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**SOC30330: Currents in Contemporary Theory**

**“There is no such thing as nature.”**

**A conversation between Mother Nature and Father Time.**

*Once upon a time, on a dark and stormy night, Father Time sits in candlelight amidst bundles of papers. Mother Nature walks in, visibly irritated.*

***Mother Nature:*** Tempus! May I have a word?

***Father Time:*** I am quite busy, Natura. *\*Flips nearby hourglass\** What do you want?

***MN:*** I have had it with your creation. The society that you have evolved over the past millennia have desecrated and besmirched the effort I have placed upon creating and sustaining Planet Earth, and it must be rectified. The humans have usurped my creations, claiming nature as their own construct due to their manipulations and social actions, they have rendered the surface of the earth at risk from their own infrastructural manifestations, and have successfully created avoidable environmental consequences that threaten the world that I have created, as well as their very own existence.

***FT:*** Oh, come, Natura! Society and Nature are entirely separate! The civilised world and the natural world merely co-exist, they do not influence or interact with one another. Please don’t waste my time with false accusations.

***MN:*** You have fallen into the trap set by your own people, Tempus. The natural world that I have created is now a shadow of what it once was, each and every aspect of its being is controlled, manipulated, and mastered by society (Dickens, 2004; 2), resulting in severe environmental issues that seem invisible to you. Society has established a world view upon nature that considers it their own construction. Your sociological development of relations and interactions between the environment and society (Dunlap, 2002; 331) have placed them under the impression that they have moulded what they view as nature, believing it to be their very own, disregarding that nature has been in existence for as long as the land has stood. Constructionist perspectives demean the work I have undertaken in my evolution of the air, plants, and animals, regarding them as constructions of society (Sutton, 2015; 301). In this sense, Tempus, society has overruled my inventions, effectively bringing about the destruction of what we have always seen as true nature.

***FT:*** But they have improved upon nature, they have researched and helped animals that would have otherwise been led to extinction. If they believe nature to be theirs, it might stem from the incredible scientific achievements that have been witnessed in recent decades, and how these endeavours have allowed them to surpass biological limitations.

***MN:*** Science is exactly what I believe to have been my downfall. In investigating animals and organisms, humans have attributed to them names and characteristics, therefore projecting upon them symbolic meaning that is relevant to their lives and knowledge (Barry, 2007; 21), an unintended consequence when I created them. This outlook leads society to believe that they possess authority over these creatures, implying that they never ‘existed’ prior to being prescribed a name or category (Sutton, 2015; 301). The introduction of typologies in nature has created a hierarchy of sorts, that strengthens the idea that nature is at the mercy of human creation (Latour, 2004; 25). What I find most baffling about this viewpoint is that these humans don’t consider themselves to be a part of it! I know you are aware of the Human Exemptionalist Paradigm that dominated society’s perceptions in the 20th century (Buttell, Dickens, Dunlap, Gijswijt, 2002; 5), and the anthropocentric qualities it exhibits in its exclusion of humans in the broad narrative of nature (Catton, Dunlap, 1978; 42). The humans I have created, as part of nature, have developed society and theories at your hand, though the passage of time, and have placed themselves in a league above the natural world, a world to which they are biologically indebted.

***FT:*** What’s the harm in them becoming aware of their capabilities? I feel you are taking it a bit personally, Natura. Humans don’t have any significant impacts on the quality of life or the environment.

***MN:*** That is where I feel you are entirely wrong, Tempus. You seem to adopt the visions and viewpoints of your pets, thinking they do nothing but good for themselves and surroundings. In actuality, it is precisely the actions of your ‘enlightened’ humans that gave rise to industrial developments and, following that, detrimental environmental consequences (Dickens, 2004; 10).

***FT:*** The Enlightenment was a positive progression that allowed humans to exact their full intellectual potential. You agreed yourself at the time that the investment in knowledge would be useful for the education of the masses. Oh, how have you changed your mind?

***MN:*** I allowed you your Enlightenment to progress the intelligence of mankind, but neither of us could have predicted the inventions they would conceive. The requirement for mass consumption has caused them to design machines that pollute the air and soil, resulting in environmental degradation (Buttel et al. 2002; 19). Their perception that nature as something that is ‘other’ or independent to their own lives damages the integral relationship between the two (Barry, 2007; 11), and is the primary reason that the environment is in danger. Surely you are not ignorant of the work that Ulrich Beck has presented to support his claim that humans have rendered the Earth’s surface at incredible risk due to the actions of the past few centuries (Sutton, 2015; 297). The continual economic growth and modern consumerism has influenced the wellbeing of almost every living organism on the planet. How can we place the future of the planet in the hands of humans who seem determined to destroy its natural resources and inhabitants for their own economic gain? You must consider that they are not fit to reside in the world we created, you have the ability to change their opinions through time! They have lost control over their own inventions and can no longer sustain the waste they produce, or the negative impact they have on their immediate and general surroundings (Franklin, 2002; 47). But you can change this, you can listen to Beck and take heed of his warnings!

***FT:*** I’m sorry, Natura, but I don’t see what a lovable multi-award-winning song-writer has to do with your concerns. Your time is coming to an end *\*gestures to hourglass\** And you’ve certainly wasted enough of mine.

***MN:*** Yes, Tempus, my time is coming to an end. The actions that I have expressed to you will eventually unwind what I have spent millennia creating and balancing. The ozone layer that I placed to protect Earth’s inhabitants from the rays of the Sun has depleted, desecrated by the Chloroflurocarbons emitted by your subjects (Sutton, 2015; 298). It seems as though they have the ability to destroy even surroundings thousands of miles from their reach. The surface temperature is consistently on the rise, melting ice caps and burning forests, as climate change makes itself known in a way even I cannot control (Stevens, 2012; 581). These risks have been manufactured by the humans, and were entirely unprecedented in the development of society. There is nothing that they have not influenced. The free fields of the countryside are divided into plots of land for agricultural use; the open ocean waters are being utilised for oil extraction and over-fishing; the trees are being shorn at alarming rates for paper and furniture and utensils. Global warming, climate change, deforestation, and desertification are anthropogenic issues that have created an ongoing environmental crisis, that does not fit in with the world we once envisaged. The truth of the matter is that there is no longer such thing as nature. I believe nature to have once existed, but it has now been subject to relentless socialisation, further evident in the domestication and confinement of my free animals (Tovey, 2003: 196). My land is being polluted for agricultural use, my animals are being commodified for food, scientific research, entertainment, and transportation, and the very surface of my Earth is being subject to harsh environmental change. This is not nature as it should be. The term itself has been usurped by the actions of society, believing it to be possessed by them due to the anthropocentric world views. I don’t believe they deserve a place in the world we formed in unison, and the concept of biological egalitarianism that we had in mind has been deconstructed and disobeyed by those in which we have placed our trust. I have no place in this world anymore.

***FT:*** If that is what you believe, then why do you spend time agonising over their actions without making counter-actions? The natural progression of society, science, and theory should lead them to realise that they are responsible for their own fate, it is no business of mine other than to turn the hands of the clock, and you should have faith in the life you created. The reason you feel obsolete is because you view the humans as enemies, and not catalysts for social change; if they are the cause of the problem, they can certainly rectify it.

***MN:*** I fear that it is too late for that, we don’t have any time left. The environmental damage seems to be severe beyond repair, but I envy your stance of indifference. I wish I could abandon the Earth and start afresh, yet I am maternally connected to this planet, and am devoted to its healing. I urge you to progress the years enough for them to take more widespread action against the natural consequences, before it is entirely beyond hope.

***FT:*** I am afraid there is not enough time in the world, Natura.

*They both watch as the last grains of sand fall from the hourglass.*

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