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"Sense and Sensibility. Editorial"

Brady, Emily

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I could write reams about why this dam project is a tragedy for Iceland's environment, but the topic of this editorial is, more modestly, to reflect on the contribution made by careful perceptual attention, or sensibility, for valuing natural environments. In many cases—but not all surely—sensibility of the perceptual kind leads to sense or sensibility of the more common sense, intellectual kind, as in having good sense or being reasonable. Something like this happens in various forms of natural scientific understanding which begin with close perceptual attention, and scientists often claim that their interest in insects, plants, animals, rocks and so on, originates in explicit forms of valuing nature that depend upon sensibility, such as wonder, beauty and sublimity. Given their etymology, it perhaps comes as no surprise that sense and sensibility are linked; however, there is a tendency to set the two in opposition, especially when aesthetic sensibility is contrasted with forms of rationality (as expressed in Jane Austen's novel, Sense and Sensibility). Some of the articles here articulate a set of tensions that relate more or less directly to the debate between humanism and anti-humanism in environmental thought, a debate which has been explored a great deal in the pages of this journal and beyond (see, for example, Attfield 2005; Hinchman 2004; Hepburn 1998; Ehrenfeld 1978). The two positions are not irreconcilable though: the connections between sense and sensibility and the ways they feed upon one another may provide some promise toward reconciliation.
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