

RELATIONAL PARADIGM OF LIFE NEW MEANINGS AND VALUES FOR LIFE WHEN VIRUSES THREATEN

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Abstract: Observing the new coronavirus pandemics context currently traversed by humanity, it is possible to broadly and safely assess the distance between human beings and the environment in terms of the perception, reading, and understanding of nature within their ecosystems and environments. The promotion of debates and considerations on the production of meanings for life, based on human and environmental relations, can be considered as an important strategy for the creation of common bonds, thus displaying the need for a change in mainstream logic for a more organic relationship between humanity and the environment.

Keywords: Paradigm; Value; Lifestyle.

PARADIGMA RELACIONAL DA VIDA QUANDO OS VÍRUS AMEAÇAM: NOVOS SIGNIFICADOS E VALORES PARA A VIDA

Resumo: Observando o contexto atravessado pela humanidade neste momento, em relação à pandemia do novo coronavírus, é possível avaliar a distância entre o ser humano e o meio ambiente em termos de percepção, leitura e compreensão da natureza em seus ecossistemas e ambientes de uma maneira ampla e segura. A promoção de debates e reflexões sobre a produção de significados para a vida, a partir das relações humanas e ambientais, pode ser considerada uma estratégia importante para a criação de vínculos comuns e, para tanto, é necessária uma transformação das lógicas, estabelecidas de acordo com a necessidade de criar uma relação mais orgânica entre a humanidade e o meio ambiente.

Palavras-chaves: Paradigma; Valores; Estilo de Vida.

Life Network

As the most emerging and currently debated topic, the spread of the Covid-19 virus allows considerations on what human contamination represents on a worldwide scale, especially when we recall the previous episodes of viral contamination in

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human history. Although respiratory illnesses have been recorded since ancient Greece, the first pandemics took place in 1889, when many elderly people were affected. In 1918, the so-called “Spanish Flu” pandemics emerged and reached several continents. Later, it was followed by the Asian Flu in 1957, the Hong Kong flu in 1968, the Swine Flu 2009, and others until 2020 coronavirus pandemics is reached.

Distancing and isolation

Viral contamination occurs when contaminated droplets are expelled into the air and are deposited on the skin or on areas that have become contaminated. This is known as the droplet route. Droplets are produced through speech, sneezing, and coughing. Therefore, the type of isolation is defined according to how much is known about the mode of transmission. Kormondy and Brown (2002) stress in relation to pandemics: “The major antigenic changes that lead to the pandemics may not be due to simple mutations, but to new strains that emerged from animal reservoirs. Some of these new strains appeared in China and Southeast Asia, where poor peasants live in direct contact with domesticated animals and, thus, facilitate the transmission of reservoirs to humans” (2002, p. 212).

Even though human contact with animals is an empirical fact, the manners and information of the population on how to deal with them is not comprehensive. The absence of a greater knowledge on how to relate to animals and, consequently, with nature can be indicative of the consequences brought about by human distance.

Education: The relationship environmental in the world production

The human being is educated for life and, regardless of the objectives, resources and instruments used in the training processes, all education is crossed by culture, where each culture prints its text on the production of life. Thus, while culture differentiates human beings in their writing, reading and interpretation in different

contexts and realities, nature brings them closer by revealing and locating humanity, as a species, in its existence in the world.

In relation to the spread of the coronavirus, the ongoing human experience sets in motion several ponderations on the existence of a common affection, obliterated by the lack of awareness on the existence of a symbiotic network of life. This is a consequence of the values and logic of the market which is shared by contexts and models aiming at unlimited consumption, but which are not capable of dissipating it.

The creation of mechanisms to move away from natural environments does not reduce or exempt the risk of exposure and susceptibility level, especially when dealing with what is still not known. Does humanity, as a species endowed with an intelligible capability, know the flora, fauna, and environmental scenarios that support and structure the different ecosystems? In order to be protected and preserved, human beings and the environment are considered, even today, as reciprocal threats. It somehow seems that the lesson on the human condition (Morin, 2011) within the environment often returns in order to be solved, due to humanity not learning the lesson about the phenomena of life in the world.

When introducing these issues from a viral locus, it is possible to think about how many more pandemics might occur, especially when one observes all the technological advances in the world. It is evident that a virus can be manipulated and fought against in a more effective and efficient manner by biotechnology and genome sequencing nowadays, but this thematic proposal suggests a discussion located in a space and a time prior to the coronavirus crisis. Considering the physical body, humans are affected in their logic and routines, since the social values involved in a postmodern society, are weakened when a common threat to global life is examined. Humanity when split into cultures and societies does not prevent the geographical and collective spread of the different forms of mutual affection which approximate human beings to their nature.

Culture and nature are parts of the same individual. There are no conflicts between them, but a relationship in which culture has a contrastive role, whereas

nature has a harmonizing one. Individuals, when experiencing culture, in its historical constructions based on differences, distance themselves from nature as a place of common origin and destination. By using the mathematical set theory as a metaphor to explain human “places”, it can be stated that different cultures are born from the same place (nature) and establish codes and practices which constitute them and produce their meaning, in which each set is an identity produced by all circulating elements. Although there are different sets and elements, there is a common place of origin and destination that gathers them during the circulation of life, i.e., an intersection area where all the elements set off and where they somehow return to at some moment and which is known as human nature.

Once we consider the issues and problems currently experienced, an indication of the need to produce new meanings for life is evident. We know culture, politics, technology, and economics, but we do not know where we meet in our natural intersection. A place where, side by side, it is possible to recognize oneself as common and ambiguously affected by converging codes, which expand and, concomitantly, limit us as human beings.

Based on human and environmental relations, the promotion of a debate on the production of meanings for life can be regarded as a meaningful strategy to create bonds, aiming at the need to change the sense of mainstream logic, and to perceive them as mutual effects. Thus, deeming it necessary to create an organic relationship between humanity and the environment.

New human and environmental senses can be produced by searching for other ways of perceiving nature during the exercise of humanity so that the values of life can be incorporated and spread while educating the human essence.

Paradigmatic considerations

Although environmental paradigms determine how individuals and society should relate to nature, providing guidance on problems and issues to different contexts, they do not guarantee accountability and real commitment by the population. There are legal documents, programs, projects, and institutional actions all over the world

that are considered successful, but when observing the current human and environmental problems, the results reveal that they are not enough when global challenges are considered.

There is a great debate on the production of environmental values, but the problem is that the incorporation of values is still related to the industrial society's logic (Macdonagh, 1998). The environmental paradigm is classified, in its basic contributions, as anthropocentric, ecocentric, and essential to sustainability. Anthropocentrism aims at protecting ecosystems and natural resources for the maintenance of human life. Ecocentrism is based on the idea that all life on the planet has an interconnected value (Kortenkamp; Moore, 2001) and the centrism of sustainability states that humanity and nature are interdependent (Silva, 2014).

When considering the established environmental paradigms, an idea of separation is automatically produced. There is a mental distance between human life and the environment, although both are parts of the same cycle. The action of promoting an environmental incorporation can benefit from human interactions with the environment. This goal may be promoted by different educational, political, social, and family institutions, but the fundamental condition is the creation of environmental senses, produced by each individual, since it is through the generation of senses that values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviors are developed. Environmental education can promote the development of an environmental affection, generated not only by the experienced relationships, but also by the type of meaning that everyone can produce in relation to the environment.

A study developed by Smith, W. (2020), with environmental educators, demonstrates that affective qualities related to connection and love for the environment are fundamental for the development of sustainability, along with the requirements of knowledge, attitudes, and sustainable practices.

Incorporation is also a consequence of the effective production of bonds within the affection/sensitization scope. Hay, Duffy, and Whitfield (2014) report that although there are important studies on sustainability, there is a great distance between the

current society and a sustainable one. Morin (2006) adds that individual perceptions of the world are structuring elements of thoughts and actions, built and based on social paradigms of reality (Morgan, 1980).

For decades, the word “sustainability” has been often used as a generating theme and, although there have been some socio-environmental changes, the results cannot be considered meaningful in face of human and environmental issues and problems. In order to transform and produce environmental values, it is a mistake to regard the insertion and location of the word “sustainability” in the dynamics of the production of values, i.e., it is necessary to replace the word during the flow, since sustainability is a consequence and not the cause of the process of production and transformation of life. The same happens to the word “responsibility”. It must be replaced, as an element which is part of the formation process, from which the desired result will be sustainability.

Culture produces a system which involves values, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. According to Shultz and Zelezny (1999), these culturally produced constructs create behaviors that are shared by society. A relational scheme developed by Lei and D’Amato (1998), between nature and society, can be used as a reference, as they point out that there are people who distance themselves from nature and others who approach it in search of unification.

The scheme presented by Lei and D’Amato (1998) serves as an inspiring model for the paradigm proposed in this article, which is based on dialogue and the reflection on the need for a conscious approach of humanity towards nature. The misleading exercise of a possible separation has made humans, in their illusion of separation and their desire for domination, produce the human and environmental devastation which they have been currently facing. One may inquire: Would humanity be in crisis with the new coronavirus if there was a closer and stronger relationship between humans and the environment? This is certainly an impossible answer, but surely humanity would know how to better deal with the crisis if there were more shared experiences and empathy. If we are all human beings, we share somehow,

the moments of abundance, scarcity, and adversity. Thus, the current pandemics can promote reflective contexts about the attitudes and behaviors disseminated by humanity during its civilizing process.

When based on affectation and the search for possibilities beyond what is known, the unlearning and learning processes of transformation and perception of the other, and of different ways of living, can contribute to the production of new human senses and social meanings. Since humanity and nature are closely founded and distance has placed them in opposite directions, the fundamental link for every life process is the relational paradigm with one's own life. This is obtained in a clear fashion and it is as simple as living. A situational model of human and environmental incorporation is now presented to clarify the concept.

Incorporation of nature

A jogger runs on a path through a small forest. He is alone and there are no cameras or passers-by that may identify him. During his exercise, he holds a small disposable plastic bottle with water so he can drink from it. Once the liquid is over, he continues holding it, so he can throw it away in a waste bin during his route. As he leaps over a fallen branch, he drops it. He has two options: to carry on jogging or to fetch the bottle. He decides to go back and pick up the bottle to dispose of it in an appropriate place. This is the moment when a human can be considered incorporated into nature and nature into him.

There are other symbolic and material elements in the process which involves human and environmental dynamics to achieve responsibility and sustainability. Such as socio-cultural ones, they also structure the flow. Specifically, in relation to the process of transformation and production of meanings, there are interdependent elements which are mutually produced and affected. Below, an inspirational theoretical model is suggested with the elements that produce an interdependent cognitive, attitudinal, and procedural system in the relational context:

Life Relational Paradigm (LRP)

Affection> Awareness> Bonding> Incorporation> Values> Beliefs> Accountability> Attitude> Behavior> Sustainability of life (human and environmental)

Regarding the process of affection, Spinoza states that: "By affection I understand affections of the body by which the body's power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, and at the same time, the ideas of these affections" (E. III, definition 3, p. 163). Affection occurs in a relationship in which the body can affect and be affected at the same time, i.e., in human relationships. Spinoza also states that effective knowledge is only achieved through affection, therefore, an approximation is necessary for a relationship to be established and knowledge to happen.

The affection, awareness, and creation of some form of bond should initially occur before the incorporation of human and environmental values by humanity and society, so as to promote the production of values and beliefs. Therefore, accountability should be the result of promoting the dissemination and development of attitudes and behaviors forged by a symbolic and material structure of sustainability.

The Life Relational Paradigm (LRP) is not based on a reductionist vision from the simplification of realities. On the contrary, it is oriented towards the complexity of the lives of individuals and groups in their material and immaterial representations, structured by the acts of approximation to achieve knowledge and the production of meanings. It considers that experiencing humanity and nature is fundamental to understand and maintain all life on Earth. Since demanding impartiality from humanity is impossible, it is only by experiencing and learning nature that humanity, as the author of other scenarios and other ways of living, can manufacture life.

The text written by the current crisis debates issues that have arisen over time but, due to the degree of affection experienced by humanity, have never been more visible and present. It also teaches that there are no borders because there is no division in the essence of nature, so everything is always somehow connected at some moment. It is a discourse of affection, in which realities and problems converge

in such a way that worldwide concerns and pains are common to all. The reflexive indication of the relational paradigm of life can contribute to sensitize human and environmental actions, by recognizing the need for beings and nature to reconcile, thus creating and incorporating new values when humanity is summoned to transform and produce behaviors that may result in the sustainability of life on the planet.

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