

stand in a mutually informing relationship. It is precisely because a trait functions *as* an F, despite having been produced by random mutation, and F happens to be a fitness-enhancing characteristic in the organism's environment, that the trait is selected and ultimately given the function *of* performing F. Likewise, the development of a trait with the selected function of doing F often results in something that also performs other 'unintended' functions. In this counterbalancing process of exchange and mutual influence, perhaps there are lessons for bringing the perceptual order of our working and living spaces closer to that of nature.

5 Three Objections

I would like to conclude by considering three objections to my claim that the aesthetics of cities and natural environments should not be thought of as diametrically opposed, but rather as bearing an important similarity.

The first objection is that it is simply implausible to hold that nature and city are aesthetically alike. This thought could be reinforced by noting that, any functional analogy between the natural and the urban notwithstanding, these environments remain quite different at the level of perceptual appearance, of form, color, and so on. Since these differences will translate into prominent differences in the aesthetic qualities possessed by natural and urban environments, one might argue, they ought to be considered distinct types of aesthetic object.

It is true, of course, that nature and the built-environment differ in many of their aesthetic features. My claim is only that they also share something aesthetically, at least to the informed eye. Furthermore, this shared aspect can be a prominent and indeed central element in our aesthetic response to both kinds of environment. The prominence of this aspect is revealed, for instance, in Dawkins' description of how his appreciation of the functional order manifest in the appearance of bats overwhelmed and displaced his earlier aesthetic responses. The "marvelous order" that Jacobs also recognized in certain cityscapes does not seem to be a minor or restricted aesthetic quality, but rather a pervasive and prominent feature of that environment. Whether we decide to call the natural and built environment the same sort of aesthetic object or not, the salient issue is our recognition of this important shared dimension.

One might also object to my position, however, from the opposite point of view. That is, rather than arguing that there is too little aesthetic similarity between the natural and urban, one might claim that, on my view, there is *too much*. More specifically, one might articulate the environmental concern that people will be more inclined to replace wilderness with urban development if they see the two as aesthetically similar. The significance of this concern depends on the causes of the sort of urban development that destroys natural areas. There are two possibilities: either it is perpetuated because of aesthetic dissatisfaction with the urban environment, which generates desire for life outside the 'ugly' city, or it is generated by something else. Earlier on, I mentioned the first possibility and suggested that it

is at least a plausible one. If it is true, however, then the objection is clearly misguided, since pointing out that the aesthetic character of the urban environment resembles that of nature would, if anything, ameliorate aesthetic dissatisfaction with the urban environment, and so *undermine* the destruction of natural areas.

If the second possibility is true, however, then a different response is in order. If the urban development that erodes natural areas is driven by economic factors, for instance, then pointing to an aesthetic feature of the urban environment will not affect it. And insofar as preserving the unique beauty of a natural area is one reason to resist such economic forces, pointing to similarity between urban and natural beauty might, in fact, contribute to such development. This all assumes, however, that the urban development that destroys natural areas is the kind of urban environment that has a similarity in functional order to natural environments. But this is unlikely to be the case. The form of urban development that is most worrisome with respect to the destruction of natural areas is urban sprawl. Yet urban sprawl is a paradigm case of a built environment whose functional order is different from that which we find in nature: highly designed and regulated, lacking in density and a spontaneous interplay of elements, it is not rich in causal role functionality. So in many cases where we must weigh the potential loss of a natural area and its aesthetic qualities against economic (or other) benefits of development, my view would not lend support to development, since the aesthetic quality lost in nature likely would not be replicated in that development.

Finally, one might wonder: Why invoke nature at all? Would it not be better to base an aesthetic for the built environment on the nature of that environment, rather than appeal to analogies with ‘the natural’? Indeed, analogies between nature and city (the ‘concrete jungle’, e.g.) have typically served to highlight the *negative* features of the urban. Arnold Berleant notes that, although “wilderness” has acquired a positive connotation during the past century, “when the wilderness metaphor is applied to urban experience ... the word reverts to its earlier, forbidding sense of a trackless domain uninhabited by humans” (Berleant, 2005, 42). But the fact that the analogy with nature has not been used to foster a positive attitude towards urban aesthetics does not mean that it cannot be. For, as I have tried to show, the city shares with the natural environment not only negative qualities, but positive ones as well. In fact, using the analogy in this way is appealing given the lack of work on the built environment in contemporary philosophical aesthetics. Given that a completely *de novo* account of the aesthetics of urban environments does not appear to be in the offing, I think we would be foolish not to use the abundant resources that have been developed for natural environments. We may measure their cut to the built environment and, even if the fit turns out to be poor, at least gain a better conception of our subject’s true dimensions. A final and important consideration is that, for better or worse, our culture continues to hold nature as a paradigm of aesthetic quality. While this remains the case, relating the beauty of the built environment to that of nature is a promising strategy for its articulation.¹⁸

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