

SAVING 'DISINTERESTEDNESS' IN ENVIRONMENTAL AESTHETICS: A DEFENCE AGAINST BERLEANT

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The old, historical concept of 'disinterestedness' has dominated the tradition of aesthetics for almost two centuries. In environmental aesthetics, a rather recent branch of aesthetics, some scholars such as Arnold Berleant have criticized disinterestedness, claiming that it is not a satisfactory criterion since it views the environment as an artwork. As an alternative, Berleant proposes a theory of the 'aesthetics of engagement'. I claim that although his main intention is to introduce a comprehensive perception of nature, 'appreciating nature as nature' (not as an artwork), into the aesthetics of nature, Berleant misinterprets 'disinterestedness' and overlooks the fact that it can still be maintained within environmental aesthetics. Disinterestedness can guide our judgements with the notions of non-instrumentality, transparent self, and impartiality. In this sense, I argue that (1) the proper opposite of engagement is not disinterestedness but a dominant concept of aesthetics left over from the eighteenth century, the 'picturesque'; (2) in contrast to holistic accounts of the philosophers who look for an *immersion-of-self-in-a-bigger-Self*, disinterestedness provides being *devoid-of-any-empirical-self* and (3) disinterestedness is not *anthropocentric*, but *anthropogenic*, human-generated, which accepts the 'otherness' of nature and opens the way for respect and care in environmental ethics.

I. WHAT IS ENVIRONMENTAL AESTHETICS?

Environmental aesthetics is one of the new areas of aesthetics which emerged in the second half of the twentieth century. Two main questions dominate the discussions in environmental aesthetics. (1) In what ways is the appreciation of nature different from the appreciation of art? (2) How, in our aesthetic judgements of nature, can we justifiably claim that some appreciation is better than others? Although environmental aesthetics has seemed to develop in recent years, experience and the appreciation of nature was a huge concern for eighteenth-century thinkers such as Anthony Ashley Cooper (Lord Shaftesbury), Joseph Addison, and Immanuel Kant. In the nineteenth century, especially with Georg W. F. Hegel, nature as an object of aesthetics lost its significance and went through a period of stagnation. After Hegel, only art as the sensible expression of Absolute Spirit became the proper object of aesthetics, and by the twentieth century the aesthetics of nature was almost totally eclipsed by the philosophy of art. In 1966, with Ronald Hepburn's

I thank Roger Paden, Dan Eugen Ratiu, and *Estetika's* editors for their helpful suggestions.

seminal article 'Contemporary Aesthetics and the Neglect of the Natural Beauty', the focus of aesthetics returned to the environment.¹

My article deals directly with the question of how aesthetic judgements in the appreciation of nature can be justified. How can we ascertain that one judgement is better than another, or 'serious' rather than 'trivial'?² How can we establish a normative criterion to help us guide our appreciation? This question is related to the first question, which asks how the appreciation of nature differs from that of art. I will start with the former question and then move to the latter. In the literature of environmental aesthetics, the proponents of the different justifications of aesthetic judgements can be divided into two camps. The first camp comprises cognitivists, who claim that science or information functions as the standard. Carlson argues that the act of appreciation 'has an essential cognitive component',³ Eaton asserts that knowledge increases aesthetic pleasure,⁴ and Lintott claims, 'the bias of science is a useful tool in the aesthetic appreciation of nature'.⁵ By contrast, non-cognitivists argue against the indispensable role of scientific knowledge in the aesthetic appreciation of nature. For instance, Brady asserts that although we may lack information about the object, 'imagination' may still encourage us to have various worthwhile perceptual experiences,⁶ and Carroll claims that we sometimes appreciate nature 'less intellectually' and only by being 'emotionally moved'.⁷ Nevertheless, since the second camp presents no 'objective' criterion, cognitivists accuse them of lacking any criterion of proper appreciation.⁸ In this respect, philosophers such

¹ Ronald Hepburn, 'Contemporary Aesthetics and the Neglect of Natural Beauty', in *Wonder and Other Essays* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1984), 9–35. For more literature on environmental aesthetics, see Emily Brady, *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003); Allen Carlson, *Aesthetics and the Environment: Nature, Art and Architecture* (New York: Routledge, 2000); Malcolm Budd, *The Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005).

² Ronald Hepburn, 'Trivial and Serious in Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature', in *Landscape, Natural Beauty and the Arts*, ed. Ivan Gaskell and Salim Kemal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 65.

³ Allen Carlson, 'Nature, Aesthetic Appreciation, and Knowledge', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 53 (1995): 396.

⁴ Marcia M. Eaton, 'Fact and Fiction in the Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 56 (1998): 154.

⁵ Sheila Lintott, 'Toward Eco-Friendly Aesthetics', in *Nature, Aesthetics, and Environmentalism: From Beauty to Duty*, ed. Allen Carlson and Sheila Lintott (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 392.

⁶ Emily Brady, 'Imagination and the Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 56 (1998): 142.

⁷ Noël Carroll, 'Being Moved by Nature', in Carlson and Lintott, *Nature, Aesthetics, and Environmentalism*, 170.

⁸ Eaton underlines the problem of relativity and sets a standard in the aesthetic appreciation of nature and introduces the concept of 'informed imagination'. She accepts Brady's arguments about the role of imagination, but argues that imagination

as Brady refer back to the historical concept of 'disinterestedness', which describes the state of one's 'imagining well' and in an impartial manner.⁹

Berleant criticizes disinterestedness for its failure to be a satisfactory criterion because it takes natural objects as artworks. In this respect, he not only formulates an argument for the first question of environmental aesthetics, that is, how the appreciation of nature is different from the appreciation of art, but also responds to the latter question that asks whether disinterestedness really does function properly for the justification of aesthetic judgements. His arguments are as follows: (1) the state of mind which disinterestedness supports is pure 'contemplation', isolating the subject within his or her own psychological set;¹⁰ (2) disinterestedness 'objectifies' and encloses the focus of appreciation 'within borders';¹¹ and (3) it fosters a 'detached' attitude by creating 'distance' between the perceiver and the perceived, reducing the perception to the parochial dominance of one sense, vision.¹² In contrast to these, he argues for (1) an aesthetic theory that integrates the 'perception of conscious body and world', which is a dynamic perceptual system that 'assimilates person and place',¹³ (2) a 'holistic' conception of environment, which takes into account a real 'lived experience' (since the term itself signifies that which *environs*, including people),¹⁴ and (3) an 'aesthetics' with an attitude of 'engagement', where perceivers act as 'participants' not merely as 'observers',¹⁵ in which multi-sensory appreciation takes place, including vision, smell, sound, touch, and taste.¹⁶

But is Berleant right on all three accounts? (1) Is disinterestedness indeed incompatible with 'engagement' and 'active participation'? In other words, does disinterestedness truly frame and isolate the object by creating distance and leaving it to the dominance of the eye? (2) Is a 'holistic' theory of aesthetics a better alternative for a proper form of appreciation of nature? Lastly, (3) does disinterestedness impose or imply any anthropocentrism since it accepts the role of human perception as the main reference point? My answer to all these questions is negative. I reject Berleant's criticisms. I claim that although his main

alone cannot function as a discriminatory factor for aesthetic judgements. In the epistemology of aesthetics some standard has to be presented which can enable us 'to imagine well'. Eaton, 'Fact and Fiction', 150–51.

⁹ Brady, *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment*, 10.

¹⁰ Arnold Berleant, 'Beyond Disinterestedness', *British Journal of Aesthetics* 34 (1994): 250.

¹¹ Arnold Berleant, 'The Aesthetics of Art and Nature', in Gaskell and Kemal, *Landscape, Natural Beauty and the Arts*, 236.

¹² Berleant, 'Beyond Disinterestedness', 244.

¹³ Arnold Berleant, *Art and Engagement* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1991), 91, 103.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 91.

¹⁵ Berleant, 'Aesthetics of Art', 236.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 237.

intention seems to be a comprehensive perception of nature, 'appreciating nature as nature' (not as an artwork), he misinterprets 'disinterestedness' and overlooks the fact that it can still be preserved within environmental aesthetics and guide our epistemological distinctions, that is, determine whether one judgement is better than another. In this sense, I argue that (1) the proper counterpole to engagement is not disinterestedness but a dominant concept of aesthetics left over from the eighteenth century – the picturesque; (2) in contrast to the holistic account of philosophers who look for an *immersion-of-self-in-a-bigger-Self*, I argue that disinterestedness provides being *devoid-of-any-empirical-self* and that (3) disinterestedness does not make aesthetic judgements *anthropocentric*, but allows that they are *anthropogenic* (human-generated). Prior to building these arguments, I will investigate the origins of the concept to clarify the continuing misinterpretation.

II. THE ORIGINS OF DISINTERESTEDNESS

The concept originates in the eighteenth century, in the writings of Lord Shaftesbury. He was the first to call attention to an ethical, religious, and aesthetic approach that is devoid of interest.¹⁷ His main target was Thomas Hobbes's approach to a common good, which bases ethics primarily on a concept of 'interest'. According to Jerome Stolnitz, 'interest' for Shaftesbury is related to the 'well-being' or the 'long-range good' of the individual or society. It is 'the desire or motive to achieve the good', but it is always a 'common' good, not a 'private' one.¹⁸ In this sense, Shaftesbury uses the concept of 'interestedness' for the kinds of action which are motivated by 'the well-being of the agent', in contrast to the 'interest of his species and community'.¹⁹

Shaftesbury aims, according to Stolnitz, to propound the idea that 'true goodness and holiness' do not depend on the concept of 'reward'. He interprets Shaftesbury as being opposed to 'serving God [...] for interest merely'.²⁰ The love of God should be for its own sake, not for the sake of any 'interest' such as fears, wishes, or desires. In this sense, as Stolnitz neatly puts it, for Shaftesbury the opposite of disinterestedness is 'egoism in ethics and instrumentalism in religion'.²¹

In this respect, Shaftesbury began to describe the virtuous man as one who is not motivated by an interest. The term began to refer to the state of 'barely seeing

¹⁷ Jerome Stolnitz, 'On the Origins of "Aesthetic Disinterestedness"', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 20 (1961): 132.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

and admiring'.²² His main goal still remained an ethical and practical perspective and attitude. The function of 'interestedness' was 'practical'; it defined the type of action that focused on a preconceived 'goal'.²³ In short, although Shaftesbury did not contrast disinterestedness with self-interest, he was the first to aim for an ethical, religious approach that was not dependent on the notion of interest at all. But his successors, particularly Addison, Francis Hutcheson, Edmund Burke, and Kant, used the concept in aesthetics. Rather than go into detail, I will touch only on one of the most important of the thinkers, Kant, with whose philosophy disinterestedness in aesthetics reached its climax.

Kant asserts that disinterestedness indicates impartiality, not being interested in the existence of the thing, and being indifferent to it in regard to one's personal desires, wishes, or 'interests'. Interest for Kant is 'the satisfaction that we combine with the representation of the existence of an object',²⁴ which by extension is the work of the faculty of desire. Interest could be either a 'pathologically conditioned satisfaction' or a 'pure practical' one.²⁵ The first, in Kant, equates with the agreeable, the latter with the good. The agreeable is a state that is 'merely the sensory gratification of the senses'²⁶ and the good is a state in which we have a 'concept of the object',²⁷ appreciating it with respect to the ends it serves us. Kant attributes the 'agreeable' to the peculiarly empirical realm that deals solely with the private sensations that can never be shared. The agreeable does not 'please but rather gratifies'. On the other hand, the good involves concepts. Something can be good 'for something', pleasing only as a means, or 'good in itself', pleasing simply for itself. Both the agreeable and the good entail an end. They are related to satisfaction 'in the existence of an object or an action, some sort of interest'. Kant says that 'in order to find something good, I must always know what sort of thing the object is supposed to be, i.e. I must have a concept of it'.²⁸ On the other hand, when we analyse a judgement of taste involving the beautiful, that is not the case. When we see beautiful flowers, we regard them as 'aimlessly intertwined in each other under the name of foliage', 'signifying nothing', not conditioned by any 'determinate concept'. The beautiful merely pleases, invoking no interest in the existence of its object. Whereas agreeable is related to 'inclinations', the good is related to 'respect' and the beautiful to 'favour'.²⁹

²² Ibid., 133.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), AA 5:204.

²⁵ Ibid., 5:209.

²⁹ Ibid., 5:206.

²⁷ Ibid., 5:208.

²⁸ Ibid., 5:207.

²⁹ Ibid., 5:210.

In an aesthetic judgement, therefore, pleasure arises not because of the object's existence but from mere contemplation of that object. I exercise taste not because of my relations with the object but because of 'what I make of this representation in myself'. Disinterestedness is the quality of the satisfaction that differentiates the beautiful from the agreeable and the good. Finding pleasure in the agreeable is the state that is 'merely the sensory gratification of the senses'³⁰ and taking satisfaction in the good is the state in which we have a 'concept of the object',³¹ appreciating the ends to which it serves. Disinterestedness indicates an appreciation not for the sake of something, as with the good, or for mere sensory gratification, as with the agreeable, but for the sake of the representation of the object alone. It not only refers to being motivated without self-concern, but also evokes the concepts of *non-instrumentality* and *impartiality*, being without bias towards the existence of the thing, indeed, being entirely indifferent to its representation in relation to personal desires, wishes, or interests. In this sense, *pace* Berleant, disinterestedness has never been defined or explained in history as an attitude that is 'distanced', 'detached', or 'isolating and framing' the 'object'. By contrast, disinterestedness in its original sense (as theorized by Shaftesbury or Kant) never had such intentions or implications. Rather, we can summarize the main intention of the concept with the following three key terms: (1) non-instrumentality, (2) selflessness, and (3) impartiality.

In the recent literature, Brady has defended 'interest' as a helpful concept for designating the features of aesthetic attitude. In line with Shaftesbury, non-instrumentalism is one of her motivations to save the concept of disinterestedness in contemporary debates. Aesthetic responses differ from intellectual ones because they are not mediated but perceived immediately without factual consideration or utilitarian concerns.³² The main importance of the concept for Brady is that disinterestedness invites an attitude that is devoid of purpose and where no object is used as a means to an end, nor sought for its 'function or use'. In this sense, disinterestedness does not mean 'indifference'; rather, it means just being free from concerns,³³ just as Shaftesbury defined it, as (in Brady's words) 'not being motivated with self-concerns'. Indifference connotes negative attitudes, such as not caring or disregarding, but disinterestedness indicates a purely neutral state, neither touched with 'interest' nor 'lack of interest',³⁴ devoid of any enthusiasm or spirit.

³⁰ Ibid., 5:206.

³¹ Ibid., 5:208.

³² Brady, *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment*, 9.

³³ Ibid., 10.

³⁴ Ibid., 34.

The second affiliated concept is 'selflessness'. Non-egoism, unselfishness, and selflessness are closely connected terms but are highly different in their content. In this respect, it is easy to confuse disinterestedness with any one of them and misinterpret the meaning and purpose it suggests in aesthetic judgements. Although Shaftesbury contrasted disinterestedness with egoism in ethics, with Addison it changed its meaning to 'impersonality' or 'selflessness'.³⁵ Selflessness or impersonality is also a proper term to describe what Kant means by the concept. In this sense, whereas unselfishness would mean 'being other-directed', that is, 'willing to put the needs or wishes of others before one's own' as the *Oxford Dictionary* states,³⁶ 'selflessness' connotes a transparency, making oneself a 'clear mirror of the object'³⁷ by which impressions are reflected without distortion.

Lastly, 'impartiality' is a potent term delineating the attitude that disinterestedness brings to aesthetic judgements. Disinterestedness functions in justifications of aesthetic judgements in order to differentiate what is 'arbitrary' and 'subjective or personal desire' from what is an irrelevant 'practical aim'.³⁸ Especially in the aesthetic appreciation of nature there are more permeable boundaries than in appreciating works of art. For example, there are no critics (of nature or natural sounds) who would instruct us in what we should focus on when listening to cicadas, how to judge if the notes are appropriately designed, or to tell us how long we should pay attention or should interact, as there are when it comes, for example, to listening to Beethoven or Bach. 'Consider,' Ned Hettinger writes, 'the self-indulgent response that appreciates a rainbow as "placed here just for me!"'³⁹ Against such self-indulgent, biased responses, disinterestedness proposes a 'standard' that denotes whether the response is 'unbiased or biased'. It guarantees a degree of impartiality so that we can assume everyone has similar appreciations. This was one of Kant's concerns as well; he prioritized disinterestedness as the first 'moment' of aesthetic judgements, for its grounding of their 'universality'. Only with a normative criterion such as this can we demand from others a similar response, for example, to a rainbow or a sunset.

To reiterate, in the following I claim, first, that disinterestedness does not entail any disengagement or passivity or any framing or isolation of the object in an

³⁵ Stolnitz, 'On the Origins', 138.

³⁶ *Oxford Dictionary of English*, 3rd ed., s.v. 'unselfish'.

³⁷ Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1, trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1969), 178.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 34.

³⁹ Ned Hettinger, 'Objectivity in Environmental Aesthetics and Protection of the Environment', in Carlson and Lintott, *Nature, Aesthetics, and Environmentalism*, 418.

elitist way dominated with just a subjective contemplative state of mind, whereas the picturesque tradition does. Second, although disinterestedness doesn't call for a holistic integration of person and environment, which Berleant looks for, it does suggest a transparency of self that is non-instrumental and unbiased; and, finally, though disinterestedness does not entail anthropocentrism, aesthetic judgements are *anthropogenic*. We would do well to acknowledge the duality of nature and human beings, that is, nature is an 'other' to us, because such acknowledgement creates space for 'respect' in environmental ethics.

III. OBJECTIONS AND COUNTER-ARGUMENTS

III.1. THE PROPER ANTAGONISTIC POLE OF ENGAGEMENT: THE PICTURESQUE

First, 'disinterestedness' and 'engagement' are, I claim, falsely contrasted by Berleant; the proper counterpole to disinterestedness should be 'the picturesque'. The picturesque implies a distant and detached attitude from the subject, and the object of aesthetic appreciation is delineated in a framed, two-dimensional picture. Coined from the word *pittoresco* ('the painter's view'), the *picturesque* literally means 'like a painting'.⁴⁰ Nature is viewed as a landscape painting where the visual qualities are emphasized. In the picturesque, nature is experienced as if it were an 'ideal landscape painting'. The approach is therefore necessarily dominated by the sense of sight. Here, vision, colour, and the play of light are the main parameters determining aesthetic response.⁴¹

Berleant's own alternative, engagement, is different from the picturesque in being three-dimensional and multi-multisensory, not reduced to sight alone, but including hearing, smell, and touch. But contrary to what Berleant proposes, disinterestedness does not rule out this attitude. What it means in its original version is being devoid of personal, self-interested concerns, being unbiased, impartial. Carlson also opposes Berleant, arguing that 'active participation and disinterestedness are not necessarily incompatible'.⁴² Disinterestedness demands a 'special unique way or a special attitude' when approaching aesthetic phenomena, and active participation means taking an active part in

⁴⁰ Paden argues that the contemporary environmental-aesthetics definition of picturesque, 'like a painting', is a misunderstanding based on Gilpin's works. See William Gilpin, *Essays on Picturesque Beauty* (London: Blamire, 1792). According to Paden, picturesque means 'in the style of a painter'. The picturesque therefore invites us to discover nature 'as carefully as a painter does', in contrast to viewing it within an 'artificial framing'. My criticisms here against Berleant address this generally accepted notion of the picturesque based on Gilpin's account. See Roger Paden, 'A Defense of the Picturesque', *Environmental Philosophy* 10 (2013): 3, 5, 10.

⁴¹ J. Baird Callicott, 'Leopold's Land Aesthetic', in Carlson and Lintott, *Nature, Aesthetics, and Environmentalism*, 108.

⁴² Allen Carlson, 'Aesthetics and Engagement', *British Journal of Aesthetics* 33 (1993): 222.

the appreciation process. But delineating a special attitude necessary for the aesthetic power of judgement does not mean that such an attitude would exclude the process of taking part. Analytically, Carlson persuasively claims, they are not mutually antagonistic. Similarly, Brady argues that Berleant's contraposition of disinterestedness and engagement 'rests on a mistaken assumption'.⁴³

In the eighteenth century the notion of the picturesque began almost to dominate all aesthetic concerns, as if it were the only aesthetic category. Berleant seems to confuse this episodically dominant type of art as if it were indeed the leading agent in the whole artistic tradition. This is nothing but a reduction of the rich history of aesthetics to the history of the picturesque alone. In this spirit, Berleant accuses Stolnitz of being instrumental in isolating aesthetics 'from the rest of life'.⁴⁴ Stolnitz, however, did not argue for passivity and distance, but, as can be seen in his idea of 'sympathetic attention', he did claim that we need to open ourselves to the object and let that perceptual experience carry us to the object's nature. This is the state of mind we should have, not a purely subjective contemplative mental process, but a direct openness to the aesthetic features of the object. In this way, we can be 'thoroughly engaged by it'.⁴⁵

Moreover, scholars such as Brady and Carlson make room for the coexistence of both the multi-sensory appreciation of environment and disinterestedness, supporting the conclusion that disinterestedness and the peculiar dominance of one sense, vision, are not necessarily dependent on each other as Berleant assumes. Brady emphasizes the need to acknowledge the 'particularity of natural environments as environments rather than merely as scenes or objects'.⁴⁶ Similarly, Carlson advocates a 'natural environmental model' in nature appreciation which differentiates between 'object model' and 'landscape model'.⁴⁷ The natural-environment model accepts the fact that we are surrounded by nature in a multi-sensory way, which includes the sound of rain, humidity of mud, smell of a rose, or odour of decay.

At the same time, both Carlson and Brady accept that disinterestedness is a crucial factor that discriminates between aesthetic judgements that are appropriate and those that are not, between the rich and the superficial. We can therefore be in nature and acknowledge its sounds, smells, and touch in a multi-sensory and three-dimensional way, and simultaneously be devoid of

⁴³ Brady, *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment*, 133.

⁴⁴ Berleant, *Art and Engagement*, 13.

⁴⁵ Brady, *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment*, 9.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴⁷ Allen Carlson, 'Aesthetic Appreciation of the Natural Environment', in Carlson and Lintott, *Nature, Aesthetics, and Environmentalism*, 125.

self-interested expectations. For instance, we can acknowledge all the perceptive qualities of chamomile but not have an appetitive desire. And we can approach a flower singularly, but can acknowledge its continuity with the rest of the atmosphere disinterestedly. We can, for example, appreciate a snowdrop in its particularity on top of a high mountain. This appreciation itself is already bounded by the context that the appreciation demands: the awareness of snow, mountain, height, less oxygen, and so on. It does not mean that we have isolated the object from its environment. Disinterestedness therefore does not discard the features of continuity and engagement with the environment. In short, Berleant's argument should be aimed not at disinterestedness, but at the picturesque. Although he might have good arguments against the picturesque, those arguments leave the plausibility of disinterestedness, and also its relevance and importance to nature appreciation, untouched.

III.2. THE DISCUSSION OF SELFLESSNESS: *IMMERSION-IN-A-BIGGER-SELF* VERSUS *BEING-DEVOID-OF-ANY-EMPIRICAL-SELF*

Second, Berleant's theory of 'engagement' looks for a holistic aesthetic appreciation in which the subject and the object unite in a perceptual field. Saito also takes issue with Berleant on this point, and argues that the appreciation of nature as 'nature' demands a 'holistic and non-anthropocentric appreciation' aiming to preserve the unity and continuity of human beings and nature. She therefore proposes an alternative model called the 'Zen-Buddhist type of appreciation',⁴⁸ and gives two reasons for choosing Zen Buddhist non-anthropocentric appreciation. First, instead of attempting to understand nature exclusively through mental activities with various conceptual schemes, this appreciation suggests a possibility of knowing nature 'directly and immediately with our whole body and mind'; and, second, Zen Buddhism does not detach the mind from the body, but invites us to perceive nature's delicate life by 'entering into' or 'becoming one with the object with our entire being'.⁴⁹ These points indicate that disinterestedness, for Saito, is not a theory that creates a 'holistic' union of object and subject, but one that presents a dualistic approach. Moreover, the inherent contemplative 'mental activity' in disinterestedness does not enable one to 'know nature' 'immediately' and 'directly', but rather presupposes an anthropocentric essence in which humans have a central role, distinctly appreciating nature from their godlike and 'impersonal' position.

⁴⁸ Yuriko Saito, 'Appreciating Nature on Its Own Terms', in Carlson and Lintott, *Nature, Aesthetics, and Environmentalism*, 157.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 158.

The discussions about holism, that is, *immersion-in-a-bigger-Self*, versus the disinterested relationship, that is, *being-devoid-of-any-empirical-self*, are actually grounded in environmental ethics. Holism as understood here is primarily an idea that has been asserted by many Eastern spiritual practices, like Buddhism and Taoism, and many Western philosophers, such as Alfred N. Whitehead,⁵⁰ Arne Næss,⁵¹ Warwick Fox, and James Lovelock⁵² in the field of ethics. Næss's idea of deep ecology and James Lovelock's Gaia theory are instances of this trend. According to the deep ecology movement, shallow views regarding the environment accept that human beings are entities separate from nature. In contrast, deep ecology rejects such an image of 'the human-in-environment [...] in favor of the relational, total-field image'. According to it, organisms are 'knots in the bio-spherical net or field of intrinsic relations'. The relationship is not that of 'figure/ground boundaries' but rather 'a holistic or gestalt view' where 'the person is not above or outside of nature [but] is part of creation on-going'.⁵³ Consequently, no particular things are perceived as 'discrete, compact, separate',⁵⁴ but rather as 'fundamentally (internally) related', in which the 'interrelationships are in constant flux'. The universe comes out to be 'a seamless web',⁵⁵ which 'denies the classical idea of the analyzability of the world into separately and independently existing parts', and is, instead, seen as an 'unbroken whole'.⁵⁶ In such a world there is no 'dualism'; everything takes place within a unity in which 'one's sphere of identification' is expanded.⁵⁷

The debate in aesthetics is a reflection of the one in ethics. I argue that Berleant and Saito's call for a holistic account of the appreciative attitude is still embraced in disinterestedness, even though it might be more limited than they would like. True, in the traditional theory of disinterestedness the self does not dissolve in a bigger Self as it does in a holistic or gestalt view; but disinterestedness still suggests an account of selflessness in different dimensions. Whereas their theories can be interpreted as implying an *immersion-of-self-in-a-bigger-Self*,

⁵⁰ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* (New York: Free Press, 1978).

⁵¹ Arne Næss, *The Ecology of Wisdom: Writings by Arne Naess*, ed. Alan Drengson and Bill Devall (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2008).

⁵² James Lovelock, *The Revenge of Gaia: Why the Earth Is Fighting Back and How We Can Still Save Humanity* (New York: Penguin Books, 2007).

⁵³ Bill Devall, 'The Deep Ecology Movement', *Natural Resources Journal* 20 (1980): 303, quoted in Warwick Fox, 'Deep Ecology: A New Philosophy for our Time?', in *Environmental Ethics: An Anthology*, ed. Andrew Light and Holmes Rolston III (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 252.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 253.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 255.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 256.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 258.

disinterestedness implies *being-devoid-of-any-empirical-self*. Disinterestedness means more than being 'unselfish'; it is to be 'impersonal' or 'selfless', where one becomes 'a pure, unflawed mirror, prepared to receive without distortion "all the impressions, which the objects that are before us can produce"'.⁵⁸ Disinterestedness implies selflessness where the self does not dissolve in the whole, as Saito and Berleant prefer, but becomes transparent. Disinterestedness has a parallel purpose, but differs in extent and degree.

In disinterestedness, the self does not dissolve in nature; rather, it keeps its identity separate, becoming more neutral and transparent. In this sense, the self becomes devoid of any empirical dependencies and determinations; it does not set aside who he or she is, but 'what s/he wants'.⁵⁹ Disinterestedness is therefore not a passive or detached relationship, but an active one that demands from the audience a concrete standpoint and interaction without 'wants or desires'.⁶⁰ The subject-object dichotomy is maintained in disinterestedness with the assumption that the natural environment is distinct from us.⁶¹ Saito's and Berleant's holistic arguments do not include such a premise. I am not claiming, however, that holism should be abandoned and that, instead, only the idea of nature's otherness hand in hand with disinterestedness be embraced. Rather, I am arguing, the idea that accepting nature's otherness and distinctness generates an elitist, detached appreciation of environment is misleading. Disinterestedness accepts this otherness and still has a lot to say about the relationship between human beings and nature. This is an important argument, and cannot be easily discarded.

The notion of 'culture' posits a difference between nature and human beings. As the term itself suggests, nature, in 'its commonest and fundamental sense', refers to all existing things that are not human and are 'distinguished from the work of humanity'. It stands in contrast to culture, history, and everything that is 'artificially' produced.⁶² In short, as Soper neatly puts it, nature is the 'idea through which we conceptualize what is *other* to ourselves'.⁶³ This acceptance of nature's otherness is, for Brady, a realistic attitude. We affect nature with our deeds and it affects us, but a gap remains between the two; yet, *pace* Brady, this fact does not lead us to 'objectify' nature or 'detach ourselves' from it. By contrast, accepting nature's otherness with a disinterested attitude can engender a respectful relationship that is devoid of utilitarian purposes and biased,

⁵⁸ Stolnitz, 'On the Origins', 138 (quoting Archibald Alison).

⁵⁹ Brady, *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment*, 132.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., 70.

⁶² Kate Soper, *What Is Nature?* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 15.

⁶³ Ibid., 16.

self-motivated concerns. The disinterested aesthetic attitude helps one 'to love something (e.g. beautiful crystal formations, the indescribable beauty of plants) even apart from any intention to use it.'⁶⁴ Disinterestedness calls for a transparent self devoid of empirical needs, so that it ultimately 'habituates us to selfless reflection and conduct.'⁶⁵ It enables us to value nature in a way that 'backgrounds personal preferences and utilitarian concerns' and 'foregrounds an appreciation of its qualities.'⁶⁶ In short, although holistic accounts advocating the *immersion-of-self-in-a-bigger-Self* might aim to erase the boundaries between human beings and nature and create a unified relation, their arguments are not sufficiently grounded to abandon the theory of disinterestedness.

III.3. ANTHROPOGENIC VERSUS ANTHROPOCENTRIC

Third, against Saito's 'Zen-Buddhist type of non-anthropocentric appreciation' theory and Berleant's idea of 'engagement', I argue that aesthetic judgements are response-dependent, which means that they are *anthropogenic*, and should not be confused with the *anthropocentric*. I argue that both authors, with their concerns about human domination over nature, misinterpret disinterestedness; disinterestedness does not lead to anthropocentrism. True, by definition aesthetic appreciation demands a dialectic between humans and nature that is dependent on the 'otherness' of nature. The claim that aesthetic judgements are anthropogenic underlines the fact that they occur within a human perspective. In that case, disinterestedness involves anthropogenism as a necessary feature of aesthetic judgement that necessitates the human-valuer.

'Anthropogenic' indicates the necessity of a 'subject-generator' in aesthetic appreciation. Aesthetic appreciation in nature is always relational; it entails a dialectic between humans and nature. No ethics or aesthetics makes sense without taking into account the human perspective; after all, human beings are the ones generating aesthetic appreciation. Appreciation by definition requires the existence of an appreciator. This is equally true of ethics: it is human beings who seek to create satisfactory morals or answer questions like 'How shall we live?' or 'How shall I act?'. These questions are directed at particular subjects:

To say of any natural thing, *n*, that *n* is valuable means that *n* is able to be valued, if and when human valuers, *Hs*, come along. There is no actual beauty autonomous to

⁶⁴ Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, AA 5:267.

⁶⁵ Mark Lucht, 'Does Kant Have Anything to Teach Us about Environmental Ethics?', *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 66 (2007): 138.

⁶⁶ Brady, *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment*, 129.

the valued and valuable forests, cirque lakes, mountains, sequoia trees, sandhill cranes. There is aesthetic ignition when humans arrive, the aesthetics emerges relationally with the appearance of the subject-generator.⁶⁷

As Thomas Nagel aptly put it in the title of his book, there is no 'view from nowhere'; the view is always from somewhere.⁶⁸ We can therefore adopt an aesthetics that can help us appreciate nature without imposing our practical needs, desires, and wishes on it. In other words, I suggest, with disinterestedness we can accept the anthropogenic nature of each proposition and appreciate nature's beauty without falling into a relativist discourse. Then, our aesthetic judgements would include a standard for a 'universal voice'⁶⁹ without assimilating or imposing our self-concerned interests. Moreover, 'impartiality' and being devoid of self-motivated concerns indicate that disinterestedness is not anthropocentric. Indeed, it urges us to refrain from imposing our own practical desires and needs. Anthropogenism is the ontology of how we make judgements. Adopting nature's otherness does not necessarily lead us to have a hierarchical, anthropocentric relationship with nature.

IV. WHY DEFEND DISINTERESTEDNESS?

All in all, saving disinterestedness in aesthetics as a criterion of justification has important consequences for environmental ethics. Although aesthetic and ethical judgements relate to separate realms of values, they can both contribute to our having a harmonious relationship with the environment. The disinterested attitude, by means of accepting nature's otherness and appreciating it with a non-utilitarian, transparent self and impartiality, leads us to respect and care for nature.

Disinterestedness leads us to pay 'attention' to the aesthetic object or phenomenon.⁷⁰ It leads us to recognize and be aware of it. Every appreciation of an object with no dependent relation consequently leads one to value it for its own sake. 'Open receptivity' to the aesthetic qualities of the natural surroundings 'frees up the mind from personal preoccupations';⁷¹ and a mind that is concerned with the qualities of the 'other' acknowledges the independent existence of that being. It exists there as it is, and that is how it has been and will be in the future. This kind of attitude is nothing but respect that involves 'allowing the other to be who they are' or what they are 'without using them as a means to one's ends'.⁷²

⁶⁷ Holmes Rolston III, 'From Beauty to Duty: Aesthetics of Nature and Environmental Ethics,' in Carlson and Lintott, *Nature, Aesthetics, and Environmentalism*, 328.

⁶⁸ Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 2.

⁶⁹ Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, AA 5:216.

⁷⁰ Brady, *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment*, 136

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 140.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 142.

Successively, care is the effort to sustain 'other' beings' existence. It is dependent on respect, because trying to nurture and look for the continuance of any existing being cannot take place without acknowledging its otherness and value.

In short, nature is distinct from us. Nevertheless, we must not misunderstand this distinction as detachment or isolation. Accepting 'a degree of distance' need not necessarily lead to an elitist, alien relationship. As Brady puts it, by means of adopting a disinterested attitude in environmental appreciation, humans could establish a 'close relationship' with nature, but at the same time enable others to be themselves. This is the way for 'enough distance' to be preserved in any friendship.⁷³ Friends have to let the other be who he or she is without assimilating that person, otherwise the relationship would be one of slavery, not friendship.

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⁷³ Ibid.

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