

Human Dissociation from Nature as the Fundamental Cause of the Climate Crisis and Environmental Destruction

Kenji Abe, Ed.D.

Toin University of Yokohama

Yokohama, JAPAN

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.22877989>

Published Date: 22-September-2026

Abstract: This paper proposes human dissociation from nature as a fundamental cause of the climate crisis and environmental destruction. It argues that treating animals as resources reinforced the belief that humans are separate from and superior to nature, fostering anthropocentrism and the exploitation of the natural world. Therefore, it suggests that reconnecting with animals as living manifestations of nature may be a promising path to restore our natural identity, reduce further environmental destruction, and attain psychological stability, peace, and happiness.

Keywords: human–nature relationship; nature connectedness; human–nature disconnection; anthropocentrism; human exceptionalism; ecological identity; human–animal relationship; animal commodification; animal exploitation; ecopsychology.

I. INTRODUCTION

Today, we all share a deep feeling that the Earth is heading toward a final dead end in the not-too-distant future [1]. We are already witnessing global warming, abnormal weather, and extreme flooding. And we think these problems are caused by our subtle luxuries and greed, such as driving cars, using air conditioning, continuously purchasing newer goods, and so on. Yet there must be something more fundamental that is causing this level of environmental and climate damages. And I would like to propose that the root cause for all these is human dissociation from nature [2]. That is, we in fact have a deep mindset that separates us from and leads us to destroy nature, including the nature within ourselves [3].

We are all born as part of nature. However, once our Western ancestors began killing animals for regular food in the Mesopotamian area around 11,000 BC [4], we came to despise animals and, consequently, nature as their habitat [4][5]. And now, as billions of people around the world admire sophisticated European culture, especially flashy American culture, this denial of nature is also spreading worldwide [6]. That is, although human beings are born and live as part of nature, we cannot accept our natural identity [7]. And it is this human dissociation from nature that is causing the current environmental destruction and climate crisis [2]. In addition, as the denial of nature leads to the rejection of our inner nature, we may also destroy outer nature through psychological projection [8]. That is, we have an impulse to destroy nature as a reflection of ourselves [9]. This further promotes environmental destruction. And this most often happens subtly and subconsciously, yet substantially, just as we casually choose Disneyland over camping in Yosemite and modern housing over wooden housing [10].

II. HOW CAN WE TREAT OUR DISSOCIATION FROM NATURE

As such, in order to stop further damage to the Earth, we must first treat our dissociation. But how? As it was originally caused by our despising animals for meat, logically, it should start with reducing or ending our meat consumption. However, because meat consumption is so deeply established and widespread, stopping it dramatically is unrealistic [11]. Thus, we need to start by learning to accept animals first. But again, how?

III. ANIMALS AS OUR GUIDE TO RECONNECTING WITH NATURE

Living far separated from nature, humans have clearly lost their natural balance [12], just as mindfulness is becoming an important keyword today. Yet animals can pull us out of the current abstract, human-made world. Animals also awaken our empathy, presence, and instinctive bond with other living beings because they are living, non-human organisms with natural instincts, rhythms, and needs. Although nature itself may appear still, animals can bring us closer to nature through movement. That is, animals are the living embodiment of nature [13][14]. As such, we can reconsider animals as a medium for awakening our connection with nature, reminding us that we are part of this living ecosystem. By accepting nature through animals, we can also accept ourselves in a true sense [15].

Downgrading animals to mere food materials placed human beings in the role of shepherds of other living beings and nature, as reflected in the Bible [16]. This consciousness—that human beings are special and separate from the rest of the natural world—contributed to anthropocentrism, encouraging us to pursue human benefits and happiness while disregarding the welfare of the rest of the natural world [17]. This human-centered orientation has contributed to environmental destruction and the climate crisis. At the same time, human beings have increasingly become consumers who may no longer critically think about their existential meaning [18].

We need to reconsider the idea that human beings are inherently separate or superior to other forms of life. The fact is that we are endowed with special memory, just as dogs are endowed with a highly developed sense of smell [19]. We need to regain our identity as part of the animal kingdom and return to being natural human beings. Thus, to reconnect with nature is also to reconsider the direction of human civilization [20]. As we regain awareness of our animal nature, we can reintegrate with the rest of the natural world [21].

In this sense, we should return to the historical crossroads at which our ancestors began killing animals regularly for meat. We should reconsider how human life can be aligned with the principles of nature [22]. A key to this process is learning from animals, which live according to the fundamental principles of nature [23].

IV. THE PREREQUISITE FOR LIVING ON THE ONLY LIVING PLANET IN THE UNIVERSE

The principles of nature govern everything on Earth [24]. They are beyond our religious beliefs [25]. Earth is so special because it is the one and only known living planet in the universe [26]. Thus, it is a prerequisite for us to live according to its natural providence [27]. Human dissociation from nature is the root cause of many of the major problems we are facing today. We need to treat it by unifying ourselves with nature, just as individual dissociation is treated [28]. Stopping our treatment of animals as a food source and respecting them as our guides, showing us the guiding light as they were originally meant to do, is a key to this process. As we treat our inner dissociation, we can treat our outer dissociation as well [29].

V. CONCLUSION

As psychotherapist Carl Jung pointed out, the ultimate goal of the individual is to integrate all the split parts of the self into a whole [30]. Integration represents a state of greater stability and resilience, whereas compartmentalization can increase vulnerability to external forces [31][32]. Now is the time to integrate our natural identity with the natural world in order to attain true peace and happiness through a more stable and harmonious relationship with this Earth. Before our disorder turns this living planet into another dead planet in the universe.

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