

A Dialectic Approach to the Conception of Beauty and the Natural Aesthetics: an interdisciplinary perspective in focus

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ABSTRACT

Nature has aesthetics of its own, what can provoke the human mind into better recognizing the concept of beauty via mental perception. As such, human mind can interact with the nonverbal expressions of nature only to better his/her primitive aesthetic knowledge and reach a more novel recognition of aestheticism via the practice of interpretative deduction. This article has been the result of a series of discussions and dialogues between the authors on the nature of aesthetic geotouring and exploring the natural phenomena based on the *Dialectical Method of Socrates* and modelled after the Platonic dialogues. The outcome of this dialectic study brings to light the fact that touring in nature through providing the due opportunity for mental perception of aesthetic phenomena can provide a clearer definition of 'beauty' in its rich variety. Aesthetic search as such will culminate in forming a more illuminated mental concept of beauty in mind, what can influence human rationale for aesthetic judgment and enrich even more the texture of human aesthetic creation. Such aesthetico-interpretative endeavor might lead to a higher potential for creating more original works of literature and art and culminate in a better judgment about such aesthetic creations.

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Introduction

*“Beauty is Nature’s coin, must not be hoarded,
But must be current, and the good thereof
Consists in mutual and partaken bliss.”*

Comus (Milton, 1799, 78)

For a long time now, man has been searching to find the answer to the question of what beauty is and what is in beauty that makes it so charming a value. History of mankind throughout is riddled with relentless attempts to find the secret to this sublime truth. John Keats (Robertson (Ed.), 1997, 251) said: ‘Beauty is truth, truth beauty,’- that is all/ Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know’; Fedor Dostoevsky (Robertson (Ed.), 1997, 134) believed that ‘Beauty will save the world’ and such beauty revealed itself to John Milton ‘Beauty is Nature’s coin...’ (Milton, 1799, 78) and these revelations unfold in succession ever onward.

In his search for sublimity, modern man aboard the titanic frigate of civilization has journeyed through the tempestuous waters of industrialization in a hope to land on the far coast of serenity and peace. In man’s imagination, pleasure-seeking is a straight path to peace and of all the causes of pleasure *beauty* has always been the most royal. Well into the twentieth century, man has found numerous ways toward the creation of beauty and its judgment. Naturally he has been endowed with the gifts to recognize the various modes of beauty and interpret them into mental concept(s), gradually leaving behind the more primitive ones and progressing toward the more modern ones in his/ her aesthetic judgment about aesthetic works, i.e. literature and art. Yet with the passage of time, the modern man is to undergo a conversion in his beliefs and orientations, going through an irresistible change in his taste and judgment of beauty; that is a remigration toward his primordial treasure of aesthetic values. Today’s man is to believe that nature in all its profuseness affords him a perfect source of excellence in beauty, what should be seen through and paraphrased mentally only to be gained.

‘Touring in Nature’: Geotourism in a Glance

In today’s world with the growing interest in such practices as ecotourism and geotourism, so many people from different corners of the world take trips to visit the geological attractions, or to put it in more aesthetic sense, the natural beauties of this very museum of natural geo wanders. Every year, a great deal of money is spent on quenching the thirst of the lovers of nature and this in itself brings a great deal of gain to different host countries. Since the advent of the term geotourism in early 1990s, good few definitions have been presented by many scholars for this term. Yet due to the multi-facet nature of this discipline, there is no adequate and universally agreed-upon definition of this term. This is because the provided definitions have been either so atomistic or so holistic in the way they have looked at and tried to interpret this practice and therefore have failed to see its globe of interest as a unified whole with all its surrounding facets grown out of its core seed.

While stating that there is no universally accepted definition of the term geotourism in the last chapter of the book *Geotourism, Geotourism's issues and challenges* (Dowling and Newsome, 2006, 248), Dowling and Newsome (2006) in the first chapter of the same book, *The scope and nature of geotourism*, have provided their own definition of this term by decomposing this blended term into its forming parts which seems a fairly collective definition:

In our definition of geotourism the 'geo' part pertains to geology and geomorphology and the natural resources of landscape, landforms, fossil beds, rocks and minerals, with an emphasis on appreciating the processes that are creating and created earth features. At the same time the tourism component of geotourism involves visitations to geosites for the purposes of passive recreation, engaging a sense of wonder, appreciation and learning (Dowling & Newsome (2006, 3-4).

In the sixth chapter of the book *Geotourism, Geoparks - a regional, European and global policy*, looking at geotourism not from a purely geoscientific angle, Frey, Schäfer, Büchel and Patzak (2006) introduce the course of the chronological development of a geopark as the result of a close association between decision makers from politics and business, scientists and regional managers. Considering geotourism as 'a challenge which must be faced for the continuation and progress of the geosciences, for public benefit and for the sustainable development of regions on a worldwide scale,' (Frey, Schäfer, Büchel and Patzak, 2006, 96-7) they state that this:

[S]ustainability aspect affects the maintenance and creation of jobs in the regions, the securing of the tourism sector, the acceptance and integration of geological and natural heritage conservation in parallel with the protection of the biosphere, and regional planning schemes. (Frey, Schäfer, Büchel and Patzak, 2006, 97)

Looking at geotourism as a macro-level discipline, Frey, Schäfer, Büchel and Patzak (2006) restate the strategically operational definition of the term 'geotourism' as defined by Frey in the 1998 meeting of German Geological Society as the outcome of the 'learning-by-doing' implementation and scientific structuring:

Geotourism means interdisciplinary cooperation within an economic, success-oriented and fast-moving discipline that speaks its own language. Geotourism is a new occupational and business sector. The main tasks of geotourism are the transfer and communication of geoscientific knowledge and ideas to the general public.' (Frey, Schäfer, Büchel and Patzak, 2006, 97-8)

In the twelfth chapter of the book **Geotourism**, *Geotourism and interpretation*, Hose (2006) gives the seemingly first widely published definition appeared in 1995 in a commissioned article for a British professional interpretation magazine:

The provision of interpretive and service facilities to enable tourists to acquire knowledge and understanding of the geology and geomorphology of a site (including its contribution to the development of the Earth sciences) beyond the level of mere aesthetic appreciation (Hose, 2006, 221).

Mentioning the fact that this has come from a working definition for research (Hose, 1994a: 2) informally undertaken for *English Nature*, he later developed (Hose, 1996) and refined (Hose, 2000a: 136) it as follows:

The provision of interpretative facilities and services to promote the value and social benefit of geological and geomorphological sites and their materials, and to ensure their conservation, for the use of students, tourists and other recreationalists. (Hose, 2006, 222)

The book of **Geotourism** as an early seminal work in this regard encompasses a variety of definitions provided by many scholars from all around the world which have turned the book to be a reliable source for later developments. Giving any more definition of geotourism is beyond the mission of this article and not our concern as a good variety of definitions have already been given by the specialized experts and authorities. Yet what this article aims to do is to add a philosophical basis to the multi-basis knowledge of geotourism, a concern that due to the purely practical and specialized focus of geotourism proponents has always been taken for granted and less cared for. The authors of this article are favoring a shift of focus from geotourism as a macro-level concern to geotourist and his/her confrontation and interaction with the nature and its various phenomena at a micro level of concern, as far as it is related to and included within the discipline of aesthetics and judgment of beauty. The perspective this article puts before its readers is that geotourism, and more specifically *aesthetic geotourism*, is a need because human nature needs to understand and be satiated by beauty; thus, touring in nature is a path the geotourist takes to avail himself of the opportunity to visit the genuine expressions of beauty inherent in the natural phenomena and various geological and geomorphological features in nature, hence the term ‘aesthetic geotourism’.

Geotourism, Nature of beauty and Beauty in nature

Touring in nature, or geotourism for that matter, is a practice which takes human mind on a journey to visit the natural phenomena and take pleasure in browsing the wonderful geological features of the planet Earth. Touring in nature as a new expression of the people’s inclination towards the natural beauty, is certainly rooted in the internal tendency of its practitioners. In other words, if this

tendency was lacking, no trace of such a practice could be seen. But an important question posed from the vintage point of philosophy is whether this practice enjoys a rational basis other than the internal tendencies of its practitioners that is the geotourists. To put it in another way, if supposedly there was no such tendency as this toward the natural features and beauties, was it possible to bring reasons in defending it so that they may create and develop such a tendency in the people toward this practice; or to look at it from a different angle, can a philosophical value be attributed to the practice of geotouring, and subsequently perusing the natural aesthetics and paraphrasing them into mental conception(s) for that matter, to consider it as valuable from this point of view.

In dealing with the above-mentioned problem, we will seek to do our research in two different spheres, that are ‘natural beauty’ and ‘artistic beauty’, while trying to answer the following questions:

First, can’t geotouring provide a better possibility in satisfying the need for natural beauties? In other words, can’t we say that geotourist can quench such a thirst in a much better and more favorable way than one who satisfies his need only in the pleasure-seeking through natural beauties in his surrounding environment?

Second, can’t the satisfaction of the needs of a geotourist for the various expressions of beauty in nature throughout the planet Earth provide him with the possibility of coming up with an illuminated mental concept of beauty, which in itself may pave the ground for a more rational judgment about aesthetics, hence a better capacity for creating the aesthetic works as well as enriching even more the texture of aesthetic creation?

Now, the hypotheses we are going to examine in this essay are as follows:

- I. Man’s tendency toward the beauties of nature is in harmony with the man’s nature and thus a good one.
- II. Geotourist can come to a better understanding of the natural expressions of beauty, and, therefore, enjoys a deeper aesthetic sense when facing the beauties of nature, hence interpreting them into a mental concept of beauty.
- III. III) The geotourist’s better understanding of natural expressions of beauty helps him to have a clearer and more vivid perception of beauty as a mental concept in its pure aesthetic conception; thus, helping him to create more beautiful works of beauty and art in case he intends to do this, and to have a better judgment of beauty if in the position of judging a work of aesthetic and artistic nature.

The point that is worth considering before embarking upon the present research is that this essay is based on the presupposition of *objectivism* in discussing the concept of beauty and aestheticism. It means that there are two points of view in studying the concept of beauty.

Firstly, beauty is an absolute property that is free of the perception of the subject and can exist without the perception of the subject so that beauty to exist does not need the subject, but it is the

subject who needs to perceive the beauty to have a better sense of life. This point of view agrees on the objectivity of beauty and thus is named an *objective* viewpoint. According to the above point of view, there are many phenomena in nature which if man does not consider them as the objects of beauty; he lacks the sound taste and judgment. The objective point of view is based on the common sense and though it is hard to prove according to Plato in the HIPPIAS Major, it is more acceptable to the majority of people.

Secondly, the other point of view toward beauty is the *subjectivism* according to which the beauty of the objects is not independent from the subject, yet the beauty of the object is an effect which cannot be traced in the object itself but originates from the perception of the object by the subject. According to this viewpoint, if there is no subject, there will be no beauty; therefore, it can be said that man bears the criterion for the existence of 'beauty' in this point of view, and it means that if man knows an object as beautiful, it will be an object of beauty, and if not, it won't be. Therefore, if there is a difference of judgment between two people in considering a natural object as beautiful, it cannot be said who is right and who is wrong, and it should only be said that they are both right. This point of view which considered beauty as a property dependent on the subject is named as *subjectivism* which is a point of view far away from the common sense. The thing to be mentioned here is that the philosophers' inability in defending the objectivism has given rise to the growth of subjectivism, but this does not mean that there have been successful attempts in defending the subjectivism. Both schools which are of equal might are still present in the battlefield of philosophical points of views and none has been able to overpower the other.

This essay is, in fact, written on the basis of the presupposition of objectivism in judgment of beauty, yet if it seeks not to do any research in this regard, it's because it follows another aim that is to prove the philosophical value of geotourism based on the objective attitude toward beauty. Therefore, dealing with the truth of this presupposition lies outside the limits of this essay.

The Need for the Natural Beauty

If it is proved that pleasure-taking in touring in the natural beauties is justifiable, this in itself cannot justify the practice of geotourism. But though proving the justifiability of pleasure-taking in the beauties of nature is not enough to prove the justifiability of geotourism, it is necessary indeed. Therefore, it is the first and foremost necessity to investigate if we can find a rational basis for pleasure-taking in natural beauties, or otherwise to see if pleasure-taking in the beauties of nature is only dependent on that very internal tendency which pulls the man toward it, so that if this tendency is lacking, no motif can be found for those looking for a cause to seek the beauties of nature.

It seems that taking pleasure in natural beauties is justified, for this pleasure has been *recurrent* and *durable* in the course of history and across the world's geography. As we know, the tendency in the people of one kind is a natural tendency, and therefore it is considered as an instinctive and

essential need. The *recurrence* and *durability* of pleasure-taking in beauty can be proved by such sciences as sociology and history, and the reason behind such a claim can be sought in these sciences. The study of the history of different nations and their cultures can prove this claim that man has always been taking pleasure in the beautiful phenomena of nature, and that's where the different arts and particularly poetry¹ have come to existence.

If we accept that this tendency has been recurrent and durable, it won't be difficult to accept its being instinctive and essential, for the distinctive feature of the essential and unessential properties is their very feature of being recurrent and durable. Such needs for sexual pleasure, food, and rest which are among such essential properties have been recurrent and durable along the course of the human history and in different nations and generations of man, but such tendencies toward having an automobile or luxuries of life do not follow the same rule and have varied across different societies. Therefore, it can be maintained that the recurring and durable tendency in one species is essential for that species; but one should be careful not to use *essential* in the strong sense of the word according to which when a property is *essential* for a species, by no means and in no time and place it can be separated from that. Here in this text, by *essential* we mean the use of the word in its weak sense. '*Essential*' as we use it in this essay is an identity which has more consistency in the individuals of one species, though the probability of its separation from others is not impossible. The desire for the opposite sex is essential in this sense of the word; since though some people can be found who actually have no tendency toward their opposite sex, this tendency can exist in the majority of the human species and be more consistent and imperishable in them. Therefore, it is not necessary to use '*essential*' in the strong sense of the word and be more likely to suffer the critical attacks by the opponents of '*essentialism*'.

However, even if we can agree that the tendency toward the natural beauty has been recurrent and durable throughout the history of human kind and therefore it is essential for this kind, even in its weak sense, then again this cannot prove that this tendency can be of value from a philosophical point of view. If we agree that the human nature is evil, whatever is essential for his nature can not considered to be of value; therefore, we can't but agree that the human nature is good and the standard for the goodness and evilness of human deeds is their conformity with the human nature. If we consider the human being in its natural status an evil creature, we can no longer regard as valuable whatever is essential for his nature and originates from his natural status, so we must prove that human being has a good nature and whatever he is seeking naturally is good, too. This hypothesis must be proved, yet providing the proof for its truth will exceed the limits of this essay. Therefore, from now on, those who agree on this hypothesis can only follow us in searching the

¹ According to the great philosophers such as Hegel and Heidegger, poetry is the loftiest expression of art.

answer to this question, though this hypothesis is in agreement with common sense and that's why the general majority of people consider evilness as some sort of diversion from the natural status.

Aesthetic Geotourism, the Dialectic

Now, we must prove the valuability of geotourism from the point of view of aesthetics. To this aim, we have to introduce some preliminary steps:

Firstly, the word 'beauty' is not a senseless word. Certainly, any one of us in our everyday life use this word in the same way we use other meaning-bearing words in order to express our thoughts and intentions, and this means that this word does refer to a thing. Therefore, there will be a mental meaning for the word 'beauty' in our mind. In a likewise manner, in referring to the objects outside our mind and in trying to describe them, we use this word. For instance, when we say '*This flower is beautiful!*' or '*That mountain is beautiful!*' and so on, this word will surely have a subjective denotation as well as an objective referent, so certainly we can consider the word 'beauty' or the adjective 'beautiful' which has been derived from that as meaning-bearing words and agree on the existence of a mental concept and objective referents to which these words refer.

Secondly, the word 'beauty' is a univocal word that is we always use this word in different statements in the same meaning. If the word 'beauty' was used in any sentence with a meaning different from the other, it was a homonymous word like *spring*, in English, which means both 'a place where water flows out from the ground' (Procter, 2001, 1400) and 'a piece of curved or bent metal that can be pressed into a smaller space but then returns to its usual shape' (Procter, 2001, 1400). When we are talking about the beauty of a flower and when we are describing the beauty of a mountain, we have in mind the same meaning of beauty in both cases. It is possible that the beauty of a flower varies from the beauty of a mountain and each one is a variant of beauty, yet undoubtedly, they are both beautiful; as man and woman who vary, but are both human beings.

Thirdly, to us, the meaning of beauty is not so bright and clear-cut; in other words, it is not precisely clear what beauty means. To look at it from a different angle, the identity of the concept of 'beauty' is not clear. The reason behind the unknown identity of the concept of beauty is that giving a clear definition of 'beauty' is not an easy job. That Plato in the HIPPIAS Major has spoken of the difficulty of 'beauty' means that giving a definition of beauty is difficult. Therefore, the concept of 'beauty' is unknown and needs to be defined.

Fourthly, the reason behind the vagueness of 'beauty' is that it is intermingled with the other properties of the object. If we could separate the 'beauty' of an object from its other properties, we could have come to a clear understanding of 'beauty', that is an understanding of 'beauty' for 'beauty' sake. The reason we cannot define 'beauty', and tell exactly what 'beauty' is, is that in the object we perceive 'beauty' accompanied by other properties of the object; like one who is familiar with 'water' only through the fruit juice and is not able to know 'water' in separation from what it

is mixed with. In other words, 'Beauty' is like a convict who had hidden himself amid the crowd, we know the convict is hiding among them, yet we cannot spot him there.

Fifthly, how can we come to a definition for a concept? Let's assume we are going to define 'beauty'. At first, we perceive 'beauty' in a beautiful mountain, here our expectation is to know the mountain as the 'beauty' itself.; if later we see a beautiful sea too, we find out that 'beauty' is not *the beautiful mountain* itself, as we have seen that *the beautiful sea* is also an object of beauty without being a *mountain*. Therefore, being beautiful has nothing to do with being a 'mountain' or a 'sea'. Now, what is it that beauty comes from? We may answer: from 'bigness', since both *the beautiful mountain* and *the beautiful sea* are big. But a little flower can also be beautiful without being 'big'! Therefore, the definition given for 'beauty' is modified by bringing a counterexample. The counterexample of 'the beautiful=the mountain' is *the beautiful sea*, and the counterexample of 'the beautiful=big' is *the beautiful little flower*.

Sixthly, in the works of Plato, the above-mentioned method in reaching a definition for the concepts is called the *Dialectical Method of Socrates*.

In the Platonic Dialogues, there is always a person like Socrates who brings a counterexample for the definitions given for every concept such as beauty, justice, and so on, and this goes on until reaching the true definition. One who looks for a common feature in various referents of a concept in order to reach a definition must try not to consider a specific feature present in the beautiful objects instead of 'beauty' itself that is the intended common feature of the beautiful objects. Thus, the more various referents possessing the intended property he brings under examination, the closer he will get to the true or near-the-true definition of that property or concept.

Seventhly, actually the geotourist through travelling to the different corners of the world and visiting the very various referents of beauty makes it possible for himself to come to a clear perception of 'beauty', as this person, considerably better than anyone else, can perceive and separate most of the *beauty's* abstraction from the other properties mixed with it in the natural phenomena. The geotourist has perceived such a wide variety of the beautiful objects that is remarkably less likely to mix 'beauty' with the other specific properties of the beautiful objects, since he has observed and known many objects of beauty which are all beautiful, yet lack those other properties. Therefore, we can say the geotourist is a dialectician too. Even if the geotourist cannot reach an inclusive and exclusive definition of beauty, he can come to the best definition possible of beauty or at least has available enough data and knowledge to reach the best possible definition, the data and knowledge that are the result of his many visits to different geological sites.

Aesthetic Geotourism, the merits

As we discussed, Man naturally is in search of natural beauties and takes pleasure in them, and as this pleasure-taking is in harmony with the human nature, it is a valuable and thus good thing. Now the question is whether the practice of geotourism may bring to him any more gain other than the

mere pleasure-taking in the local environment surrounding the geotourist without going any further to the other geological sites; though this in itself has its own merits. The answer is positive. The geotourist can benefit from such gains that are not reachable without geotourism practice.

In the first place, through his dialectical journey, the geotourist can come to a vivid perception or the least blurred vision of beauty. It means that he satisfies his aesthetic need with a purer perception of beauty obtained by separating 'beauty' from the many other properties possessed by the beautiful objects. Like one who directly quenches his thirst with pure water or water with high degree of purity rather than fruit juices and therefore through the satisfaction of his need for water comes to have a better feeling, the geotourist satisfies his natural tendency for 'beauty' with a purer 'beauty' and therefore will enjoy a better and more favorable aesthetic feeling as compared with those who don't.

In the second place, certainly man before creating the artistic beauties has perceived and understood the natural beauties. Through visiting the beautiful phenomena in nature, man has come to perceive the 'beauty' in them that is the beauty existing in them intermixed with their other properties. It means to man these phenomena have been the referents of the concept of 'beauty' and man has derived his own concept of beauty from them. In the next step, the creative man has tried to create new referents for 'beauty' based on the conceptual model he himself has borrowed from nature; it is when the creation of the aesthetic works begins, be it literature or art. Aesthetic works, be it literature or art, are doubtlessly other referents of the concept of 'beauty' and are created according to the conceptual model taken from the nature and beautiful natural phenomena.

Now if the concept initially drawn out of the natural objects such as the concept of beauty is a clearer concept or has the least degree of vagueness, it will give us a much better model for creating works of aesthetic nature, i.e. literature and art. If the concept of beauty is not clearly defined, it will refer to the traits other than the beauty itself and therefore more referents will be recognized for that, which are included under the definition of such a concept only due to the vagueness present in that concept, that is the concept of beauty; while they are no due referent for this concept. Thus, some works of aesthetic or artistic nature, be it literature or art, will be created which are by no means objects of beauty and are erroneously regarded as beautiful. The authors believe that one of the most important factors leading to the differences of artistic taste among the people is this very misperception; and that's why some believe that a work if of artistic value, while others may disagree with them.

In addition to the subject of the creation of aesthetic works, i.e. literature and art, inspired by the concept of beauty originated in the natural phenomena explained above, the idea of judgment of beauty in the works of beauty and art can also be discussed in the light of the above reasoning. One who has a more vivid and clearer picture of beauty in mind can better differentiate between its true and false referents. Like a person who has a clearer picture of a convict and can spot him more

easily and quickly when seen him amid the crowd; but one who has no clear picture of the convict and is not familiar with his features, though he may have tracked him into the crowd, will either remain in a state of doubt or take the wrong person as the convict, let it be him or not. It is the same for the critics of the aesthetic works, be it literature or art, who seek to judge a work of literature or art and wish to prefer those works which are of more aesthetic value; if their mental picture of 'beauty' is a blurred one, they won't be on the right track in their judgment.

Having no clear mental concept of beauty, if we don't say it is the only factor, is one of the most important factors affecting our judgment of works of beauty and art which leads to disagreement of opinions among the artistic critics paving the ground for the occurrence of mistakes in their judgments.

Strange as it may seem, in the light of the aforementioned reasons, the creator or critic of an artistic work may be more successful in his job if he is a practitioner of geotourism and travels to visit the natural manifestations of geo rather than just choosing to sit in a corner and deprive himself of seeing the *beautiful* visage of nature in its rich variety.

Conclusion

Without overestimating the value of the natural beauties and overlooking that of the aesthetic or artistic works as Plato had done, we can say the natural beauty is the answer to the natural need of man, and if this natural need is going to be satisfied through touring in the nature, we can enjoy a much better and more favorable satisfaction of our need for *beauty* in nature as well as keeping ourselves from falling prey to the pitfalls caused by the blurriness and shadowiness of our perception of the concept of *beauty*. To put it in a nutshell, touring in the nature is among the effective factors helping to clarify and illuminate the man's mental concept of *beauty*, thus influencing human rationale for aesthetic judgment and enrich even more the texture of human aesthetic creation. Such aesthetico-interpretative endeavor might lead to a higher potential for creating more original works of literature and art as well as a better judgment about such aesthetic creations.

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