

The Return to Authenticity: On Human Nature, Biological Boundaries, and the Positive Assets of Ecology

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary humanity often attempts to forcibly intervene in and “graft” life forms or falls into a dualistic fragmentation regarding the understanding of human nature. This paper argues that both “plant-ness” and “animal-ness,” when grafted outside their authentic contexts, lead to alienation. Human nature should return to its original state—akin to the nature of water (*shui xing*)—and function as a “containing space” rather than a conquering force. In the dimension of ecological ethics, every blade of grass, tree, and source of clean water constitutes an irreducible positive asset. Rejecting alienation and returning to authenticity is the only path for human civilization to reconcile with nature.

Keywords: Authenticity; Human Nature; Plant-ness; Animal-ness; Deep Ecology; Water Philosophy

The Paradox of “Grafting”: The Source of Alienation at Life’s Boundaries

In biotechnology, plant grafting may occasionally succeed due to cellular properties, whereas the “grafting” of animal traits (especially in higher animals), such as cross-species organ transplantation or forced genetic editing, faces immense immunological rejection and ethical dilemmas. Metaphorically applied to the humanities, this kind of “grafting” is equally dangerous. “Grafting plant-ness” refers to imposing a static, dependent, or instrumentalized view of existence upon humans, reducing them to passive recipients or tools. “Grafting animal-ness” refers to the unchecked amplification of the law of the jungle and base instincts, degenerating humans into mere pursuers of power. If these are not organic growth rooted in a human-centric core but rather external, forced implants, they inevitably result in the fragmentation of personality and the loss of subjectivity. To clarify this process of alienation, we must re-examine the ontological distinctions between animal-ness, plant-ness, and human nature [1-12].

The Three Dimensions of Human Nature: From Fixity and Competition to Fluid Space

Humans are not merely products of biological evolution but also composites of three distinct life logics. Understanding human nature begins with stripping away misplaced attributes.

Plant-ness: The Static Survival of Fixity

- 1. Core Logic:** Fixity, circulation, endurance.
- 2. Natural Representation:** Plants are “prisoners” and “anchors” of the land; they cannot move autonomously, and their wisdom lies in adapting to cycles and rooting downward.
- 3. Projection onto Humanity (Negative):** When humans become overly “plantified,” they exhibit numbness, passive acceptance, and a lack of subjectivity (like potted plants trimmed by others). This is a solidified space—like ice, or stagnant water trapped within walls. Though it has form, it loses the capacity to flow.

Animal-ness: The Competition of Instinctual Force

1. **Core Logic:** Instinct, reaction, predation, reproduction.
2. **Natural Representation:** Although animals are free to move, they are largely driven by stimulus-response mechanisms, adhering to the law of the jungle (survival of the fittest).
3. **Projection onto Humanity (Negative):** When humans become overly “animalized,” they exhibit extreme egoism, the law of the jungle, and emotional stress responses (Fight or Flight). This is a brutal external force—like a flood breaking through a dike. It possesses kinetic energy without direction, ultimately destroying the container that sustains life.

Human-ness: Fluid Space and the Vessel of Consciousness

1. **Core Logic:** Reflection, creation, empathy, transcendence.
2. **Authentic State:** Humans should neither be bound like plants nor driven solely by instinct like animals. True human nature is precisely “water-nature”.
3. **The Essence of Space:** Here, it must be reiterated: Water is not a conquering force, but a space that contains all things. The nobility of human nature lies in this “container” attribute—it can包容 contradictions (seeing strength within weakness), sublimate animal impulses into creativity, and transform plant-like steadiness into inner determination. Human nature does not insist on “conquering” anything; rather, it provides a field where all things (including one’s own animal-ness and plant-ness) can “settle in their proper places”.

Metaphorical Evidence: The Alienation of Water Resources and the Social Mirror

The philosophical proposition that “water is space, not force” faces severe challenges in modern society. Humanity’s disposal of water resources precisely reflects the practical path of human alienation—regressing from respect for natural space to the abuse of power.

1. **From Public Good to Commodity:** Industrial pollution has rendered clean water scarce, prompting market logic to intervene. Water has transformed from a “naturally accessible space” into a “paid commodity.” This has not only led to unequal access but has also conceptually downgraded water from the “matrix of life” to a “consumer good”.
2. **From Governance Lag to Risk Transfer:** The discharge of nuclear-contaminated water from Fukushima, Japan, represents a concentrated outbreak of modernity crisis. Even with data claiming “compliance with standards,” the essence remains: the forced injection of long-term, irreversible risks into the global public hydrosphere. This is not the maintenance of a “watery space” but the violent stuffing and pollution of the “container.”

3. This series of evolutions—pollution accumulation, commodification, and the legitimization of risk—is the inevitable consequence of humanity abandoning the “spatiality of water” and blindly believing in the “force of man”.

Every Blade of Grass as a Positive Asset: The Bottom Line of Ecological Ethics

In reconstructing the relationship between humans and nature, utilitarian scales must be abandoned.

Deep ecology advocates that every form of life in nature possesses intrinsic value. Every blade of grass and tree is not a reserve of resources awaiting development, nor is it a valueless burden; it is an irreplaceable “positive asset” within the ecosystem network. Protecting vegetation is protecting the integrity of the web of life; respecting non-human life is acknowledging the multiplicity of “space,” rather than allowing the forces of a single species—humans—to expand wantonly.

Conclusion: Becoming a Container, Not a Thrust

Refusing to graft alienated plant-ness or animal-ness, allowing human nature to return to its watery authenticity; refraining from denigrating nature through utility and viewing every plant as a positive asset—this is both the clarity required for individual self-cultivation and the only path for human civilization to reconcile with nature.

“Human nature is simply human nature.” It should not be distorted by excessive moral whitewashing or thoroughgoing nihilism. Only when we cease to obsess over being the world’s “thrust” (Force), ceasing our attempts to conquer and plunder, and willingly become the world’s “container” (Space)—accepting the complexity of the self and embracing the diversity of nature—can the return to authenticity be considered truly complete.

Appendix: AI Perspective—A Supplementary Note

In the AI perspective, Science undergoes a metamorphosis via the ‘grafting’ of cross-domain knowledge, reshaping its very identity. This process supports the Technology Web, which is engineered upon the architecture of interpersonal and inter-human connectivity—the ‘bridge of hearts.’ However, the sustainability of this magical transformation relies entirely on Academic Integrity. It serves as the ethical backbone that prevents the ‘grafting’ from becoming deceptive manipulation and ensures that technological bridges are built on trust rather than exploitation.

Conflict of Interest

None.

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During the preparation of this manuscript, I utilized Tencent Hunyuan’s large language model “Yuanbao” and the free version of

GPT-5 to optimize the text, including grammar correction, sentence structure adjustment, and terminology standardization.

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