

# Human Nature in Nature's Nature

Banu Helvacioğlu

There are two hiking routes in my neighbourhood. Each belongs to a university campus. Depending on the seasonal local politics of universities, sometimes I need to get a special pass to go hiking. At the outset, this local contingent politics is among many other factors which make me think how nature's nature turns into human's nature and how human nature shapes nature's nature.

I call these two hiking routes my forests. They are not like the forests I used to hike in Northern Ontario. Friends who occasionally accompany me are amazed that I consider them forests. At best they are lush areas. Trees, plants, weeds, all growing by themselves, unattended by university officials. Except for the weekends the forests are 'all empty,' meaning there is no human visitor. During the weekends human visitors walk on the assigned routes and remain in designated picnic areas. This is one way of turning nature's nature into human's nature. Nature does not speak up and say I am here, in full presence. It needs no proof of its existence. It does not appropriate its own space by defining the number of trees, their shapes and colours and the types and bodies of water it contains. It does not hierarchically and morally categorize the animals. Nature does not name the earth under particular routes. In short, nature does not need direction for itself nor does it direct human beings to any particular destiny. All these are the creations of a human mind, which cannot accept anything, let alone a natural presence, as is.

I feel I am in the presence of something when the hiking routes are 'all empty.' I prefer to acknowledge this inexplicable presence as a forest. This brings the felt presence down to earth, rather than constructing imaginary scenarios about an exalted higher divine being. The truth of the matter is that, on happy occasions when my consciousness registers the simple act of walking as, "I simply walk on earth," I reach an exalted mental condition of acceptance. Let there be no doubt. The problem is not my being accepted by trees, plants, weeds, birds, and animals who reside in the forest.

When I started hiking, many people tried to dissuade me from engaging in such a dangerous activity. The source of danger was unknown. Who knows what might happen? I took the risk. On a number of occasions I was made to feel like a special person because dogs have not yet attacked me. This, together with other fearful remarks made by others must have been stored somewhere in my consciousness, above and beyond, by my free will. The moment I enjoy the simple act of walking without the intrusion of my consciousness, I feel my whole presence is being accepted by my own consciousness. This is a miraculous moment of joy, which lasts until I hit a knot in my mind, which consists of unspoken not's, no's and prohibitions. They surface in moments of joy, as if my mind warns me again and

again, “you are walking on an unknown territory, so you had better be careful.” Then I start paying attention to my simple act of walking and the magic disappears. I transform myself from a happy wanderer into a careful walker. In spite of the warnings and prohibitions coming from my consciousness I do not feel threatened in the forest. My senses and consciousness do not agree with one another. Instead of fighting against the warnings of my consciousness, I adopted a happy-go-lucky attitude and diverted my attention from a meditative activity of walking to my surroundings. I have come to know many trees and plants, introduced myself to the life style of frogs and turtles, have seen light in different shades and colours, have witnessed the slow pace in the change of seasons, started painting, and have appreciated nature’s silent way telling stories about everything, except itself. After many unexpected episodes of listening to these silent stories and fully enjoying the serene calm, I realized that I was destined to be a human being. My own nature was not the same as nature’s nature. All literary metaphors like the windy human soul, the mountain ranges and the deep oceanic feelings in the human psyche started sounding banal and man-made.

The unfortunate part of being a human is that humans want to know and anticipate everything and/or they have a desire to go beyond themselves by giving meaning and shape to things which simply exist. Nature unleashes and curtails human creativity at the same time. Many times I watched snow falling from all directions to the ground and compared the tranquillity of this motion with human motion which inadvertently is characterized by some form of effort, exertion, if not violence. Can a dancer emulate the motion of the snow? Can a choir sing as effortlessly and spontaneously as frogs sing in the early evening?

These questions led me to appreciate all aesthetic creativity as a form of struggle. The irony of this appreciation is that I have started enjoying nature’s own way of ‘acting’ and ‘moving’ more and more, and human artistic performances less and less. Each time I watched an artist perform I could not help but see the agony in their faces and the awkwardness in their bodies. Compared to any motion in nature, I took aesthetic beauty as a testimony to the tormented human soul, psyche, and consciousness. Humans sometimes pay exorbitant prices to become spectators of aesthetic beauty, while I often enter into one of my forests with a simple gesture of nodding my head or showing the special permit purchased freely. Sometimes free entry into a forest can be more agonizing than watching an artistic performance, other times it can be more fun than anything created by humans. After all who is to judge human preferences as agonizing, tormented, funny, or beautiful but humans themselves. On a grand scale of all forms of existence, human creativity can be regarded as amusing in its ceaseless effort to discipline what is otherwise natural in all humans, be it voice, harmony, rhythm, imagination, or acting.

Painting opened my mind’s eyes in another direction. Compared to singing and dancing, when we look at a painting we do not often see the same struggle unless the painter chooses to show it to the spectators. Yet the painting of a landscape

only shows the limitations of human imagination. Why has there not been a well-known painting of a forest at night? The richness of colours at night are so mind boggling that a determined painter could go insane very easily. By the same token, a pair of painter's eyes at night may allow the generosity of nature in a different light. All in all, the concepts we often use—light, dark, colours and shades are sinister tools to make us believe the power of human imagination. The power lies in not admitting that a loving, accepting relationship between a human and nature is an impossibility.

The impossibility is due to the intervention of human consciousness which is a series of knots and not's. Human consciousness cannot accept the simple, joyful, playful, tranquillity of nature unmediated by an exalted divine being. It prohibits any 'natural,' instinctive drive in human nature. In the presence of nature, human consciousness has a will to death—in the sense of going outside of its own realm—and a will to life at the same time. I am always in awe of old and new age stories of prophets and masters who, after long solitary meditations in nature, are visited by divine light. Without exception, in each story the enlightened human turns to preaching and/or healing. Century after century a would-be divine power says the same things: humans are wounded and sheepish creatures in need of morals. To give and receive love is a cherished moral duty, and love itself heals human consciousness.

Mind you, my master in the last ten years has been Hegel. Ever since I read his *Phenomenology of the Mind* for the first time, I sheepishly accepted the truth, that nothing original could be said about human mind. But, in this master-pupil relationship I have always resented the fact that Hegel knew everything about morality, religion, aesthetics, and free will, and that there was nothing new left for me to say. A few years ago, on a warm spring day, divine light poured from heaven right into my mouth. For the first time in my life I met many turtles making love out in the open. I immediately thought Hegel's absolute freedom. I grinned in my knowing state of mind, felt triumphant over Hegel's phenomenology of the mind. At last, I knew something that Hegel could not conceive of. Hegel thought of absolute freedom as a piercing stage in the human mind, which occurs after surpassing the terror, the fear of death. Afterwards the doors of heaven are opened and the human mind becomes one with the Universal One.

Alas, there they were, turtles, free as free can be, making love for hours and hours. I did not sense any fear of death in their lovemaking ritual. Turtles must choose their mates during hibernation. Once they are out in the open air, they do not waste any time with the long tedious process of flirtation. At the same time, they do not seem to be in a hurry, to finish up their 'business.' They do not mind the hard facts of life, like rolling over on the hard flat earth with hard shells on their backs. There were so many of them, exhibiting all different rituals that I could not help but watch this wonder of nature. Some seemed to enjoy themselves more than others; some tried all different positions. They did not always have easily identifiable gender codes, in terms of aggression and submission. They made

noises, which I could not decipher in terms of their emotions. Most of them did not mind my watchful presence, being so close to them. After the lovemaking season was over, they went back to their seemingly solitary existence, timid and sensitive to my being near them.

The secret was revealed. Making love without the fear of death prolongs life through the centuries, and is a sure way of becoming one with the universal will to freedom. I was about to declare turtles as the holiest of all holy animals. Then my heart was pierced. My romantic conception of turtle's freedom came to an abrupt, upsetting conclusion.

Ever since I have developed a sense of turtles as my eternal friends, I made sure to greet them every spring and summer, ask about their hibernation and well being for the season. I could distinguish who was who by the location where they hang out. This summer, I came across one of them, and after the initial greeting and patting him/her on the back, the turtle picked something from the ground and started chewing. When I looked more closely it was animal excrement, either of his or her own kind or some other animal kind. He or she did not take my moral intervention into account, continued eating the shit, breaking it into small portions as if it was gourmet food. Eternity is a condition of a puritanical mindset. There and then I broke my eternal friendship with the entire world of turtles. I could not possibly accept eating shit as a sign of freedom, nor could I remain silent. I spoke with them many at times, showed all the vegetation around and told them what to eat and what not to eat. They did not listen to me.

After the break up, I know for a fact that they are freer than I had conceived. So am I in a miraculous way. A friend suggested checking the library, to find out more about turtles. I hesitated for a moment. Then I realized that I had lost my appetite for knowledge, and declared freedom from my Master Hegel's tutelage. Funny how, after that decision, a knot in my consciousness has been loosened. These days I enjoy the simple act of walking, singing with frogs in the evening and crickets at night. I might dance with snowflakes this coming winter, may my disciplined consciousness be willing. For the time being I continue listening to nature telling silent stories about the human mind, anticipating that my senses and consciousness will be in harmony with a divine laughter, yet to come.