

The Value of Nature

- a paper by Galath Antoniette

When asking ourselves: “What is the value of nature?” most of us tend to be utilitarian. We may think of walks through a forest with birds singing and think “I use nature to relax”. Or when we were last going fishing: “Well I caught a fish and I had a good time”. Some of us may come to think of everything we produce that comes from nature, like agricultural products, natural materials like leather and wool, wood and stone, and so on and so forth. In this thesis I will argue that these needs are just scratching the surface of something much deeper, and that our very existence as we know it depends on nature in a way that is independent of our existing level of technology.

First of all it is important to acknowledge that all our material needs for nature can be substituted by artificial products if the right level of technology is present. This has led some people to argue that we don't need nature at all, and to some extent they are right. Every product, material or service derived from nature can be produced by machines, given sufficiently high levels of technology. But how did those machines come into being in the first place? Well someone had to think them up. And now we are touching upon what is missing from the equation: Imagination.

The people that used to believe in an all powerful God, a creator, could not imagine that all the wonderful phenomena of nature were created by chance. But that was indeed what had happened. The one law guiding all of evolution, survival of the fittest, was, combined with randomness, responsible for all of nature's wonders. But in early history God and nature had one thing in common. It was something beyond our control, something bigger than man or even mankind you could say. And either could be responsible for inspiration and imagination. “It came to me suddenly, as from above,” some could say. Other people found inspiration in nature. The following argumentation will be based on the idea (which for this paper will remain a postulate) that there has to be something beyond ourselves, beyond our control, in order for us to get inspired and have new ideas.

Is that not exactly what nature is? That which is not part of our society, which is beyond our control? Thus, in order for us to have new ideas, and to develop, we need nature. This goes far beyond needing wool for a sweater, or wood for a table. Without nature we would simply degenerate into a standstill, or something that would keep moving within the same patterns until finally destroyed by entropy.

In my work as a bioengineer I am creating nature. But that creation does not come out of the blue. It is building upon my own knowledge about nature and inspiration from the nature around me. You may say that technology and nature form a symbiosis, nature giving to technology and technology giving back to nature. And once my creation is done I leave it to have its own life, and in most cases that means the possibility to develop into

new lifeforms over millions of years. Nature becomes technology and technology becomes nature.

What then can we take with us from all this? Well, it means that we must limit our civilizations in order to preserve or create room for nature. And we must stop polluting and respect the nature there is and the nature to come. Because if we don't our future is in jeopardy, leaving us with a poorer society and a poorer nature in the end. And we will all lose some important part of our humanity.