



THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MAN AND NATURE AS REFLECTED IN HUMAN CONSCIENCE

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Abstract: *Man's removal from the natural environment and his anthropocentric positioning in the anthropic environment are the result of a long cultural development. The path from man as part of nature to man as the master of nature goes through changing patterns of thought and action. Founding/cosmogonic myths have supported, in the consciousness of humanity, the feeling of belonging to nature as a place of genesis and the becoming of man. When man was no longer identified with nature and extracted from its systemic functioning, he became a user of the resources generously offered by nature. Thus, the development of human habitats was done with the decline of the natural environment and at the expense of the alienation of man from nature. The nature that gives us everything and does not request anything in return now appears as a lost paradise that we are looking for inside us. The operation of the natural environment on Earth is a model of systemic organization in which the intelligence of matter is an everyday observable reality. Living according to natural rules is a profoundly religious experience of meeting with eternity, finding the lost paradise. That is why the return to nature in the sense of observing and reproducing a model of action and organization, validated by the very functionality of the planet, may be the solution to the salvation of human society from self-destruction. In the first part of the article, the authors deal with patterns of thought and action in the relationship between man and nature in archaic societies versus contemporary society, continuing with aspects of human intervention in the functioning of natural systems. At the end of the article, the authors emphasize the need of a shift in paradigm in the approach to nature. In conclusion, modern man's attempt to dominate and control nature has only disturbed and distorted the natural environment on Earth. All the aggressive changes induced on nature produce natural hazards that can no longer be managed and controlled, turning into threats to human society. In this context, the paradigm shift means respect for nature, understanding its functioning mechanisms, and developing a preventative behavior to preserve the natural balance of the environment.*

Keywords: *man -nature report, consciousness, matter intelligence, environment, human society*

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Introduction

This work intends to investigate the way which evolves from the sacred to the profanity of man's historical and cultural transformation, influences his relationship with nature. The removal of his spiritual essence and the exacerbation of the material aspect of his existence we consider to be the reality of our day, which empties the life of metaphysical significance and produces an existential crisis. The inner goal is offset by compulsive consumption of goods and services that induce shyness and dependence, a self-estrangement, and the nature of the human being as a dynamic system. If the traditional worlds were directly connected to the dynamics of natural systems by a communion of man with nature, the present world is connected to the modern world system. To dominate the present context is the instinct of the gain that apparently brings wealth, but still produces a fall of the moral energies of man and, at the same time, an unprecedented destruction of nature.

We think that the way in which man, through different patterns of thought, has interacted with nature throughout history has transformed him from an element of nature in a dynamic system into a consumer of goods and services offered by nature. This has two consequences: once, it is the destiny of alienation of nature and, second, a process of destroying nature.

The mythical thinking and the sanctification of nature in archaic societies

In the attempt to define himself and to find an identity in relation to the surrounding reality, the archaic man resorted to symbols, myths and rituals, whose significance reveals the awareness of a particular situation by comparison with the Cosmos, thus substituting the direct acknowledgement of nature by coherent concepts. In this context, the objects have no intrinsic autonomous value; they become real only as much as they belong to a transcending reality. The objects acquire meaning and value only if they are impregnated with magical or religious power. The gestures and the actions become meaningful only if they belong to a transcending reality in which a primordial action repeats itself. Consequently, for the archaic man, reality is a function of imitating a celestial archetype, while the rituals and the significant profane gestures become meaningful only because they repeat actions performed *ab origine* by gods (Eliade, 2008, p. 13).

In *'The Myth of the Eternal Return'*, Mircea Eliade made an inventory of a series of celestial archetypes which corresponded to certain terrestrial realities. According to the beliefs in ancient Mesopotamia, the river Tigris had its pattern in the star Anunit, whereas the river Euphrates in the star Swallow. For the people living in the Altai, the mountains had an ideal correspondent in the Sky. In the Iranian cosmology, each abstract or concrete terrestrial phenomenon corresponded to a translucent and invisible celestial term. All Babylonian cities had their archetypes in constellations, and for the Jews, God had created a celestial Jerusalem before the earthly city of Jerusalem was built by people. In India, all royal cities were built using the mythical pattern of the celestial city in which the Universal Sovereign resided in *illo tempore*. Any territory that

was occupied in order to be inhabited by people was beforehand subject to a transformation from chaos to cosmos by means of ritualistic ceremonies. Thus, the place was given a valid, real form, acceptable only through sanctification. Nature itself and everything man has built are edifices validated only when compared with an extra-terrestrial archetype conceived as a plan, a form or a double which exists cosmically and serves as a pattern (Eliade, 2008, p. 14-17).

In his relationship with nature throughout history, man has developed a symbolism of the 'center'. Thus, the center could be the Sacred Mountain or any other temple, palace or royal residence seen as an '*axis mundi*', respectively, the converging point for Heaven, Earth and Hell. In the most distant parts of the world, the symbol of the Sacred Mountain exists from times immemorial. Consequently, in Indian beliefs, Mount Meru rises in the center of the world and the North Star hangs above. The Ural-Altaiic people recognize the sacred mountain Sumeru, and the Iranian beliefs mention the sacred mountain Elbours (Haraberezati), which is situated in the center of Earth and is united with the Heaven. Similar beliefs can be found in Finnish and Japanese cultures, and the top of the Sacred Mountain is not only the highest on Earth, but also the Hub of the Universe, the starting point of Creation.

To the same extent, the temples, the cities and the holy places are associated with the sacred mountain tops. The Babylonian temples bore suggestive names such as: "Mountain House", "the House of the worldwide Mountain", "the Tempest Mountain" or "the Link between Heaven and Earth". The Borobudur temple is an image of Cosmos and is built as an artificial mountain. As a result of being situated in the middle of the Cosmos, the temple or the holy city represents the meeting point for Heaven, Earth and Hell. This symbolism kept manifesting until the dawns of modern times, when the Christened Europe took over and developed the symbol of the center as a reproduction of the Universe in its essence by erecting grand medieval cathedrals (Eliade, 2008, pp. 19-23).

In archaic societies, any ritual follows a divine archetypal pattern. Moreover, any human activity becomes efficacious if it exactly repeats an action performed at the beginning of time by a god, a hero or an outstanding ancestor (Eliade, 2008, p. 27). All the important acts of everyday life have been revealed ab origine by gods or epic heroes, and people do nothing else but repeat these paradigmatic gestures for ever and ever. At the same time, the activities that are not related in any way to exemplary patterns, nor have a mythical significance are considered profane (Eliade, 2008, p. 32).

In the archaic world, any activity that serves a precise purpose is proven legitimate by ritual. For example, dancing has sacred origins as it was performed with the purpose of finding food, of paying homage to the dead or of establishing order in Cosmos. The origin of dancing is extra-human, having been created *illo tempore* by a totemic animal, a god or a hero. No plant is valuable in itself, but only to the extent in which it is isolated from the profane place by taking part in an archetype or by repeating some gestures or words that consecrate it. The rituals of building repeat the primordial act of cosmogonic construction, while the sacrifices dedicated to the building of an edifice are an imitation of the primordial sacrifice celebrated in the creation of the world (Eliade, 2008, p. 34).

A first interesting conclusion is that the archaic man only recognizes himself as real if he renounced his identity and is content with imitating facts and gestures considered sacred, as any action, which does not have an exemplary pattern, is void of meaning and lacks reality (Eliade, 2008, p. 38).

A second conclusion is that, by imitating archetypes and by repeating paradigmatic gestures, time is abolished, as any action that takes place in this logic happens right at the beginning of time. As a result, man is projected in the mythical era - when the archetypes have revealed themselves for the first time. Abolishing profane time and projecting man in mythical time occurs only during the rituals that mark important moments such as feeding, breeding, hunting, fishing, working, war etc. (Eliade, 2008, p. 39).

Consequently, a mythical thinking pattern requires:

- Abolition of profane space in favour of mythical space through the symbolism of the centre which projects any palace or temple in the centre of the mythical space;
- That an action is real and valid only if it imitates a gesture, an archetypal action, first performed *illo tempore* by an ancestor, a god or an epic hero;
- That any archetypal action suspends profane time and belongs to a mythical time.

The spiritual-materialistic relation as reflected in ancient philosophical thinking

Defining the human being in various systems of philosophical thinking has generally removed man from his natural environment and has placed him somewhere in an ideate space, having no correlation with the surroundings in which he leads his terrestrial life. In his works, Greek philosopher Plato, a disciple of Socrates, assumes the opposition between reality and knowledge, between appearance and essence, between common sense and science, between reason and senses and identifies man with his divine essence, the soul/ anima, which is the only one immortal, a traveller through ephemeral terrestrial bodies. The imperfect body is considered a prison for the soul and the senses are the chains that bind man to an inferior reality. Reason leads man into the knowledge of truth, into a reality situated outside time and space, into the world of “ideas”, which is the fundament of truth. Ideas are eternal, just like the immortal soul (Mânzat, 2003, p. 8). Aristotle was also influenced by Pythagoras, mathematician and philosopher, who claimed that the soul was divine, immortal and reincarnated in successive lives.

Aristotle, disciple of Plato, defines man as a rational animal. In ‘*De anima*’, Aristotle analyses the human soul in relation with its biological side. The soul is bound to the body and bears the latter’s print; it is prisoner in a body with an individual, concrete form. Aristotle noticed that psychic acts can only be interpreted and understood from the perspective of their relationship with the functions of the biological body. For that reason, Aristotle was named ‘the father’ of experimental psychology (Mânzat, 2003, p.

12). Both Plato's and Aristotle's ideas will be found in the philosophical trends of Neoplatonism and Neo-Aristotelianism, as well as in the Christian philosophy - owing to its remarkable representatives St. Augustine and St. Thomas d'Aquino, who assert that man is an immortal soul, essentially divine, independent of the biological body. Consequently, the idea was consolidated that man is spirit without substance, an entity that can be conceived without a body that can be dependent of the natural environment in which it leads its extra-terrestrial life.

The identification of the human being with the soul has led to the following hypotheses throughout history:

- The hypothesis that time and space, fundamental components of the natural surrounding world, are only related to the transitory body, the prison of the soul. In order to discover oneself, man must break the barriers of the body, of the time and space, of the surrounding world and live in an immaterial and a-temporal existence, in an eternity that is not related to the natural world.
- Ever since the human being started being conceived outside its relation to the natural world, it has no longer mattered if the natural surrounding world would be annihilated. In fact, for many representatives of ancient Christian theology, only the souls will survive in God's kingdom, and the natural world is doomed, except for the souls of the human beings and the a-corporeal angels.

Rationalism, Cartesian thinking and the alienation of the human being from nature

Beginning with the Middle Ages and up to modern times, European philosophy has approached man as a rational and intelligent being, endowed with self-consciousness, a concept adapted from the idealistic Platonism based on soul. Rationalism emphasizes reason as an exclusive way of knowledge, thus minimizing the contribution of sensory perception.

The Cartesian philosophy, developed in the 17th century, with Renee Descartes and, later, Spinoza and Leibniz as main representatives, brings up the concept of immediate rational knowledge of reality through reason as unique criterion of investigation and verification of acquired knowledge; it was considered the most efficacious means of reaching the truth. Historically, this school of thought appeared in a context in which the transition from feudalism to capitalism demanded progress in science and technology. The new philosophy, in opposition with the scholastic thought, proposed a method of investigating reality that served the development of science and technology. There could be only one truth and it had to be found in nature, not in a transcendent world, as the medieval theologians had stated (Descartes, 1957, p. 17).

Descartes, whose famous *cogito ergo sum* postulate is still known today, looks for the truth in himself or in the great book of the world and applies mathematical knowledge to the entire field of knowledge. In his "*Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting One's*

Reason and of Seeking Truth in the Sciences”, Descartes presents four precepts by which reality can be known mathematically – rationally:

- Only the things that our mind seems to know undoubtedly seek analysis;
- The difficulties under examination are to be divided into as many parts as possible, to be better studied (analysis);
- Study the simple aspects first and proceed with the complex ones (synthesis);
- Repeat reviews and generalisations to make certain that there was no error or omission (enumeration).

The Cartesian philosophy anticipates the scientific research of nature with the purpose of making discoveries and thus becoming masters of nature. Descartes points that “*it is possible for us to reach knowledge that would be useful in life and that... by knowing the power and the action of the fire, of the water, of the stars, of the heavens and of the other bodies surrounding us... we could give it the appropriate use, thus becoming masters and owners of nature*” (Descartes, 1957, p. 27).

By the power of knowledge man not only escapes and eludes nature, he also proclaims himself sole master and beneficiary of nature. We consider that his pattern of thinking led to the present crisis in ecology nowadays.

Myth in modern society

Mythical thought is apparently characteristic of archaic societies. But if we start thinking that “*the myth is a way of being in the world*” (Eliade, 2008, p. 15), it can be said that, at the level of individual experience, the myth has never disappeared. The great mythical themes continue to manifest themselves in the human mind and in modern societies but are more difficult to recognize because of the prolonged procrastination process. Thus, the old sacred values have been revived at a profane level of social life, as a break between the archaic and the modern world. The difference lies in the fact that, in the modern world, there is a personal lack of thought of traditional societies. Society cannot be released for as long as the myth is identified by the exemplary pattern, repeated rituals, the rupture of the Nepron time for reintegration during the primordial period, and the man of all time experiencing the mythological paradigm. There are, however, major differences between archaic and modern societies. If, in the Roman Empire, the work, the war, the love was sacred, in modern societies work is desacralized and the man is the prisoner of his job. He is captive in the present time, being deprived of liberty, the possibility of escape on a collective scale is fun. Mircea Eliade considers that modern novelties translate into the profane reevaluation of the old sacred values: “*Thus, we can understand the building of the myth for the individual and the community, and the understanding of the myth will be considered one day among the most useful discoveries of the 20th century*” (Eliade, 2008, p. 29).

In “*Modern Man in Search of a Soul*”, C.G. Jung (1933) states that the modern world is looking for a new myth that will allow it to find a new spiritual source. At its personal level, the myth has never disappeared because it was found in dreams and nostalgia of

modernism even if this is not observable at first glance. Mythical behavior sees more at the level of the inconvenient, for a myth never disappears from the psychic news, it only camouflages its functions. And if the archaic man had the capacity to integrate the instinctual aspects of his existence into the mind through a coherent psychic structure, the modern man dominated by rationalism is no longer able to integrate symbols, being freed from superstition and estranged from spiritual values.

From the natural system in the world economic system and conversion systemic

The modern man created a new world that dominates nature through technical achievements more sophisticated are becoming more dangerous, because though the man tends to become a machine of production and consuming goods. Removing the human being from his spiritual essence and embracing himself to the exclusivity of nature creates the illusion that he is the master of nature until it produces extreme manifestations that the most sophisticated technologies cannot withstand.

The economic growth generated by the industrial revolution has caused natural breakdown and natural decline, and man is subject to serious distortions caused by the dynamics of the modern world economic system. The systemic functioning of the world economy and system dependence has generated a form of modern slavery. The modern world system has disconnected the world of systems, money and debt being the forces that activate the system. Economic growth, while being considered a positive process, has the secondary effects of artificialization and degradation of nature, the removal of man from nature and his alienation. The planet is subjected to a dehumanization process dominated by the rule of 20/80, that is, 20% of the world's population possesses 80% of the world's wealth, while 80% of the population receives only 20% of the world's wealth. One can speak of a systemic conversion of the modern world whose main tools are the economic growth and the propagation of political power (Bădescu, Bădescu, 2014, p. 23-25).

The degradation of nature and the overcoming of steady thresholds are a generic action taken by the human society. So many systems have been created since the Industrial Revolution that the operation and reproduction of natural systems have been seriously disrupted. The worldview is subject to serious distortions caused by the dynamics of the modern world system, and it has the power to set its own standards of living (Bădescu, Bădescu, 2014, p. 21).

Modernity has raised the economy to the rank of the most powerful system of shaping the destiny of mankind. This phenomenon is called the systemic conversion of the world through economy. (Bădescu et al., 2014, p.29)

Modern economy is a system that transforms everything: society, man and nature. Economy manifests itself in a form of antagonistic duality, respectively as a system that produces value and, at the same time, as a framework of systemic bankruptcy of nature. If economic growth is seen as positive phenomenon for society, it is due to the exhaustion of the natural systems (Bădescu, Bădescu, 2014, p. 23).

In “*Nature Failure - Denial of the Earth’s Limits*”, Anders Wijkman and Johan Rockström identify four aspects of the systemic conversion of the modern world through the economy:

- conversion reshapes the light to the logic of the dominant system;
- conversion distorts the world;
- conversion is forcing the world and is bankrupting it;
- conversion also affects society and nature.

According to Wijkman and Rockström (2013), profit and GDP are two concepts that turn economic growth into an economic war that systematically leads to the failure of nature. The process of systemic conversion through the world economy has created a disproportionate social and environmental interdependence on the one hand and economic benefits on the other, and this is a threat to the global crisis faced by mankind (Bădescu, Bădescu, 2014, p. 79).

The contemporary world faces an environmental management crisis that stems from the fact that the classical economic system is antiquated, being based on unlimited material growth, without taking into account the fact that the natural resources that subsidize development are limited. In this context, it is necessary to rethink the human condition from the perspective of the fact that man is interconnected with nature (Wijkman, Rockström, 2013, p. 28-29).

The current economic model needs a reassessment as it has major deficiencies. Resource depletion, environmental degradation, climate change, biodiversity loss are negative consequences of economic growth. GDP as an indicator of economic development only provides information on economic activity and results, not on the development of human well-being and prosperity. Natural capital is used without its value being recognized, and here we refer to the many ecosystem services that nature offers, water and air purification, waste and residue decomposition, plant pollination, natural water circuit etc. (Wijkman, Rockström, 2013, p. 219-221).

Even since 1972, through “*The Limits to Growth*”, the Club of Rome has warned mankind on the risk of depletion of vital natural resources and the consequences of pollution that will jeopardize the global economic system in the first half of the 21st century. The forecasts have been vehemently rejected in the political circles of the day, but current scientific assessments come to confirm them (Wijkman, Rockström, 2013, p. 267).

Another study, “*Environmental and development challenges: The imperative to act*”, warns of the future of the planet: “[...] civilization is facing a real hurricane of problems caused by overpopulation, overconsumption in rich countries, the use of ecologically destructive technologies and serious inequality. It is the reduction of biodiversity that feeds the life-maintenance systems of all mankind, the destruction of the climate, the global pollution, the diversion of essential bio-geo-chemical cycles, the increased danger of large epidemics [...]” (Wijkman, Rockström, 2013, p. 268).

A natural question: what is the place and the role of man in this system?

Alfred Adler argues that man is an inferior being in relation to other large mammals, but the feeling of inferiority and insecurity has always acted as an incentive for discovering new ways of adapting his position to balance with respect to nature. Therefore, the sense of inferiority of man with regards to nature has led to the development of human society and implicitly to its adaptation to different environmental conditions. Moreover, this complex of inferiority is masked by a complex of superiority proclaiming and justifying the right of man to be the master of nature (Adler, 1996, p. 20).

In the Introduction for Larry Dossey's "Space, Time&Medicine" (1982), Fritjof Capra states that "*the common denominator of the crises he carries through mankind today includes a crisis in the process of knowledge, from this we persist in a Cartesian-Newtonian vision applied to a reality that can no longer be understood in terms of classical science*" (Mânzat, 2010, p. 24).

The great thinkers of the 20th century are worried about the rupture produced in man through the loss of humanity. In the modern age, scientific research and technological evolution did not increase humanization, but instead removed man from nature and self. Science and technology, which have exponentially developed since the twentieth century, have increased man's performances through computerization, cybernetization or robotization. However, the price to be paid was man's removal as a natural being. Lucian Blaga defines *man* in the 'Trilogy of Culture' (2011) as '*a cultural being*'. Edgar Morin advances the idea that '*man is a cultural being by his nature and a natural being through his culture*' (1973, p. 100). C.G. Jung points out that '*the inconvenient is ancestral, while the consciousness of the inconvenient is gone*' (Mânzat, 2010, p. 56).

In search of solutions to the problem of the lost human, Ilya Prigogine "is advocating a new alien human and nature. Man is a part of nature as nature is a part of man ". The same paradigm is shared by Vasile Tonoiu, who sees the new alliance as the "process of humanizing the anatomy and neutralizing man". In the cooperation of man with nature, domination has not found its place. The technology will no longer violate nature, and nature will become a cosmic home, in other words, society and nature will tend towards the same (Mânzat, 2010, p. 28-29).

Andreas Wijkman and Johan Rockström advocate for a circular economy based on recycling, on reuse and on an extension of product lifecycle, which benefits from low production costs and efficient waste management and from a focus on product quality (Wijkman, Rockström, 2013, p. 277).

In conclusion, the attempt of the modern man to dominate and control nature has only to distort the natural environment on Earth. Fortunately, nature has its own intelligence and potential for enormous self-regulation, as man understands to be part of nature and not just a destructive use of its benefits. Thus, beyond the ecological crisis with which humanity is confronted, there is a crisis of authentic values and principles for a healthy life, in harmony and balance with nature.

Living according to natural rules is a profoundly religious experience, a meeting with eternity, a re-finding the lost paradise. Therefore, the return to nature in the sense of observing the reproduction of a model of action and organization, validated by the functioning of the planet, can be a result of rescuing human society from self-destruction. In this context, it is necessary to change towards paradigm of respect for nature, to understand the functioning mechanisms of nature, and to opt for preventive behavior to preserve the natural balance of the environment and to secure the future of mankind on Terra.

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