

## Aesthetic and Historical Values—Their Difference and Why It Matters

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### Abstract

Aesthetic and historical values are commonly distinguished from each other. Yet there has not been sustained discussion of what, precisely, differs between them. In fact, recent scholarship has focused on various ways in which the two are related. I argue, though, that historical value can differ in an interesting way from aesthetic value and that this difference may have significant implications for environmental preservation. In valuing something for its historical significance, it need not always be the case that there is a reason to want people to experience the entity. Valuing something for its aesthetic merit, by contrast, does imply a reason to want people to experience the entity. I suggest that in virtue of this difference, some historical values may offer better justification for preserving natural environments than do aesthetic considerations.

Keywords: Aesthetic Value, Historical Value, Nature, Preservation, Normative Reason

### 1 Introduction

Philosophers and non-philosophers alike often list aesthetic and historical values as reasons to protect nature.<sup>1</sup> Yet there has not been sustained discussion of what, precisely, differs between the two. In fact, recent philosophical work emphasizes various ways in which aesthetic and historical considerations are related. Environmental aestheticians, for instance, often hold that appropriate aesthetic appreciation of nature can, and perhaps should, be guided by scientific knowledge of nature, including facts about its history. So, plausibly, nature's aesthetic value is partly constituted by its historical features.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, recent work on historical value has suggested that historical features can themselves be proper objects of aesthetic appreciation and that certain historical values can even count as species of aesthetic value.<sup>3</sup>

Although aesthetic and historical values are related in many respects, I argue that some historical values differ in an interesting way from aesthetic value, and that this difference may have significant implications for environmental preservation. A first pass at

the difference is this: in valuing something for its aesthetic merit, there is a reason to want to experience the entity, whereas this is not the case with historical value. Recently though, Carolyn Korsmeyer has argued that people *do* often want to experience things that they value for their history.<sup>4</sup> So, drawing lessons from her discussion, I go on to offer a more refined account of how aesthetic and historical values differ. I suggest that, whereas valuing something for its aesthetic merit implies a reason to want people to experience the object, this is not *always* the case when one values an object for its history. Sometimes people value an object for its history without there being a reason for them to want people to visit and experience the entity. I then provide an account of when an object's history does, and when it does not, imply a reason to want people to experience the entity. I end by suggesting that, in virtue of the difference between the two values, historical value may offer better justification for preserving nature.

Now, before I begin, a word on what I mean by 'nature': I follow John O'Neill, Alan Holland, and Andrew Light in holding that 'the concept of the natural as opposed to the artificial is historical'.<sup>5</sup> I will hold that one thing is *more natural* than another just in case it has been *less influenced* by humans. The comparative degree of human influence on two entities may not be entirely apparent. Nonetheless, I will rely on a rough approximation of when something is more natural than something else. For instance, I assume that a currently-used cargo ship is less natural than a city park, which is less natural than a remote, old-growth forest.<sup>6</sup> I recognize that there remain a variety of conceptual issues about the concept of 'nature', but I cannot resolve them here.<sup>7</sup>

## 2 Aesthetic value

In order to articulate the difference between aesthetic and historical value, I want first to briefly survey environmental aesthetic theories and recent discussions of historical value. I take up the former here and the latter in Section 3.

It is widely agreed that nature can have aesthetic value. Much of the controversy in environmental aesthetics is over what counts as appropriate aesthetic appreciation of nature. Nick Zangwill argues that ‘the beauty of inorganic things depends only on their perceivable appearances [...] and [that] to properly appreciate the beauty of inorganic things, we need only an awareness of their perceivable appearances [...]’.<sup>8</sup> This view is known as formalism.

In contrast to formalism, a number of aestheticians defend views according to which appropriate aesthetic appreciation of nature should involve cognition of *non-perceivable* features. Allen Carlson defends such a theory. Borrowing from Kendall Walton’s ‘Categories of Art,’ Carlson argues that, analogous to how a correct aesthetic judgment about art ‘requires knowledge of art history and art criticism,’ aesthetic judgments of nature require ‘knowledge of natural history and natural science’.<sup>9</sup> He thinks, therefore, that we should appreciate nature ‘in light of knowledge provided by the natural sciences, especially the environmental sciences such as geology, biology, and ecology’.<sup>10</sup>

Carlson takes himself to be arguing against views, such as formalism, that he says are ‘scenery-obsessed’.<sup>11</sup> His concern is that, by focusing only on the way that nature *appears*, we fail to appreciate it for what it really is. For instance, a natural coastline and a human-designed coastline can have the exact same formal properties and therefore *look* the same. If we only focus on their appearance, we miss the fact that one is ‘the product of the erosion of the sea’ and the other a product of ‘human ingenuity’ and ‘careful design’.<sup>12</sup> By experiencing each coastline in light of this scientific and historical information, we can detect different aesthetic properties in each. The natural coastline might be awe-inspiring while the human-constructed one may seem contrived and kitschy.

Many philosophers, while sympathetic to Carlson’s view, modify it in various ways. Yuriko Saito argues that, in addition to scientific facts being relevant for appropriate aesthetic appreciation of nature, information provided by ‘indigenous traditions, folklore, and myths’ can also inform such appreciation.<sup>13</sup> Alternatively, Patricia Matthews holds that ‘scientific

knowledge is necessary for appropriate aesthetic appreciation of nature' but denies that *every* piece of scientific knowledge is necessary.<sup>14</sup> Rather, scientific information is necessary 'because, and only when, it affects how we perceive the natural object.'<sup>15</sup> Going in yet another direction, Glenn Parsons holds that we should 'view [a natural] object under scientific categories in which it truly belongs and which maximize the aesthetic appeal of the object'.<sup>16</sup>

Now, something that I want to note and which will be important later is that, even though Carlson, Saito, Matthews, and Parsons emphasize the role of non-perceivable information in aesthetic appreciation, they still hold that appropriate aesthetic appreciation of nature involves a sensory component. Carlson, for instance, says that '[w]e *must* experience our background setting in all those ways in which we normally experience it, by sight, smell, touch, and whatever'.<sup>17</sup> We use scientific information to help *frame* our sensory experiences. Such information allows us to 'transform raw experience by making it determinate, harmonious, and meaningful'.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, even though Saito holds that aesthetic appreciation should involve cognition of non-perceivable information, she also holds that 'our aesthetic experience *begins and ends* with the sensuous surface' and that 'the visual surface of nature is an integral and necessary element of our aesthetic appreciation'.<sup>19</sup> Likewise, Matthews says that

In the end, whether the object is aesthetically valuable will depend on the total perception of it—not merely how it fits into a system, but what other aesthetic (and nonaesthetic) properties it has and how unity relates to those other properties when the object is perceived. So experience, not just knowledge, is important.<sup>20</sup>

And finally, recall that Parsons says that we should 'view [a natural] object under scientific categories'.<sup>21</sup> He clarifies that we should do so in a way that '*makes the object look aesthetically best*'.<sup>22</sup>

To summarize then, Carlson and those following him depart from formalism, not by rejecting the idea that a sensory experience is a key part of aesthetic appreciation, but rather in holding that there is more to aesthetic appreciation than just that.<sup>23</sup> As a result, I will take it as relatively uncontroversial that aesthetic appreciation of nature involves sensory experiences of nature, leaving open whether it involves more than that too. Extending this further, note that, though Carlson and others talk first and foremost about aesthetic *appreciation* of nature, they also take their claims to imply something about nature's aesthetic *value*. Therefore, given that it is relatively uncontroversial that aesthetic appreciation of nature is partly of nature's sensible features, I will also take it as relatively uncontroversial that nature's aesthetic value is partly constituted by its appearance.<sup>24</sup> Later, I focus on this feature of nature's aesthetic value to help articulate the difference between aesthetic and historical values.

### 3 Historical value

Historical value has received less philosophical attention than aesthetic value. Those who have explored it, though, identify a diverse range of such values. So, again laying a foundation for later, I want to briefly consider the variety of historical values as well as suggest why natural entities might have a sort of historical value just in virtue of their naturalness.

Carolyn Korsmeyer follows Alois Riegl in distinguishing 'age value' from 'historical value'.<sup>25</sup> As Korsmeyer uses the term, 'historical value' 'attaches to objects insofar as they represent a stage of cultural creativity'.<sup>26</sup> By contrast, age value 'is to be found in objects that embody the passage of time and that show the marks of their antiquity'.<sup>27</sup> For instance, age value 'attaches to cultural artifacts such as buildings, bonzai, and flint axes and to natural objects such as sequoias and amber'.<sup>28</sup> Clarifying the difference between age and historical

value, she says that ‘historical value’ ‘engages quests for information and knowledge about previous ways of life, whereas age value prompts a kind of wonder at the thing itself’.<sup>29</sup>

Focusing on a different aspect of age, Geoffrey Cupit explores whether ‘age brings a certain enhancement to [peoples’] status’ and suggests that it might, noting that old objects are often respected on account of their age.<sup>30</sup> This suggests that an object’s old age may be of value. In a similar vein, though Simon James does not argue that old objects deserve respect just in virtue of being old, he holds that they ‘deserve respectful treatment’ because ‘they tend to embody – or in some other way relate to – narratives that humble people will take seriously ...’<sup>31</sup> So, natural entities such as old trees, meteorites (which are often upwards of 5 billion years old), and mountains might deserve special treatment if, in being old, they relate to certain narratives.

Focusing on yet another sort of historical value, John Hammond argues that ‘it makes sense to value and protect nature as a part of one’s cultural heritage.’<sup>32</sup> Developing this line of thought, Janna Thompson argues that we are obligated to preserve certain natural entities because they are part of our cultural heritage. She details a variety of ways in which something can be of heritage value: An entity might relate in an important way to a community’s past, such as a tree that was the meeting place for generations of kids in a neighborhood; An area might have ‘traditionally been celebrated as inspiring or beautiful’ and thereby have a history of being visited; An entity might be related to ‘historic events or traditions’; And an entity might have been a ‘formative influence’ on the ‘development of a community or nation’.<sup>33</sup>

Adding to Thompson’s discussion, note that an object can be of historical value for a particular person on account of its relation to that person or their family, as is the case with heirlooms and objects from one’s past. Similarly, someone might value a hiking trail because it was one that they routinely hiked as a child with their father. I believe that it could have value to that person on account of this.

Alternatively, there are also objects that have value in virtue of their past connection to someone famous. To borrow an example from Cheryl Foster, people often canoed part of the route used by Meriwether Lewis and William Clark that went near a naturally-formed arch, called Eye of the Needle, that was noted by the explorers. That landform (before it was vandalized) was arguably of value due to its relation to Lewis and Clark.<sup>34</sup>

Summarizing the foregoing, I will hold that natural objects can have historical value on account of their age (especially if they bear clear marks of the past) as well as on account of their relation to certain people, communities, or events. Of course, though, notice that a natural entity might also lack these values.<sup>35</sup> A natural entity may not be old and may not be closely related to someone's family, community, or to a famous person or event. So, what I now want to suggest is that, in addition to the foregoing sorts of historical value, there is a different sort of historical value that every natural thing has: it is a value they have on account of their past independence from humans and our influences or, recalling the definition of nature I am working with, a value they have on account of their naturalness. Although it is beyond the purview of my discussion to provide a full account of such value, I want to defend this idea from recent criticism and, in the process, provide evidence that makes the claim more plausible.

The criticism is that there seem to be entities or events that have no value (or at least no non-instrumental value) even though they are natural. Alan Holland argues, for instance, that it is 'a very strange sensitivity indeed that can gaze into a nest of fledglings that has recently been frozen and starved to death because the parent has met with some accident, and discern value'.<sup>36</sup> Even though the fledglings died a natural death in the sense that their death was not caused by, or contributed to, in any significant way by human activities, Holland thinks that their early death lacks value. Nonetheless, he does think that there is 'meaning' and 'significance' in their death and that we should not destroy such meaning or the circumstances that give rise to it.<sup>37</sup>

Others, though, have taken Holland's example to cast doubt on the idea that the mere naturalness of an event, even if seen as bearing meaning, justifies preserving the processes that led to it. J Michael Scoville says 'it is not clear in what sense the meaningfulness of the gaze into the lifeless nest [...] supports the view that we should preserve the set of relations that eventuate in situations such as this'.<sup>38</sup> Following Scoville, one might think that the mere naturalness of an event or entity is not, by itself, of value and does not constitute a reason to preserve the thing.

I sympathize with the feeling that the early and painful death of the fledglings is in some sense terrible. Nonetheless, I still think that there is something valuable about their situation on account of its history. To some, this might sound cold-hearted. Yet if it does, it is probably because one is thinking of value as something we always have reason to enjoy, rejoice in, or be pleased by. It *would* be disturbing for someone to rejoice in the fledglings' painful death. But this is not how I am thinking of value. When I say that a thing is valuable, I just mean that there is a normative reason for someone to value it.<sup>39</sup> Importantly, there are a variety of ways to value something, including loving, honoring, admiring, cherishing, appreciating, or respecting the thing.<sup>40</sup> Not all of these attitudes need involve, say, enjoyment. I can respect someone without enjoying their company. I can aesthetically appreciate a movie that makes me terribly sad. So, just because I feel upset at the sight of the frozen fledglings does not by itself show that I do not value something about their circumstance.

One piece of evidence that the natural aspect of their predicament *is* valuable is that it would be reasonable for someone to hesitate to intervene and help them. Imagine, for instance, hiking deep in the backcountry of Wyoming and chancing upon the fledglings just a bit before they freeze. If I were in this position, I would be torn about what to do: on the one hand, I am deeply saddened by their predicament and will be haunted by the thought of their slow death; but on the other hand, I might hesitate to intervene. After all, I chanced upon them while hiking in an area that is relatively free of human influence.

My hesitation is evidence that I value, at least in some sense, the fledglings' circumstance. It might be an expression of a certain kind of respect I have for it. Importantly, my hesitation seems *warranted*. Although I am not providing an account of *why* it is warranted, it at least seems to make sense that one might hesitate in the above circumstance. This is evidence, then, that the fledglings' circumstance has value.

But why say that the fledglings' predicament is *valuable* rather than follow Holland and hold that it is merely meaningful? After all, you might still think that it sounds a bit odd to say that their situation has value. By contrast, it may be less odd to say that their circumstance has significance and meaning. In more detail, according to Holland, nature's meaning is 'constituted by the meaningful relations that we find there, as well as by the meaningful relations that we are able to forge with that world'.<sup>41</sup> Simon James, who is largely sympathetic to Holland's project, says that, 'to see a natural thing as having a certain meaning [...] is, very often, to see it as being "appropriate" to some wider context'.<sup>42</sup> So, the meaning of a natural entity has to do with the way in which it relates to other things or fits within a broader context. On such an account, the fledglings' death has meaning because it stands in ecological relations to other things.

Yet the reason I think that the fledglings' circumstance has value and not just meaning stems from something that Katie McShane notes: all sorts of things are *bad* precisely on account of their meaning.<sup>43</sup> A Nazi flag has meaning on account of its relation to the Nazi party such that when someone raises the flag today, it is appropriately seen as a symbol of their aspirations for, say, Aryan dominance. Of course, having this meaning does not imply a reason to endorse or preserve the flag. Although this case is quite different from that of the fledglings, it suggests that merely saying that the fledglings' circumstance has meaning is not enough to say whether there is a reason to, for instance, preserve the conditions that gave rise to their situation.

Holland and James might have a ready response, though. For instance, James argues that in interpreting nature and other things, ‘one can exhibit vice’ if one sees the wrong meanings or fails to see the right ones.<sup>44</sup> We might draw from this the idea that an entity’s correct meaning is the meaning a person with the relevant virtues would see in it. Going further, we might think that the meanings which can rightfully be condoned are those that the virtuous person would endorse. Of course, the virtuous person would not endorse the ideals of the Nazi party so it will not be the case that the Nazi flag, meaningful as it is, should be endorsed.

Leaving this line of response open, I still prefer to talk in terms of value. For at the very least, this term more transparently conveys the presence of normativity. By saying that the fledglings’ circumstance has value, one clearly conveys that there is something worth preserving about it. ‘Meaning’ and ‘significance’ do not have the same normative ring to them. So in sum, I think that even things such as the fledglings’ death can have value on account of the fact that it came about through natural processes. This helps support the idea that natural entities more generally have historical value just in virtue of their naturalness.

#### 4 Aesthetic and historical value: their differences

I now want to explore how aesthetic and historical values might differ from one another. One reason this is important is that recent philosophical work has emphasized various ways in which the two are related. We saw this already with those environmental aestheticians who base aesthetic merit partly on non-perceivable, historical considerations. Yet it is also true for those writing on historical value. Carolyn Korsmeyer, for instance, argues that certain historical values are a kind of aesthetic value. She says this about, for instance, the aforementioned ‘age value’.<sup>45</sup> Relatedly, she ‘defends genuineness as an aesthetic property, an aesthetic value, and a feature of experience’, where by ‘genuineness’ she has in mind the

property of an object being ‘the real thing’, or bearing a real, material connection to something from the past.<sup>46</sup>

Erich Hatala Matthes also connects aesthetic and historical value. He argues that we sometimes aesthetically appreciate objects for the way in which they represent history, or for what they tell us about it.<sup>47</sup> For instance, people who visit the Montshire Museum of Science in Vermont have a chance to hear fabricated recordings of what the birdsong sounded like at different points in Vermont’s history.<sup>48</sup> In listening to the recordings, Matthes suggests you ‘might imagine the museum evaporating as you fill in the historical landscape in your mind’s eye’.<sup>49</sup> In such a case, one aesthetically appreciates the birdsong on account of the way in which it represents the past.

Without denying that historical and aesthetic values can be related in the above ways, I will argue that they can still differ significantly from each other. That is, even if Korsmeyer and Matthes are right that historical properties can engender aesthetic experiences and bear aesthetic value, historical properties can *also* bear certain kinds of historical value that differ importantly from aesthetic value.

To begin, I want to build on the foundation I set earlier. Recall that it is relatively uncontroversial that the aesthetic value of natural entities depends at least partly on their appearances. What I now want to argue is that, in virtue of this, an object’s aesthetic value provides a reason for people to want to aesthetically appreciate the entity and, therefore, to engage sensorily with it. Put differently, I will argue that when one values something for its aesthetic merit, there is a reason for that person to take an interest in having people experience the entity.<sup>50</sup>

First consider some cases that exemplify the idea: If one values a hiking trail for its beauty, then according to the foregoing, there is a good reason for that person to take an interest in having people experience its beauty. They might take photos and post them on social media or tell friends about the trail. Interestingly, something similar is the case for

sublime entities, even though they may not engender pleasure. For instance, if one values a waterfall for its sublimity, and therefore partly for its thunderous roar, then the foregoing implies that there is a good reason for that person to take an interest in having people get close enough to the waterfall to *hear* the roar and *feel* the ground shake beneath their feet. In both cases, when one values the natural object for its aesthetic merit, there is a reason for them to want people to experience the entity.

Now consider an argument for the foregoing claim. Earlier, we saw that the aesthetic merit of natural entities depends partly on their appearances.<sup>51</sup> As a result, when one values an object for its aesthetic merit, one partly values its appearance, or the way it would appear to a subject in certain circumstances. Now, if one values the way an object would appear to a subject, then it seems that there is at least some reason for that person to want a subject to have the object appear to them in that way. Therefore, in valuing an object for its aesthetic merit, there is a reason to want people to experience the object.

Now let us ask: is the same true for nature's various historical values? Is it, in other words, true that valuing a natural object for its history implies that there is a reason to take an interest in having people experience the entity? Consider an initial argument that the answer to both questions is no: A natural object's current appearance does not partly constitute its history. So, at least on account of valuing an object for its history, one does not value its appearance. So, it is not the case that there is a reason, at least just in virtue of valuing the object for its history, for that person to want people to experience the object.

Although this argument is on to something important, it is not correct as it stands. First, as we have seen, sometimes an object's history is expressed in an especially clear way in that object's current appearance. For instance, recall Korsmeyer's description of 'age value' as being 'found in objects that embody the passage of time and that *show the marks of their antiquity*'.<sup>52</sup> When one values an object for its age value, one values it partly for the marks of its past. For instance, one might value a piece of sea glass partly for its smooth

surface because it is a result of its long journey. In doing so, there may be a reason for one to take an interest in, say, rubbing the glass between their fingers while imagining its journey.

Second, even when an object's appearance does not bear clear marks of its history, there may still be good reasons for us to want to experience the entity on account of valuing its history. Korsmeyer notes, for instance, that 'The urge to touch is common when encountering objects singled out for their age and historical uniqueness'.<sup>53</sup> For instance, she discusses a boat slip from the Erie Canal that was unearthed in Buffalo, New York. When local government officials planned to rebury the slip after discovering it, members from the community protested. As a result, the state government altered their plan and preserved the original slip above ground, incorporating it into the cityscape. Korsmeyer explains this phenomenon by suggesting that people wanted to see and touch the slip so that they could be in touch with the past, even if the slip did not bear obvious marks of its history. She recounts one person claiming that 'The trip back [in time] would be so much easier for me if I could reach out and touch the walls of the Commercial Slip'.<sup>54</sup>

As the foregoing suggests, there are a variety of cases in which valuing an object for its history implies that there is a reason to take an interest in having people engage with the object, just as is the case with aesthetic value. Yet I still think that the earlier argument to the contrary is onto something correct. So, refining it in light of Korsmeyer's discussion, I want to suggest that *sometimes* people value an object for its history without there being a reason for them to want people to experience the object. In other words, valuing an object for its history does not always imply a reason to want people to experience the object.

To begin supporting this, note something that was left implicit in the case of the Commercial Slip: those who wanted to see and touch the slip presumably wanted to do so because they took an interest in being connected to the original Erie Canal. If someone did *not* care about being connected to the Erie Canal, then barring some story to the contrary, it does not seem that there would be a reason for them to take an interest in touching the

Commercial Slip. This suggests that there is a reason for people to want to experience something on account of valuing its history when they take *an interest* in being connected to that part of history, or something else along these lines. For instance, one might value a place as a pilgrimage site and have an interest in contributing to it as a pilgrimage site. If so, there would be a reason for them to want to visit the place partly on account of its history.

Similarly, one might value a battlefield for its relation to the sacrifices of past people and have an interest in honoring those people. If so, there could be a reason for them to want people to visit the memorial on account of its history. In sum, then, there is a reason to want people to experience something on account of valuing its history when either (a) the object bears clear marks of its history, as is the case with sea glass, or (b) one has a desire for people to be connected to the part of history embodied in the object, or something else along these lines.

With this in hand, we can see why some instances of historical value do not imply a reason to want people to experience the entity: in short, someone might reasonably value an object for its history without it being the case that the object bears clear marks of its history and without it being the case that the person has a desire for people to be connected to the aspect of history embodied in the object. In such an instance, there will not be a reason for that person to want people to experience the entity. To support this idea further, let me show how it arises in particular cases.

There is a trail that I routinely hiked with my father growing up. A bit off trail is a very large boulder where we would often take a break. I think I have good reason to value the boulder for its historical connection to my father. It is not an heirloom, but it is connected in a similar sort of way to our family. Now, in valuing it for this connection, is there a reason for me to want to see the boulder, to sit on it, or to have others do so?

Well, in virtue of valuing its connection to *my* family, it does not seem that there is necessarily a reason for me to want people *outside* of my family to visit the boulder. In fact, I

might like that it is a place where just my dad and I would stop and therefore not really want other people to go there. Interestingly, it also does not seem that there is necessarily a reason for *me* to take an interest in going to the boulder. Although my father and I would often stop there, the boulder is not a pilgrimage site in the sense of our wanting to contribute to a tradition in which it is visited.

You might think, though, that there is a reason for me to visit the boulder because I want to be connected to my father. After all, I do love him. Yet this is not quite right because my father is still alive. So, in virtue of loving him, I need not take an interest in going to *the boulder* to be connected to him—I might as well just join him for dinner. Even after his passing, though, I do not think that there will necessarily be a reason for me to want to visit the boulder. It need not be a feature of my love that I have an interest in being physically connected to my father. Or, alternatively, I might not see the boulder as something that *would* connect me to him.

I am not denying that I might have a strong, affectively-laden experience—say, with tinges of nostalgia—were I to visit the boulder. What I am saying is that, even though I could have such an experience, it need not be the case that I have an interest in experiencing such a thing when I value it for its history. And, insofar as this can make sense, I believe that I can value the boulder for its history without there being a reason for me to want to visit it.

Yet at this point, you might begin to doubt that I *do* value the boulder. In response, then, let me say that I would be upset if I learned that the boulder had become strewn with litter and spray painted. I would be more upset about this, at least, than I would were I to find out that some other boulder, unconnected to my past, was defaced. In a different case, I would also be a bit saddened to learn that the Forest Service pulverized the boulder to make a small dam nearby. I would feel these ways not necessarily because I could no longer visit the boulder and feel connected to my father or anything like that, but rather just because I want it to exist in a roughly similar state to the one that my father and I are familiar with. This

suggests that a person might value an object for its history without there being a reason for that person to take an interest in experiencing the object or in having others experience it.

Consider a different example. The Pando aspen grove in Utah is thought to be amongst the oldest living organisms at, roughly, 80,000 years old. I believe that someone can value the grove for its immense age, and in particular respect it, without there necessarily being a reason for them to want people to go and stand in the grove. A person might simply value that an organism that old continues to exist and not have an interest in people being connected to the world 80,000 years ago, or anything like that.

Those who have doubts about this, though, might find it hard to imagine someone who respects something for its immense age but does not have some reason for wanting to be connected to the deep past. So, let me grant this and now support a more modest thesis: even if there is always a reason to want people to experience an object valued for its history, this reason can be significantly weaker than is the case when one values an object for its aesthetic merit. To support this, contrast Pando with the giant sequoias of California. Whereas Pando is 80,000 years old, the giant sequoias are a 'mere' 3,500 years old. Part of what is notable about the sequoias, though, is their immense stature, which engenders feelings of the sublime. By contrast, Pando does not bear clear marks of its age—it looks like many aspen groves do. So, I think it is reasonable for people to value the giant sequoias largely for their aesthetic merit and Pando largely for its historical value, and to see both as highly valuable.

My hypothesis is that there is a stronger reason to take an interest in visiting the giant sequoias than there is to visit Pando. Why might this be? Well, I think it is plausible that a prominent feature of valuing the sequoias for their awe-inspiring stature is an interest in standing below them and feeling a sense of awe. By contrast, even if one wants to be in touch with the distant past, this desire does not seem central to valuing Pando for its age. Instead, what one might care first and foremost about is simply the fact that Pando continues to exist, not that it be experienced. So, though someone who values Pando might have good reason for

taking a small detour in their road trip to visit the aspen grove, there is a stronger reason for them to want to see the giant sequoias such that it would make sense for them to fly across the country to do so.

Consider a different case, this time of someone who values a natural area for its past independence from humans, or for its naturalness. Specifically, think of any number of mountain ranges in the western United States. Many of them have trail networks and a history of human interaction, whether it be past mining ventures, indigenous settlements, or pasture land in their foothills. Nonetheless, they are relatively natural and might be valued for that.

When someone values such an area for its naturalness, is there necessarily a reason for them to want people to go and experience the area, say by hiking in it? I do not think so. I can understand wanting to be able to hike in *some* natural areas but it need not be the case that valuing natural areas for their history implies a reason to take an interest in having each one of them be visited and experienced. Rather, someone might want humans to *limit* their interactions—even seemingly innocuous ones—with the environment and show restraint. If so, they may want people to largely forgo visiting certain mountain ranges. So, one might value certain areas for having been relatively uninfluenced in the past without there being a reason for them to want people to visit it.

Yet perhaps I am wrong and valuing something for its naturalness always implies a reason to want people to experience the entity. Even so, I think that this reason can be weaker than the one we have on account of valuing something for its aesthetic merit. To bring this out, consider one final example. Imagine that a cave is discovered and the first people inside report unparalleled beauty and absolutely pristine conditions. Then imagine each of the following two headlines reporting the discovery. The first reads: ‘Cave discovered—beauty so great, Governor to permanently restrict all access’. The second reads: ‘Cave discovered—so pristine, Governor to permanently restrict all access’. Although an admittedly bizarre

example, the first headline seems far more perplexing than the second. What explains this is the fact that there is a stronger reason to want to experience the cave, and so to allow at least *some* access to it, on account of its beauty than its pristinity.

## 5 Why the difference matters

I have argued that valuing something for its history does not always imply that there is a reason to want people to experience the object, or more modestly that there is not as strong of a reason as when someone values an object for its aesthetic merit. Even though aesthetic and historical values are related in various ways, they nonetheless can still differ in virtue of the reasons they give rise to.

Yet why does it matter that they differ? One reason is that it helps to provide a more complete picture of these values, which is especially important for historical value given that it has received less philosophical attention. Another reason, though, is that it can shift how we think about our relation to nature. If we focus on aesthetic considerations to the neglect of the varied ways in which people value history, I worry that we may end up thinking of natural areas largely as places it would be great to visit and fail to recognize that people might reasonably value a natural area and want it to be protected, but do so without necessarily wanting people to visit the area.

Relatedly, this suggests that the difference between aesthetic and historical value may have important consequences for environmental preservation. I have not argued for this directly, but given that an object's aesthetic merit implies that there is a reason for people to want to experience the entity, one might think that, unless people *can* experience the entity, it does not make much sense to preserve it for its aesthetic merit. For instance, if people could not stand before giant sequoias and experience their sublimity, it would not make sense to devote resources to preserving them *for* their sublimity.

Of course, people *can* experience giant sequoias, so aesthetic reasons justify our preserving them. But, as Glenn Parsons worries, some natural areas might be ‘inaccessible or fragile, preventing all but a few from aesthetically appreciating [them]’.<sup>55</sup> Other places might be so far away that people cannot realistically go and experience them. And of course, there may be quite a large number of things that have aesthetic merit such that we cannot appreciate them all. In each of these cases, I worry that the aesthetic considerations may not provide the best reason for preserving the entities, especially if preserving them requires making significant economic sacrifices.<sup>56</sup>

The historical considerations, though, may be more helpful.<sup>57</sup> Given that there is not always a reason, or a comparatively strong one, to want to experience something valued for its history, it can make sense to preserve a natural entity even if people cannot visit it. So, recognizing the ways in which historical values can differ from aesthetic value may not only be important for developing a better grasp of these values. It may also be helpful for justifying certain kinds of environmental preservation.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, the U.S. Endangered Species Act and the National Environmental Policy Act as well as Brady, 2003: 21; Hammond, 1985: 168; Thompson, 2000: 244-245; Vogel, 2015: 236; and Warren, 1997: 175.

<sup>2</sup> See: Carlson 2000; Matthews 2008; Parsons 2008; and Saito 2008.

<sup>3</sup> See: Korsmeyer 2008, 2012, and 2016; Matthes 2018. It is Korsmeyer who emphasizes the latter point.

<sup>4</sup> Korsmeyer 2008.

<sup>5</sup> O'Neill, Holland, and Light, 2008: 148.

<sup>6</sup> See Siipi, 2008: 77.

<sup>7</sup> See, for instance, McKibben 1989 and Vogel 2015.

<sup>8</sup> Zangwill, 2013: 576.

<sup>9</sup> Carlson, 2000: 68.

<sup>10</sup> Carlson, 2000: 6.

<sup>11</sup> Carlson, 2009: 8.

<sup>12</sup> Carlson 2000. See also Saito 2008

<sup>13</sup> Saito, 2008: 162.

<sup>14</sup> Matthews, 2008: 194-195.

<sup>15</sup> Matthews, 2008: 194-195.

<sup>16</sup> Parsons, 2008: 312.

<sup>17</sup> Carlson, 2000: 48, emphasis mine.

<sup>18</sup> Carlson, 2000: 48-50.

<sup>19</sup> Saito, 2008: 162 and 153.

<sup>20</sup> Matthews, 2008: 197

<sup>21</sup> Parsons, 2008: 312, emphasis mine.

<sup>22</sup> Parsons, 2008: 312, emphasis original.

<sup>23</sup> Other accounts of environmental aesthetic appreciation also maintain that such appreciation involves a sensory experience (see: Berleant, 1992: 166 and 169-170; Brady, 2003: 15; and Carroll, 2001: 373-374). I focus on the views I do because one might be most suspicious of whether my later claims apply to them. I will argue that valuing something for its aesthetic merit implies a reason to want people to experience the entity. Given that Carlson and the others de-emphasize the role of sensory experiences in aesthetic appreciation, one might doubt that they would agree with me. By pointing out that they think that sensory

experiences play an important role in aesthetic appreciation, I offer support for thinking that my later claims hold on their accounts.

There is also another reason I focus on Carlson's view. Others have suggested, as I will, that aesthetic and historical features diverge. Keekok Lee, for instance, isolates a tension between aesthetic and 'geologic' concerns in some environmental policies (1995: especially 219). The tension she articulates, though, would not arise if one adopts Carlson's view. What I show is that, even for views that base aesthetic value partly on scientific and historical facts, there is still an important difference between aesthetic and historical values. Thank you to an anonymous referee for prompting me to consider this aspect of Lee's work.

<sup>24</sup> See: Carlson, 2000: 93-5; Matthews, 2008: 188; Parsons, 2008: 314; and Saito, 2008: 162-3. The more general idea that the aesthetic merit of material objects depends at least partly on their sensory qualities underlies various views in aesthetics. For instance, it helps make sense of the view that in order to judge an object's aesthetic merit, one must have firsthand experience of the object (Wolheim, 1980).

<sup>25</sup> Korsmeyer, 2008: 122.

<sup>26</sup> Korsmeyer, 2008: 122.

<sup>27</sup> Korsmeyer, 2008: 122.

<sup>28</sup> Korsmeyer, 2008: 122.

<sup>29</sup> Korsmeyer, 2008: 223

<sup>30</sup> Cupit, 1998: 715 and 717.

<sup>31</sup> James, 2013b: 16

<sup>32</sup> Hammond 1985.

<sup>33</sup> Thompson, 2000: 241-242.

<sup>34</sup> Foster, 1999: 75 and Korsmeyer, 2008: 121.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Hammond 1985 and Thompson 2000.

<sup>36</sup> Holland, 2011: 382-383.

<sup>37</sup> Holland, 2011: 387.

<sup>38</sup> Scoville, 2013: 23.

<sup>39</sup> See also McShane 2007.

<sup>40</sup> McShane, 2007: 52-54. Cf. Holland, 2011: 385 and James, 2009: 82.

<sup>41</sup> Holland, 2011: 387.

<sup>42</sup> James, 2013a: 614. For James' criticism of value-talk, see: James, 2015: 65-89.

<sup>43</sup> McShane 2012.

<sup>44</sup> James, 2013a: 617.

<sup>45</sup> Korsmeyer, 2008: 122.

<sup>46</sup> Korsmeyer, 2008: 117-118.

<sup>47</sup> Matthes, 2018: 649.

<sup>48</sup> Matthes, 2018: 653-654.

<sup>49</sup> Matthes, 2018: 654.

<sup>50</sup> This does not imply that, in valuing something for its aesthetic merit, one has *most* reason to want people to go and experience the entity on the given occasion. If experiencing something undermines its aesthetic merit, then there will be a reason to want people to *not* visit it. The above also does not imply that aesthetic value is good only *for the sake of* the experiences it engenders.

<sup>51</sup> Note that genuineness, which Korsmeyer says is an aesthetic merit, does not seem to depend on sensory features. Nonetheless, I think that Korsmeyer would agree with my ultimate claim: when an object is valued for its aesthetic merit, including its genuineness, there is a reason to want to experience it.

<sup>52</sup> Korsmeyer, 2008: 122, emphasis mine.

<sup>53</sup> Korsmeyer, 2008: 121.

<sup>54</sup> Korsmeyer, 2008: 121

<sup>55</sup> Parsons, 2014: 98.

<sup>56</sup> Note that semi-natural and non-natural things can also be inaccessible, fragile, or so numerous that few, if any, can aesthetically appreciate them. I believe that my claims in this article can apply to such entities, though I do not have space to show this.

<sup>57</sup> This is not to say that historical values do not have their own problems. Historical values may generally be weaker than aesthetic ones, or less motivating. I leave such issues for later discussion.

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