

Hepburn's Metaphysical Imagination in Natural Aesthetics and Its Implications for Aesthetic Education

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Abstract:

This article aims to explore the implications of R. M. Hepburn's metaphysical imagination in natural aesthetics for aesthetic education through a literature review. Hepburn, a renowned British philosopher, pioneered contemporary research in natural aesthetics. He pointed out that metaphysical imagination can be constructed as a metaphysically significant way of "seeing as" or "interpreting as," involving the totality of experience. This concept has four key characteristics:

1. Deriving metaphysical aesthetic experience from the concrete features of an object.

2. Experiencing metaphysical beauty through the subject-object relationship:

Hepburn believes that *the sense of being one with nature* is a prime example of an abstract metaphysical concept. When immersed in a landscape, we can contemplate the perceptual analogies between ourselves and the environment. For instance, we may feel our bodies connected to nature, sensing that its life is also our life—we breathe its air and share the warmth of the sun. The branching of tree limbs and leaves mirrors the branching of our blood vessels, while the gentle, rhythmic motion of waves lapping against the shore resembles the steady rhythm of our breathing. Being one with nature is an aesthetic experience of harmony, resonance, reconciliation, and rhythm, rather than merely an intellectual acknowledgment.

3. Deriving metaphysical beauty from the unity of contradictions or the co-presence of opposites:

For example, when admiring a vast autumn forest of golden larch trees, the light spreads evenly and diffusely throughout the woods, creating an aesthetic experience filled with two seemingly contradictory emotions, such as tranquility and excitement, or drama and serenity. This paradoxical feeling is akin to what Wordsworth described in his experience of mountainous landscapes—a combination of *tumult* and peace.

4. The Metaphysical Aesthetics of Infinity:

A landscape extending endlessly into the distance, bathed in sunlight, or a vast, tranquil night sky can simultaneously evoke a sense of serenity, benevolence (*benign*), and continuity that transcends nature itself. This experience creates a feeling of *serene unbounded extrapolations*, an aesthetic perception of "infinity."

Based on Hepburn's theories, this paper proposes four implications for aesthetic education:

1. Transitioning from sensory appreciation to metaphysical imagination.
2. Teaching students to experience the aesthetics of being one with nature.
3. Teaching students to experience the beauty of the unity of contradictions.
4. Teaching students to experience the metaphysical aesthetics of infinity.

Keywords:

Metaphysical Imagination, Being One with Nature, Infinity, Aesthetic Education.