

I'm writing this at six in the morning on a bank of the River Wye. The river is beautiful. It doesn't just look beautiful. It sounds beautiful, because I can hear the edges of the river trickling past the roots of the trees that line its banks and dip their branches back into the river. I can hear the birds too. The birds may not be part of the river, but they are part of the beauty of the river. Every so often I hear cars in the distance, getting more frequent, nibbling away at the beauty. But the river is still beautiful. It doesn't just feel beautiful, it is beautiful.

At least, that's how it feels to me. People will say, "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder" – it's a matter of opinion. But that doesn't sit right with me. If beauty is in the eye of the beholder, then if I stop "beholding" the river, its beauty stops. But the river will still be beautiful when I stop looking at it. In fact, and it really seems like a fact to me, the heart of the beauty of the river is that it will carry on being beautiful without me. There is something beautiful in knowing that when I leave, the river will still be sliding between its banks, staying beautiful until I see it again. Even when I see it for the last time, and never see it again. Even if nobody was ever here to see it.

Maybe there's a clue in the phrase, "I find the river beautiful". People say, "I find..." as a way to say I'm expressing an opinion, I'm *just* expressing an opinion, feel free to disagree, don't mind me. But to find something, it has to be there already. I don't make the river beautiful. I find it beautiful. And next year, when I come back, I will find the beautiful river again.