

REAL NATURE AND TECHNOLOGICAL NATURE – A GENERAL SURVEY OF THEIR IMPACT UPON HUMANS. THE DRAMATIC CASE OF JOHN CLARE

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Abstract

In this paper, we have dealt with a particular aspect of modern technology, namely its relationship to real nature. Nature has always been close to us, humans, and has been studied and copied ever since antiquity. Advanced technology, on the other hand, is a more recent achievement. Both, nature and technology, have been taken as models able to improve human life. In spite of the fact that they say we are technological species, nature is part of our very existence, while technology seems a little bit more detached from what we used to call human beings. However, there are examples of people who were actually destroyed by being disconnected from nature. Nevertheless, recent discoveries proved that the truth lies somewhere in-between. Nature and technology are partners and not enemies. Modern life requires modern devices, as well as the benefits of real nature!

Key Words: *modern technology, real nature, disconnected from nature, partners not enemies*

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1. Modern Technology and Its Immediate Impact Upon Humans

Everyday life activities are connected to all devices of modern technology. Young people say they would die not having a cell phone. Older people say the same not having a computer. Technology is used in all domains of human activity and, usually, it is meant to make life easier. The truth is that technology is absolutely necessary in many domains, but it is not necessary in others. It is important that we should make the difference!

There are both pros and cons of technology used in every domain. By using it, the world does not seem so abstract and a lot of information is at hand.

However, technology use must not be excessive. *Extreme technological use in adolescents*, for instance, can cause all sorts of problems; socially and physically. Adolescents need to understand that technology is an amazing thing; but, at the same time, it should not be used all of the time. They should not be dependent on it. By being dependent on technology brings about our being disconnected from nature. This disconnection from nature can have a negative impact on humans because we are missing the *beneficial effects of nature*. As a result, we are less connected to nature and feel less responsibility to protect this environment.

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Some researchers' report notes that "nature is essential for human existence and good quality of life. That most of nature's contributions to people are not fully replaceable, and some are irreplaceable." Yet, nature has been significantly exploited by people and the drivers of change have accelerated over recent decades, "with the great majority of indicators of ecosystems and biodiversity showing rapid decline" (Richardson, 2019).

2. What happens if we are disconnected from nature. The Case of John Clare

The importance of our connection to real nature has ever been beneficial. However difficult it might seem, there still are dramatic examples regarding the effects of technology upon certain people. One of these examples is the case of John Clare, one of the most famous and interesting English Romantic poets.

John Clare (1793-1864) has been considered the greatest poet of the working class. Nobody has ever written more passionately about nature, about childhood spent in the countryside or about one's alienated and unstable self. However, he was not the subject of a comprehensive, literary biography, until Jonathan Bate (2003) wrote one.

John Clare was born in a rather poor family, and later on, he had a large family with many children. Consequently, he had to work hard in order to get the necessary money, but he also felt the urge to write poems. He never left his native village, Helpstone, in Hamptonshire, England. He wrote many poems, and he did it out of instinct. He said that God was talking to him in verse and what he did was nothing more than putting down what God told him.

Nevertheless, John Clare was not a usual man. It often seems to be playing with words and rhymes. He was religious, but not fanatic, and had faith in God. According to him, God too lived in nature, and nature itself was the best example of the perfection of God. During his childhood, all he could do was to wander around his native village and find out the beauty of nature. Woods surrounded his native village and Clare learned to love nature. Like most of the poets, Clare was a very sensitive person. He watched all details in nature: birds, their nests, their eggs, insects, green valleys, brooks, flowers, and many other things. Nature became his only refuge, the ideal place, his travelling guide, lover and friend. That is, *nature became his own nature*. Moreover, this is an important step in one's life, as we need nature in order to be able to survive.

One day, he lost nature. *The Enclosure Acts* were one of the factors and the major one. These acts were a series of Parliamentary Acts, the majority of which were passed between 1750 and 1860; through the Acts, open fields and "wastes" were closed to use by the peasantry. *Open fields* were large agricultural areas to which a village population had certain rights of access and which they tended to divide into narrow strips for cultivation. The wastes were unproductive areas — for example, fens, marshes, rocky land, or moors — to which the peasantry had traditional and collective rights of access in order to pasture animals, harvest

meadow grass, fish, collect firewood, or otherwise benefit. Rural laborers who lived on the margin depended on open fields and the wastes to fend off starvation. (The Enclosure Acts¹). But, at the same time, there also were some powerful financial people who believed, and they were not entirely wrong, that money could also buy love. They enclosed the place, changed its use, made profit, and gained even more money. Unfortunately, such people are to be found even today, and, moreover, their number seems to be increasing. They lack the reality and health culture, common sense and compassion. They are „organized” in a specific group, and cannot be talked to, as they seem to speak a completely different language. The language of money! They can hear you, but they do not understand what you are saying.

3. What happened to John Clare?

By losing the woods and all that surrounded the village, he found himself isolated from nature, as nature was taken away from him. He couldn't either understand or bear the irreversible disconnection. First, he tried to struggle with the new feeling. He tried to share it with others. He wrote almost exclusively about it! Eventually, he was defeated, he suffered a serious nervous break-down, took to drugs and alcohol. His end was a mental illness that finally killed him. Previously, he had spent half of his life in asylums, and was often judged to be a mentally ill poet. But *John Clare died because he had lost nature!*

It has been said that getting rid of the ground brought about many liberties. but many liberties were also lost. This proves to be a paradox. Clare deals with it in his wonderful poem entitled *The Fallen Elm: Thou'st heard the knave, abusing those in power/ Bawl freedom loud and then oppress the free;/ Thou'st sheltered hypocrites in many a shower,/ That when in power would never shelter thee.*

The environmental crisis began with the Enclosure Acts (McElroy, 2012). The avidity era, the privatization, as well as the confiscation of public goods was prognosticated by those acts. They prepared the soil for these toxic harvests (Moore, 2003).

The truth is that people have used the ground carelessly for centuries being interested in *personal and financial incomes*. In some instances, they just do not know what the effects of their actions are. *They justify their domination and superiority upon the environment when they notice that they are separated from nature.* They think they are great and powerful. Moreover, they breakaway from church, and especially from God.

4. John Clare and the Loss of Nature

No Romantic poet has ever written more passionately about the happiness of being close to nature. No other poet has ever fought more powerfully and constantly to underline the everlasting nature along generations. But no other poet has ever written about the *loss of nature for ever*. Clare is just on the border between *the*

¹ *Enclosure Acts—Great Britain 1700–1801 – UWSP* [www4.uwsp.edu > english > rsirabia > notes > enclosureacts](http://www4.uwsp.edu/english/rsirabia/notes/enclosureacts).

experience of joy in nature and its loss for ever, as well as possessing the feelings one experiences after nature no longer exists. Clare's poetry offers a viewpoint for what *to survive the death of one's own nature* actually meant (Bewell, 2011).

What seems worth mentioning is that John Clare, although defeated by the loss of nature, had never changed the tone and feelings of joy and bliss when writing about his native village and its surroundings. He kept his love for nature even when he was in an asylum and very ill.

5. How Do Humans Relate to Nature?

Our Connectedness to Nature has always been beneficial and necessary. Even though we can connect with nature in a range of ways, there is a growing fear that some people, particularly children, are becoming increasingly disconnected from nature. The increase in people living in urban areas and the lack of green spaces in those urban areas contribute to our disconnecting from nature (Gelsthorpe, 2017). The historian Christian Lous Lange defined technology as being a useful servant but a dangerous master (Gates, n.d.).

Our relationship with the natural environment can be understood through the concept of *biophilia* and the *biophilia hypothesis*. (Wilson, 1990). The term explains humans' innate need to affiliate with other life such as plants and animals. This essentially means that *humans have a desire to be near nature*.

In this respect University of Washington psychology professor *Peter Kahn* has spent much of his career analyzing the relationship humans - nature. Kahn works to understand the intersection of two modern phenomena: the *destruction of nature, and the growth of technology*. As UW's director of the *Human Interaction with Nature and Technological Systems Lab* (HINTS), Khan researches humans in relation to both *real nature* and "*technological nature*": digital representations of the wild, such as nature-focused documentaries, video games, and VR stimulations (Skills2Learn E-Learning).

The effects of *technological nature* proved to be positive. For example, researchers have found that nature videos played in prisons drastically reduce violence amongst inmates, suggesting nature's relaxing influence translates through screens. Yet there is a limit to the extent technological representations of nature can provide the soothing, restorative, creativity-enhancing benefits of a walk in the real woods. (Matei, 2017). Kahn's concern is that in the process of pursuing technological nature, *we are becoming increasingly alienated from the real thing*, growing to accept a digital substitute for engagement with the wild, and compromising our fundamental affiliation for the environment in the process.

6. What does Professor Kahn think about technological nature?

Asked about the subject of nature versus technology, Professor Peter Kahn answered some essential questions regarding the growth of technology. He undelined that nature is necessary for our physical and psychological wellbeing. Interacting with nature teaches us to live in relation *with* the other, not in

domination *over* the other (Matei, 2017). Because this is what people did: they tried to dominate nature. Professor Kahn is sure that we are a technological species because the impetus for it lies within the architecture of our very being. But, even though we are a technological species, we are now out of balance. To struggle, we need more nature and more wild forms of interaction with more wild nature; we do not need too much new technology (Matei, 2017).

Conclusions. What could people do about it?

The major cause for any harmful activity starts with the human habit of generalizing, of neglecting the value of each individual, of disregarding human needs in favour of personal benefit. In former times, people knew very little about the negative impact of their life style upon the environment. Today, the problem is not the lack of knowledge. Science and technology have demonstrated how severe the deterioration of activity is because of pollution.

The world biggest problem today is people's lack of obligation towards the health of the environment. Some people are perfectly content with the degradation of the environment while they are looking for personal gains. Maybe we need laws which are able to regulate this absence. It is possible that laws already exist, but they are not consistently applied. (Schultz, 2002) Should a profound understanding of the relationship between man and nature be considered a correct attitude, that may significantly contribute to getting happiness, prosperity, and longevity for the representatives of human society, then a defeated man is he who has no longer feelings and no interest in perceiving real life. His face becomes stiff, he has no wrinkles of expression, often but sneers, professionally', without any movement of his face muscles, as if he were dead. Such a man can no longer communicate with others. He is obsessed but with money, power, and his own wellbeing!

People have intuited the crucial importance of nature for man. Today, due to scientific researches, it became clear that a close contact with nature may help us avoid depression, stimulates our self-esteem, help us to be more aware, less aggressive and indifferent, and improves performances in our professional activity (Nituleac, 2012). At the same time, modern technology is getting advanced on a daily basis and applying different *technologies* is making our lives simpler. *Modern technologies* like artificial intelligence, machine learning are rewriting the future of work. Industries are now witnessing a cultural shift in the workplace (Naveen, 2018).

Biological diversity is the "infrastructure" that supports life on our planet: the air we breathe, the food we eat and the water we drink are only possible as long as we have healthy biodiversity. Yet, this essential human lifeline is severely threatened.

As mentioned above, new technologies come with a range of associated risks and opportunities, and can be used for good or for worse. Technology can be used to restore biodiversity as well as to destroy it, either intentional (e.g. resource extraction) or unintentional, through its unmanaged effects (e.g. some types of genetic engineering). Thus, *awareness* and *responsibility* are key when designing and utilizing any type of technology (Revkin, 2014).

The three main types of *limits on technology* are natural, economic, and ethical. *Natural limits* are ones where the laws of the universe physically prevent us from doing something. This is a hard *limit*; it implies to understand the changes of the universe (Idem) However, a common attitude of those who are seriously concerned with the relationship nature – technology is that of finding a bridge between the two. Whatever we do, nature and technology are two realities, which should be friends and not enemies (Flat, 2015) Cases as such of John Clare is an exception rather than the rule! The solution was given by people such as by Bill Gates, who said that “the advance of technology is based on making it fit in so that you don't really even notice it, so it's part of everyday life,” (Gates, n.d.). The technologist Kevin Kelly believes that technology is “a force of nature”, evolving along the same principles as any living species. Or perhaps nature, like humanity, is a sort of mysterious technology. (Kelly, 2010)

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