

'Do we need nature?'

Synopsis

We humans have indeed come a long way in such a short time. We no longer practice human sacrifice. There is no denying our competence at using tools. Most of us understand the concept of inalienable rights. Our science has allowed us to control Nature so much so that we soon may become its master, instead of the other way around. Will we be as cold and distant, seemingly uncaring in our mastery as Nature has been to us? There might even be a time when we ask ourselves, 'Do we even need Nature?' If so, our answer should be 'yes, we do need Nature.' Its beauty is unbounded and its bounty great. Moreover, it is seemingly unique. Therefore, our course should lie in preservation, as Nature is one of the rarest entities in the universe. But Nature can also be harsh and unforgiving and cause us great pain and sorrow. So, we must also strive to control Nature absolutely. It is our right to be safe, secure and be free to reach our greatest potential. Why do we need to endure famine due to drought, or have a child suffer from ghastly diseases? Why do I need to watch my parents slowly but surely waste away as age inexorably engulfs them? Actually, do I need to watch myself slowly disappear? Why not stop all this? We can and do. And as each day passes we do more and more. One day we will surely take control of our destiny.

The young boy lifts his head to the tall, lean figure staring down at him. "Is the Sun really the maker of all things?" the boy asks. The man's headdress flutters in the wind as he looks at the boy approvingly, "The Sun is the maker of all things. The Sun protects us and feeds us. Our crops grow tall because of Him, we are safe from the darkness because of Him, and our people prosper because of Him." The boy turns and looks up at the stairs of the Temple. They seem so high, but he can barely stop himself from running the whole long way to the top. The man touches the boy's shoulder to start him up the stairs. "Soon I will be with Him and speak of our people's needs" the boy whispers. "Yes, soon you will be in the arms of the Creator, and our people will be safe for another season" responds the man. The high priest could only hope the Creator would find the boy a satisfying gift.

If there is any one thing that exemplifies Nature to we humans, it must be the Sun. The Sun has always had a special place in the numerous pantheons of numerous cultures. So the fact that we now can create our own suns contained within devices of our own making must signify something. Perhaps it is a certain demarcation of the slow but inexorable march of humankind to control our own destiny. Nature is not good to us. Nor is it bad. It just is. Unaware of itself or us. But in case you haven't been looking around lately, Nature (which for now should include us) is the most valuable item in this universe. Drop your religion for a second and take a good hard look around. We seem to be alone. The SETI Institute and others looking for extraterrestrial life as yet have drawn

a blank. There doesn't seem to be much out there other than non-organic material, at least in our galactic neighborhood. For us right now, Nature is it and we are, arguably, its finest creation. Indeed, a creation poised to break free as a son might from an uncaring, sometimes brutal stepfather.

Do we need Nature? Yes, of course. What would we do without the sound of a great waterfall, the summer breeze that cools us so delicately or that song of a robin on a spring morning? Not to mention all Nature produces that we use as raw materials for the production of human necessities. Indeed, Nature provides us with the very essence of all we have and can produce, beginning at the most subatomic level.

Do we need to worship Nature? Absolutely not. But we do need to control it, every aspect we possibly can. In fact, we have been trying to do so since we first stood upright...to throw off the yoke of subservience to Nature that, on the one hand, nurtures us, and on the other causes us so much death and sorrow.

How should we ultimately treat Nature in our advance to control it? To answer this question we must first define what we mean by Nature. Of the numerous definitions we can choose, the best for our purposes of discussion is to define it as the external world in its reality. Nature shall encompass anything other than the community of humankind. Using this definition we will not leave anything out.

With each technological advance our control of Nature moves closer to actuality. Now some will say that we should not tamper with what is, as Nature is ordained by their Creator to be such a way. To those I say prove it. But you must use consensual validation and the scientific method. No other proof will do. If you can offer such proof...we will talk. Others will say we must advance humankind economically and spiritually without concern for Nature. It is our right and destiny. To these I say....take a vacation. Stop, relax and look around. Then take a good look at yourself. If you need to destroy all that is good about Nature just to feel good about yourself, then get some therapy because you have some serious problems.

The answer of course lies in between. Minimize or eliminate the bad and accentuate the good. Of course, but who determines what is good and bad about Nature? We will. It all gets done. Perhaps a particular question such as "Should we produce and use this specific viral vector to alter the genes" won't be answered for a hundred years, but it will be answered. The truth and what is right always comes to the surface sooner or later, with or without bloodshed. And with each truth unveiled we will have a better direction.

Deep down we know that each human is endowed with inalienable rights. Whether one is beautiful or not, intelligent or not or anything or not doesn't matter. What matters is that each has a right to better him or herself. If the manipulation of Nature is involved, so be it. Genetically engineer one's diabetes away. Excellent. Engineer myself to be stronger and healthier. Fantastic. Become more intelligent. Why not? It is one's right. Create nanobots to destroy all oak trees because you are allergic to oak pollen. I don't think so.

Because bringing Nature under control is a world issue, all nations will need to participate in some fashion. If the United States wants to prevent the Brazilian government from allowing its citizens to completely destroy its rain forests, how does it go about doing so? If pollution from new economies of industrializing nations affects the nations around it, how does one nation control the offending country? Do other nations have a right to do so? It is well established scientifically that any ecosystem is extremely fragile and that one change can cause subsequent changes throughout that ecosystem, sometimes unintended changes, having a large scale effect on biodiversity, and thus knows no nation's boundaries. Therein justifies the right of others outside a national boundary to exert influence for change. How this would be done is anybody's guess, if it can be done at all. I am not sure the politics for such solutions exists yet. But it will in time, as we humans are a selfish lot. We will figure out what is best for this new community of mankind technology has given us. Otherwise, we extinguish ourselves. And Nature, or some being, has given us genes that work hard to make sure that does not happen. The invisible hand is present in more than economics. Because of its power, governmental policy may play only a marginal role in the long run. As I said before, the truth ultimately prevails, especially so if the scientific method can be used. We will advance our knowledge and the control of Nature regardless of some object, much as how stem cell research and cloning is severely limited in the United States because of religious beliefs but permitted to proceed in other countries.

Of the numerous problems we have in controlling Nature, one of the largest is overpopulation. Arable land is at a minimum. And, in fact, we have already, in a roundabout way, been dealing with the problem through the invention of reliable birth control. Who can deny that its effect has been to free both men and women from Nature's reproductive slavery and also help reduce the world's population, thereby taking less stress off the environment? I am sure some scientists have already calculated the optimal population for a stable secure ecosystem. This would be one way to control Nature so the products of Nature we need will always be available, whether or not those items have even yet been discovered.

If you have never seen photos of the polluting of our world, look at those produced by our satellites and the space shuttle. What incredible damage we have done in so short a time. Such pictures are readily available on the Internet. How will we recover and maintain the health of our planet and make Nature work within our economic needs as we know we must? This is quite a problem. But we are already on our way to creating a very sophisticated industry sector designed to clean up the pollution we create to supply our needs; sort of a closed, healthy Human/Nature artificial ecosystem. Governments are involved, as is the business sector and just ordinary people; each for their selfish interest.

Control hurricanes? Stop tornadoes? Nobody in their right mind would argue we should not do so. We just need to figure out when and where to make them occur to keep a healthy environment. It would also be nice to be able to produce rain when and where we needed.

Come to think of it, why not move all industrial production to the Moon and create our own Garden of Eden here. No pollution, no way to get sick, no way to die by Nature. Live young and healthy for ages until an accident takes your body away. Of course you will get a new body, cloned for your use with a new saved mind that only forgets perhaps a few days before the accident, since that is when you last backed up your mind. We could really begin to populate and explore the Universe with such power. Extend our control over Nature in other worlds we find. This will all happen; we just live at the beginning of such a time so it is hard to see. We will control all aspects of Nature because we must do so for our survival. And I guess we must thank Nature for those instincts. But then, are we not Nature's finest creation? Hmmmm.....