

# Moral Views of Nature: Normative Implications of Kant's *Critique of Judgment*

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**Abstract:** Kant has traditionally been viewed as an unhelpful resource for environmental concerns, despite his immensely influential moral and political philosophy. This paper shows that Kant's *Critique of Judgment* can be a valuable resource for environmental ethics, with methodological implications for political action and environmental policy. I argue that Kant's *Analytic of the Beautiful* and *Critique of Teleological Judgment* provide philosophical tools for valuing nature aside from interest and for developing forms of environmental protectionism. My approach differs from other Kantian accounts that discuss our moral relations to nonrational nature, since these usually rely on Kant's limited statements about flora and fauna in his *Lectures on Ethics*, *Metaphysics of Morals*, and the *Analytic of the Beautiful*. Though we can defend indirect duties toward animals and beautiful plants, as these accounts convincingly show, they rarely engage with the possibility of us having moral views of ecosystems. Moral views of nature can be useful as methodological heuristics for mobilizing and instituting environmental policies regarding climate change such as biodiversity loss, and this paper will provide a defense of a Kantian moral view of nature from which subsequent climate-related actions can be motivated.

**Key words:** Kant, teleology, environment, *Critique of Judgment*.

Kant has traditionally been viewed as an unhelpful resource for environmental concerns, despite his immensely influential moral and political philosophy.<sup>1</sup> This paper shows that Kant's *Critique of Judgment* can be a valuable resource for environmental ethics, with methodological implications for political action and environmental policy. I argue that Kant's *Analytic of the Beautiful* and *Critique of Teleological Judgment* provide philosophical tools for valuing nature aside from interest and for developing forms of environmental protectionism for human and non-human related reasons.<sup>2</sup> Kant's natural aesthetics and regulative teleology can be used to prepare humanity for appreciating nature disinterestedly and fulfilling its duties toward itself and with regard to flora, fauna, and ecosystems. Kantian commentators in environmental aesthetics stand to gain much by incorporating elements from the *CTJ*, since Kant's view of nature's systematicity is one way for valuing ecosystems and non-beautiful creatures. Environmental ethicists stand to benefit from Kant's regulative teleology, since it provides a heuristic for viewing nature holistically while avoiding metaphysical

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[1] A dismissive attitude toward Kant is widespread in animal and environmental ethics circles (Hoff 1983; Regan 2004; Singer 2009). Recent literature shows that Kant is relevant to contemporary global problems, but these rarely involve discussions of climate change (e.g., Roff 2013; Reglitz 2016).

[2] Parenthetical references to Kant's writings give the volume and page number(s) of the Royal Prussian Academy edition (*Kants gesammelte Schriften*), with the following abbreviations: *MM* = *Metaphysics of Morals*; *LE* = *Lectures on Ethics*. *CJ* = *Critique of Judgment* which includes *CTJ* = *Critique of Teleological Judgment*; *AB* = *Analytic of the Beautiful*; *AS* = *Analytic of the Sublime*.

problems of constitutive teleology (Svoboda 2015).<sup>3</sup> My approach differs from other Kantian commentators that discuss our moral relations to nonrational nature, since these usually rely on Kant's limited statements about flora and fauna in *LE* (27:459; 710), *MM* (6:443), and his views of natural beauty and morality in *CJ*.<sup>4</sup> Though we can defend indirect duties toward animals and beautiful plants, as these commentators convincingly show, they rarely engage with the possibility of us having broader moral views of nature (including ecosystems) from a Kantian perspective. By moral views of nature, I simply mean ways of relating to flora, fauna, and ecosystems with non-exploitative concern.<sup>5</sup> Moral views of nature can be useful as methodological tools for mobilizing and instituting environmental policies regarding climate change such as biodiversity loss, and this paper will provide a defense of a Kantian moral view of nature from which subsequent climate-related actions can be motivated.

This paper is divided into four parts. Part 1 briefly considers a paper by J. L. Bilbro critical of Kantianism, using it as a foil to investigate how and to what extent Kant's *CJ* can be an environmental resource. Part 2 examines Kantian beauty, highlighting its ethical connections for the environment. Part 3 looks into the *CTJ* to address limitations in Kant's account of beauty vis-à-vis the environment. Finally, Part 4 concludes by highlighting the implications of this approach, specifically as regards to how Kant may be valuable for climate change by way of his regulative teleological view of natural systems. Though Gaian-style thinking is helpful in environmental ethics, Kant's account is superior for climate change insofar as it has been (and still is) more influential in moral and political discourse, while still being able to approximate a Gaian view of nature. These moral views of nature, developed from the spirit of Kant's philosophy, are one among many resources which we can use in promoting protectionism in the Anthropocene.

My argument proceeds in three main moves: First, I show that reflection on beautiful natural objects can promote an environmentally helpful, non-instrumental relationship between humanity and flora and fauna and that it can facilitate us in discharging our indirect duties regarding them. Second, I explore in a novel way Kant's views on natural systems, by juxtaposing them with his account of beauty; in practical discussions of nonrational nature, commentators typically focus either on beauty or

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3] Environmental philosophers often utilize constitutive teleology to persuade individuals to care about nature. Since we are part of one purposive organism, in destroying nature we shirk our responsibility to the whole. As Svoboda (2015) notes, teleology can be helpful for defending indirect duties to flora and fauna, but a constitutive teleology runs into metaphysical problems, including incompatibility with contemporary scientific accounts of evolution. Kant's *regulative* teleology, as Svoboda shows, avoids these problems since it is of mere heuristic value, and in this paper I suggest that it can be of additional use for considering the value of natural systems such as ecosystems, rather than simply flora and fauna.

4] See, for instance, Guyer 1993; Wood 1998; Korsgaard 2004; Svoboda 2015.

5] I do not set out for myself the unlikely task of showing that Kantians can respect nature or have direct duties in regard to it; rather, what I aim to show is that we have good moral and aesthetic reasons for viewing natural objects in non-instrumental terms, and these imply certain ways of treating them.

teleology in Kant but rarely do they explore their environmental value in tandem. Finally, I connect the non-exploitative attitude toward flora and fauna that judgments of beauty support with the holistic view of natural systems developed in teleological judgment, to promote a non-exploitative relation of humanity to ecosystems.

### I. INITIAL OBSTACLES

In environmental philosophy and environmental aesthetics, Kant has been and remains a marginalized philosopher. This is exemplified quite well in a paper entitled “Sublime Failure: Why We’d Better Start Seeing Our World as Beautiful” (2015) by J. L. Bilbro. In the paper, Bilbro argues that beauty (of the non-Kantian variety) can be valuable for fostering humility and opening pathways for responsible environmental action. Though Bilbro primarily engages with literature in ecocriticism and aesthetics, he begins his discussion with a jab at Kant’s sublime. Accounts of sublimity, such as Burke and Kant’s, which elevate autonomous humanity above nature, can only promote mastery over nature and technological-fixes to ecological problems (Bilbro 2015, 134). Bilbro does not seriously engage with Kant scholarship vis-à-vis environmental protectionism; instead, he uses Kantian sublimity as a foil for his own ends. Nonetheless, I think his deeper worries about Kant’s philosophy can be informative for understanding why Kant has been marginalized. Despite Bilbro’s explicit focus with problems of Kantian sublimity, his readers may easily be led to generalize further, concluding that Kant’s anthropocentrism makes his philosophy anathema for protectionism. Yet, the sublime is only a small part of Kant’s aesthetics.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, Bilbro fails to consider the *CTJ*. I grant that Kant’s account of sublimity may, at first glance, appear unhelpful for protectionism.<sup>7</sup> Still, Bilbro and his readers need not conclude that it is justified to reject the *CJ* in its entirety, especially Kant’s accounts of beauty and teleology.<sup>8</sup> Kantian beauty, to the contrary, facilitates a disinterested relationship toward beautiful objects of nature. Indeed, on Kant’s view, we are to value the beautiful in nature not for what it can do for us, but for its own sake, even if we cannot regard it as an end in itself. I concede to Bilbro that beauty can be important for protectionism (though his view of beauty differs from the Kantian one). I also concede that Kant’s account of sublimity is problematic for a healthy relationship to nature. Where I disagree regards what I take to be an underlying suspicion he and others have of Kant, namely that the anthropocentrism of Kant’s general philosophy is what leads inexorably to his environmentally problematic account of sublimity. I

6] Kant even claims that the *AS* is a “mere appendix” to his project (*CJ* 5:246).

7] See Brady (2013) for an environmental defense of Kantian sublimity.

8] See Biasetti (2015) for an environmental defense of Kantian beauty, where the ecological potential of Kant’s teleology is mentioned but not explored in any detail (2015, 153n67).

submit that Bilbro is both right and wrong about Kant – right about his limitations regarding sublimity, but wrong insofar as Kant's *CJ* can still be a resource. We should not rule out the *CJ* wholesale since Kant's accounts of beauty and of natural systems hold promise for the development of moral views of nature.

## II. KANT, BEAUTY AND THE ENVIRONMENT

As has been noted in the literature, there are several ways in which Kant's *CJ* can be of use for thinking about humanity's relationship to nature in non-instrumental terms. One approach focuses on Kant's account of natural beauty. This view hinges on beauty as a symbol of morality (*CJ* 5:351-354) and is often supplemented with similar passages from *MM* (*MM* 6:442-43). In brief, a disinterested appreciation of natural beauty functions as moral preparation for acting humanely to ends in themselves and discharging our indirect duties regarding non-rational nature. This can be understood, as some have called it, as an environmental ethic of enlightened anthropocentrism (Sandler 2018, 116). According to Kant in *AB*, we disinterestedly value beautiful nature when we reflect upon it. The cultivation of a reflective appreciation for beautiful nature has affinities, on Kant's view, to moral feeling: "[...] to take a *direct interest* in the beauty of *nature* [...] is always a mark of a good soul; and [...] if this interest is habitual, if it readily associates itself with the *contemplation of nature*, this indicates at least a mental attunement favorable to moral feeling" (*CJ* 5:298-9). When we cultivate aesthetic feelings in our disinterested appreciation of nature, we develop an *attitude* favorable to morality: "[...] if someone is directly interested in the beauty of nature, we have cause to suppose that he has at least a predisposition to a good moral attitude" (*CJ* 5:300). The reflection of nature's beauty can instil in us, according to Kant, an aesthetic disposition to appreciate the seeming purposiveness and harmony of nature. Appreciation for nature's beauty and harmony can thus allow us to view nature with disinterest (and even with love)<sup>9</sup> in addition to its capacity to cultivate in us an attitude favorable to performing our duties regarding nature, such as the preservation rather than wanton destruction of nature.<sup>10</sup> Destruction of beautiful nature, on Kant's view, degrades

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9] Though Kant argues that "true love" (i.e., practical love) is based on equality and hence obtains only among rational agents (*LE* 27:65), Kant suggests that "The beautiful prepares us for loving something, even nature, without interest" (*CJ* 5:267; 5:380). Turning to the *Vigilantius LE* (from 1793) can help us make sense of Kant's distinction between practical love of humanity and sensuous love of nature. In these lectures, Kant suggests that "[...] we are to love all objects of nature in proportion to their known perfection. This is based on the pleasure we take in the purposiveness of every natural object. It is love from feeling [...] it is intrinsically correct that this love of natural creatures, and the knowledge of them, can contribute to our self-perfection and morally practical activity [...] This moral satisfaction [in loving natural objects] has the beneficial effect, that it enlarges both our receptivity to all perfections of the kingdom of nature, and our moral disposition. We are in a position to love the objects of nature [...] This duty is naturally an imperfect one" (*LE* 27:668-9).

10] Such Kantian duties are "in regard" to nature. Though we can appreciate natural objects disinterestedly, our duties regarding nature always refer ultimately either to our moral perfection or to our treatment of other ends in themselves.

humanity's moral perfection (Svoboda 2015). We have an imperfect, though direct duty to ourselves to prevent such destruction. As Kant puts quite succinctly,

A propensity to wanton destruction of what is *beautiful* in inanimate nature (*spiritus destructionis*) is opposed to a human being's duty to himself; for it weakens or uproots the feeling in him which, though not of itself moral, is still a disposition of sensibility that greatly promotes morality or at least prepares the way for it: the disposition, namely, to like something (e.g. beautiful crystal formations, the indescribable beauty of plants) even apart from any intention to use it (MM 6:443).

The connection between this passage on beauty in *MM* and Kant's discussion about beautiful nature in *CJ* can be sharpened by considering Kant's account of beauty as a symbol of morality in *CJ*. Paul Guyer establishes the connection between our duties regarding nature and beauty rather nicely:

Response to beauty is like the judgment of morality in being immediate, disinterested, free, and universal. It is unlike the latter in being represented to sense rather than through concepts. But since the pure idea of morality is not itself directly representable to sense, this disanalogy does not undermine the analogy between beauty and morality but is rather what requires the former to become the symbol of the latter (Guyer 1993, 316).

Taste prepares us for disinterested attachments; that is, even if the *content* of objects of taste is independent of morality, the *experience* of taste is a cause of a disposition favorable to the performance of duty [...] Kant clearly believes that experience of the beautiful can be an instrument or means for the development of a subjective disposition – he here calls it “love” – which is intimately connected to moral duty (Guyer 1993, 317-318).

Though duties do not stem from the aesthetic experience itself, the experience helps us to cultivate a virtuous attitude favorable for assisting us in discharging our duties, which include indirect duties about our treatment of non-rational nature.

To summarize, aesthetic reflection on beautiful natural objects (such as flora and fauna) has at least two important environmental implications. Such reflection can, first, promote a disinterested, non-instrumental and non-exploitative relationship between humanity and beautiful objects and, second, it can be used as one possible resource from which we can use to motivate protectionism, including proscription of wanton destruction of nature. To develop a healthy and sustainable relationship with nature, we obviously need to cultivate the proper attitude toward it, and this must involve non-exploitative comportment: benevolent stewardship rather than cruel domination to start. Moreover, since the opportunity for reflection on beautiful nature is valuable for our aesthetic and moral development on Kant's view, we should ensure that we do not destroy beautiful flora and fauna (and thereby preserve biodiversity) that could have been otherwise appreciated disinterestedly.

One immediate concern about constructing an environmental ethic from Kant's account of beauty regards its limited application. Beautiful nature, by virtue of its analogy

with morality and its ability to prepare humanity for morality by teaching us how to disinterestedly value other entities from an aesthetic standpoint, allows us to value the beauty in nature and gives us reason to protect it. This, naturally, includes many flora and fauna. Beautiful nature, however, is not the sole constituent of ecosystems; in fact, many keystone species (i.e., species whose functions are essential for ecological resilience) are often ugly, small, or aesthetically uninteresting. Not all nature is beautiful. How can Kantians value non-beautiful nature?<sup>11</sup> In *AS*, Kant asserts that sublime nature is humbling to our sensibility by virtue of its immense size or power. Small nature, by contrast, is associated with contempt and disrespect (*CJ* 5:249). Yet, small, non-beautiful organisms often play important roles in the functioning of ecosystems (as in, e.g., zooplankton in marine environments). If these are contemptible for Kant, how can he be of any use for supporting environmental protection? Moreover, how can Kantians value environments or ecosystems that appear to resist judgment as singular objects for reflection? In short, Kant's moral-aesthetic account of beauty seems inadequate to account for non-beautiful nature and natural systems.

### III. RECONSIDERING THE CRITIQUE OF TELEOLOGICAL JUDGMENT

As a way of responding to the question of the value of non-beautiful nature and natural systems, I suggest that we draw from Kant's connection of the aesthetic experience with scientific inquiry and appreciation of nature as an interconnected system. Though *CTJ* doesn't concern itself with beauty,<sup>12</sup> utilizing aspects of it that discuss organisms and nature's systematicity open a way for Kantians to supplement the moral insights of *AB* to natural systems such as ecosystems; valuing ecosystems will, of course, include non-beautiful nature that is not accounted for in *AB*. For non-beautiful flora and fauna have important roles to play in the flourishing and harmony of the whole. By making use of teleological reflective judgment, we can take Kant's view of natural beauty and its implications for protectionism to include aesthetic and moral consideration of natural systems and non-beautiful creatures.

One way to bridge the judgment of beautiful flora and fauna to environments is, I submit, through a detour into the *CTJ*. Obviously, an obstacle for this is that, though Kant discusses beautiful objects (e.g., flora, fauna) he doesn't explicitly discuss the beauty of *ecosystems* in *AB*; this is because taste concerns inner purposiveness whereas the teleological judgment of natural science concerns external purposiveness (harmony of our mental faculties vs apparent harmony of nature suited for our faculty of judgment). The question is thus how to build a bridge between the two and to discern whether a

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11] There is a great deal of literature on the status of the ugly in Kant scholarship. Some commentators even suggest that, based on Kant's account, nothing can be ugly (see Shier 1998). To address this would call for more argumentation than the scope of this paper allows. Hence, I instead focus on environmental implications for *non-beautiful* nature.

12] *CTJ* rarely mentions pleasure or beautiful nature (cf. *CJ* 5:380).

Kantian can transition from reflection of a single beautiful object of nature (which is the main business of *AB*, *CJ* 5:243) to those of natural systems (which ends up being a task of *CTJ*, though not with regard to beauty but with regard to natural science, *CJ* 5:378-384). Of course, viewing nature as a beautiful totality has not stopped its destruction thus far. Nonetheless, at least in the realm of environmental ethics, philosophers have suggested that such views are important for praxis (and indeed eco- and bio-centric thinking has been useful in facilitating conservation movements by helping us to see nature in non-instrumental terms). Now, in the pre-critical works, Kant has no problem with judging the whole of nature as a sublime and beautiful cosmic system.<sup>13</sup> Such an approach for the critical Kant runs into several problems, so I limit my concern to the judgment of natural systems such as ecosystems, for which we may also use Kant to motivate protectionism.<sup>14</sup>

According to Kant, the appreciation of natural beauty prompts scientific investigation into nature (*CJ* 5:185; 5:379-381; 20:204). By reflecting on beautiful organisms and viewing them disinterestedly by means of aesthetic judgment, we may become more receptive to viewing without interest (in what they can do for us instrumentally) environments of said organisms – environments which include non-beautiful organisms – as well-functioning holistic systems. Reflection on beautiful organisms can prompt us to investigate their relationship with natural systems. Some might object that the association of an object's beauty with an inquiry into its environmental context precludes the appreciation of the former. Kant sometimes even talks this way.<sup>15</sup> Nonetheless, it is crucial to recognize that

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13] A discussion of the evolution of Kant's thought on this matter is interesting but exceeds the bounds of this paper. In *Universal Natural History* (1755), the young Kant presents a holistic and purposive nature. Prior to his critical bifurcation of phenomenal and noumenal, Kant throughout judges nature as a unified, ontologically dynamic reality; speculates on the existence of rational aliens (1:351-61) and on how humans are not the pinnacle of creation but are just another middling species (1:353-4); and judges nature to be beautiful and sublime (1:255-6; 306; 365). The collapse of the pre-critical project, leading to the developments in the *Critiques*, led Kant to re-evaluate many of these views.

14] It would be interesting to consider whether Kant's critical philosophy could allow for judgment of everything in nature as beautiful. Environmental philosophers have attempted to do something of this sort. The discussion of an "ecological self" in deep ecology is one example. See Guyer (2006, 172) for a critique of the Kantian "precognitive" view that everything in nature is potentially beautiful. Though I find the precognitive view enticing (especially insofar as it allows us to connect the pre-critical works to Humboldt and Schopenhauer), I do not endorse it. Rather, I suggest that if we connect teleological judgment of natural systems with aesthetic judgment of beautiful nature, we may begin to see a means of viewing non-beautiful *natural systems* and their constituent flora and fauna with disinterest, worthy of protection. This is because teleological judgment allows us to see that non-beautiful creatures are embedded in natural systems, and they also play an important aesthetic role in how we can judge said systems as beautiful. This is not dissimilar to Leibniz's famous remarks on the ugly marks of a painting; they are just as essential for seeing the painting as a unified, singular object for judgment.

15] It is possible for the appreciation of beautiful flora (say, for instance, a flower) to fail to lead the judge to further investigate nature. Conversely, Kant often suggests that knowledge of an object sometimes makes it harder to judge its beauty (*CJ* 5:231). For determinate knowledge of that object's natural end (e.g., the purpose of its colorful buds) requires the judge (e.g., the botanist) to abstract from this in appreciating its form. See Humboldt (1997, 38-40), who deals with this objection in greater detail, and Guyer's (2006) "metacognitive" view for a contemporary resolution to the problem.

for Kant, we can freely shift between the two types of reflective judgment, namely aesthetic and teleological judgment.<sup>16</sup> If we could not shift freely between the two, we would have to admit that natural scientists remain aesthetically blind, which is absurd. To judge an animal as beautiful, for instance, involves conceptual distancing from the ecological features of the animal so that it can be viewed in terms of inner purposiveness. This would appear, at first, to exclude any possibility of utilizing aesthetic judgment for teleological, science-based purposes. I would suggest, however, that the *disinterested interest* (and subsequent curiosity) that judgment cultivates in appreciating beautiful objects such as animals can be valuable in facilitating scientific inquiry since it allows us to view nature without the prejudices of *instrumental interest*; disinterested interest in nature lets us be receptive to how natural systems function, whereas instrumental interest in nature blinds us to see everything in terms of human use-value relations. There are obviously conceptual differences in both types of judgment, but a disinterested interest allows for a more open relationship to nature. Rather than seeing animals in terms of what they can do for us as commodities, for example, the cultivation of disinterest via aesthetic judgment better positions us to disinterestedly appreciate, by means of teleological judgment, how such fauna play an important role in the harmonious functioning of the natural system in which they inhabit.<sup>17</sup>

The appreciation of beautiful natural objects can spark an intellectual interest into how such objects are possible and prompt curiosity into how they operate and have adapted to their locale; teleological reflection leads down a path to cognition of how various ecosystems are objects that overlap and are embedded in larger climes. Research beginning with the appreciation of beautiful organisms can thus, on Kant's view, even facilitate a view of nature as a whole (*CJ* 5:398). Of course, a judgment of beauty is not necessary for stimulating intellectual interest in ecosystems and nature as a whole, and this is one reason why beauty is not discussed in any great detail in *CTJ*. Part 2 of this paper argued that judgments of beauty have moral implications for our treatment of flora and fauna. Part 3, then, will show that we can extract similar moral implications for ecological systems and the non-beautiful flora and fauna that are constitutive of them. I will proceed by discussing two modes of argumentation for seeing how the *CTJ* can add to or supplement the *AB* as regards protectionism.

The first mode pertains to how teleological judgment, through reflection on the interconnected parts of organisms, allows us to view and individuate ecosystems like organisms (as singular objects); once we see ecosystems as singular objects, we can then potentially view them as beautiful. Kantian teleological judgment, then, can be

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16] Proto-environmental philosopher Alexander von Humboldt is one such figure heavily influenced by Kant in this regard. In the introduction to his first volume of *Cosmos*, Humboldt argues that aesthetic judgment, though autonomous in its own respect, can supplement us in our investigations of nature and facilitate further aesthetic judgments. For Humboldt's interpretation, aesthetic and teleological judgment are connected, the two mutually reinforcing each other.

17] This is not dissimilar to Leopold's famous injunction in "The Land Ethic" (1949) to shift from a commodity-based view of environments to a disinterested appreciation for their integrity, stability, and beauty.



appropriated as a reflective scaffold from which it becomes possible to judge ecosystems as beautiful, by way of their systematic harmonization of manifold and diverse flora and fauna. A view of mere diversity cannot be judged as beautiful (*CJ* 5:243), and hence, the unifying power of teleological judgment is needed to reflect on the diversity of ecosystems as unified objects. Natural systems can be understood in regulative terms as *Gaian*, i.e., as like singular organisms.<sup>18</sup> From this unifying function of teleological judgment, we can then appreciate natural systems as beautiful (*CJ* 5:379), since they can be judged as singular objects; prior to the supplemental feature of teleological judgment, ecosystems appear as abstract, dispersed, and dis-unified: a pond appears first as a hodgepodge collection of water, creatures, and resources; and then, reflectively, as a single, organized micro-ecosystem. Additionally, if we can make use of teleological judgment as a supplement to judge ecosystems as beautiful, then even non-beautiful nature constitutive of beautiful ecosystems deserve indirect moral consideration since teleological judgment reveals that each organism, no matter how small or uninteresting, contributes to the beauty and unity of an ecosystem.<sup>19</sup> When nature is viewed only through the narrow lenses of *AB*, it is difficult to motivate the protection of non-beautiful nature, since we are only obliged to protect and conserve beautiful objects. Fortunately, with the integration of teleological judgment regarding nature as a *Gaian* system composed of singular yet interconnected ecosystems, the moral-aesthetic problem of non-beautiful nature can be resolved.<sup>20</sup> This is because the non-beautiful elements of ecosystems can be appreciated as constitutive of said ecosystems when we judge them as beautiful; just as a beautiful painting can be appreciated even for its non-beautiful marks, so also can non-beautiful flora and fauna be appreciated when we judge an ecosystem as beautiful. To be clear, I do not mean to suggest that teleological and aesthetic judgment can be synthesized, as we do not require empirical knowledge to make pure judgments of taste. I mean that we can shift between the two in order to develop a stronger sense of disinterested appreciation for objects of nature in an environmental context and that the cultivation of one can be used to mutually reinforce the other; this is because teleological judgment allows us to individuate seemingly disparate “arenas” of nature as singular, unified objects; an environment, through teleological reflection, can be seen as a singular ecosystem with the potential to be judged as beautiful.<sup>21</sup>

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18] In the history of environmentalism, framing devices such as Lovelock’s Gaia Hypothesis, which suggests we ought to view the earth as a unified, self-regulating organism, have been influential in moving people to care about conservation.

19] As field ecology shows, not every organism in an ecosystem is essential for its maintenance. My point is that teleological judgment, with its regulative rather than constitutive use, allows us to *view* natural systems as individuated, unified objects.

20] That nature is, *in toto*, a harmonious system is a necessary idea for Kant. I do not mean to imply that this *idea* of nature is beautiful, since ideas cannot be, properly speaking, beautiful. Rather, I mean to suggest that making use of this idea via teleological judgment can assist us in viewing ecosystems as singular objects that can, subsequently, be judged as beautiful.

21] See Allison, who discusses how natural beauty can facilitate scientific inquiry and teleological reflection of nature (Allison 2001, 59). See Guyer, who argues that natural purposes play no role in judgments of taste (Guyer 2006).

The second mode for which teleological judgment can be of value for protectionism pertains to its potential for appreciating and loving nature, preparing us to act morally in regard to it. Essentially, teleological judgment can be used to bolster environmental thinking for Kantians and make Kant sympathetic in the realms of ecological thought. Now, the scientific exploration and aesthetic appreciation of nature's systematicity facilitates a view of nature's unity. Just as we are inspired by the harmonious ways in which organisms are essential for their environments by analogy to how our own organs function for us, so we can also appreciate the beautiful unity of nature in its heterogeneous diversity of empirical laws (*CJ* 5:185-87). We may value organisms that seem not to contribute to the functioning of ecosystems by making use of teleological judgment in order to frame natural systems from larger unified perspectives.<sup>22</sup> One might worry that, on this view, everything that exists could be valued, which could entail problematic consequences or lead to eco-misanthropy. This, however, is precisely why it is important to underscore the *regulative* nature of Kant's view, and the constraints put on it by his views on morality and imperfect duties.

Now, since teleological judgment can help us see the entirety of ecosystems as connected systems for which we may value, it can assist us with realizing our duties by letting us discern those constituent flora and fauna of ecosystems that typically remain, as it were, concealed. In a sense, it is easy to motivate protectionism for beautiful creatures, since we naturally care for such beings. However, non-beautiful creatures tend to captivate the public mind far less. Teleological judgment, due to its Gaian outlook, lets us see each non-beautiful part of an ecosystem as significant and valuable. When we see these parts, we then can begin to consider our duties in regard to them, since we recognize that their protection is an indirect duty for which we must realize. In addition, Kant thinks teleological judgment can help us to love nature, which relates to our duties (*LE* 27:668-9). Kant makes the following connection between judgments of beauty and teleological views of nature:

Once nature has been judged teleologically, and the natural purposes that we find in organized beings have entitled us to the idea of a vast system of purposes of nature, then even beauty in nature, i.e., *nature's harmony with the free play of our cognitive powers as we apprehend and judge its appearance, can similarly be considered as objective purposiveness, namely, of the whole of nature [regarded] as a system that includes man as a member.* We may regard nature as having held us in favor when it distributed not only useful things but a wealth of beauty and charms as well; and *we may love it* for this, just as its immensity may lead us to *contemplate it with respect [Achtung]* and to feel that we ourselves are ennobled in this contemplation – just as if nature had erected and decorated its splendid stage quite expressly with that aim (*CJ* 5:380, emphasis mine).

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22] The issue of invasive species and protectionism is particularly difficult (and has led to disputes between animal and environmental ethicists), and I do not mean to grapple with it in this short paper. At the very least, I hope to suggest that Kant has the resources to deal with such issues if we make use of his regulative account of natural systems, since such systems can always be viewed by teleological judgment as embedded in larger macro-structures. The tricky part, I admit, is where to draw the line to motivate concrete protectionism.

Aesthetic judgments of nature attune us, by making us more susceptible to disinterested reflection in the future, for reflecting on nature's systematicity and appreciating ecosystems with disinterest. Bridging Kantian aesthetics with teleology prepares the way, as the above passage suggests, for humanity to love nature and regard it with respect.<sup>23</sup> When we reflect on nature in this way, we can understand and appreciate how we are members of nature, not masters over it. This appreciation compels humanity to avoid being complicit in unnecessary harm toward nature. To put it simply and illustratively, if you appreciate the beauty of the butterfly and her relation to her ecosystem, you'll love her, and then you'll be more readily able to extend this love and care (as an imperfect duty) to the caterpillar and even the insects with which she feeds.

In line with the first mode of argument, if ecosystems are considered as beautiful objects, then we have additional reasons to not wantonly destroy them (just as we have duties not to wantonly destroy beautiful flowers or crystal formations).<sup>24</sup> To be clear, I am not saying that ugly or non-beautiful nature is beautiful; rather, it is by viewing an ecosystem as beautiful and thereby deserving of *prima facie* protection, that the parts that make up the ecosystem should also deserve a degree of consideration insofar as they are constitutive of it. In line with the second mode of argument discussed above, a Gaian appreciation and love of natural systems prepares us to realize our duties in regard to the nonrational flora and fauna that populate said natural systems, many creatures of which would otherwise remain concealed to us without teleological judgment.<sup>25</sup>

Because beautiful judgments are judgments concerning singular objects, it might be objected that an attempt to judge ecosystems as beautiful is misguided because these are dynamic systems or aggregates. To the contrary, I claim that if first, the insights of Kant's *CTJ* on how inquiry of organized beings motivates a view of nature in terms of organized systems and second, if *AB*'s injunction is only to consider those objects in nature beautiful that are singular which may include organisms, then this objection may be discharged. For, take an organism such as a beautiful flower (e.g., *CJ* 5:229); a Kantian account warrants judgment of this flower as beautiful provided the proper occasioning conditions for a judgment of taste obtain, discussed in *AB*. However, from the standpoint of *CTJ*, the flower (as an

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23] In *MM* (6:442), Kant argues that we only have duties "with regard to [*Ansehung*]" nonrational nature. In this passage from *CTJ*, however, "*Ansehung*" is not the technical term used. It is a curious question of how to interpret what Kant means by saying nature may be contemplated with respect.

24] Kant appears much stronger in condemning animal abuse than destruction of inanimate nature or flora. Rather than viewing this as a weakness, we may view this as a strength, as it allows us leeway to navigate between apparent moral dilemmas, as animal welfarists and environmental ethicists are wont to become embroiled. And, at the very least, it is clear that "wanton destruction" (*ein Hang zum bloßen Zerstören*, *MM* 6:443) of ecosystems without good reason will involve unnecessary animal suffering, so if the latter is to be favored the former must be considered.

25] See footnote 9 *supra*.

organized system) can be understood as composed of an interrelated aggregate of purposive objects; internally, the cells function to make the organs function, and externally, the flower maintains itself as a self-regulating system. I suggest it is the same with regard to ecosystems. Though it might seem counterintuitive to think of ecosystems as singular objects, especially since we often make use of abstract ideas such as “harmony” in describing them, I think the analogy between organisms and the harmony of their parts to ecosystems and their interconnected constituents helps clarify how this is possible.<sup>26</sup> We can understand an organism as a singular object of perception despite its manifold parts, and similarly, we can make sense of certain ecosystems as singular objects in a similar way, by means of teleological judgment (I admit that judging macro-ecosystems as objects appears problematic). Flora and fauna are viewed teleologically as cells that compose ecosystems, which are as it were organs that compose larger natural systems. If *AB* allows for judging organisms such as flowers as beautiful, why not allow for the possibility of judging ecosystems in like regard? And if the judgment of a flower as beautiful entails a duty to avoid wantonly destroying it, does not a similar judgment of an ecosystem also entail a similar duty for avoiding wanton harm?<sup>27</sup> To be sure, *pure* judgments of beauty link nicely with morality, whereas teleological judgment, with its connection to humanity and empirical concepts, is decidedly less pure. I stand with Allison on the important connection of natural beauty with appreciation and inquiry of natural systems, and suggest that even if we cannot make a pure judgment of an ecosystem as beautiful, we have reasons to protect it from the standpoint of humanity as the final end of nature (addressed in the conclusion of this paper). Alternatively, if we stipulate that it is possible to make a pure judgment of an ecosystem as beautiful, then the same sort of protectionism and non-exploitation that can be mobilized for beautiful flora and fauna can be extended further to ecosystems. This would consequently motivate protection of non-beautiful flora and fauna, given that they are constitutive of beautiful ecosystems, as marks are to a painting.

Paul Guyer and Allen Wood argue, in line with much of the foregoing, that Kantians may value non-rational nature by connecting aesthetic and teleological judgment to morality. For instance, according to Wood, “Kant thinks we also have moral duties regarding nature in general as regards what is beautiful or purposive in it. We must not wantonly destroy what is beautiful in non-rational nature” (Wood

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26] Symphonies (which, on a Kantian view can surely be judged as beautiful) are no less abstract than ecosystems, though both cannot easily be appreciated for their beauty in a single presentation due to the multiplicity of their parts. If ecosystems cannot be judged beautiful, it's difficult to understand how harmonious symphonies could be either.

27] Since our duties to nonrational nature are wide, we can easily limit them to cruel and destructive actions committed by humanity (such as factory farms or deforestation), not those done by other animals to animals or plants.

1998, 191). Additionally, Wood argues that Kant's teleological view about humanity as the ultimate end of nature is

[...] emphatically *not* a view of nature which sees it merely as a tool or raw material for human beings to do as they please [...] When we regard ourselves as the ultimate end of nature, we look at nature as a unified and harmonious teleological system – the term for it today would be 'ecosystem' – and we undertake the responsibility of shaping our ends in such a way that they provide this system with its crowning unity and harmony [...] of acting as preservers and guarantors of that system. (Wood 1998, 204)

Guyer supports the connections between aesthetic and teleological judgment with morality, but he sharpens this approach by emphasizing the heuristic importance of natural ends for making sense of the practical significance of nature understood as a harmonious system. On his reading, reflection on nature's beauty and purposive interconnectedness could not allow humanity to

[...] interpret morality to require the denial or destruction of nature within or without our own skins [...] the supposition that morality is an end of nature would be incompatible with any idea that morality could permit or require wanton destruction of natural resources without regard to the ecology of nature as a whole as an arena fit for continuing human habitation. (Guyer 2007, 93)

As Wood and Guyer make clear, aesthetic, and teleological judgments, as analyzed by Kant in *CJ*, have environmental implications that many traditional readers of Kant fail to consider. Because many commentators like Bilbro fail to engage the *CTJ*, they find little means to discuss how we may be motivated on Kantian grounds to protect natural systems. Wood and Guyer do a good job at showing how we may proceed in this respect, and in this paper, I hope to have explored in greater detail the environmental significance of the *CJ*, especially for our consideration of ecosystems.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

In the foregoing, I have presented two routes Kantians can pursue to defend protectionism, in addition to two modes of argumentation relating to the *CTJ*. These routes are not necessarily systematic, but are rather eclectic, meaning that the second can help supplement the first insofar as it runs into limitations for protectionism. First, appreciating nature's beauty disinterestedly fosters an injunction to preserve nature and avoid wanton destruction of it. Second, viewing nature teleologically, as an interconnected system, allows for us to conceive of natural systems as singular objects capable of disinterested appreciation, entailing similar injunctions against exploitation of ecosystems and natural resources. Additionally, teleological reflection of natural systems prepares us to realize our duties regarding nature, since it makes many aspects of systems, such as inconspicuous flora and fauna, visible. It is hard to protect flora and fauna if we fail to notice them in the first place. The Gaian-view of the *CTJ* brings such

entities in greater relief, and we can thereby make use of our duties from *MM* regarding them. Of course, it might be objected that the teleological view of nature from *CTJ* is problematic for protectionism since it is decidedly anthropocentric, instating humanity as the hegemonic final end of nature (*CJ* 5:429-36). To reply, it must be borne in mind that when we think about nature in these sections of the *CJ*, it is not from the standpoint of determinative judgment yielding theoretical cognition of nature; rather, teleological judgment is reflective, taking its standpoint from what must be posited by us in order to make sense of how nature could be amenable to our cognitive faculties. Moreover, Kant's discussion of morality and the final end of nature adopts a practical perspective, which means that even if humanity is the final end, we still have duties to not wantonly exploit or damage nature.<sup>28</sup> I agree that it is anthropocentric, even if only from a regulative perspective, but that this is not necessarily a problem for protectionism. In the Anthropocene, humanity as the dominant species of the planet has not only moral obligations to nature, but we also have existential reasons for protectionism: if we do not become stewards and alter our relationship to nature, we will face climate destabilization and societal collapse, spelling doom for untold numbers of humanity.

If we are to take seriously Kant's injunction that we view natural beauty with disinterested appreciation, we can begin the shift from exploitative and unsustainable despots to moral and benevolent stewards. For the reflection on beautiful nature, because of its disinterest, prepares us to value nature in non-instrumental terms in domains such as morality; it can thus aid us in discharging our moral duties to ends in themselves as well as those regarding nonrational nature. As stewards of nature, we do not destroy nature without good reason, and we understand the value of natural systems – both for the flourishing of nonrational nature and in light of our rational interest for scientific inquiry (*MM* 6:212). To be sure, making a judgment of beauty does not *necessarily* motivate protectionism, and it may seem that we are simply pushing the problem one step back. Thus, it is important to recognize that Kant's account of aesthetic judgment is merely one of the resources we can draw from in trying to motivate reasons to protect nature. One of the virtues of this approach is that it allows, akin to imperfect duties, for some leeway regarding decision-making about when there is a good reason to destroy nature. With this caveat, we can evade apparent ethical dilemmas since humanity ultimately has the final say.<sup>29</sup>

In the end, then, Kant's moral view of nature in *CJ* can be mobilized for altering how we have been treating nature thus far and henceforth. Though only one resource among many in our environmental toolbox, it is one that is nonetheless vital since

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28] See Guyer for more extensive attention to this objection (1993, 330-34).

29] A classic ethical dilemma in environmental ethics has to do with whether it is permissible to destroy a microecosystem to establish a school for a developing country. Bio- and eco-centrists are stuck with the hard problem of justifying whether the ecosystem has priority over the children. With a Kantian approach, though we have reason to protect said ecosystem, we may be able to justify destroying it to facilitate the sustainable progress of culture.

Kant's systematic philosophy is more defensible than many dogmatic approaches in environmental philosophy, and his philosophy has already been mobilized for other matters regarding international policy. This is indeed timely, since climate change, perhaps the biggest threat faced by humanity today, poses not only destruction to future and present humanity, but also to the stability of global biodiversity. With a sixth mass extinction underway, failure to act in line with sustainability precludes the possibility of appreciating much of nature, in addition to the massive failure that moral agents face regarding their duties toward nature. Our detour through the *CTJ* may help us in formulating this Kantian call to action since the Gaian-esque view that can be gleaned from it helps us to better appreciate natural systems and be less biased in assessing our duties regarding nonrational nature. Accordingly, the *CJ's* moral view of nature is one important tool that Kantians can draw from to justify regulatory change, and this vindicates Kant from those environmentalists who have marginalized him.

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