

# Animal Beauty, Ethics, and Environmental Preservation

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Animal beauty provides a significant aesthetic reason for protecting nature. Worries about aesthetic discrimination and the ugliness of predation might make one think otherwise. Although it has been argued that aesthetic merit is a trivial and morally objectionable basis for action, beauty is an important value and a legitimate basis for differential treatment, especially in the case of animals. While the suffering and death of animals due to predation are important disvalues that must be recognized, predation's tragic beauty has positive aesthetic value that can be appropriately aesthetically appreciated.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Animal beauty is a paradigm of aesthetic value. What could be more graceful than a gazelle loping across the African savannah? Or consider the beauty of birds: the bright flash of a cardinal against the deep green cedars, the charm of the male feeding his female companion, or the haunting call of the loon. Although Yellowstone National Park was spectacularly beautiful without them, the return of wolves has dramatically increased the park's aesthetic appeal.

According to aesthetic preservationism, natural beauty is a major justification for environmental protection.<sup>1</sup> If natural beauty amounts to anything, it includes the beauty of animals, wild and free, on the move. If our world lacked its splendid animal beauty, the justification for protecting the environment would be significantly weaker. In this paper, I defend the significance of animal beauty for environmental preservation by addressing two potential problems.

First, some might believe that the focus on animal beauty is superficial and morally objectionable.<sup>2</sup> Many think that human beauty is a trivial and even a morally objectionable basis on which to value and act toward people. Why think that valuing and protecting animals on the basis of their beauty is any less trivial or objectionable? Just as we should not protect people based on how attractive they are, so too we should not decide which animals (and their environments) to protect

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<sup>1</sup> John Fisher explores "aesthetic preservationism" in "Aesthetics," in Dale Jamieson, ed., *A Companion to Environmental Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), pp. 264–75. Eugene Hargrove was one of the first to develop this position in some detail. See his *Foundations of Environmental Ethics* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1989), esp. chap. 6. Stan Godlovitch criticizes an extreme version of this view in "Aesthetic Protectionism," *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 6 (1989): 171–80.

<sup>2</sup> Glenn Parsons and Allen Carlson examine a closely related worry about aesthetically appreciating animals that they call "the immorality objection. See Glenn Parson and Allen Carlson, *Functional Beauty* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2008), pp. 116–20.

based on their aesthetic merits. Implementation of the U.S. Endangered Species Act is often criticized on these grounds for protecting charismatic megafauna at the expense of the “creepy crawlies” who are left to extinction. Similarly, aesthetic preservationism with a focus on animal beauty might be objectionable because it supports preferential treatment of grizzly bears over bugs on aesthetic grounds.

A second objection to using beauty of animals in environmental preservation is that the widespread suffering, death, and predation of wild animals is aesthetically negative. These components of animals’ lives seriously detract from a positive aesthetic evaluation of them, and they undermine animal beauty’s contribution to aesthetic preservationism, thus significantly weakening the doctrine. Although many prize the aesthetic experience of predation in nature, there is arguably an obligation to avoid aesthetically valuing events that involve great suffering and death. Such concerns also count against the policy of predator restoration and against environmental preservation more generally.

In response, I argue that although these objections do not leave aesthetic preservationism with a focus on animal beauty unscathed, they do not seriously weaken this approach to the protection of nature. Beauty is not a trivial value nor an inappropriate basis for differential treatment, and this is especially true of the beauty of animals. Although predation involves seemingly negative aesthetic elements, predation is a kind of tragic beauty that it is appropriate to positively appreciate.

## II: BEAUTY AS AN OBJECTIONABLE BASIS FOR THE TREATMENT OF HUMANS AND ANIMALS

Physically attractive people 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 public office, and so on. It is uncontroversial that some of this preferential treatment is morally problematic. Robert Fudge notes that “moral education” is needed to “correct for such biases.”<sup>3</sup> Rob Loftis argues that the focus on human physical attractiveness is superficial: 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. . . .”<sup>4</sup>

It is not easy to explain why it is wrong to assess and differentially treat people based on their aesthetic merit. Given that beauty is paradigmatically valuable, why is human beauty not also uncontroversially valuable?<sup>5</sup> Moreover, if human beauty

<sup>3</sup> Robert Fudge, “Imagination and the Science-Based Aesthetic Appreciation of Unscenic Nature,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 59 (2001): 276.

<sup>4</sup> J. Robert Loftis, “Three Problems for the Aesthetic Foundations of Environmental Ethics,” *Philosophy in the Contemporary World* 10 (2003): 43.

<sup>5</sup> I use *beauty* to refer to the entire range of aesthetically valuable characteristics, including physical, behavioral, psychological, and contextual features of objects, among others. *Beauty* is sometimes

is valuable, should it not count for something in our thinking and behavior toward other people? People often choose a spouse or friends based in part on their aesthetic merit and this aesthetic discrimination does not seem morally objectionable or invariably superficial.

#### DOES AESTHETIC DISCRIMINATION VIOLATE MORAL EQUALITY?

Perhaps using aesthetic merit to value and differentially treat people is problematic because it violates the ideal of the moral equality between persons: beauty queens should not be treated better than the rest of us. Loftis provides this 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.<sup>6</sup>

All persons, no matter their degree of aesthetic merit, deserve equal consideration of their interests. Although more attractive people might get fairer trials than do less attractive people, they should not.

If we accept a notion of animal equality, then perhaps aesthetic discrimination concerning animals is also inappropriate for similar reasons. Preserving attractive endangered species before less attractive ones (solely on aesthetic grounds) fails to treat these species as equals. If a bird rescue organization chooses to rehabilitate hawks, eagles, and owls, but not vultures, and does so for aesthetic reasons, it violates the requirement of equal consideration of animals. Would choosing a pet at the pound based on aesthetics similarly violate the equality of animals?<sup>7</sup>

The meaning of human equality and what it entails are neither well understood nor agreed upon. Animal equality and its implications are even more up for grabs. Those who have argued for equality between humans and animals do not claim that the same considerations about how we should treat and value humans necessarily apply to animals. For example, neither Peter Singer nor Tom Regan argue that the equality of humans and sophisticated animals implies the equal value of their lives.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps (as I argue below) aesthetic merit plays a more legitimate role in assessing the value of animals than it does with humans.

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used more narrowly to refer to a particular type of aesthetic merit in contrast with others, as when the beautiful is distinguished from the sublime.

<sup>6</sup> Loftis, "Three Problems," p. 43.

<sup>7</sup> Perhaps aesthetic discrimination between moral equals is only problematic in *public decision making* and not in *private decision making*. This approach would allow using aesthetic considerations to choose friends and pets while prohibiting aesthetic merit counting in decisions about medical care, guilt or innocence, species preservation, or other questions of public policy. An appeal to liberalism's idea that government should remain neutral on conceptions of the good (including aesthetic good) might help justify this distinction.

<sup>8</sup> Singer argues that "the death of a human being is a greater loss to the human than the death of a mouse is to the mouse—for the human, it cuts off plans for the distant future, for example, but not in

Those who reject egalitarianism between humans and animals might believe that animals who are roughly at the same level of psychological sophistication have equal moral status. If such status ruled out differential treatment because of differences in aesthetic merit, then bison would not warrant better treatment than cattle, despite bison's (arguably) superior aesthetic merit. Consider the conflict between sea lions and salmon in the Pacific Northwest. Ignoring complications due to human responsibility for this conflict, if moral status preempts other considerations and if level of psychological sophistication determines moral status, then the sea lions should get preference over the salmon. But if aesthetic value comes into play and is not automatically overridden by considerations of moral status, then it is arguable that the spectacular life cycle of the salmon adds significantly to its aesthetic value and that it might tip the scale toward the salmon.<sup>9</sup>

I leave the question of the nature of moral equality and what it implies about aesthetic discrimination unresolved. However, I do insist that we should not simply assume that moral considerations always outweigh aesthetic ones. Consider the boring life of Mrs. Goody Two-Shoes. Arguably, it is inferior when compared to the life of a person who—though not perfectly moral—has led an aesthetically valuable existence.<sup>10</sup> Or again, if we agree that it is sometimes justifiable to put resources into creating and preserving art (and other objects of aesthetic value) rather than using those resources to save human lives, then we also sometimes prioritize aesthetic values over important moral considerations.<sup>11</sup> Aesthetic value, it seems, is a substantial value and not a trivial value, such as a mere tie breaker.<sup>12</sup>

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the case of the mouse" (see Singer's response to "frequently asked questions" at <http://www.princeton.edu/~psinger/faq.html>). Regan argues that "death for the dog though a harm is not comparable to the death of a human because the magnitude of harm that death is a function of the number and variety of opportunities for satisfaction it forecloses for a given individual." See Tom Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), p. 351.

<sup>9</sup> Many have pointed out that sea lions' lives are also spectacular. This point raises the difficult question about how to justify claims about differential aesthetic value. While such judgments are common, they may be harder to defend with regard to natural aesthetic value than with regard to the aesthetic value of art, in part because artistic intentions are only available as a criterion for art evaluation. Although some have found the "equal beauty thesis" for natural objects appealing, such a view is not only counterintuitive, but also pragmatically unhelpful as it blocks the role of aesthetic value in determining conservation priorities. For a discussion, see Stan Godlovitch, "Evaluating Nature Aesthetically," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 56 (1998): 113–25.

<sup>10</sup> I borrow this example from Marcia Eaton, "Integrating the Aesthetic and the Moral," *Philosophical Studies* 67 (1992): 219–40. Eaton has us compare the life of Goody Two-Shoes with that of painter Paul Gauguin who deserted his family to travel to Tahiti for the sake of his painting.

<sup>11</sup> Dale Jamieson makes a related point when he argues that, during World War II, it was not obviously wrong for Winston Churchill to protect London's art from the blitz rather than using the resources to save people's lives. See Dale Jamieson, "Animal Liberation is an Environmental Ethic," *Environmental Values* 7 (1998): 48.

<sup>12</sup> For the claim that natural aesthetic value is only a tie breaker, see Gary Varner, *In Nature's Interests* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 22.

## AESTHETIC MERIT AND AUTONOMY

Perhaps it is because a person's beauty is to a great extent beyond his or her control that using beauty in determining how we treat people is believed to be problematic. Aesthetic discrimination based on such uncontrollable features differentially treats people on the basis of their good and bad fortune. Such treatment seems morally undesirable, perhaps unfair, when we have the alternative of treating people on the basis of factors for which they are responsible.<sup>13</sup> In addition, differentially treating people based on uncontrollable features reduces their ability to direct their lives. If people are treated on the basis of features that *are* under their control, their autonomy is enhanced, for doing so "allows people to determine, through their own actions, how others will respond to them."<sup>14</sup> Thus, there is arguably a presumption against differential treatment based on an individual's uncontrollable characteristics when doing so impairs the individual's autonomy and/or fails to reflect his or her status as a responsible agent.

Applying these rationales to the assessment of aesthetically based, differential treatment of humans and animals is problematic. For one thing, not all aesthetic merit is beyond an individual's control. To what extent human beauty is beyond our control depends on how we understand human beauty. Even if we limit the issue to physical attractiveness, much of it is something we do control. Some people choose an appearance that repulses others: they are dirty, smelly, and gluttonous. Others choose cleanliness, are careful about what they eat, and stay in shape. When we base our treatment of people on a choice they have made about their physical appearance, we are treating them on the basis of factors for which they are responsible, and we are not limiting their ability to control their lives. Aesthetic discrimination is only problematic for the reasons suggested when it is based on aesthetic factors beyond an individual's control.

More importantly, autonomy and responsibility in animals is significantly limited when compared to these capacities in (ordinary adult) humans. Whether and to what extent animals can be morally responsible and/or autonomous are difficult questions about which research is ongoing.<sup>15</sup> These questions also depend on which animals one is considering and on how full a notion of moral agency or autonomy one is working with. I think it is safe to assume that the presumption against differentially treating individuals based on uncontrollable aesthetic merit is significantly weaker when applied to animals. For most animals (namely invertebrates), there is likely

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<sup>13</sup> John Rawls calls characteristics of people that they did not earn "arbitrary from the moral point of view" and argues that it is unfair for society to reinforce advantages secured by chance. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 15.

<sup>14</sup> James Rachels, "What People Deserve," in John Arthur and William H. Shaw, eds., *Justice and Economic Distribution* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1978), p. 159.

<sup>15</sup> For a full blown defense of the claim that animals (at least mammals) are moral beings ("know right from wrong" and "have a moral sense" including "a sense of justice"), see Marc Bekoff and Jessica Pierce, *Wild Justice: The Moral Lives of Animals* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

no such presumption at all, for they (probably) lack autonomy and responsibility entirely. Even for cognitively sophisticated animals, the presumption that we should treat them on the basis of factors for which they are responsible and in a way that enhances their autonomy attenuates to the extent that animal responsibility and autonomy are relatively diminished.

#### THE SUPERFICIALITY OF PHYSICAL APPEARANCE AND DEEPER, INNER BEAUTY

Another reason to resist the differential valuing and treatment of humans (and animals) on aesthetic grounds is the belief that beauty is a trivial value. The commonplace—"beauty is only skin deep"—reflects this idea. Loftis' suggestion that it is vain for people to care much about their appearance 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 focus on 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. The social practice of ranking women by how their bodies look is degrading 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 must guard against the idea that people's bodies are all that matter about them, so too we must guard against the idea that people's bodies are insignificant. Humans (like other animals) are physical beings and what our bodies are (and look) like matters. What is problematic is a *sole* focus or a *disproportional* focus on a human's physical nature and appearance, not paying attention to people's physical beauty per se. Holmes Rolston, III, 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."<sup>16</sup>

One reason people might think beauty is unimportant in the assessment and treatment of people (and animals and the environment more generally) is that they accept an overly narrow conception of 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

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<sup>16</sup> Holmes Rolston, III, "From Beauty to Duty: Aesthetics of Nature and Environmental Ethics," in Arnold Berleant, ed., *Environment and the Arts: Perspectives on Environmental Aesthetics* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2002), p. 129.

their aesthetic content.<sup>17</sup> 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.”<sup>18</sup> 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, even 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 he or she looks like, transcend the sensuous surface, and learn something about the person. This is also true in 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 amazing sonar emission and detection capabilities. Cows and bison might be thought to be roughly equivalent in aesthetic merit when judged in terms of their physical appearance. But when one considers differences in their origins, how they behave, and what they represent, that judgment of aesthetic merit will alter radically. Leopold gives the following related 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.<sup>19</sup>

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

The belief in the alleged superficiality of human beauty is thus 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 mere physical appearance. These points go a long way toward answering those skeptics who think human beauty should be irrelevant in our assessment and treatment of people. As with humans, the physical attractiveness of animals is not an unimportant part of their value. We have also seen that the beauty of animals goes beyond their physical attractiveness and that fully appreciating that beauty requires understanding and responding to animals’ behavior, ecology, and what they represent.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Although I dismiss aesthetic formalism here, there are formidable defenders of the doctrine. For a defense with regard to nature appreciation, see Nick Zangwill, “Formal Natural Beauty,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 101 (2001): 209–24.

<sup>18</sup> Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac with Other Essays on Conservation from Round River* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 168.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 260.

<sup>20</sup> There are a variety of possible objects of appreciation involved in our aesthetic response to animals. We might, for example, aesthetically appreciate the animal as a unique individual. Or we might appreciate it as a manifestation of certain excellences of its species. Gene Hargrove has suggested that our appreciation of animals is more “Platonic” than our appreciation of other natural objects, such as

While I have maintained a parallel in the defense of the importance of beauty of people and animals, I think that the beauty of animals should play a greater role in how we value and treat them. Because animals lack the complexity of psychological “inner beauty” that counts with people, other dimensions of their beauty, especially their physical attractiveness, count relatively more. Although animals can have personalities, the depth of their personalities and the aesthetic dimensions of those personalities are significantly limited compared to those features in typical humans. For example, animals cannot be witty or tell jokes (though they can be playful). We stretch these concepts if we were to speak of the “compelling,” “boring,” “humorless,” or “fascinating” personality of (virtually all) animals, while these assessments of human personality are relevant to a person’s aesthetic character and value. Thus, concentrating on the physical attractiveness of an animal misses far less of that being’s aesthetic value that does a similar focus on a human’s physical attractiveness.

Furthermore, in the assessment of human value, beauty has many more competitors than it does in the assessment of animal value. Intellectual and moral virtues are the clearest examples here. Open-mindedness, courage, generosity, compassion, honesty, and so on are central to an evaluation of a person. While animals have virtues and vices of various sorts, the presence of such intellectual and moral virtues are (for the most part) extremely limited and rudimentary when compared to their existence in typical humans. Thus, fixing one’s attention on animals’ beauty does not ignore these other significant dimensions of value in the way in which it does when the focus is on human beauty.

Relatedly, the argument that a single-minded focus on human physical attractiveness 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. Consider the demeaning fascination with unusual human bodies in “freak” shows. While there are meaningful dimensions in our understanding and assessment of animals (i.e., the psychological and intellectual dimensions of their lives), these features in animals are significantly limited when compared to the role they play in human lives. Thus, a sole focus on the bodies of animals and on their physical attractiveness is far less problematic than with humans. In the case of animals, there is far less meaning to demean.

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mountains (where the focus is on diversity and uniqueness). Animal appreciation often involves the assessment of whether or not a particular animal is a good exemplar of its kind (Hargrove, *Foundations*, pp. 123–24). Glenn Parsons argues in favor of appreciating animals on the basis of their “looking fit for function” (his example is a cheetah built for speed). See Glenn Parsons, “The Aesthetic Value of Animals,” *Environmental Ethics* 29 (2007): 151–69. John Fisher suggests appreciating individual animals on analogy with appreciating performances of musical masterpieces, arguing that each “species has its own story with its own unique and marvelous solution to the problem of ecological survival.” See John Fisher, “All (Wild) Animals are Beautiful,” presented at the annual meeting of the American Society for Aesthetics, Los Angeles, October 2007 (available from the author). I like all these suggestions and take a pluralist attitude toward what we are appreciating when we aesthetically respond to animals.

Consider some examples. It is not plausible to think that Audubon Society members demean birds when they spend the morning, binoculars in hand, watching birds' bodies and admiring their beautiful physical characteristics. It is true that if they ignore the birds' ecology, cognitive ethology, and behavior, they are missing much of value about the birds. But I don't think doing so counts as debased treatment of birds. Relatedly, we should not evaluate national park visitors who stare at animals and focus on their physical appearance like we do 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 not demeaning to the animals. To some extent, it is even a praiseworthy celebration of their value.

To sum up the discussion thus far, beauty, whether human or animal, is neither a morally objectionable basis on which to evaluate and treat others nor a superficial value. A belief in moral equality does not clearly threaten the legitimacy of aesthetic discrimination. While the presumption to treat individuals as responsible agents and enhance their autonomy counts against aesthetic discrimination with humans, this presumption is significantly diminished when considering aesthetic discrimination concerning animals. Finally, I have argued that beauty in general and physical beauty in particular are not superficial values and that much of the problematic nature of basing one's evaluation of humans on the basis of their aesthetic merit either does not apply to animals or is significantly weakened. In general, aesthetic merit plays a more legitimate role in assessing the value and treatment of animals that it does with humans. Aesthetic preservationism with a focus on animal beauty is thus rescued from one set of objections.

### III: ANIMAL BEAUTY AND THE UGLINESS OF ANIMAL SUFFERING, DEATH, AND PREDATION

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

#### UGLINESS IN ANIMALS

One dimension of this negative aesthetics of animals concerns the alleged existence of ugly animals. Are there any ugly animals?<sup>21</sup> 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 skulls, swollen

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<sup>21</sup> Fisher comes very close to denying this claim. See "All (Wild) Animals are Beautiful."

legs, crossed eyes, and arthritis, among other ailments. On one standard account, animals' beauty comes from their "looking fit for function"<sup>22</sup> or "possessing parts with natural functions they are well suited to perform."<sup>23</sup> This account helps to explain the apparent ugliness of these poor animals, many of whose parts were not well-suited to their natural functions. It also explains the presumed ugliness of naturally deformed animals (such as, amphibians with missing or malformed limbs or digits).

Are there ugly animals besides deformed ones? 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 . . . bats, snakes, slugs, worms, centipedes and spiders. . . . Our negative reaction to these things outweighs their positive aesthetic value of embodying their interesting life story.<sup>24</sup>

One might go further and argue that *all* animals have significant dimensions of ugliness in their lives. They get dirty, become sick, decline, and eventually die, in the process losing whatever appealing colors or grace they might have had.<sup>25</sup> Perhaps only animals in their prime or animals that live up to the ideal of their species are thoroughly beautiful. Rolston conveys the ugliness of diseased animals thus: "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."<sup>26</sup> The presence of these dimensions in animals' lives presents a formidable problem for positive aesthetics (viz., the idea that all of wild nature is beautiful) and constitutes a real worry for the view that the aesthetics of animals in nature is positive on balance.

My focus is on the aesthetics of animal suffering and death in predation. I ask how the value dimensions of predation should affect our aesthetic response to it. Animals in nature suffer and die in many ways, including death by starvation, disease, cold, thirst, parasitism, and being outright killed by predators. Predation appears 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 stimulating, searching them out and valuing them as some of their most precious encounters with the natural world. Attendance

<sup>22</sup> Parsons, "The Aesthetic Value of Animals," p. 151.

<sup>23</sup> Malcolm Budd, *The Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature: Essays on the Aesthetics of Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 103.

<sup>24</sup> Yuriko Saito, "The Aesthetics of Unscenic Nature," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 56 (1998): 106.

<sup>25</sup> Positive aesthetics (viz., all wild nature is beautiful) might be more plausible for *inorganic* than for *organic* nature, for the former is not subject to the negative aesthetics arguably associated with sickness, decrepitude, and death. See Glenn Parsons, "Natural Functions and the Aesthetic Appreciation of Inorganic Nature," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 44 (2004): 54–56.

<sup>26</sup> Holmes Rolston, III, *Philosophy Gone Wild* (Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1986), pp. 128–29.

in Yellowstone National Park has increased since wolves were brought back and witnessing a wolf pack bring down an elk is a prize many seek.

It is arguable that the suffering, killing, and death involved in predation are something we should not appreciate and further that the phenomenon is aesthetically negative.<sup>27</sup> If so, we have a rationale for condemning the widespread practice of aesthetically appreciating predation and an aesthetic argument against the environmental goal of predator restoration (viz., we should not add ugliness to the world). Further, given the centrality of predation in animal lives, if predation is aesthetically negative, it seriously hinders using animal beauty for an aesthetic defense of the environment.

#### 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 have a plausible response to it.<sup>28</sup> Malcolm Budd raises this issue when he criticizes the claim that because of their nature, ecosystems are aesthetically positive, 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.”<sup>29</sup> In a paper that defends “the aesthetics of unscenic nature” but criticizes the doctrine of positive aesthetics, Saito 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 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.<sup>30</sup>

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

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<sup>27</sup> Tyler Raterman, has recently argued that predation is “lamentable.” See his “An Environmentalist’s Lament of Predation,” *Environmental Ethics* 30 (2008): 417–34. He does not address the aesthetic implications of his negative appraisal.

<sup>28</sup> Holmes Rolston, III is an exception. See, for example, his “Disvalues in Nature,” *The Monist* 75 (1992): 250–78.

<sup>29</sup> Budd, *Aesthetics of Nature*, p. 104.

<sup>30</sup> Saito, “Aesthetics of Unscenic Nature,” pp. 108–09.

context, why not the latter?"<sup>31</sup> She worries about the possibility of speciesism in "treating human suffering differently from animals' suffering,"<sup>32</sup> but then leaves animals out of her conclusion about the moral inappropriateness of aesthetically appreciating natural disasters that cause suffering. For several reasons, including that wild animals are not insulated from the forces of nature as are humans, 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 nature-caused suffering when he responds to this objection of Saito's to positive aesthetics. 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 that causes human suffering leaves the doctrine untouched.<sup>33</sup> Carlson also seemingly embraces a more general response to objections aimed at the aesthetic appreciation of natural events that cause suffering. 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.<sup>34</sup>

Carlson's response to the possible aesthetic implications of the suffering caused by nature seems to be that nature is amoral and thus that assessment of nature's deeds is not appropriate.

But this response is not an adequate solution to the problem that suffering in nature presents for positive aesthetics. Although nature is not a moral agent and thus morally assessing the behavior of hurricanes, of worms in possums, or (probably) of predators is inappropriate, these events can be evaluated on nonmoral grounds. One might wonder if these occurrences are intrinsically valuable, disvaluable, or neutral. Is it not a bad thing that hurricanes wreck human property and lives, that possums are infested with worms, or that wolves must kill to survive? Might nature be a better place if it functioned without such suffering and killing? We need to determine how our answers to such questions should be integrated (if at all) into our aesthetic responses to these events. Pointing out that nature and natural items are not morally responsible and cannot be blamed does not address this issue.

In addition to these nonmoral value assessments (and their potential aesthetic implications), there are relevant moral assessments to be made. When hurricanes destroy people's lives, should humans be blamed for weak building codes, allowing

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Allen Carlson, "'We See Beauty Now Where We Could Not See It Before': Rolston's Aesthetics of Nature," in Christopher Preston and Wayne Ouderkirk, eds., *Nature, Value, Duty: Life on Earth with Holmes Rolston, III* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2007), p. 115.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

development in hazardous areas, or ignoring global warming? Do humans have a moral obligation to alleviate the suffering of the possum or possibly to rescue the prey?<sup>35</sup> Should our responses to these moral questions affect our aesthetic responses to these events? In particular, what are we to make of 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?

While Carlson is right that a positive aesthetics of *wild* nature is not challenged by nature-caused human suffering, this response leaves untouched the challenge to positive aesthetics resulting from suffering, death, and killing in nature absent humans. Carlson's only response to the objection that it is not appropriate to appreciate purely natural events that involve great suffering (e.g., predation) is this: "At most they only show that it may not always be morally acceptable for humans to aesthetically appreciate every case of positive aesthetic value."<sup>36</sup> This response ignores important issues about the relation between aesthetic values and other values. Carlson here simply assumes that suffering in nature (an apparent disvalue) does not affect 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. Additionally, Carlson here seemingly adopts a strict separation between the moral appropriateness of the aesthetic appreciation of an aesthetic object and the aesthetic value of that object, a position he has forcefully rejected on other occasions. If we are to properly assess how the suffering and death involved in predation affect (if at all) the aesthetics of predation, we need an understanding of how aesthetic values relate to other values (including moral ones).

#### RELATIONS BETWEEN AESTHETIC VALUES AND OTHER VALUES

Some believe 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, their creation, or our response to them. On this view, that the Roman Coliseum was designed as a place for human sacrifice is not relevant to its aesthetic value, nor to our appreciation of that value. Similarly, if we think of predation as an aesthetic object, then the suffering and death of an elk being preyed upon by wolves is not relevant to our assessment of that event, nor to our aesthetic response to it.

I label such a view *aesthetic apartheid* and consider it highly implausible.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup> For discussion of the latter, see Tyler Cowen, "Policing Nature," *Environmental Ethics* 25 (2003): 169–82.

<sup>36</sup> Carlson, "Rolston's Aesthetics of Nature," p. 123, n. 65.

<sup>37</sup> This view was famously held by Oscar Wilde who wrote: "I am quite incapable of understanding how any work of art can be criticized from a moral standpoint. The sphere of art and sphere of ethics are absolutely distinct and separate." See Oscar Wilde, "Letter to the Editor," *St James Gazette*, 25 June 1890, in *The Artist as Critic: Critical Writings of Oscar Wilde*, ed., Richard Ellmann (New York: Vintage, 1969), p. 236. Quoted in Allen Carlson, *Nature and Landscape: An Introduction to Environmental Aesthetics* (New York: Columbia, 2009), p. 64.

Aesthetic objects and activities are not immune from non-aesthetic evaluation. That Leni Riefenstahl's powerful cinematography glorifying Hitler is art does not remove its contribution to the Third Reich from moral scrutiny. Apartheid seems oblivious to the fact that any human action can be morally appraised, including acts of aesthetic creation or appreciation. Sometimes aesthetically appreciating something, even something of positive aesthetic value, can be morally unacceptable. Imagine staying to appreciate the end of a symphony while a fire consumes one's home and family, or pausing to take award-winning photographs of that fire. Displaying and aesthetically enjoying posters of the mushroom clouds from the atomic bombs that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki might grievously offend one's Japanese friends. Even if we grant that these photographs have positive aesthetic value (and we might not), we can see how it can be morally problematic to appreciate this value.

If we reject apartheid, we allow that aesthetic responses and objects can be evaluated on non-aesthetic (including moral) grounds. Doing so opens up the possibility of evaluating aesthetic responses to such events as Hurricane Katrina and wolf predation in Yellowstone Park. Arguably (and this is what Saito argues for humans), it is morally wrong to aesthetically appreciate such events because doing so fails to take seriously the suffering and death of the humans and animals involved. Accepting this position, however, might not imply that these events lack positive aesthetic value. We might argue that it is morally wrong to aesthetically appreciate predation and still maintain that accepting this view says nothing about predation's aesthetic value (as Carlson suggests above). Aesthetically valuing predation (or Hurricane Katrina) might not be an aesthetic mistake, even if it is a moral one. On this view, the positive aesthetics of nature is not at issue, only the moral appropriateness of our response to it. We might have *moral* reasons for opposing predator restoration and for condemning those who aesthetically enjoy predation events, even though we have 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 a moral 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*. From this standpoint, artworks can be great aesthetically, despite the fact that they are morally depraved and that appreciating them is morally objectionable (though aesthetically unobjectionable). Although this position does not require apartheid between the aesthetic and the moral, it does insist that the moral (or other non-aesthetic) value of an entity is irrelevant to its aesthetic value. Views in this camp have been called "moderate autonomism."<sup>38</sup> According to moderate autonomism, although it is appropriate to morally evaluate art works, such evaluation is irrelevant to their aesthetic merit. Applying this position to the

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<sup>38</sup> Noel Carroll, "Moderate Moralism," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 36 (1996): 223–38. Carroll contrasts "moderate autonomism" with "radical autonomism," the latter denying that it is ever appropriate to judge art morally (what I have called "aesthetic apartheid").

evaluation of predation, we get the idea that any intrinsic disvalue of predation (due to animal suffering and death) is not relevant to 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," suggests moderate autonomism. I find moderate autonomism's sharp separation 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 account, aesthetic values can influence non-aesthetic values (including moral values) and vice versa. We might call this view *interactionism*. If such interaction obtains in the case of predation, then the (non-moral) disvalue of the suffering and death of prey would affect (presumably negatively) the aesthetic value of predation and thus bear on our assessment of the beauty of animal lives.<sup>39</sup>

Cases in which an artist's message is so immoral that it subverts the aesthetic goals of the work are often mentioned as examples of interaction. Consider a writer whose work will be successful only if he or she gets the reader to feel sympathy for a 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 might be racist or sexist jokes in which the humor (aesthetic value) is undermined because they involve accepting an obnoxious stereotype or enjoying the suffering of disadvantaged groups. 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."<sup>40</sup>

Pollution sunsets present another test case for whether aesthetic value can be 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 aesthetically appropriate? For the most part, environmental aestheticians have suggested a negative answer.<sup>41</sup> I believe that interaction is applicable in this case

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<sup>39</sup> According to an interactionist view labeled "immoralism," sometimes negative moral content can *positively* affect aesthetic value. See Daniel Jacobson, "In Praise of Immoral Art," *Philosophical Topics* 25 (1997): 155–99, and Matthew Kieran, "Forbidden Knowledge: The Challenge of Immoralism," in Jose Bermudez and Sebastian Gardner, eds., *Art and Morality* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 56–73. The change in direction of value immoralism postulates also occurs in my account of predation as a "terrible beauty" (see below).

<sup>40</sup> Kendall Walton, "Morals in Fiction and Fictional Morality," in Alex Neill and Aaron Ridley, eds., *Arguing about Art*, 2d ed. (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 341.

<sup>41</sup> Two examples are Emily Brady, *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), pp. 246–51, and Robert Stecker, *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), pp. 27–28.

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 about the sunset 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 should either be dampened or removed entirely.

The argument for this view involves rejecting a narrow, formalist understanding of aesthetics in favor of a more inclusive view. Aesthetic responses should not only involve perception (understood narrowly and formally), but they can (and sometimes should) also include cognition, 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 dead fish and hear the wheezing of vulnerable people who are breathing the polluted air. Emotions become (or should be) 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 feelings that sunsets normally deliver are (or should be) absent or radically diminished.

These examples of interaction 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). Not only can our ethical (and other) values affect our aesthetic responses, but interaction can go the other way. Carlson has argued for this position when suggesting that aesthetically appreciating magazines such as *Playboy* promotes a sexist attitude toward women.<sup>42</sup> Given interaction, the attempt to compartmentalize aesthetic and other values will fail.<sup>43</sup>

#### EVALUATING PREDATION

If we accept interaction between aesthetic values and other values, we must take seriously the question of whether predation has a negative impact on the aesthetics

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<sup>42</sup> Allen Carlson, *Aesthetics and the Environment* (New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 66–67.

<sup>43</sup> Some have argued for a close conceptual connection between the aesthetic and the ethical, suggesting not just interaction between two types of value, but deeper integration. See, for example, Eaton, “Integrating the Aesthetic and the Moral.”

of animals. 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 involves any 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 response is a likely reaction. In a culture where animals are inhumanely raised and slaughtered for food, used in unpleasant ways for research, and subject to many other forms of mistreatment, many people don't seem to believe that the death or suffering of animals matters much. Such beliefs are manifest as well in the ridicule that would greet the suggestion that Yellowstone predation involves questions of moral responsibility, both because we could rescue 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 and take their pain and death seriously, we seem pushed toward the conclusion that aesthetically appreciating predation manifests a kind of depravity, perhaps not as bad as aesthetically appreciating a cougar attacking a human child, but twisted nonetheless. On this view, because predation expresses violence and involves suffering and death, those with the proper emotional sympathies for animals will not find it aesthetically alluring. Further, if there is any aesthetic value in such events, we perhaps have a moral obligation not to aesthetically appreciate it.

Having articulated the problem that predation presents for the positive aesthetics of animals (and thus for treating animal beauty as an important component of aesthetic preservationism), I now attempt a response. I do so by briefly considering our moral obligations toward predation, assessing the disvalues and the values associated with predation, and exploring how these factors should integrate into our aesthetic response.

In terms of moral responsibilities, if we have an obligation to rescue the prey, aesthetically appreciating predation is problematized. Especially given interactionism, it seems inappropriate to aesthetically appreciate an event we have an obligation to prevent.<sup>44</sup> But do we have such an obligation? If we rescue the prey, we prevent suffering and death for the moment. But especially if the prey population is near carrying capacity, there is the likelihood that the prey will suffer and die in other ways later (perhaps by starving or freezing to death). We also must worry about nutrition for the predator and the affects on ecosystem health of additional prey. In terms of mitigating suffering and death and protecting ecosystems, the best and increasingly more realistic solution would be to introduce contraception for

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<sup>44</sup> Some remarks of Allen Carlson's help explore this idea: "Once the aesthetically valuable is recognized, there is a straightforward imperative concerning it. 'This is beautiful, so eliminate or ignore it' is almost as close to a 'contradiction' as is 'This is morally good, so do not do it.' . . . According to this aesthetic imperative, once recognized, ugliness is to be prevented and beauty is to be appreciated and preserved." Carlson, "Rolston's Aesthetics of Nature," p. 117.

both predators and prey. But doing so involves significant and widespread human interference in the daily operations of ecosystems and in the lives of predators and prey. It seriously compromises the wild integrity of these animals and their ecosystems, drastically reducing their independence and naturalness. I believe that such human intervention in nature would create so much disvalue that it would be wrong, even though we could lessen the total suffering and death in nature by so doing.

If we have no duty to rescue prey, then the potential conflict between a positive aesthetic response to predation and our moral duty to prevent it dissolves. This possibility 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. Only in the latter case does the duty to rescue undermine the appropriateness of a positive aesthetic response.

In terms of the disvalues and values involved in predation, it is difficult to assess the severity of the disvalue of an animal's death. I believe that it is a disvalue, though typically 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. The degree of disvalue depends on the animal's level of psychological sophistication, as well as other factors, including its aesthetic value. I think the suffering of animals is a more serious disvalue and do not believe that sympathy for the suffering of wild animals is a mistake.<sup>45</sup> Animal suffering is real (though typically less intense and complex than analogous human suffering), it is a significant disvalue, and it should elicit a sympathetic emotional response in humans. Our aesthetic response to predation must take these disvalues into account.

But these disvalues are not the whole story about predation. Death for the prey is life for the predator. Intrinsic disvalue is instrumental to intrinsic value: "There is not value lost so much as value capture."<sup>46</sup> The natural process of predation exhibits admirable and aesthetically stimulating traits in both 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 and thereby helps shape the nature of the species involved. A world that evolved without predators might not just lack these magnificent creatures, but might also lack these admirable traits. Predation also helps regulate the population of prey and protects ecosystems that might otherwise become degraded. When we contextualize predation and understand what we are attending to, we see that although predation involves the disvalues of animal suffering and death, it also involves the positive values of animal life, of the production and display of admirable animal species and traits, and of the functioning of healthy ecosystems. Disvalue and ugliness, though present, are intermingled with and productive of value and beauty.

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<sup>45</sup> Compare Holmes Rolston, III, *Conserving Natural Value* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 111–13.

<sup>46</sup> Rolston, "Disvalues in Nature," p. 253.

Aesthetic appreciation of predation must come to terms not only with the suffering and death involved, but also with predation's positive dimensions.<sup>47</sup>

Although not definitive, I believe the above considerations validate the moral and aesthetic appropriateness of positive aesthetic appreciation of predation. As long as we take the suffering and death of the prey seriously, we have no duty to refrain from appreciating predation. There is much of positive value in predation that we can and should aesthetically appreciate. The disvalue of the prey's suffering and death remain poignant and it must be integrated into the overall aesthetic response to and evaluation of predation. A sympathetic emotional reaction to the prey's suffering and loss of life should color the appreciate event. But this emotional involvement should not wash out the positive aesthetic appreciation involved, and it may even deepen it.

There is beauty in predation, but it is a sad beauty, perhaps even a "terrible beauty."<sup>48</sup> 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), 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 easily accessible 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."<sup>49</sup> The disvalues to the prey heighten our affective absorption as we experience this fundamental way that life functions on our planet. The disvalues of the 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 contribute positively to the aesthetic response.

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<sup>47</sup> As in the pollution sunset case, an appropriate aesthetic response to predation requires understanding its nature and meaning by interpreting it in context. The necessity of proper contextualization is widely accepted in art appreciation. It is commonly and plausibly argued that one cannot properly appreciate Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* without understanding its art-historical context. Appropriate nature appreciation also depends on contextual factors: aesthetic appreciation of a tiger in the wild is very different from appreciating a tiger in a zoo. Of course, not all contextual factors are aesthetically relevant (e.g., that wolf predation increases Yellowstone's tourist income is not) and specifying which are relevant (and why) is difficult and controversial. Potentially relevant factors include a phenomenon's origins and consequences, as well as its content. I do not here present a detailed theory of aesthetic relevance for nature appreciation. But these issues have not been settled in art appreciation, where much more work has been done. In the case of predation, I argue that appropriate aesthetic appreciation requires that one not isolate the death and suffering involved from the broader role predation plays in shaping natural history.

<sup>48</sup> Carolyn Korsmeyer, "Terrible Beauties," in Matthew Kieran, ed., *Contemporary Debates in Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 51–64.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

Those who aesthetically appreciate predation—assuming they take the disvalues of the suffering and death of animals seriously—need not be violating any moral duties nor making any aesthetic mistakes either.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

I have defended using the beauty of animals as part of an aesthetic justification for environmental preservation. Using aesthetic merit in our thinking about the value of animals or in our decision making about how we should act toward them need be neither morally objectionable nor superficial. 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. I have also argued that the suffering and death in predation need not lead us to conclude that predation is aesthetically negative. The pervasive fact of predation in animals' lives does not work against using the beauty of animals as a justification for environmental preservation.

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