequences they cause and thus are not appropriately blamed (or praised). Nonetheless, these events can be evaluated on non-moral grounds. We can ask not if these occurrences are moral or immoral, but whether they are good or bad (or perhaps neutral). Are they intrinsically valuable or disvaluable? Is the world a better place in virtue of these occurrences or a worse place (or neither)? Is it a good thing that hurricanes wreck human property and lives? Is it a good thing that possums are infested with worms or that elk are killed by the wolves? We can also ask the more general question about whether it is good that some predators live by killing sentient prey. Is nature a better place because this is how it works, or might it be better if it functioned without such suffering and killing?

We need, in addition, to address how our answers to these value questions should be integrated (if at all) into our aesthetic responses to these events. Consider the following description of nature:

The wilderness teems with its kinds but is a vast graveyard with a hundred species laid waste for one or two that survive . . . Wilderness is a gigantic food pyramid, and this sets value in a grim, deathbound jungle. All is a slaughterhouse, with life a miasma rising over the stench. Nothing of the compassion or morality that we value in culture is found there (Rolston, 1986, p. 129).

Such an assessment of nature attributes significant disvalue to nature and it is reasonable to ask whether and how this disvalue should figure in our aesthetic response. Pointing out that nature and natural items are not morally responsible and cannot be blamed does not answer this question.

In addition to nonmoral value assessment in these cases, there are also plenty of moral questions that can be raised. When hurricanes destroy people's lives, should humans be blamed for poor building codes and practices or for allowing development in hazardous areas? Do humans have a moral obligation to alleviate the suffering of the possum, if we can? How should our answers to these moral questions affect (if at all) our aesthetic responses to these events? In particular, we need to address Saito's worry that it is not morally appropriate to positively aesthetically appreciate natural events--such as predation or hurricanes--that cause great suffering and death.

Carlson responds to these moral questions in two ways, neither of which I find satisfactory. He writes,

[These] comments are in line with Saito's remark to the effect that aesthetic appreciation in such cases may not be "morally appropriate," but nonetheless they do not counter the contention that Saito's examples miss the point as objections to Rolston's version of positive aesthetics. At most they only show that it may not always be morally acceptable for humans to aesthetically appreciate every case of positive aesthetic value (2007, p. 123, note 65).

It is true--as mentioned above--that Saito's examples of human suffering caused by natural events are not counterexamples to the appropriateness of appreciating nature apart from human

involvement. But the relation between a possum and its worms is a purely natural event and this possible counter-example to the doctrine that all of pristine nature is positively aesthetically appreciable does not miss the target. Carlson provides no response to the objection that it is not morally appropriate to appreciate purely natural events that involve great suffering, as in the relation of predator and prey.

Carlson's remark that these worries at best show that "it may not always be morally acceptable for humans to aesthetically appreciate every case of positive aesthetic value" is puzzling and ignores important issues about the relation between aesthetic and other values. Carlson has provided no reason for assuming that suffering in nature does not count against nature's positive aesthetic value. That this suffering is "nonmoral" does not show it is irrelevant to our aesthetic response to and evaluation of such events. To properly assess how the suffering and death involved in predation affect (if at all) the aesthetics of predation, we need to explore how aesthetic values relate to other values (including moral ones).

Relations Between Aesthetic and Other Values

Some hold the position that morality (and other nonaesthetic values) should have nothing to do with aesthetics. Aesthetics is one thing and morality is another, and it is a mistake to ask moral questions about aesthetic objects or our response to them. On this view, that the Egyptian pyramids were built by slaves is irrelevant to both their aesthetic value and to our aesthetic appreciation of that value. Similarly, that elk experience extreme pain as they are killed by wolves is not relevant to our aesthetic response to this event, nor to our assessment of the aesthetic value of predation. I label such a view *aesthetic apartheid*.⁸ Apartheid seems oblivious

⁸ This view was perhaps held by Oscar Wilde who wrote "There is no such thing as moral or immoral

to the fact that any human activity can be morally appraised, including the act of aesthetic appreciation. Sometimes aesthetically appreciating something, even something of positive aesthetic value, can be morally unacceptable. We can imagine circumstances where great harm would result from aesthetically responding in a positive manner to a great work of art: Consider a madman who will kill if we respond positively to Leonardo da Vinci's Last Supper. More realistically, I expect that people have been grievously offended by the aesthetic enjoyment of Leni Riefenstahl's powerful photography glorifying Hitler or by the display of posters of the mushroom clouds from the atomic bombs exploding over Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Even if we grant that these artworks have positive aesthetic value (and we might not), we can see how it might be morally problematic to appreciate this value. Note that in these latter cases, the moral wrong of appreciating these works is related to their problematic nature (unlike in the madman case).

If we reject apartheid, we admit the possibility that some aesthetic responses can be criticized on moral grounds, and this includes positive aesthetic responses to events such as Hurricane Katrina and wolf predation in Yellowstone Park. It is arguable that it is morally wrong to positively appreciate such events because so doing fails to take seriously the suffering of humans and animals and the disvalue in the loss of their lives. Admitting this, however, need not commit us to the view that these events lack positive aesthetic value. We might take the view that it is morally wrong to aesthetically appreciate predation (and more generally suffering in nature) and still maintain that this says nothing about predation's positive aesthetic value. Aesthetically valuing predation is not to make an aesthetic mistake, but rather a moral one.

book. Books are well or badly written. That is all."

Animal beauty would not be implicated, only the moral appropriateness of our response to it. Note that if this argument can be substantiated, it would still give us a strong *moral* reason for opposing predator restoration and for condemning those who seek out predation events to aesthetically enjoy them, even if we had no aesthetic reasons for so doing.

We might also hold that predation in nature (and not just our positive aesthetic response to it) is intrinsically a bad thing, an evil feature of the world (though not morally evil), while insisting nonetheless that it has great aesthetic value. This is a view that has sometimes been taken toward “immoral art” such as Riefenstahl’s film *Triumph of the Will*. On this account, artworks can be great art, even though they are morally depraved and appreciating them is morally objectionable (though aesthetically unobjectionable). Although this view does not practice apartheid between the aesthetic and the moral, it does insist that a moral defect (or other non-aesthetic disvalue) is not an aesthetic defect (or disvalue). Views in this camp have been called *autonomism* (Carroll, 2000). The claim here is that although it is appropriate to morally evaluate art works, such evaluation is irrelevant to their aesthetic merit. Applying this idea to the evaluation of predation in nature, we get the notion that any intrinsic disvalue of predation (due to animal suffering and death) does not affect its aesthetic value.

Carlson’s statement that worries about suffering caused by nature “at most only show that it may not always be morally acceptable for humans to aesthetically appreciate every case of positive aesthetic value” borders on autonomism. I find autonomism’s sharp distinction between aesthetic values and other values problematic, as do many other aestheticians, including Carlson himself in other writings. Rather than maintaining a rigid separation between the aesthetic merit of an object and its non-aesthetic merit (including moral value), I believe such values can interact

with each other. On this view, aesthetic values can influence non-aesthetic values (including moral values) and vice versa. We might call this view *interactionism* or perhaps *integrationism*. If such interaction obtains in the case of predation (and more generally animal suffering in nature), then the (non-moral) disvalue of the suffering and death in the lives of animals could negatively affect the aesthetic value of predation and our assessment of the beauty of the lives of these animals.

Cases where an artist's message is so immoral that it subverts the aesthetic goals of the work are often mentioned as examples of interactionism. Consider a writer whose work will be successful only if she can get the reader to feel sympathy for a certain character. But the writer and the character portrayed are virulently anti-semitic and the morally objectionable nature of this attitude makes a sensitive reader unable to feel sympathy for the character. Because of a moral flaw in the work, the work fails aesthetically. Here a moral defect creates an aesthetic defect. Another example is provided by racist or sexist jokes whose alleged humor (aesthetic value) depends on accepting an obnoxious stereotype or on enjoying the suffering of disadvantaged group members. Kendall Walton describes the interactionist response: "We may declare pointedly that it is *not* funny—precisely because its message is offensive. To laugh at it, we may feel, would amount to endorsing its message, so we refuse to laugh. Even judging it to be funny may feel like expressing agreement" (2002, p. 341).

Pollution sunsets present another test case for whether aesthetic value is affected by other kinds of value. Does the fact that a sunset is caused by pollution lessen its aesthetic value and/or render its positive aesthetic appreciation less appropriate? Philosophers, for the most part, have suggested a negative answer to this question. I take the integrationist approach and argue that a

person properly sensitive to the harms of pollution (and more generally sensitive to the damage humans are causing to the earth and its life forms) will be (and should be) less able to appreciate this sunset. The proper aesthetic judgment is that it is not beautiful (i.e., not aesthetically positive all things considered), or, at the very least, less beautiful. With the knowledge that it was caused by pollution, the aesthetic delight will (should) either be dampened or removed entirely.

The argument for this view starts by rejecting a narrow, formalist understanding of aesthetics in favor of a more comprehensive and inclusive view. Aesthetic responses should not just involve perception (understood narrowly and formally), but they can (and sometimes should) also include conception, imagination, and emotion. Each of these moves us beyond the pretty colors and interesting patterns of the pollution sunset toward more negative connotations. Knowing *what* we are aesthetically appreciating is relevant to the aesthetic response. In this case, we are appreciating not just a colorful pattern in the sky, but one resulting from the light of the setting sun shining through harmful particles expelled by industry. These particles damage lungs, send children and the elderly to the hospital, and acidify lakes. As we experience the pollution sunset in light of this knowledge, imagination comes into play (or should) and we might picture fish floating belly up and hear the wheezing of vulnerable people who are breathing the polluted air. Emotions become engaged and we feel disgust at the thought of the dead fish, sympathy for those whose breathing is made more difficult, and anger toward both the industry executives who profit by externalizing their costs onto others and the regulators who fail to do their jobs. While the colors and the patterns may still be pretty, the aesthetic delight and peaceful feeling that sunsets normally give are absent (or radically diminished).

These examples of integration are reinforced by the thought that our aesthetic sense is not an isolated compartment of our lives but rather is fundamentally tied with who we are, what we believe, and what we value (including ethically value). Thus the attempt to compartmentalize aesthetic and other values will fail. We are right to worry when one we love does not share our aesthetic responses and judgments, for this manifests a potentially deep rift between people and not just a difference in one isolated area of their lives. Not only do our ethical (and other) values affect our aesthetic responses, but interaction also goes the other way. Carlson has argued this when suggesting that aesthetically appreciating magazines such as Playboy and Hustler promotes a sexist attitude toward women: He writes,

It is clear that we do not aesthetically appreciate simply with our five senses, but rather with an important part of our whole emotional and psychological selves . . . what and how we aesthetically appreciate cannot but play a role in shaping our emotional and psychological being. This . . . helps determine what we think and do and what we think is correct for others to think and do. In short, our aesthetic appreciation is a significant factor in shaping and forming our ethical views (2000, p. 66-67).

Evaluating Predation

If we accept integration of aesthetic values with other values, we must take seriously the question of the negative impact on the aesthetics of animals of predation in nature (as well as other animal suffering and death). We cannot simply assume that the suffering and death of animals is one thing and the aesthetics of these events is something else.

One response is to deny that the suffering and death involved in predation (and other natural events) involves negative value. Not only is there nothing morally blameworthy going on, but no intrinsic disvalue of any sort is present. If one challenged the Yellowstone tourists watching the wolves kill elk, this is a likely reaction. In a culture where animals are inhumanely

raised and slaughtered for food, massively used in unpleasant ways for research, and subject to many other forms of mistreatment, people just don't believe that the lives or pain of animals counts for much. Such beliefs are manifest as well in the ridicule that would meet the suggestion that Yellowstone predation involves questions of moral responsibility, both because of the possibility of rescuing the prey from the predator and because humans are responsible for bringing these predators back to Yellowstone.

If we reject this dismissal of the value of animals, we may seem pushed to the conclusion that aesthetically appreciating predation manifests a kind of depravity, perhaps not as sick as aesthetically appreciating a cougar attacking a human child, but objectionable nonetheless. Other analogies might be aesthetically appreciating dog fights or perhaps gladiators fighting to the death. On this view, because predation expresses violence and represents suffering and death, those with the proper emotional sympathies for animals will not find it aesthetically alluring. If there is any aesthetic value there, we have a moral obligation not to aesthetically appreciate it.

Having presented the problem that animal predation presents for the aesthetics of animals as forcefully as I can, I now attempt a response. I do so by briefly assessing both the disvalues and values in predation and then considering how they should integrate into our aesthetic response. Consider first the death of the animals preyed upon. The disvalue of an animal's death is an exceedingly difficult question that I cannot adequately address. I believe that, considered in itself, it is a disvalue, though not a seriously grave one and not on a par with the death of a human whose life plans would be thwarted by the death. I also think the degree of disvalue depends on the animal's level of sentience, as well as other factors, including its

aesthetic value. I think the suffering of animals is a more serious disvalue than are their deaths.

Unlike some, I do not believe that sympathy for the suffering of wild animals is a mistake.

Animal suffering is real (though often less intense and complex than some human suffering), it is a significant disvalue, and it should elicit a sympathetic emotional response in humans, as well as requiring moral consideration. Our aesthetic response to predation must to take these disvalues into account.

But these disvalues are not the whole story about predation (and more generally animal suffering and death in nature). In the case of predation, death for the prey is life for the predator. This is a case of a intrinsic disvalue being instrumental to an intrinsic value. Looked at more broadly, “there is not value lost so much as value capture” (Rolston, 1992, p. 253). The natural process of predation exhibits admirable and aesthetically stimulating traits in predators and prey: The muscle, power, intelligence and sometimes cooperative behavior of the predator and the alertness and fleet-footedness of the prey. Predation selects for these valuable capacities in both predator and prey species. If our world had evolved without predators, these admirable traits might well be absent. Predation also helps regulate the population of prey and this protects ecosystems that might otherwise become degraded (resulting in harm to animals). When we contextualize predation and understand what we attending to, we see that although predation involves the disvalues of animal suffering and death, it also involves the values of animal life, the production and display of admirable animal traits, and the functioning of healthy ecosystems. Disvalue and ugliness, though present, are intermingled with, and productive of, value and beauty. Aesthetic appreciation of predation must not only come to terms with the suffering and death involved, but it must appreciate these positive dimensions as well.

The question of human moral responsibilities concerning predation can be addressed in light of this analysis of predation. If we rescue the prey, we will need to insure that the predators have alternative sources of nutrition (which presumably should not involve killing sentient animals). The rescue prevents the suffering and death of the prey for the moment, but especially if the prey population is near carrying capacity, we need to consider the possibility that the animals will die in other ways later (perhaps by starving or freezing to death). We also must worry about the affects on ecosystem health of additional prey. In terms of mitigating suffering and death and protecting ecosystems, the best solution would be to introduce contraception for both prey and predators. It quickly becomes clear that preventing the suffering and death of prey involves massive human involvement in the daily operations of ecosystems and in the lives of predators and prey. This seriously compromises the wild integrity of these animals and their ecosystems, drastically reducing their independence and naturalness. Such human intervention in nature would create so much disvalue (whether understood as moral, aesthetic, or otherwise) that it would be wrong for us to rescue the prey, even though we could lessen the suffering and death in nature.⁹

With no duties to rescue the prey, the potential conflict between our aesthetic response to predation and our moral duties regarding it dissolves. Given integrationism, it seems problematic to aesthetically appreciate an event we have an obligation to prevent. This helps explain why a positive aesthetic response to a wolf attacking an elk is radically different from a positive aesthetic response to a cougar attacking a human child. Although sympathetic emotional responses should be present in both cases, only in the latter case does the duty to

⁹ I expect that an argument along these lines could also be made to show that predator restoration is the

rescue undermine the appropriateness of a positive aesthetic response.

As long as we take the suffering and death of the prey seriously, we have no duty to refrain from positively appreciating predation. There is much of positive value in predation that we can and should aesthetically appreciate. The disvalue of the prey's death and especially of its suffering remains and these must be integrated into the overall aesthetic response to and evaluation of predation. A sympathetic emotional response to the prey's suffering and loss of life should color the appreciate event and our response to it. But this emotional involvement should not wash out the positive aesthetic appreciation, and it may even deepen it. There is beauty here, but it is a sad beauty, perhaps even a "terrible beauty" (Korsmeyer, 2005). Instead of an easy beauty such as pretty scenery, the aesthetics of predation is more complex and difficult. Just as the aesthetic experience of the sublime is more profound than the experience of the pretty, in part because it is sterner, less lovely, and involves more difficult and even negative emotions (such as fear and terror), so the aesthetic experience of predation is more difficult and profound because it too involves taxing emotions such as sympathy and pity. Although not particularly pleasurable, it sustains attention, supports meaning, and has far greater significance than does more easy animal beauty, such as the delight at seeing a cardinal at the feeder or the graceful running of a gazelle. Carolyn Korsmeyer's description of terrible beauty sheds light on the aesthetics of predation: "With terrible beauty attention is arrested by elements that strain the heart and yet they induce us to linger over them and savor them in all their heartache and woe" (Korsmeyer, 2005, p. 59). The disvalues to the prey heighten our affective absorption as we experience this fundamental way that sentient life functions on our planet. The disvalue of the

right thing to do.

suffering and death of the prey in the context of the positive values of predation may increase, not decrease, the aesthetic value of the event and may contribute to the quality of the aesthetic response. Those who aesthetically appreciate predation—assuming they take the disvalue of the suffering and death of animals seriously—need not be violating any moral duties nor making any aesthetic mistakes either.

Conclusion

I have defended using animal's beauty as part of an aesthetic justification for environmental policy and the preservation of nature. I have argued that it need be neither morally objectionable nor superficial to use the beauty of animals in our thinking about animals' value or in our decision making about how we should act towards them or their environments. There are sufficient differences between humans and animals to disarm the suggestion that the problems in using beauty to judge and evaluate humans apply straightforwardly to animals. Such a view is compatible with taking the moral status of animals seriously.

I have also argued that the suffering and death in animal predation need not count as ugliness in animals lives that works against using the beauty of animals as a justification for environmental preservation. However, even if we accept my argument for a positive aesthetics of predation, it remains to be seen if such a case can be successfully made in response to other dimensions of alleged ugliness in animals' lives.¹⁰ Still, I hope to have shown a way that we can defend the beauty in animals' lives even while taking their suffering seriously.¹¹

¹⁰ I particularly worry about making this argument for disease and parasitism, as illustrated by Rolston's possum and its worms.

¹¹ I thank John Fisher for valuable help in formulating some of the issues in this paper.

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