Man and his environment

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On the geological time scale man has been on earth for an infinitesimally short time, and yet he has the power and potential to make substantial changes to the environment. Hence it seems paradoxical that, on the one hand, our human race thinks that it has evolved a long way from its days in prehistoric caves, and, on the other, feels as frustrated as ever with things around it.

Perhaps "insecure" is the best term to describe the predominant feature of our ancestors' life. There was always the fear of wild beasts, other men, insufficient food, inadequate shelter, etc. Something in their nature pushed them to search for food when they were hungry and if successfully obtained there was the momentary thrill of joy in achievement and happy relief from the pangs of hunger. However, when the food had been consumed, the old anxiety and insecurity returned again. Those feelings were as bad as before. But there was also a difference. The experience gained in surviving was being used in future efforts at survival. This accumulating experience was called "knowledge", and as man used it for surviving by establishing better methods of living, he said he was making "progress". It became easier to catch food due to his improved knowledge or "progress", but the thrill of joy he had experienced in catching it earlier had somewhat diminished. The thrill now came from making the animal skin into clothing as it was the new challenge.

With the passage of time, man seems to have forgotten that he was not, and still is not really, interested in the so called "progress" that is measured by technological or economic indices, but in that "thrill" which he is aware of but cannot reproduce at will. Searching for this thrill man "progressed" from cave-dwelling to moon-walking but the thrill itself remained as rare an experience as before. When there was not enough to eat, searching and finding food gave something of that thrill, and it was easy to rationalize that it was a characteristic of food. That this was not so was known by seeking more and more of it in food and failing to find it. What is true of food is true of almost everything else in life.

The whole story of human evolution and progress is the chasing of this elusive experience that has been described here as thrill of joy and can be called "complete fulfillment". The paradox mentioned in our opening paragraph is thus no paradox at all, because mankind as a whole has made very little, if any, progress towards achieving "complete fulfillment", except in the sense that, by pursuing it in many fields which seemed to promise such satisfaction, mankind had learned where fulfillment does not lie. Maybe we have been too concerned with the superficial satisfaction of technological progress: maybe there is little comprehension of

the real thrill of life: maybe it is too difficult to recognize the progress we have made towards "complete fulfillment". Whatever the reason, the frustrations of today's man are real.

We seem to have brain-washed ourselves into thinking that achieving a little more of "this" and a little more of "that" will really satisfy ourselves and give us the permanent thrill. We insist on chasing our own shadows and feel frustrated when they keep just as far as they ever were and yet naively believe we can capture them in our next dash forward. The shadows keep changing their forms with our mad rush and in fact the faster we run the faster they change! The present seems to be a time when the form of the shadow is called the "problems of environment and natural resources".

Instead of heroically dashing forth again, can we stop for a moment to catch our breath? Let us allow ourselves to be humbled by the thought that despite our sweating and panting to date, we have made little progress towards real fulfillment. Let us look objectively at the question of man, environment and resources.

For this purpose these three constituents of the problem must be defined. Environment and resources are not mutually exclusive terms. Resources are, and should be thought of as, part of the environment. The terms of the question, then, are reduced to *man and his environment*. Broadly speaking, what is environment is not man, and what is man is not environment. By defining one, we can define the other in a negative way. To start with: What is environment? All that is around anyone or anything is its environment. The air, the trees, the buildings, the social, political and economic complex, all other men, and even the body, feelings, ideas and thoughts of any one man as seen by that one man are part of his environment. Likewise, we could describe the environment of any other one man, or one animal, or plant, or even, to complete the concept, any one inanimate object. Thinking only of *man*, that one man for whom we described the environment, what is left after describing his environment? We do not have a picture of man as a zoological specimen but as a single focal point in the total Man-Environment Complex. Each one of us has a focus in the sub-

A plea to ourselves . . .

jective principle of this complex, and the objective principle around each focus is the environment of that focal point. Thus, man's environment is that which he "sees" and the one who does the "seeing" is man. Within the total Man-Environment Complex there are many focal points — many men in this restricted sense. The totality of all these foci (man, animal, plant, mineral) is the Subject of the entire Man-Environment Complex. This Complex itself cannot be defined any more precisely than by asserting: "it is all that is". It is the Subject of this Complex who, through its many foci as "men", uses resources. No single focus can even conceptualize the Subject as by definition it is the one that "sees" and not that which is "seen". Yet some rough statements about the nature of the subject may be possible. Firstly it exists, secondly it "sees", that is it has awareness, and thirdly it is seeker of the "thrill". If the Subject did not seek thrill we who are foci in it would not care about thrill either. The foci become troubled by the thoughts of possible future scarcities and problems of pollution because they see in them threats to the very possibility of the search for thrill. The foci must find the answer. Unless it is found the insecurity and anxiety of our ancestors will continue to be with us.

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Now, consider this allegory of a resource-manager dealing with production of timber and recreation on his forested land. He has a very able and aggressive young timber-supervisor. Who aims to obtain as high profits from timber production as possible. Also, let there be an older parks-supervisor, who is equally able, but milder in nature, and devoted to maximizing the net social returns from recreation produced over the forest land.

Both the dedicated supervisors, in the course of their duties, would prepare plans of action that each thought best from his own point of view. Both would, almost unconsciously, undervalue the other's product and suggest to the manager quite different plans of operation. The manager, if he is real, would know his supervisors and try to see the merits of their proposals without being affected by the aggressiveness of the timber-man or the modesty of the parks-man. He would also look for a synthesis of the two plans, so that the total benefit from timber plus recreation should be as high as possible. The profits made by the timber operation alone or returns from recreation alone will not dominate his outlook. He will keep his eye on the *total benefit*.

Now let us assume that the resource-manager has gone on leave, and the timber-supervisor, in recognition of his "dynamism" and initiative, has been made to officiate as manager in addition to his timber duties. An immature man in such a dual role is likely to carry his aggressiveness and over-

enthusiasm for timber into the manager's office. He is likely to ride rough-shod over the park-supervisor's plans repeatedly. It is possible that he may suddenly realize that the parks-supervisor is no longer the happy looking friend that he was, and may, being an immature and impulsive person, decide to please him by accepting all his plans as they are. The situation may stay like this for some time and then swing back to the old stage when the timber-man in him re-awakens. Both the situations would be results of the unsuitability of this dashing and hypersensitive young supervisor for the managerial post. He could not see the two view points at the same time and create a meaningful synthesis. Neither could he see nor feel that there were not only the two competing objectives (timber profits versus recreation returns) but a third objective also — that of the manager — which went beyond these two and incorporated them in itself.

If the vacationing resource-manager decided to quit his job, and our timber-supervisor was faced with the prospect of being in his shoes permanently, *then we would find the situation to be very much like that confronting us in the world today*, and because of which the Man and Resources Conference took shape last year.

Today's man is the aggressive timber-supervisor of the allegory, environment is the milder parks-man, and the resource-manager's charge is the Man-Environment Complex. If we really do not want any more conflict between the hedonistic economic man and the infantile wilderness enthusiast, then we must learn how to become managers of the Man-Environment Complex. Of necessity it involves giving up our personalities as men concerned with ourselves alone. We have to transcend ourselves if we hope to control environment. We must learn that we, in reality, are not mere timber-supervisors anymore, though we will have to play that role also. Environment is not to be "conquered", in the normal sense, and sought to be enslaved by us, but to be recognized for what it is — an inseparable part of the Man-Environment Complex, without which man is nothing, and which is incomplete without man. Rather than "conquer", we have to "integrate" the environment into ourselves and integrate it *consciously*. The product of such integration is the resource-manager mentioned above, and only when he is produced, are the problems of mankind taken care of. In fact one can say that producing such

To let us catch our breath . . .

integrated men is not only the *means* to solving our problems but the very *objective* of the life process.

Perhaps some people will agree with these views and readily assert that becoming manager of the Man-Environment Complex, i.e. becoming integrated man, is the problem of the day. They may even feel that they are already doing that. However, this does not seem to be the case. If in our allegory the timber-supervisor accepts the responsibilities of the resource-manager, but does not forget that he was a timber-supervisor, *then he cannot be the manager we need*. Just learning more about recreation is not the answer. This can only produce in him a split personality. It is not mere additional information that he requires but an integration of the psyche. He has to become something quite different; but it is not possible to show clearly what that different thing is unless he first becomes it. The first step may be to try and keep his over-enthusiasm for timber in check, and direct part of it — at least — towards the goal of becoming a manager. At the same time, this attempt must not result in his becoming a recreation enthusiast, for that will only have meant jumping from the frying pan to the fire.

Men have sought the answer to their problems of a hostile environment by manipulating the environment. They have succeeded in changing it, and have enormous potential to change it further, but *they have not solved the problem*. The moment some change has occurred, the problem also has changed. And, although the emphasis may have varied from time to time and from land to land, the problem has remained more or less intact. Running faster after our shadows will not result in catching them.

And follow the method of Alexander the Great

Regarding shadows, there is a story. It is said that King Philip of Macedonia had a magnificent horse but it was scared of its shadow. No one could safely ride him. One day, young Alexander saw the futile attempts of an attendant in bringing the beast under control and offered to tame him. In the presence of the King he first turned the animal to face the sun and then mounted a very docile horse. Some say that it was this totally fresh approach of turning around the horse, away from its shadow, that earned for Alexander the title of "Great".

A totally fresh approach of this nature is called for in attacking the problems of man and his environment today. Trying to manipulate the environment *alone* has given no enduring answers in the past and is not likely to be any more successful in future. The negative suggestion of "letting nature run its course", in the sense of encouraging wilderness on a massive scale, is too impractical and ridiculous to be paid any serious attention. The latter suggestion is a real "drop out" for mankind. *Homo sapiens* may not be the only part of the Complex concerned with future, but we believe that, because of the brightness of the foci that we humans are, we have an obligation to make use of the faculties with which we have evolved. Like Alexander we must stop our horses from looking at their shadows and "turn around". Then the shadows will follow us and cease to bother us by appearing as one phantom problem or the other.

If we can see that mankind (as a collection of foci in the subjective principle) and environment are two living and *mutually dependent* phenomena that are acting in the totality of the Man-Environment Complex, then it is evident that a balance can be attained only in terms of the whole Complex and not in terms of man alone or environment alone. Such a balance has of necessity to be trans-man and trans-environment.

Certain actions may be highly desirable if seen from the point of view of man alone, for example, many of the resource-using economic activities. Other actions may be highly desirable from the point of view of environment alone, for example, promoting world-wide wilderness (if it were possible to do so). But what is seen as desirable for man alone, without taking into account the environment, is usually detrimental to the environment, if seen only from the latter's point of view. Similarly,

what is desirable for environment alone can hardly be accepted by man. Such a situation is very natural, unless we realize that, in reality, "desirability" or "undesirability" have meaning only in the context of the whole Complex that transcends both its components. Mankind does make some effort to this end in assessing "impact studies" — i.e. estimation of effects of certain actions on the environment — but he makes these assessments as an un-integrated being which represents only part of the total complex as defined above and not the whole. There is a need to change the viewpoint

of assessment. There is a need for a new integrated "man", representing the whole complex, as has been exemplified in the allegory. Only individual men who have transcended their nature and integrated the "unknown" environment of their own psyche can arrive at a trans-man and trans-environment balance. Here, outwardly adjusted people, in the usual psychological sense, will not do.

So far, the term civilization has meant more and more attempts at subduing environment, while taking the nature of man as something inviolable. It is true that men have talked about this, but there has been no real action to produce a new "man". Even those who object to this statement can verify for themselves that most attempts at changing the nature of man have been directed toward other men. The underlying principle that has hardly been questioned is: "It would be fine if only other men change as I would like them to".

Similarly, man's efforts towards the environment have been based on a parallel assumption that "all would be fine, if only circumstances could change as I would like them to". It is these implicit assumptions in the minds of men that have always given them the romantic attachment to a "frontier". It is inherent in man's nature to be a problem-solver — a surmounter of "frontiers". We push the frontiers in the hope that all will be fine once we have conquered them. Unfortunately, because of man's current nature and viewpoint, surmounting the frontier means changing the environment; and the changed environment throws up another frontier. Mankind, in his becoming "civilized", has moved around within the total Man-Environment Complex, overcoming one local set of frontiers after another and moving to new ground, but not retaining all of the past experience. Even if he had retained all past knowledge, this method of analysis of the parts would not necessarily result in a solution for the whole, especially as the "knowledge" was that accumulated by man looking at the problem as man alone. The problems — the frontier — must be viewed as the whole — the man-environment whole. This frontier may look quite different from any of the old ones, and part of the approach to that frontier that we are faced with now is the one dealing with the nature of man himself. It was the wild beasts at one time, then the drudgery of living, and now the transforming of man's own nature. No longer do we kill animals merely because we fear them, and parts of the world even think they have overcome the fear of economic deprivation by having made more goods and services available on a per capita basis than ever known in history. Is it possible that the next challenge is to become aware of the necessity to change ourselves; and, having become aware, to actually make the change?

We are not saying here that "all would be fine if only other men changed as we would like them to", but suggesting that "man" should become what he really is; an integral part of the Man-Environment Complex — something more of a man or in other words an integrated man. If he is to "manage" this Complex, then surely he must manage it as an integrated and integral part of it and not as a representative of one or other of the two components.

That some men have been, and others still are, aware of the complete unity between themselves and their environment can be seen clearly from the modes of behaviour of the so-called "primitive" people.

Animals were considered as much responsible for their captures or being killed as the actual manner and implements of taking them. They formed a kind of supernatural society to themselves and consequently the hunter had to please them all, in much the same manner that he would himself be pleased, with ritual, gifts, and praise, in order to gain their assent to be killed.¹

Because Environment is living, it reacts to what man does, raising problems that man must either solve, or suffer. The appropriate reaction required of man at the present time is to integrate his psyche and become something more of a man, which means recognizing his new position as the resource-manager in the allegory. He must not hide behind the mask of a narrow-minded supervisor who swings from a pro-timber position to pro-recreation position like a pendulum.

It is suggested that only attempts at becoming truly human can give that thrill which propels people to progress. In mankind's egotistical way of thinking, the challenge is to move from "man the animal" to "man the human". If by "turning around" our horses we can become the "resource-managers" then all problems of the environment will be automatically taken care of. Studies that will unearth ways and means of seeing the necessity of "turning around" and then reaching the position of a real "resource-manager" are the most important needs in the context of present concern regarding environment. This will qualify us for the same title as that of Alexander. If we do not see the point and insist on continuing with patchwork, though it may be on a gigantic scale, disappointment is certain.

¹See page 476 of Driver, H. E. 1961. Indians of North America. The University of Chicago Press. 668 p.