Re-envisioning Ruskin’s Types: Beautiful Order as Divine Revelation

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Abstract
The 19th-century art critic John Ruskin offers an intriguing approach to nature as ‘divine art’; he sees in natural beauty ‘types’ or artistic images of the Godhead. Ruskin’s epistemology requires some refinement, but he offers a potentially fruitful approach to the divine revealed in the natural world. I reformulate Ruskin’s typology with reference to the epistemology of Michael Polanyi: through this approach, one may enter into Ruskin’s Christian ‘vision’ of nature with its unique symbolic practice. From this standpoint, I develop Ruskin’s types relating to natural order. My claim, in line with Ruskin’s, is that within human experience of a beautiful world is a revelation of divine order.

Keywords
beauty, epistemology, John Ruskin, natural revelation, theological aesthetics

In the 18th century, the poet James Thomson remarked: ‘I know no subject more elevating … more ready to awake the poetical enthusiasm, the philosophical reflection, and the moral sentiment, than the works of Nature. Where can we meet with such variety, such beauty, such magnificence? All that enlarges and transports the soul!’ But 300 years later, the environmental aestheticians, J. Douglas Pournos, believes that modern aesthetics engages natural landscapes only with difficulty, since landscapes lack an author or authorial aesthetic. Under such tacit atheism, natural beauty lacks the context


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that is necessary for meaning, even as the human experience of natural beauty actually  

One thinker, however, who contributes significantly to the religious context for making sense of natural beauty is John Ruskin. Seen as the profound art critic of the 19th century, and perhaps of all time, Ruskin is an interesting religious figure, in that, at least in the early part of his life, he upheld a commitment to biblical revelation alongside an emphasis on the revelatory function of natural beauty.  

Ruskin’s understanding of beauty differs in some respects from mine, and the ‘types’ of God that he sees in natural beauty are certainly open to question and refinement. But his use of types makes possible a symbolism within which Augustine would call creation’s ‘divine art’ or ‘text’—a symbolism of natural beauty as a multifaceted ‘image’ of the divine.‘Typical’ beauty for Ruskin means that, within a certain theological framework, beautiful things in general typify God, while aspects of beautiful things typify aspects of God. These aspects of beauty are phenomena, such as order, repose, and boundlessness, and Ruskin perceives

3 I use beauty and the beautiful to refer to beautiful forms—that is, beauty manifested in a context—not to an abstract Platonic Form of beauty.

4 Ruskin was raised as an evangelical, but eventually moved away from his conservative view of the Bible. In Letter 33 of the Fors Clavigera, he denies that the Bible is the ‘Word of God’, however; in Letter 42 he calls his childhood learning of the Bible ‘the most precious, and, on the whole, the one essential part, of all my education.’ At the time of his writing on typi-
cal beauty, Ruskin seems to have held to biblical inspiration in the traditional sense, and his understanding of revelatory beauty is enabled for those holding higher views of Scripture (John Ruskin, Fors Clavigera: Letters to the Workmen and Labourers of Great Britain, in The Works of John Ruskin, vols. 27-28, ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (London: George Allen, 1967), 27, 409, 28: 102).

5 Augustine calls creation ‘divine art.’ For Paul Ricoeur, a text can be ‘any set of signs that may be taken as a text to decipher, hence a dream or somatic symptom, as well as a ritual, myth, a work of art, or a belief.’ This understanding of text involves ‘an enlarged concept of expression.’ Many different artistic and textual metaphors might be used for nature, each bringing out different aspects. ‘Scuplture’ and ‘drama’ are somewhat less metaphorical than ‘word’, ‘speech’, ‘text’, because they involve visual perception directly, whereas books, stories, and texts, unlike nature, are verbal, and only involve perceptual images indirectly as they are described verbally and formed mentally. But all of these metaphors connect with perception and perceptual images (Augustine, On the Trinity in The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, Part 1, vol. 5, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill [Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City, 1991], 6: 12; Paul Ricoeur, Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation, trans. Denis Savage [New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1979], 26).

By referring to both ‘images’ and ‘symbols’, I refer to artistic, non-verbal but commu-
nicative, representations of diverse kinds. I use symbol and image interchangeably to refer to the beautiful, however, symbol conveys the communicative, representational nature of an object, while image conveys its non-verbal, artistic character. My use of image is not restricted to the visual. I understand visual ‘images’ and other combinations of sense impres-
sions as potential sensor images. I do not use image or representation in the Platonic sense of imperceptible copies. Rather, I give beauty a proper artistic status of its own instead of an inferior status as ‘copy.’

6 These phenomena, in Michael Polanyi’s terms, through his own epistemic ‘vision’ of the world and through his unique symbolic ‘practice.’ In Polanyi’s epistemology, one gains access to a sphere of knowledge through practice or ‘field work’ within a particular discipline, whether it be a scientific or religious discipline. This means that one acquires skill with the discipline’s conceptual ‘tools’ and idioms, learning to ‘indwell’ them as part of a particular epistemic approach to, or vision of, the world.2

I suggest that we can, in this way, ‘indwell’ (that is, live and work within) Ruskin’s vision of the world with its symbolic approach to natural beauty, and in so doing, we will shed light on common human experiences of a beautiful world. This sort of sym-
bolic thinking, for Paul Ricoeur, is a practice by which we detect and decipher, illu-
minate and give order to our experience, potentially even our experience of God through the world. This claim that beauty reveals something of God’s nature (rather than project created qualities inappropriately upon God) is not the sort of claim that Ricoeur believes one can ‘prove’ but is rather a ‘wager’ that one can only ‘saturate’ with intelligibility through various rich descriptions of experience. But it is well worth exploring whether human beings, in relation to a beautiful world, might be able to acquire aesthetic, religious, and epistemic ‘beauty-skills’ through which God becomes knowable. God might reveal himself in this way, not simply because he himself might be, in some sense, beautiful, but because he chooses to communicate symbolically and aesthetically through creation’s art. Such communication could be effective apart from any qualitative ‘resemblance’ between that communication and the communicator. In fact, it would be better to say that such communication (that is, created, beautiful forms) aesthetically ‘complements’ God’s nature rather than resem-
bles it, much as works of art complement an artist’s vision or personality. This com-
plementarity could also be much like a figure in a painting that aesthetically complements the rest of the painting without strictly resembling it. And further, if this object happened to be covered up, one might even be able, given the rest of the paint-
ing, to imagine its general appearance.3

With this sort of approach in mind, I engage Ruskin’s understanding of order in natural beauty, seeing this order as aesthetically complementary and revelatory of divine harmonies, both within the Godhead and toward creation. But Ruskin’s formu-
lation of this general idea requires some refinement. In the first section, I describe and begin to reformulate Ruskin’s approach to natural beauty. In the second section, I rework Ruskin’s types relating to natural order (leaving aside for now his other types).4
Ruskin's Concept of Typical Beauty Modified

In the second volume of Modern Painters, Ruskin presents a unique view of natural beauty as a primarily religious and revelatory phenomenon. In the manuscript of this volume, he states: "all which is the type of God's attributes—which in any way or any degree—can ... fix the spirit ... on the types of that which is to be its food for eternity;—this and only this is in the pure and right sense of the word BEAUTIFUL." Ruskin sees in creation 'expressions' of God's nature that are found to be beautiful. These types of the Godhead, rather than being 'stamped upon matter for our teaching or enjoyment only,' are 'the necessary perfection of God's working, and the inevitable stamp of His image on what He creates.' The types, then, are artistic outworkings of God's nature rather than Platonic types or forms existing apart from God. Through this typological vision, beauty promises 'a communion ultimately deep, close, and conscious, with the Being whose darkened manifestations we here feebly and unhappily delight in.'

Seeing this revelation of God in creation is 'cause for thankfulness, ground for hope, anchor for faith.' Here Ruskin seems to be offering a more theoretical development of what his mentor Wordsworth called 'pregnant vision.'

While maintaining a position that is similar to Ruskin's, I seek to improve somewhat upon his epistemology. One problem with Ruskin's theory is that he overstates the importance of morality and the affections in appreending revelatory beauty, because he does not consider that we experience beauty through diverse metaphysical systems and epistic approaches to the world. We also evaluate and reflect upon our beauty experience, intellectually and religiously. Of course, this evaluation and reflection do not occur separately from affections, morals, and imagination — the contrary, these aspects of our knowing are intertwined inseparably. So Ruskin is correct that our heart response to God affects our theological and, therefore, our understanding of aesthetic experience: purity of heart can enable one to recognize beauty as revelation and be thankful to God for his gifts. In this sense, it is quite true that only 'the pure in heart ... shall see God' (Matt 5:8, RSV; 4:49–50). So I can concede to Ruskin that the ideal Christian, with the right theological outlook on nature, might 'see' God through the world's beauty through a particularly religious or non-religious aesthetic vision, with its own morality, affections, and reverence, whereas the current of a 'neutral' vision only impoverishes experience.

But despite Ruskin's epistemological emphasis on Christian morality and reverence, many people have no access to a Christian vision of the world. And many people also have

10 John Ruskin, Modern Painters, in The Works of John Ruskin, vols. 3–7, ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (London: George Allen, 1897), 4, 365, emphasis original. Here Ruskin seems to be not so much narrowing the scope of what is beautiful as he is claiming that all beauty is already typological in character.
11 Ibid., 4, 91.
12 Ibid., 4, 143.
13 Ibid., 4, 144–145.

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profound experiences of beauty without the purity of heart that Ruskin requires, and without making any explicit connection between natural beauty and God. So there would seem to be no moral or doctrinal prerequisite for encountering an 'excess' of meaning in the human experience of beauty. In Jean-Luc Marion's terms, our experience is 'sanctified': we know and experience more through the world than we perceive directly. Or in Polanyi's terms, beauty—experience could offer a 'transcendental' of transcendence.

Thus, non-theists, vaguely religious people, or lapse Christians could still experience God tacitly through beauty while hillwalking or gardener, but be less able or willing to connect their experience explicitly with God's influence or claim upon their lives. Even the atheist could apprehend revelatory beauty, displayed in glacial ice or ponda bear cubs, but set upon this revelation only in apparently non-religious ways, such as by becoming an artist or environmental activist. The non-believing environmentalist could still be living out a response to natural beauty's revelation, as it imparts an implicitly eschatological hope for a redeemed order between nature and humanity. Similarly, the artist in painting a landscape could be replying in kind (implicity) to creation's revelatory artwork, much as a theologian draws up more prosaic descriptions of the world. These 'non-religious' responses to revelation may not benefit from conscious recognition or acceptance of God's self-disclosure, but this does not make them less important in their own right for being only implicitly moral or theological, as Ruskin seems to think, probably due to his evangelical background. Ruskin even claims that one can always recognize the work of a moral artist as superior to that of an immoral one, owing to the latter's merely aesthetic rather than moral perception. But I do not follow Ruskin here in giving primacy to the moral and affective over the sensory and cognitive in beauty—experience, except insofar as morality and affections influence one's theological understanding of beauty.

Re-envisioning the Typological Approach

Still Ruskin may well be correct in his central claim that it is beauty's artistic and microcosmic presentation of deity that produces pleasure in the viewer. Ruskin emphasizes six types of the Godhead in the constitutions of beauty: unity, the type of divine comprehensiveness; symmetry, the type of divine justice; moderation, of divine government by law; purity, of divine energy; repose, of divine permanence; and infinity, of divine incomprehensiveness. In volume five of Modern Painters he adds to his list colour, the type of divine love. But for present purposes, I will focus only on the types of unity, symmetry, and moderation under the broader heading of natural order.

16 Polanyi, Personal, 90, 94; Michael Polanyi and Harry Prosch, Meaning (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1975), 61; Michael Polanyi, The Tactful Dimension (London: Routledge, 1968), 4.
17 Ruskin, Modern Painters, 4, 211–212.
18 See ibid., 4, 144.
19 Ibid., 4, 76–145.
20 Ibid., 7, 417–419.
Ruskin's typology is noteworthy in that it permits no superficial reading of God the face of nature but requires thought and reflection (often theologically informed reflection) upon nature itself. And perhaps we require even more thought and reflection on nature than Ruskin did, because our culture is more alienated from nature than his: urbanites today know less about birds and wildflowers than did city-dwellers of the past, when economies were more agriculturally based. Ruskin's typology also requires a poetic sensibility toward nature that is nurtured by theism but unadorned by modern naturalistic science. Ruskin himself was especially gifted with poetic imagination, but he also lived in an age that was more gifted with sight toward creation. The 19th century was more concerned to find God in nature, especially through the influence of natural theology and literary figures such as Wordsworth. Even Wordsworth may even have inspired Ruskin's concept of types with his "types and symbols of Eternity." Such readings of nature were encouraged by a more pervasively religious Zeitgeist, since only religion can legitimately extract poetry from, and attribute art to, the natural world while naturalistic science must smudge into nature as the work of human subjectivity apart from God.

But in interpreting creation's art, as with the work of any human artist, we must be cautious in affirming that a particular flourish of divine style reveals God in a way that we can apprehend. Although Ruskin's typology is quite restrained in comparison to, for example, Jonathan Edwards's or John Keble's, his affirmations can still be overly ambitious, and he criticizes this tendency in himself in his 1883 commentary on Modern Painters.22 Ruskin's ambition stems partly from his belief that beautiful forms reveal a

21 On this connection between agricultural economies and knowledge of nature, see Richard Adams, Introduction to Pilgrim at Tinker Creek, by Annie Dillard (London: Picador, 1985), 8.
23 See, for example, Ruskin, Modern Painters, 4: 112 n. Edwards, for example, understands the sky's pale blue to typify the seen's humility and "holy passiveness" (id.), and he connects water to sin through its "flattening" and decentrality. Keble links flying birds to "Powers in heaven above who watch our proceedings," and through Ambrose, understands the moon reflecting the sun to typify the church (Jonathan Edwards, Images or Shadows of Divine Things 114, 117, in Typological Writings, in The Works of Jonathan Edwards, vol. 11, ed. Wallace E. Anderson and Mason I. Lovcance Jr with David Watters [New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1993], 94; Keble, 147–148, 156, 119).

fairly extensive range of monotheistic attributes. He also assumes that his readers possess some prior understanding of these divine attributes, and so he tends to read attributes into nature even where they do not seem readily apparent from nature. But despite this tendency, Ruskin's types are significant, because they highlight vague elements of the human experience of natural beauty—elements that all religious (and perhaps non-religious) people can share, even if they share them only through very diverse symbolic descriptions and practices. Non-monotheists, with no doctrinal understanding of divine attributes, might still have an awareness that something deeper is occurring in their experience of an aurora or a sea eagle in flight. This differently-skilled experience of being able to describe it in terms of Ruskin's chosen divine attributes could still intimate something like divine order, permanence, or infinity, but take on somewhat different character 'shapes.' This is because these shareable elements of experience are only shareable in more or less symbolized and conceptualized ways, and people symbolize and conceptualize experience in more or less skilled ways according to different metaphysical visions of the world. But in many cases the lack of a more general, universal aspect of human experience—our perception of a beautiful against God's designing beauty to point to him, given that beauty's revelation is non-verbal concepts are ready to hand. People draw on very different conceptual frameworks to describe their experience, and owing to these different frameworks, their descriptions are veritable to varying degrees and often in need of refinement, especially (from a Christian perspective) in light of monotheistic and Christian truth. 24

24 But Ruskin does give this disclaimer: "Let... the reader bear constantly in mind that I assert not on his accepting any interpretation of mine, but only on his dwelling so long on those objects which he perceives to be beautiful, as to determine whether the qualities to which I trace their beauty be necessarily there or not" (Ruskin, Modern Painters, 4: 91).
25 By "differently-skilled," I mean non-monotheistic—not skilled in the theological resources of the monotheistic religions or the specifically Christian eschatological vision of the world (e.g. the image of Christ and Christology), but utilizing the skills of other religious traditions according to their own unique metaphysical and epistemic visions.
26 All of this is compatible with Ruskin's qualification: I 'have, throughout the examination of Typical beauty, asserted our instinctive sense of it; the moral meaning of it being only discernible by reflection' (Ruskin, Modern Painters, 4: 211).
of human experience. And with such a tool we may discover more than we would otherwise. So Christian truth need not be something imposed inappropriately upon the world, but can be part of the heuristic vision through which the world is ‘discovered,’ becomes intelligible, and is understood correctly. In this sense, experience and religious understandings of experience are not so separable or distinguishable, because our religious understandings are also part of our experience. Moreover, there is no ‘pure’ experience uncoloured by our prior understandings. There is rather a complex, mutual interchange of meaning between experience and religious vision, with each shaping the other. But by recognizing the importance of human experience of the world, and by engaging it theologically, albeit through a Christian vision, Ruskın’s approach is distinct from a theology of nature built solely upon Scripture and tradition. And at the other end of the spectrum, his approach is also distinct from a putatively neutral natural theology, since, in the interests of neutrality, natural theology forfeits the richness and resources of the Christian vision. The result is that natural theology merely constitutes its own attenuated epistemic vision. But despite the contribution of a Christian vision, non-Christian understandings of the world are not categorically untrue for being made without the light of Christian truth, because they can be seen as less skilled, or often just differently skilled, understandings of the same revelation. All such understandings, including Christian ones, are by nature indefinite: they are like the different understandings given by different instructors as to the correct way to swing a golf club, and such ‘instruction’ relates to the development of our beauty-skills and symbolic practices. We require this sort of instruction or guidance on how to perceive and understand the beautiful, and in this respect Ruskın’s typology (or a modification thereof) becomes important as an instructional ‘pointer.’ As we appropriate Ruskın’s epistemic vision and symbolic practice and ‘live within it,’ his types give general form and direction to our more particular, nonverbal experiences of beauty. This typological form and direction help to shape our skills and practice, which contribute to a larger whole than our recognition of individual types alone. This larger whole of our aesthetic apprehension is like the mastery of a painter, which comprises a wide range of brushstrokes, shading techniques, and thematic knowledge, but surpasses each of those by integrating techniques with unconscious ease. The painter’s mastery gives rise to the overall excellence of the painting, while our understanding and integration of specific elements in the painting allow us to recognize its aesthetic power. In a similar way, we can learn to see better the brushstrokes within creation from aesthetic, scientific, and religious angles and, thereby, to understand better the divine artist. These brushstrokes may not always take on the character of distinct types in our experience, since, as we walk outdoors on a particular day, we may only take note of, say, strikingly bright planes amid bold lines and shadows. Yet this clean strikingness may also speak of God in its own way. Due to this complexity and variability in our beauty-experience, we can move beyond types of divine attributes to include a broader symbolic ‘beauty-practice’ within creation’s

Nevertheless, I do not attempt to prove, but only dare to conceive, this possibility that Christian theism allows us to know more than do other worldviews.

27 Ruskın, Modern Painters, 4: 76, 91, 211. Ruskın says that his types are only the most ‘palpable and powerful’ of the ‘infinites ways’ that matter may ‘put us in mind’ of divine perfections (Ruskın, Modern Painters, 4: 76).

29 Though it might be defended through appeal to a retributive theory of justice (‘an eye for an eye’)—an appeal that I will consider shortly.

30 Polanyi, Personal, 208.
newly integrated meanings—that is, meanings linked to, or ‘captured’ by, a symbolic focal centre. These are new ‘discourses’ of reality's continued unveiling that cannot be fully predicted before we in fact discover them.\(^3\) By this working within and heuristic extending of Ruskin's symbolic practice, we can say something not only about God, but in the very process of knowing God through nature, we can also come to recognize something about humanity in relation to God and creation. In this way, a personal and communal reshaping of Ruskin's vision opens up new epistemic vistas and horizons, potentially deepening and enriching our understanding of divine revelation.

But despite my reshaping of Ruskin's types, I retain his general approach to typical beauty as symbolic of the divine. And it is an approach that Ruskin himself does not overturn despite all his later hedges and revisions to Modern Painters, implying that he found it compatible with Darwinism and his own later, less evangelical, outlook on Christianity.

From Ruskin's typology, it appears that beauty reveals nothing inconsistent with, or drastically different from, special revelation. But by revealing in a different way—through creation's art, though the senses—beauty further our understanding, our overall picture of God, much as human art furthers our understanding of doctrine, and reveals something about our humanity that cannot be translated fully into words.\(^2\) And though God's art in nature in natural beauty cannot resemble God himself as ‘wholly other,’ we are not thereby forced onto the other horn of an unpleasant ‘either-or’ dilemma we need not plunge into the apocalyptic abyss of God as je ne sais quoi (I know not what). Rather, God's art might at least give us an aesthetically complementary picture of his nature—an artistic image that ‘fits along with’ his nature, and in that sense reveals the divine. And if natural beauty does communicate something in this way that is irreducible and not fully translatable, how much less can we afford to ignore its message? If beauty images what cannot be fully verbalized, then beauty's revelations, in a profound sense, can only be accessed through beauty.

### The Revelation of Beautiful Order

In addition to this need to access beauty's revelation through beauty, a further constraint is that beauty's symbolisms are not fully separable into constituents. Beauty as a whole might image God in ways that aspects of beauty cannot, much as a myth analyzed and demythologized cannot bear the same meaning as the myth itself, and the divine essence cannot be rightly divided.\(^3\) But despite this caution, we must somehow obtain greater purchase on what beauty might symbolically reveal. Ruskin does this by examining perceived aspects of beauty, and one such aspect to consider is order.

The Psalms' view of nature emphasizes order through God's immanence, his abiding and ordering power within his creation.\(^4\) Such divine presence in nature is consistent with violent change and cataclysm, but Ruskin holds that natural beauties also manifest ‘a holy reverence, beyond and out of their own nature, to great harmonies by which they are governed, and in obedience to which is their glory.’\(^5\) Certainly there is a profound order to creation, a unified complexity at every conceivable level of reality: cosmological, geological, ecological, physiological, cellular, chemical, and physical, to say nothing of mind—matter or spirit—matter interactions. Even at the apparently chaotic level of molecular and subatomic motion, the axiom ‘from nothing, nothing comes’ seems applicable, in that order cannot arise without a priori from an absolute disorder. Whatever chaos there is in creation is bounded and checked by order.

A strong connection between natural order and beauty is also made by the environmental philosopher and ‘father of environmental ethics,’ Holmes Rolston. Rolston examines the scientific complexities of life in diverse ecosystems such as savannas and alpine regions, and he suggests that beauty arises out of this ecological complexity. He observes that nature at the extreme ends of the size continuum (subatomic and cosmological) displays the least complexity, while the mid-levels of scale occupied by humans (e.g., ecosystems and the psyche) display the most. Thus human beings do not live at the level of the mysteriously large or small but at the level of the mysteriously complex.\(^6\) It is precisely at this human level of reality that beauty becomes significant as a combined subjective-objective phenomenon. Beauty, personality, and ordered complexity are allied in the created order.

### Natural Order and Creation's Art

Thus Ruskin confines himself appropriately to natural order, to logos or divine wisdom, 'submissively acknowledging the great laws by which the earth and all that bears are ruled throughout their being.'\(^7\) In this respect, Ruskin agrees with Augustine, for whom order is central to God's revelation through beauty. In Augustine's aesthetic, order belongs to God primordially and therefore functions as an image of God that is manifest in created

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31 See Polesny and Poches, Meaning, 62-63.
32 Karl Rahner emphasizes how art communicates what cannot be put into words (Karl Rahner, 'Theology and the Arts,' Thought 57 [1992]: 17-29).
33 On demythologization as a reduction or change in meaning, see David Brown, 'God and Symbolic Action,' in Divine Action: Studies Inspired by the Philosophical Theology of Aquinas, ed. Brian Hebblethwaite and Edward Hussey (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990), 120-121.
34 Ps 1, 8; 19: 1-6; 24: 1-2; 33: 6-9; 50: 9-11; 65: 5-13; 74: 13-17; 104: 133: 3; 135: 5-7; 136: 4-9; 25; 147: 4-9; 15-18; 48.
35 Ruskin, Modern Painters, 4: 140.
36 See Holmes Rolston, III on size, complexity, and humanity (Holmes Rolston, III, 'Cosmological Aesthetics: Over our Heads and/or in our Heads,' paper presented at the conference on 'Cosmological Aesthetics: Aesthetics of Sky, Space, and Heaven' [Finland, March 2009], 18-19).
beauty. But Ruskin also leaves room for the artistic element in natural beauty, noting that 'love of order' is not 'love of art.' He acknowledges that order is necessary to art, just as tone and punctuality, 'an ordered room, or a skilful piece of manufacture,' 'rules and different things' or the same things in different ways. 38 Ruskin makes these statements in Ruskin allows natural beauty also to say new and different things through God's creative production and our creative reception of beauty. In other words, beauty is able to function within the context of creation's art. Natural beauty can say different things through its different configurations of order, such that an orchard, a stag, and a mountain will display somewhat different natural orders and therefore communicate differently as art.

Ruskin's artistic outlook on creation, however, stands in marked contrast to our aesthetic appreciation of nature. He also suggests that order and complexity. 39 Surely order and complexity contribute to beauty, and science does not provide a complete explanation for our experience of natural beauty. We do not need to become scientists who are conscious of nature's every mechanism in order to appreciate beautiful mountain groves and streams above tranquil lakes. Rather, exciting an admiration of the Creator above and beyond our appreciation of intricate mechanisms—mechanisms that may or may not in themselves be beautiful. 40 In this natural beauty to science; for, as George MacDonald notes, natural beauty is the 'laboured.' 41 Ruskin's scientific approach also suggests an overly objective understanding of beauty—on that overlooks the style of the divine artist in favour of mechanism, and minimizes the felt quality of the perceivable in favour of objective order. Ruskin also blur the distinction between beauty and intrinsic, and this blurring eventuates in his calling the ugly, but elaborate, aspects of nature 'beautiful.' 42

38 God's 'repose appear in creation in a way that is fitting. In that supreme triad is the source of all things, and the most perfect beauty' (Augustine, On the Trinity, 213).
39 Ruskin, See Stories, 170-172.
41 Richard St John Tyrwhitt points out that our aesthetic appreciation involves more than appreciation of design (Richard St John Tyrwhitt, The Natural Pantheology of Natural Beauty (Oxford: Tyrwhitt, 1720), 67).
42 George MacDonald, A Dish of Ores (London: Sampson Low, Marston, 1893), 258-259.
44 But even Ruskin is nearly led into a similar blurring of art at the feet of nature, leaving his view of order in relation to art still lacking. Due to his strong commitment to strictly natural order (meaning for him order that is observable in and derivable from nature), he adopts the antithesis of the classical aesthetic. In the name of 'obedience to nature,' he rejects classical architecture in favour of the Gothic. 44 Ruskin may be correct in highlighting the merits of the Gothic, but he pushes the point too far. There is room for revelatory potential in both. For surely God can speak in different ways through different freedom and extravagance in the Gothic vaults and spires.

Like architecture, the natural world must be allowed a similar freedom of expression as a divine work of art. Even mountains, once symbols of evil for some theologians, is not to say that all natural order is beautiful, or that no beauty-skills are required to see mountainous landscapes as ordered beauty rather than merely sublime or dominating. But there is still a common element in the human experience of ordered beauty that people symbolize and partly conceptualize in different ways. Even with such common experience, mountains need not be either wholly positive or wholly negative aspects of nature. In their size, height, and danger they can be destructively sublime as easily as they are beautiful. Along with factors, they can also be nature's beautiful cathedrals, while man-made cathedrals can be seen as variations on their structure. 45 Given such beauty-experience, it is not surprising that many ancient cultures besides Israel symbolize the meeting place between the human and divine by a sacred mountain (mammade in experience of natural beauty suggests that God 'dare not live in temples built by hands') and of God's dwelling place cannot be thus confined, neither can his creation of beauty be constrained by human conceptions of order. If the earth itself is his creation 'with its fount of waters, and mountain pillars, and vaults of clouds,' then no less than sacred architecture, the earth in its ordered beauty also speaks of God. 46

44 See Ruskin, See Stories, 173.
45 On the differing messages of the Gothic and the Romanesque, see David Brown, God and the Enchantment of Place: Reclaiming Human Experience (Oxford: Oxford University, 2004), 153.
46 Thomas Burnet, for example, called mountains 'the noise of a broken world.' See Marjorie Nicolson on 16th- and 17th-century theological explorations of topography (Thomas Burnet, Sacred Theory of the Earth, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: 1711), 144-145). Marjorie Nicolson, Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory: The Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite (Seattle: University of Washington, 1997), 82-83.
47 See Ruskin, Modern Painters, 4: 425.
49 Ruskin, Modern Painters, 7: 114.
A Reformulation of Ruskí's Types Dealing with Order

With special relevance to natural order, Paul Tillich draws attention to 'the inexhaustible richness' of objects in 'sober, objective, quasi-scientifically observed reality.' Tillich even without displaying an overt naturalism,50 similarly, when artists, such as Dutch landscape painters, celebrate the beauty of objects as they are, their work can be read as art also applies fittingly to Ruskí's locus of revelation in natural beauty, because beauty manifests ultimate reality as we see it, and observe the inexhaustible richness of material order. This richness of order is a matter of perceiving the transcendental depth of objects given their inherent form, such that, for Jacques Maritain, like Augustine, ordered forms are 'a vestige or ray of the creative intelligence imprinted at the heart of created things.'51 This understanding of ordered form is also conducive to Ruskí's typology of flowers or trees, shell or rock, or oak or pine. Of course, non-religious people might deny such creative intelligence, and interpret beautiful order only in terms of the aesthetic richness of an ordered cosmos. But theists can experience beautiful order as the fulfillment of God's existence and life, which also unfolds and interacts closely with creation. And by entering further into a Christian epistemic vision, Christians can make sense of beautiful order in terms of the harmonious interaction and interdependence of the divine persons. Thus, although beauty does not reveal threefoldness, it can reflect God's triune harmony within himself and toward creation.

Ruskí discusses order under the headings of no less than five separate types or qualities displayed in natural beauty: unity, symmetry, moderation, purity, and infinity. In this essay I will only consider the first three that I believe are reducible to natural experience, these three qualities (in nature not so much individually, but more generically. 52 Therefore, in contrast to Ruskí, I maintain that unity, symmetry, and moderation do not reveal distinctly different aspects of God so much as they bring to light the harmony of the divine nature and its implications in slightly different ways.

51 On this reading of landscape painters, see Brown, Enchantment, 112.
52 Maritain expresses the idea in terms of splendor formae, that is, the principle which constitutes the proper perfection of all that is... the ontological secret that they bear within them, their spiritual being, their operating mystery' (Jacques Maritain, Art and Scholasticism and the Frontiers of Poetry, trans. Joseph W. Evans [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1902], 24–25).
53 But this experiment need not be conceptualized exactly as I conceptualize natural order, for example, by someone with no scientific knowledge.

Unity, Symmetry, and Moderation: Natural Order Reflecting Divine Order

Not all natural order is beautiful, but in the beautiful, all 'connection and brotherhood' among elements strike us as both 'pleasant and right,' reflecting Ruskí's understanding of unity: the aspect of order that contributes to beauty by joining various parts.54 Without such unity among parts, newness and variety alone cannot produce beauty; for even a complete kaleidoscope does not produce totally new things, but only ordered re-combinations that must display a certain unity.55 This unity is present even in the great diversity of natural forms, which do not weary the mind or senses, as do too much change or repetition in the same thing. Nature's diverse unity hold our attention, supporting Ruskí's unity of nature, and demonstrating that 'complexity need not involve confusion.'56

An example of this natural unity is the central theme unifying many variations, like the basic order of a tree uniting many different species of tree, such that beauty obtains in both similarities and differences among species. Similarly, Ruskí notes the 'unity of membership' among parts of the body or nature in a harmony, as well as the 'original unity' of objects originating from the same source, such as petals of a flower or branches of a tree. There is also a 'sequential unity' in the progression of musical notes in a melody, and a 'submedicinal unity' among many objects subjected to the same force, such as waves or clouds ordered by the same wind.57

Symmetry also is a kind of unity of parts, although Ruskí distinguishes it from unity, describing symmetry as a separate type of divine justice.58 Ruskí was probably eager to find a trace of God's moral nature in creation, Nevertheless, the similarity between equal at best. Moreover, the God of the Bible seems to deal with human beings in peculiarly ways that pose an inequality between what is desired and what is received. One might wonder: 'Is this really a conflict of values or a conflict of values that is even more, the conflict of justice and symmetry by saying that justice excludes exclusion is still somewhat artificial and does not factor extenuating circumstances into account well beyond the reach of physical symmetry. Given a fuller account of justice, one better than a simple, bilateral symmetry, it seems a more difficult to experience a sense of justice through order or symmetry. Therefore, symmetry as a type, like symmetry as a beauty-property, fits more appropriately within the broader categories of unity and
order. Both symmetry and other kinds of unity seem to be experienced in beautiful forms in roughly the same way. 

Ruskin describes another aspect of unified order under the heading of moderation—
that is, the aesthetic moderation of form and colour in the beautiful, without which forms become ungraceful, movement violent, and colours glaring in comparison to nature's subtle and almost unnoticeable curves and colours. 59 This aesthetic moderation provides the unified backdrop that makes peacock feathers and swallowtail butterflies aesthetic extravagances by comparison. Ruskin understands this aesthetic moderation to be the type of divine governance by law, bringing into focus another facet of God's ordered relationship with creation. In this relationship, moderation expresses what Ruskin calls divine self-government: the divine nature that is in no way above God and thus able to constrain him, but that flows freely from his being into the physical and moral order of creation. 60 Because of this self-government, God is not capricious or arbitrary but committed to governance through laws flowing from his being. These divine laws are expressed in a natural beauty displaying an ordered and appropriate moderation.

Ruskin believes that this aesthetic moderation also explains the degrees and absences of beauty in nature: he believes that there are absences of beauty for the purpose of highlighting the types by contrast with their absence. 61 But a better explanation for these absences is that all cannot be equally beautiful simply as the result of an intricate and free created order. Freedom in the created order involves constants working together with variables, and only this arrangement can produce so many diverse and complex natural beauties, carving out braided rivers instead of canals and growing gnarled tree trunks instead of pillars. This natural diversity requires so much freedom that we can rightly wonder at how nature allows for so many beauties without producing more monsters. 62 Yet even the forms that lack beauty are not usually monstrous: they are often odd or interesting. If God takes pleasure in the odd and interesting in nature as well as the beautiful, then an equal distribution of beauty might have proved undesirable by excluding giraffes, dinosaurs, and hippopotami, the delights of all children.

Whether we consider this free natural order in terms of unity, symmetry, or moderation, creation is full of harmonious rapport, both among objects, and between objects and subjects. These reports include the interrelated orderings of days, months, seasons, and ecological rhythms, as well as the interdependent ordering of elements in beautiful wholes. Elements such as colour, pitch, curve, size, and location have an inseparable dependency on each other's being within a beautiful whole. 63 This beautiful interdependency as Ruskin notes, often 'has no reference to ultimate ends' but 'is itself, seemingly, the end of operation to many of the forces of nature.' 64 But this end in nature is also a

66 Ruskin understands material unity to typify 'divine comprehensiveness,' which means God's immediate and all-encompassing relationship with creation, rather than God's own inner being (4: 92). But it is difficult to separate God's inner being from his comprehensive relationship with creation, because this relationship is not the outworking of God's inner comprehensiveness of being.
67 See Ruskin, Modern Painters, 4: 93.

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