

## PSYCHOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MAN AND NATURE

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**Abstract.** *This paper points out some major aspects of the dynamic of the relationship between man and nature, depending on the psychological development and organization of the former. Two main stages are delimited: a) the passive-reacting stage and b) the active-transforming stage. Characteristic for the first stage is a diffuse consciousness, which sustains the perception and the feeling that man is intrinsically a constituent part of nature. The second stage is characterized by the process of differentiation and specialization inside the consciousness, and by the development of self-consciousness and of individualization. This acquisition has led to the development of man's capacity to systematically create and produce the tools by means of which man could act to change or transform some given conditions of nature. Historically, this process, which has been perfected, became the main psychological factor that influenced the character of the relationship between man and nature, in both positive and negative ways.*

**Keywords:** psychological, relationship, man, nature.

The relationship between man and nature has evolved following an extremely sinuous and contradictory trajectory, alternating favourable moments and critical ones. The dynamics of this relationship was and still is conditioned by the degree of concordance between man's survival and adaptive needs, on the one hand, and the conditions offered by nature, on the other hand. Because, at the human level, adaptation is achieved by way of mediated behaviours and is dictated by psychic functions and mechanisms, the dynamics of the relationship between man and nature necessarily implies a psychological dimension.

The differentiation and development level of cognitive, motivational, affective and volitional functions determines the degree of complexity and type of adaptive behaviours. Depending on the objective to which these behaviours are subordinated, they can be classified into two groups: a) exploratory-operant (instrumental) behaviours, and b) satisfactory or consuming behaviours. For the dynamics of the general relationship between man and nature, the most important are the latter. These behaviours consist in the investigation of the environment, in discovering and identifying and acquiring the proper "objects" needed to satisfy specific states of necessity. It is obvious that, just as man's psychic organisation and development couldn't attain their highest potential from the very beginning-on the contrary, they had only begun their long journey towards their highest point,-neither could the exploratory-instrumental behaviours take on such varied, specialised and complex forms as they do today.

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According to the evolutionary model of the universe, on which our entire scientific knowledge is based, man is a result of successive evolutive transformations of Earth's environment during billions of years, and it represents, from a qualitative viewpoint, the highest stage of evolution on our planet.

Therefore, primordially and generically, man is a natural being, a structural part of nature. But, maintaining his characteristics as a dynamic and evolutive system, he continued his development, going further to ever higher levels of organisation and enlarging its capability for adaptation. It is important to point out that this evolutive process took place with a permanent interaction with the natural environment. By its specific variability and unpredictability, the environment often acted as a stimulating factor for the cognitive and regulatory functions of the brain. These functions became more and more complex and acquired, especially after the development of articulate speech, superior qualitative properties, such as categorisation, symbolisation, abstracting.

It is unanimously admitted that, from the moment the *homo sapiens sapiens* species appeared, the general anatomic and biological structure, including the brain structure, no longer suffered significant transformations. This means that, from that moment on, man's evolution was restricted to the psycho-behavioural aspect.

As a consequence, the way in which man will interact with nature is conditioned by his psychic development, by the level of functional organisation of consciousness, as a higher form of psychic reality. Based on these criteria, historically, the relationship between man and nature has traversed two main stages: a) the passive-reactive stage, and b) the active-transforming stage.

The first stage starts with the moment *homo sapiens sapiens* appeared and ends with the moment when man started creating tools. The second stage starts with the moment man started to systematically manufacture tools and still continues to this day.

The first step is associated with a still diffuse, poorly differentiated consciousness, dominated by the immediate situational experiences and subordinated to the satisfaction of the primary biological needs. Such consciousness expressed an organic unity of man and nature, the man perceiving himself as a constituent element of nature. In this capacity, man was subordinated unconditionally to its laws, despite the fact that he didn't understand them.

This form of primary consciousness made possible the accomplishment of exploratory-operant behaviours only of the passive-reactive type: direct responses to natural stimuli and the satisfaction of basic needs, such as food and shelter, with what nature offered (the hunter and gatherer stages).

In order to obtain these "goods", man used natural tools, such as sticks and stones. Catastrophic natural phenomena frightened man and frequently endangered his life. The only things he could do to react to them and influence

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them were to run away and to develop a repertory of practices and rituals meant to appease the spirits and divinities which he thought to be at their origins. In these conditions, the animistic thinking appeared and developed. It was the psychological premise of religious consciousness. That was the only way primitive man tried to influence nature.

From a psychological point of view, at this stage in his evolution, man felt completely dominated by nature. The relationship between the two had an accentuated asymmetric character.

The second stage of man's psychobehavioral evolution is characterised by the differentiation of cognitive contents and operating structures inside the consciousness, due to the development of speech and of the combinatorial capability of the brain. These changes led to the delimitation and affirmation of self-consciousness, different from the initial collective consciousness, and to the ontogenetic development of the individualisation principle.

As a result, the individual will perceive and consider himself as a subject, an Ego, different from others, different from the collective self.

And, despite the fact that he continues to recognise and obey the rules and norms of the tribe or family, he will tend to accomplish and be aware of his own self (self-realisation).

A second essential change that took place in the internal structure of the consciousness consisted in the individualisation and delimitation of three basic components of the adaptive behaviour: the motive, the means and the goal. Each of these components became the object of a distinct analysis and evaluation.

As a result, man's relationship with nature changed in quality, evolving from the passive-reactive form to the active-transforming form. On the one hand, man was able to plan and express anticipatory goals, on the other hand, he was able to plan and mentally establish the way to achieve them, by choosing the adequate means.

The transition from the simple use of tools to the systematic production of tools stimulated man's creative and inventive capability, at the same time raising man's self-confidence.

The process of creation and production of tools as a way to increase his ability to influence nature represented the main factor that influenced the future evolution of the relationship between man and nature.

In the first stage of man's history, up until the machine age, between the 17<sup>th</sup> and the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, this process was sustained by a constancy of the equilibrium, where nature's transformations were within the reasonable limits of satisfying man's material and spiritual needs (a certain symmetry between demands and supply, products).

But, starting with the second stage of man's history, the machine and large-scale industry stage, besides the positive side of facilitating and diversifying the

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satisfaction of man's needs, the process was also associated with a negative, entropic side, consisting in the production, in time, of perturbing, destructive effects on nature. In this stage, man no longer has the role of nature's partner; instead, he is nature's master, his slogan becoming "struggle with nature, in order to subjugate it". Man's conscience was focused on obtaining as many goods and advantages as possible, leaving aside the operation of estimating and evaluating the negative effects that might appear in time.

Other psychological factors that had a negative influence on the dynamics of the relation between man and nature are: letting the human existence be governed by the principle of "having", which stimulated an excessive preoccupation for acquiring goods and wealth and for obtaining them at any cost; linking one's prestige and personal or group status to material values, to money (money=power, prestige, security etc); the unlimited nature of man's demands, claims and needs (however much man has, he is never content); egotism and envy ("I must have as much as possible, the others should have as little as possible"; "I envy and hate X because X is richer than me"); man's attitude of devaluating nature and overrating the products of civilisation and culture-anthropocentrism; absence or weak development of the regulating function and ecological component of conscience.

These psychological characteristics found on an individual level are coagulated and integrated at a superordinated social level. They leave their mark on the development politics at the state level and on the relations between communities. The awareness of the major critical problems created by ignoring the integrity of nature and savagely exploiting its resources, that materialises in international debates, will it manage to lead to timely corrective solutions and to steer man's psychology towards other coordinates that those of his evolution so far? The answer is sceptical. In order to re-establish a balanced and harmonious relationship with nature, man himself needs to undergo a transformation, in his very essence and internal psychic structure - in his conscience.

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