

Man Versus Nature

If man is part of nature then anything he does is perfectly natural, and all his works and engineering projects - dams and the like - and his trash heaps and pollution and deforestation are different only in degree from ant hills, wasps colonies, and bird's nests or the defoliation produced to vegetation in bird colonies, the accumulation of bat dung in caves, or guano deposits on Pacific islands.

But traditionally man is not part of nature. He regards himself above nature. This point of view goes back to ancient times and is rooted in our Judeo-Christian culture and finds expression in the Old Testament. God created the whole world with everything in it before creating man, which was a special act, the climax of His creative powers.

What do we mean by the Nature of Man? Do we mean "What is man", or do we mean the characters of man that are natural - that, in other words, are consistent with what we consider are the basic characteristics of all living things. Do we mean his characters that define as well all other living things.

Nature and the Artist

Nature surrounds the artist, he is obsessed with it and in his attempt to understand nature is constantly portraying it in paintings or slicing out bits of it in photographs. The artist believes that the understanding of nature is to be found in its beauty, if you will, or complexity and not in its utility. Beauty has acquired an unfortunate sentimental soft overtone, which is not at all what the artist finds so compelling in nature. It is rather the extraordinary complexity and infinite variability in the world around him that inspires the artist. In this respect the artist and the ecologist have much in common. One expresses his inspiration

emotionally in his pictures; the other expresses the same preoccupation intellectually. Art can't exist without emotion and good science with it. A work of art may be attempted on an intellectual basis but emotion creeps in inspite of the artists efforts to keep it out.

Man as a Part of Nature

Emphasis has always been placed on man's ability to control nature, which distinguishes him from all other animals.

This power is greatly exaggerated. He is only able to control a very small environment, and even if his big cities are accepted as controled environments in them he is only partly successful. Storms still batter them, floods inundate them, and snow sometimes buries them. So much for external forces arising in weather disturbances, but what about the disruptions to this artificial environment caused by his own mismanagment?

Thus, consider the effects of smog and polution of rivers and lakes, and even the ocean, by his effortsto control his environment, which succeed only in deteriorating it. Man is successful, however, in establishing micro-environments: artificial shelters with controlled atmospheres to suit his needs and taste. No other animal can do this except some of the social insects. But it is a matter of degree only between man's house and the nests of many birds or the dens of many of the mammals.

Adaptations, some of extraordinary specificity, are genetic reactions to environmental conditions, and, if not examples of artificial environments, are at least selections of environments most suitable and agreeable to the species in question. For extreme specialization consider the waterfall larval insects and and Adreey's insect flower and miroorganisma adapted to extremes of temperature.