

## Nature Enemy of Man?

Regarding Eric Hoffer's extraordinary article (Oct. 26) "Nature is Man's Real Enemy":

We write, as an anthropologist and a 'geographer respectively, to correct some grave distortions. We have each lived for several years (12 and 7, respectively) in tropical Africa, and have a deep personal and professional concern for Africa.

From an ecological standpoint, one is left with a sense of despair at the shrill polemics and the miasma of misunderstanding of man's place within nature. His false premise of "harmony designed and dictated by man" is grotesque. For it is man's applied technology that increasingly creates specialized environments, putting man's major endeavors into greater disharmony with the totality of his "natural" environment.

Nature was never man's enemy while he remained an unspecialized member of evolutionary processes;

what has got out of hand is man's penchant for creating highly particularized circumstances in time and place for the paramount benefit of himself, rather than seeking to include as great a spectrum of beneficial life-forms as possible, for specialization involves exclusion .. It is not the forests of Africa, nor any other continental surface as yet untouched by the benefits of defoliation chemicals, that is the enemy. Within the tropical latitudes of the world, vast areas of luxuriant vegetation function as man's greatest (and unbidden) atmospheric depollutant. And the continents' rivers feed to the oceans, on the west, east and south, an enormous volume of DDT-free nutrients for all forms of oceanic life: this is no longer true of northern latitudes, Kew World nor the Old World, where western "civilized" man is congregated . . .

Man may have migrated from Africa to "unfold his unique capacities" but have they everywhere been beneficial, and can they be maintained without the continued contribution of man's unspecialized area of origin to rectify his wilful disassociation from nature?

According to Hoffer, man (in Africa) has been enslaved and degraded to an extent unknown anywhere else. Africa is marked by "brutalization" and the continent is "cruel . . . anti-human." It is callous and cynical to use "enslaved" in this perverted way.

How is Africa brutal and anti-human? What is the evidence? Or are these rash statements merely an expression of deeply ingrained prejudices and stereotypes'? From our experience, and from observations of other qualified observers, African society is characterized by qualities that we like to think of as "human," to a greater extent than are our own super-technological societies . . .

A striking feature in Africa is the strong identification of man with the natural world as shown in countless rituals. In our own frequent. Visits to Africa, one of the main, and most welcome sensations is that of being among people again, of appreciating the beauty of face, young and old, in contrast to the harsh masks that our industrialized societies so often produce.

DAVID BROKENSHA  
Professor and Chairman  
Department of Anthropology  
BERNARD W. RILEY  
Assistant Professor  
Department of Geography.  
UC Santa Barbara