

Human sensitivity towards nature: Eastern and Western perspectives

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to focus on the religious and philosophical ways humans view nature, and how we perceive and treat our planet, including all its living entities. Its purpose is to make a positive influence on individuals living in the Eastern and Western hemispheres, so that those who are unaware may be given an unexpected glimpse at our current human situation, which appears increasingly discouraging with regard to sensitivity towards nature.

Design/methodology/approach – By offering a subtle, insightful view of human nature and its connection to religion and the universe, rather than facts and statistics on pollution alone, this conceptual paper introduces theoretical and philosophical discussions from comparative literature as well as narratives from actual interviews conducted in Japan.

Findings – As human beings, we need to better define our position in this world, in order to learn to appreciate the true value of our own existence. With regard to the question of where humans lie in nature, a basic difference exists between Asian and Western views. The Asian view of nature has traditionally regarded humans and the universe as continually interacting together – human beings are an integral part of life. This differs from the basic Western notion of humans and nature comprising two separate, opposing elements.

Originality/value – This paper offers readers a deeper understanding of how humans feel and perceive nature, to help them realize how urgent it is for us to respect our natural resources on Earth.

Keywords Religion, Sustainability, Sensitivity, Nature, Human, Spiritual

Paper type Conceptual paper

Introduction

With the world growing closer together, diverse cultures have merged and now, contemporary society all over the globe tends to focus on the scientific, technological advances originally acquired from the West. This technological progress has greatly modified our lifestyles. It has become a focal point in our relationships and has changed how we see and treat our planet as well as the non-human entities with whom we co-exist.

In Western societies, intellectual and philosophical pursuits generally seem to be considered less important than certain scientific and technological accomplishments. This attitude is in sharp contrast to the Far-Eastern viewpoint that real knowledge is internal and non-verbal, and cannot be identified or classified by concepts. In Far-Eastern cultures, a substantial sense of oneness with nature has traditionally prevailed. Would not it be advantageous if the cultures of the West could adopt this attitude and realize that humans are not the centre – the absolute, dominant force in our natural environment – but only one part of our universe?



It is time for us to reorient ourselves towards Mother Nature and go where we belong, back to feeling a part of our natural world and treating it with the full respect it deserves, instead of hovering over it, stealing its nourishment, and harming its future. It is obvious that environmental pollution is one of the most important problems facing the world today, with far too much destruction of our natural resources. The underlying reason for much of this is that humans simply do not respect nature enough. We are using these natural resources to make our lives more comfortable and to provide ourselves with excess material goods. The overall focus tends to be selfish, and mainly from a financial point of view, instead of an ethical, philosophical, or religious one.

If we can transform our basic philosophy towards nature, if we can learn to be more respectful and appreciative towards the resources we have been given, we can begin to change our way of dealing with the Earth's natural surroundings and raw materials. We can let nature prosper and grow instead of spoiling it for the generations to come.

Historical and theoretical observations

Japanese traditions

In Japan, for centuries, emphasis has been placed on observing and appreciating nature through art, including *ikebana* flower arranging, the traditional tea ceremony, *haiku*, pottery, *origami*, and *kimono* textile designs. Many aspects of the traditional ways the Japanese conceive the world and nature are revealed through their natural appreciation of art – in both its creation and admiration. Nature is also represented through legendary Japanese plays, music, festivals, and dances describing mountains, rivers, flowers, trees, and their relationship to humans and gods. Things have changed with the times, however, and fairly recent history reveals to us that as Japan pursued its over 100 years of modernization, it modelled itself after the USA and Western Europe, especially with regard to technological and scientific innovations.

With the arrival of urbanization and technological advances, the Japanese have become increasingly less interested in the traditional lifestyle of their ancestors and are seeking the comforts of a modern, consumer-friendly, fast-paced society, which originated in the West. In the Western world, nature is certainly appreciated, yet one does not usually see such a deep, cultural, and religious tradition of focusing on nature to enhance a person's daily life, compared to Japan. In the West, people go to the mountains, parks, and the seaside; they cultivate gardens, buy flowers, and so forth, yet there seems to be quite a difference between Japan and the West as far as traditional sensitivity towards nature is concerned.

Western attitudes

Current attitudes in Western Europe and Northern America display a value system where the forces of innovation prevail over the merits of tradition or conservation. It is a polarization of these concepts – which lead to either destruction or conservation – that is firmly rooted in the great nations of the West. Indeed, for the past several centuries, these countries have brought about a certain degree of territorial and cultural expansion that was combined with major breakthroughs in science and technology.

Perhaps in return for the earlier loan of technological advancement and certain Western ideals, Japan's spiritual and philosophical appreciation of nature can somehow be exemplified in order to enhance Western civilization, which is becoming increasingly automated and materialistic. There is a "need to strive for inner peace and peace among peoples and for the reversal of environmental damage [...] to pursue peace and environmental health as the 'need to heal the world'" (Herrera, 2001).

This could be seen as an effort to help restore humanity on this planet, by providing ancient Far-Eastern notions about humans and nature, which put nature and spirit on the same level. It could show the West another alternative, bringing Japan and the countries in the Western hemisphere closer together, with a common purpose in mind: to restore humanistic values in modern-day societies through greater appreciation and human sensitivity towards nature.

Comparison between East and West

The historical, philosophical, and religious differences between the Far-Eastern and Western cultures comprise the central focus and main purpose of this author's research. By comparing the way the Japanese and Western societies view nature, this author sought to determine its role from a human perspective. In Japan, for example, nature has traditionally represented a sort of mirror, reflecting one's innermost feelings, perceptions, intuitions, and sensitivities. Throughout the centuries, it has greatly affected the Japanese people's lifestyle and habits. Nature has also influenced their interactions with others, especially their families, and throughout their daily activities. Traditionally, they have shown a deep sense of appreciation for nature in their lives. As time goes on, however, natural surroundings, education, social norms, values, and priorities in Japan have changed; these factors have had an effect on how the Japanese, especially the younger generations, view and treat nature today.

Religious significance

Focusing on the significance of nature from a religious perspective, this author researched various religions in Japan, as well as Christianity in the West, in order to see whether one's religious background might affect the degree of sensitivity a culture feels towards "nature," and all it encompasses. One could imagine that lifestyle and religion have an influence on how one values and appreciates nature, in both Japan and in the West. Yet it is practically an impossible task to measure whether people living in one country have a higher level of sensitivity towards nature than those in another, especially when one compares cultures that are so traditionally different. In fact, the Japanese ways of behaving, thinking, speaking, and writing alone are in sharp contrast to those in most Western countries. When one adds the great influence of religions such as Buddhism, Shinto, Taoism, Japanese folk religion, and Confucianism, this difference becomes even more evident.

Technology and urbanization

The difficulty in determining whether people living in one country have a higher level of sensitivity towards nature than those in another remains understandable. After examining the behavioural, linguistic, philosophical, and religious differences between Japan and countries in the West such as the USA, Belgium, and France, certain assumptions can be made. Societies around the world are becoming increasingly influenced by high technology and urbanization. For example, the inhabitants of Tokyo, a metropolis, have been affected by fast-paced technology and rapid urbanization. This ultra-modernization has created youths living in a materialistic and convenient society where they, contrary to their forefathers, regard nature as less important in their daily lives. It even appears that they have become insensitive to it, preferring the games and technological instruments that are constantly being developed and improved for personal entertainment and fulfilment.

With an increasingly modernized lifestyle, the Japanese and people in the West are changing the ways they observe traditional religions in their respective countries, which might be affecting the degree of sensitivity they feel towards nature. There seems to be an aspect that teaches humans greater sensitivity towards nature in the Far-Eastern religions, such as those in Japan, compared to religions such as Christianity in the West. A main concern is that the younger Japanese, as well as some of their Asian neighbours, have so easily adopted the ideals of the West that they are disregarding the traditions, religions, and value systems that teach appreciation towards nature in their own cultures. In fact, contrary to Western society, religious distinctions are seemingly not very important to the Japanese. Reischauer (1988) states: "Shinto festivals, Buddhist ceremonies, Confucian ethics, or Christian weddings and Christmas celebrations are normally not acts of religious affirmation but simply customs". The Japanese wedding is significant in that many couples choose to perform not only Shinto ceremonies but also Christian ceremonies, even though almost all of the couples are non-Christian.

Values and priorities for the future

As humans strive to succeed in the world of innovation that gleams before our eyes, we accumulate the material novelties of the future, forgetting our basic, humanistic, and ancestral values. Our priorities have been rearranged, and it has become obvious that people living in our modern societies around the world are making minimal efforts to keep nature an important part of human existence. Little by little, all forms of life on Earth are becoming victims of various forms of pollution created by humans. In our industrial societies in the last few decades, human power has been multiplied many times over. Unfortunately, however, technological and economic advancements have monopolized the creative, appreciative, and visionary forces of human beings. In today's world of convenience, technology, and rapidly growing metropolises, humans are becoming less exposed to nature than before, and perhaps becoming less sensitive to its charm and beauty.

Findings

Through this author's research, an increasing trend in the modern Japanese lifestyle has been discovered, which indicates a decreasing degree of appreciation for the subtleties of nature, as well as certain traditional religious views. Highlighting the awareness of this downward trend might help humans become more conscious of it. If humans could feel a deeper sensitivity towards nature, would not we be in a better position to stop environmental destruction on our planet, which poses a true threat to mankind and our future?

Human relationship to nature

In the West, humans have continuously attempted to conquer nature, while the Japanese have sought to maintain a state of harmony with nature, with the aim of reaching spiritual satisfaction. Historically, the Japanese, as an entire population, have relished nature's many wondrous facets, treating each one as a beautiful, unique entity, which they cherished in their daily lives. Ever since the beginning of Japan's ancient folk religion, the connection between humans and nature has been regarded as a deep, mutually inspiring relationship where each influences the other. Although it appears to be diminishing, this evolving yet perpetual connection is still evident to some degree in the modern Japanese lifestyle.

Indeed, the Japanese people's traditional, loving attitude towards the beauty of nature is expressed in the many ways they celebrate every season. It is amazing to see just how much effort the Japanese have made for centuries, as they go out of their way to appreciate the various forms of nature that accompany each season of the year. Their appreciation ranges from cherry-blossom viewing in spring, to picnics in the autumn leaves, to mountain climbing in summer, to snow festivals in winter. Moreover, their appreciation extends to the tea ceremony, flower arranging, poems, literature, plays, and all other forms of traditional Japanese art and culture, which display nature in its finest light.

In the ancient days, Japan, as well as China, held very different beliefs about the concepts of nature vs spirit, and they did not actually have categories to express these concepts as we did in the West. In fact, there was no existing conflict between nature and spirit. Evidence of this can be seen in their traditional art forms, which exhibit harmony between the two concepts, blended together in poetry, painting, and other naturalistic ways of artistic expression.

Western perspective: dominance over nature

There is a common assumption that maintains that humans seek to conquer nature in the Western world. What are the reasons for this? First of all, God instructs humans to "rule" over nature in the Bible:

God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (Genesis 1:28, King James Version).

Moreover, according to certain scholars, an inherent fear of nature resides in the West, due to a lack of understanding about the mutual relationship between humans and nature, and due to a fear of God's wrath. In the West, every aspect of human influence is defended with continual vigilance, including the human personality, the "ego".

Our modern, technologically advanced Western society tends to view nature as merely a vast expanse upon which humans must relentlessly impose their order. Historically, Christian reason – disassociated from feeling – has considered nature as a potential form of destruction to humans; therefore, it must be manipulated and controlled. Nature has been conceived as an instrument of either God's will or His wrath.

Furthermore, the Western mind places so much importance and emphasis on verbal communication that it seems to have lost its ability to *feel* reality and what lies between the words of speech it creates. *Feeling* in this sense could be described as an intuitive capacity to feel nature – or a lack of it – and its substance, and the reality in which we, as humans, live in the universe. The laws of nature to which we have ascribed, until now, in the West are not discovered, but created by humans. The whole concept that nature is following some fundamental order is being replaced by the theory that this order is not pre-determined. For many, the idea of pre-existing and determinative laws has become obsolete. As Watts (1990) suggests, these laws are merely seen as "human tools, like knives, with which nature is chopped up into digestible portions".

In the West, nature stands against "man," the "master," who feels he has a right to rule over it. Many Western philosophers and psychologists such as Freud concentrated on the "ego" as the basis of human beings' reason for living, and as the source of human beings' true intentions. Yet humans who are focused on their own ego do not seem to have the capacity to view nature in its true perspective. Humans who live by their egos are humans who identify themselves, their minds, and their full awareness, with a

narrow and limiting sphere of attention referred to as “human consciousness”. Historically, however, experience shows that most scientific discoveries based on certain insights have arisen through a deep, subconscious field of awareness that we humans are reluctant to trust. This constant focus on ourselves not only leads us away from nature, it could potentially lead us away from joyful living. As we focus on our increasingly busy lives, we forget to make the effort to absorb the beauty around us, especially the beauty that arises from nature. “Seeing beauty in a flower could awaken humans, however briefly, to the beauty that is an essential part of their own innermost being, their true nature. The first recognition of beauty was one of the most significant events in the evolution of human consciousness” (Tolle, 2005).

Christianity evokes humanistic and very strong feelings, such as a human being’s love and appreciation for others, and belief in eternal life. However, in Christianity, humans tend to feel like they are outcasts from nature. Christianity teaches humans to seek a perfect, eternal life teeming with joy and happiness, without the pain of suffering and sadness. In this respect, Christianity is very distinct from nature in its true and raw form. The Christian concept of holiness is represented by human actions, and by human thoughts, while the Far-Eastern, especially Buddhist, concept of simply *being* – that is, existing – appears less important, if it is not entirely ignored, in our modern Western society, which has been founded on Judeo-Christian principles.

The fact that we concentrate less on being and existing ourselves has an influence on how people in the West regard nature. It is as if it were not there to exist for itself; as if it were there for humans alone. The spiritual concept of feeling part of nature is lacking in the West. We are currently nothing more than frustrated outsiders in relation to the concept of nature. According to Watts (1990):

We can see an individual leaf in all its clarity without losing sight of its relation to the tree. The difference between the animals and us is possibly that they have only the most rudimentary form of the individualized consciousness but a high degree of sensitivity to the endless knot of nature.

We are chiefly a thinking society in the West. We have aimed to achieve success in life by setting priorities on technological improvement, stemming from our intellectual development, and rational perspective on life. The historical reasons for this are a direct result of our religious upbringing in the West, which has gradually modified how we treat nature. Through its specific assumption that humans are the most perfect living entities in all of nature, throughout history, Christianity as a religion has supported the idea that humans are superior to all other living forms on Earth.

Far-Eastern religions and traditions

According to many scholars in the field of Far-Eastern religions and traditions, less mental concentration, especially on the self, and full relaxation of the mind and the senses brings about a deeper level of sensitivity and awareness of one’s surroundings. Doing this in the park, as a form of walking meditation, relaxes the mind and fills the heart and soul with the wonders of nature. These wonders have always been there but are unheard and unseen by a vivid mind that is overactive, over-stimulated by conscious thoughts, and trying to cope with the struggles of living in a modern world. Of significant interest is the fact that from a Western perspective, with regard to the holistic view of the human body, mind, and spirit, these three elements are not as linked as they are in the Far East.

Many religious traditions still exist in Japan, such as Japanese folk religion and Shinto, Buddhism, and Confucianism, which have greatly influenced the Japanese lifestyle. In addition, Christianity has had a significant cultural influence in Japan since its arrival in 1549, and its re-entry over 100 years ago, as have new religions that are continually emerging. These traditions are constantly influencing each other and because they are so complex, the contemporary Japanese religious status may be regarded as contradictory. In fact, the Japanese do not seem particularly interested in religion nowadays. With intensified urbanization and industrialization, increasing numbers of the general population do not feel they can identify with any kind of religion at all. The author interviewed one woman from northern Japan, who replied, “kankei nai,” signifying that religion had nothing to do with how she lived her life (anonymous interviewee, 2002, personal communication).

Zen Buddhism

As far as Japanese history is concerned, Buddhism was of an even greater educational and cultural interest than Confucianism; it carried into Japan a rich background, including landscape painting, sculpture, and literature. This is why one cannot cite Japanese culture without referring to Buddhism, for in all phases of its development, one can find obvious traces of Buddhist feeling and flavour. In Buddhism, equal importance is given to all living entities in the universe, and there is nothing more concrete, simple, and direct in order to feel the perfect harmony of nature than Zen Buddhism. It is the way of life that has been a great contributing factor to the profound Japanese philosophy and sensitivity towards nature.

Contrary to Christianity, which is based on faith, thus more theoretical and cerebral in its approach, true knowledge of Zen Buddhism can only come about through experience. Verbal narratives do not give us the same sensation of things we attempt to comprehend or see. Zen is not something that can be intellectualized; therefore, words can only convey part of the meaning of things. This is why Zen Buddhism is not affiliated with sermons, as sermons simply remain words. When people feel stifled and are not sure who they are, or where they are heading, the practice of Zen appears as a solution to their secret longing for truth.

Zen has more to do with deep feelings, intuition, and emotions, and less to do with words than other religions. “This increased awareness leads us to reach out to others in love, peace and compassion and to act with the intention to alleviate suffering in the world” (Herrera, 2001). It is precisely for this reason that the Japanese might have been less able to identify with adjectives when describing nature, when this author attempted to measure their sensitivity towards nature. Adjectives are words that, according to Zen philosophy, seem more like obstacles than guides to comprehension, especially in defining a person’s appreciation towards nature.

In Buddhism, feelings and intuitive emotions can be found everywhere, especially in nature. In Buddhism, there is an original Buddha nature that exists in all things: in mountains, streams, flowers, trees, and even rocks. But where is it in humans? If we look at animals, we realize just how they are different than we are. They do not play roles, change facades, or pretend to be what they are not. Most of us, especially in the West, feel morally superior as humans, for our original nature is saturated with self-will. We feel as if we are the centres of the universe, to which all else is related.

To comprehend the way the Japanese feel about nature, this author attempted to uncover the secrets of Buddhism, especially Zen Buddhism. Zen followers search for a direct insight into nature’s inner beauty. In fact, they regard the inner nature of all

things as the Truth. They disregard outward accessories as frivolous obstacles in the search for Truth. In Zen, *jihī* (compassion) is an attitude of gratitude or thankfulness with which one lives. It may be called instinct – one does not use the mind, nor subjectivity or objectivity, it is just an absolute feeling that lies at the core of our existence. Even though Christianity and Zen Buddhism both regard compassion as being essential, there is a difference in their interpretations of this term.

In Christian terminology, compassion means an emotional link to other people's joys and sorrows. In Zen, however, *jihī* (compassion) is the full acceptance of all things or people encountered in the present. What is important is that in Zen, *jihī* can be aimed at objects as well as people, and it signifies the acceptance of everything "just as it is," without impartiality. This could explain why Zen masters and followers appreciate Zen rock gardens so much. To them, what may seem like a few rocks scattered amongst patches of wild moss, surrounded by raked gravel to us, has a profound spiritual meaning. Inanimate objects are regarded just as highly, and with just as much compassion, as animate ones. In fact, when cutting a rose from a bush, Japanese tea masters, practicing the ancient art of the Buddhist *cha-no-yu*, have described hearing a faint "cry" from the delicate rose.

Zen Buddhists attempt to no longer live "their" lives because they realize that they *are* life, to its greatest potential. Every moment is precious and signifies eternity. They live completely in the present – right here, right now. In Buddhism, the goal is to practice "mindfulness" in each waking moment – to observe and understand what goes on all around and inside of us. In our modern, hectic world, we are usually lost, either pondering about the past or worrying about future goals, projects, and commitments. When we become "mindful," that is, absolutely living in the present, we are able to see and listen in a most profound way.

The Buddhist philosophy teaches us to tread on our green planet, with other living beings, as it exists right now. We must realize that peace surrounds us, in nature, and all over the world, and in our bodies and spirits. It lives in us.

Zen teaches us that we as humans are part of the cosmos, filled with spiritual energy that is constantly flowing through our bodies and through our souls. We will eventually disappear, like water, yet soon resurface in another physical form as part of nature and the universe that surrounds us. With regard to the Zen understanding of nature, it is through transparency that love of nature commences. The observer feels complete transparency, to the point of becoming utterly pure. Removed from his or her bodily form, he or she exists without an objective world, without a subjective mind. In this transparent, absolutely pure state of mind, he or she observes the external world of commotion and multiplicity, yet appreciates the beauty of nature, no matter how small its form. He or she finds satisfaction and beauty in restless forms such as crashing waves in a rough sea or howling winds from a typhoon, just as much as in serene moments while observing endless pastures, daisies fading at dusk, a cow chewing on tender new grass, or the sun rising at dawn.

The most important characteristic of Zen asceticism with regard to the Japanese love of nature is how it teaches people to give nature the respect it fully deserves. It treats nature as if it were human and friendly, like us, as one whose inner self is well meaning, like ours. It teaches us to respect – not violate or crush – nature, to regard it as our friend, not our foe. Its beauty lives in us and likewise, we live in it.

Far-Eastern cultures highly value the concept of naturalness (*shizen* in Japanese). They feel that the mind must stop trying to act upon itself and upon its stream of experiences, and simply let nature unfold in its own way and shape our world.

Thus, a main difference between the Western and Asian mind is that the Western mind is logical and conceptual while the Asian one is intuitive. This is especially seen in fields such as religion, metaphysics, interpersonal relationships, and the arts.

There is a spiritual relationship between Zen and the Japanese appreciation of art and nature. All types of art, especially those found within the depths of nature, in order to be viewed according to the Zen philosophy, are to be appreciated through insight into the mystery of being, life's true meaning, and the beautiful things surrounding us. This insight is called *satori*.

Different levels of awareness

In the Taoist religion and in Buddhism, contrary to Christianity in the West, all living things including mankind have their own unique relationship with the world, and each is considered equally valid. This brings us to different philosophies, different levels of awareness, and recognition of the senses, in which all of these factors lead to different vocabularies concerning the mind, body, and spirit. For example, the Japanese often use the term *kokoro*, which usually refers to "heart," as a substitute for the terms "mind" and "spirit".

In order to explain why there is a different usage of terms describing the human "mind" and "spirit," one must look at how the human body is interpreted in each culture. The Japanese, as well as the majority of the people in the Far East, have traditionally held different views of the human body than we have in the West. Much of this is due to major differences in religion, such as the Eastern belief in reincarnation, the belief that the body is simply a vehicle or a receptacle, and an emphasis on meditation in the East. In fact, in ancient Japan, the *hara*, or abdomen, was regarded as "the place where the soul resides". It was considered to be the physical centre of the body. According to this theory, it is the most important part of the body, the part which connects all living parts of us, and which connects us to nature and the universe. On the contrary, in Western philosophy, Descartes imagined "this place where the soul resides" to be in the pineal gland of the brain (Barkye, 2008, p. 182).

The relationship between the three terms: body, mind, and spirit, is what defines the concept of holistic living, which plays a vital role in the human connection to nature. In the West, we have difficulty realizing that thought alone is not what is most important as we define our place in the universe. For the reality of nature is not divisible and separate, contrary to the way our thought processes function. Our world is not a mosaic of things which lie side by side or continually overlap; it is unified, and each component consists of a meaningful piece in this complex puzzle we call life. In fact, human beings' true existence can be characterized by a permanent, existing connection between mind, body, and the spiritual world. This represents the Japanese, and Asian, way of viewing the world and the entire universe. The environment in which we exist is regarded as a holistic part of our existence.

Language and meaning

Can words really indicate how one feels or how sensitive one is towards nature? The concept of *meaning* is perhaps one of the major components of human behaviour. It has a psychological significance, represented by a cognitive state, relating to the functioning of representational processes in language behaviour. Due to the fact that languages have particular meanings, in given situations they create a certain expected type of behaviour. Language can be used as a tool for uncovering the meaning and level

of sensitivity individuals attribute to certain concepts in nature; this idea is truly fascinating, from a psychological, sociological, linguistic, and humanistic point of view. Yet is it really *meaning* that we are measuring here?

Each language has its own structure, and within this structure we can define the use of certain roles that are learned in childhood – for example, male and female roles – transmitted by social norms and rules. These various linguistic structures and roles are bound to influence us, even though we may not consciously be aware of their impact on our attitudes, daily interactions with others, and overall perceptions of life.

It is interesting to consider that formerly, there was no basis of thought in the Chinese and Japanese cultures that pitted the concepts of nature and spirit against each other, as is done in the Western world. In these ancient cultures, forms of art such as poetry and painting were the most spiritual expressions of natural life. Further, in the Far East, a prevalent view is held that true knowledge is non-verbal and outside the realm of conceptual thought.

Classification is a human invention, and the natural world is not readily displayed to us in a classified form. The act of *feeling* in nature is actually the concept of silent observation, or, according to Watts (2001):

[...] the attitude and approach whereby nature must be explored if we are to recover our original sense of integrity with the natural world [...] Things are separable in words, which are inseparable in nature because words are counters, and classifiers, which can be arranged in any order.

Before we can formulate feelings and emotions into words, we must first realize what our true impressions of nature are. In the Western world, we consider that a law of nature exists, which is a certain order of events that can be identified by the thought process such as through words and adjectives. This law of nature is seen as universal, for it comes from the Western belief in monotheism, with one single God ruling the world.

Conclusion and recommendations

Western science shows awareness towards nature based on selective, abstract, and analytical processes. The world is observed through a magnifying glass that reduces it to “intelligible things”. This opens up a whole new area for discussion and sheds light on a certain level of awareness. We must look at the means through which awareness of the seamless unity between humans and the natural world can arise, referring to the realm of feeling, rather than thought, leaning towards poetry rather than direct, intellectual philosophy. Yet coming to this awareness can be difficult, because in order to find it, actions of the will, or ego, will only be able to reinforce its separate expression of consciousness.

Moreover, our human feelings are not constant, fixed states of emotion. They are continually in motion, demonstrating not only motility, but ambivalence. There is a polarity between them, such as happy vs sad, love vs hate, etc. In fact, the more we know about ourselves and our innermost secrets and desires, the more difficult it is to define our human nature and express how we feel. The further we let ourselves spontaneously reach inward and tap our natural, pure source of energy, the more likely we are to discover a surprisingly different, more intense way to feel.

Unfortunately for us, our thoughts do not allow us to see ourselves in this way. As Westerners, we see ourselves as the subject, with nature the object. For although Western culture thrives on technological innovation, it is at a loss in terms of where and how humans fit into our natural surroundings. Our traditional and modern views of

existential thought need to be enlightened. Our Western way of thinking ultimately exploits the Earth's resources without realizing the damage it inflicts, for nature is not exactly contrived according to "mutually exclusive alternatives," deriving from a typically Western ideology based on logic and the influence of language.

To conclude, this author recommends that all humans devote more time to the daily practice of inner reflection, such as in traditional Far-Eastern practices of meditation, martial arts, and yoga. Starting with ten minutes of stillness per day, this author challenges readers to sit on a cushion in a quiet room. Closing our eyes, we let ourselves relax. Ever so gradually, we experience a release of mental and physical stress, slowly lessening our grasp of repetitive, self-obsessed thoughts that quicken our heartbeats and pollute our minds. With a greater sense of awareness and deeper compassion for all, this peaceful experience should enhance our sensitivity towards nature, provide us with newfound appreciation and respect for all living beings on Earth, and motivate us to pursue an environmentally sustainable lifestyle.

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