

Webinar “Called to unity - Towards an ecology of relationships”
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RELATIONALITY IN NATURE

Stefania Papa, Associate Professor of Ecology, Dept. of Environmental, Biological and Pharmaceutical Sciences and Technologies, University of Campania 'Luigi Vanvitelli', Italy

In my talk, I would like to explore with you a feature of nature that is not only fundamental, but also extremely fascinating: its **inherent relationality**.

In the vast landscape of life on earth, there is a complex and delicate harmony between organisms and the environment in which they live. The concept underpinning this harmony is **relationality**, which leads us to understand that every living being and every element of nature are linked by complex and interdependent relationships that, together, sustain life itself.

These relationships are not unidirectional, but characterised by reciprocal exchanges of energy, matter and information.

For example, plants need the carbon dioxide they absorb from the atmosphere and, through photosynthesis, produce oxygen that is essential for animals to breathe. At the same time, animals provide carbon dioxide to plants through respiration and help replenish essential nutrients by consuming organic matter.

Another example. **Walking in a forest, have we ever wondered: how is it possible for two trees very close to each other to survive?**

If they were competing for resources (water, light, minerals, etc.), only one should survive.

Also, how is it possible that smaller trees, not receiving natural light due to the density of much larger surrounding trees, do not immediately die?

We all know that plant organisms need light to grow.

A forest is not a collection of isolated organisms, there is close cooperation between each of them. Each plant, each tree is able to receive information about the needs of the surrounding plant organisms.

How can this be possible?

The roots of 90% of all plants are connected through a network, called mycorrhizal network, consisting of fungi, by which plants transfer water, nutrients (such as carbon, nitrogen, phosphorous) or protective compounds in the event of infection, from one plant to another. This reciprocal transfer follows the dynamics of the '*source-sink*' model, from plants in habitats with high resource availability (*source*) to plants in habitats with lower resource availability (*sink*). For example, plants living in a place with plenty of light transfer carbon to plants in shady places, where less light availability limits photosynthesis. This process exists not only between trees of the

same species, but also between trees of different species. This mutual cooperation facilitates the survival of organisms and the expansion of the entire forest.

From what has been said so far, it would seem that everything in nature is perfectly in harmony.

But is it really so?

No, ecological relationships are not always balanced or harmonious. Relationships do not exclude conflict. Animals, for example, may compete for resources such as food, living space or potential reproductive partners.

Conflict in the natural world can take many forms, such as direct competition for resources, predation, intraspecific competition for social dominance, and so on. Symbiotic relationships, such as parasitic or predation relationships, also often involve some form of conflict between the species involved. Thus, we can find harmony on the one hand and disruption on the other in the natural world. This diversity of relationships, including both conflict and cooperation, is fundamental to the functioning of ecosystems and to the ongoing evolution of life on Earth, which is continually subject to new challenges.

Man, and human activities: how do they fit into all this?

Human activities have changed more than half of the world's ecosystems, often causing imbalances in ecological relationships, with consequences for the stability of ecosystems. Over-exploitation of soil, flora and fauna, but also polluting the air or building on land without any logic, has led to profound imbalances in the environment. Pollution, born of the inability to adapt human action to the rhythms of nature, has caused numerous consequences on ecosystems. This has also been the case with poor soil management that has caused accelerated erosion after their abandonment, or desertification where they have been misused. Hydrogeological disruption has also often been caused by human neglect or underestimation of the limits of environmental resources. What is happening to our planet today is there for all to see: habitat loss, increasing pollution rates, overexploitation of natural resources, climate change ... all of this has led and is leading to the deterioration of the benefits provided by ecosystems to mankind, on which our very survival depends!

If we look at the history of mankind, our impact as disruptors of the natural balance becomes clear. As living beings, we depend on the resources provided by our environment to satisfy our basic needs, including food. This means that, in order to live and thrive, we must consume other life forms, such as plants and animals. Consequently, our history is largely a **narrative of exploitation** of nature

But the true essence of nature is not exploitation! The true essence is harmony, relationality.

To guarantee our life, therefore, we must re-enter the nature from which we have detached ourselves, thus annulling the separation we have constructed with respect to it. That is to say, coming out of the man/nature dichotomy. We are nature, but we have placed ourselves outside of it. The scientist Stefano Mancuso has written in several of his texts that *“man has set himself up as the measure of all things, responsible as he is for making everything in his own image and likeness, without any sensitivity to the other living organisms that have evolved over millions of years”*.

Yet, the **value of every human being** does not depend on what he has, on what he knows, it does not even depend on what he is, but rather it depends on **his ability to step outside of himself, his**

absolute and irrefutable truths, to graft himself into the relational logic present in the nature that contains him.

The Cosmic Evolution Process, which owes its origin and existence to the **logic of relational harmony**, introduces us into this extraordinary adventure: we are a part of matter capable of creating relationships, of coming out of ourselves, of opening ourselves, of embracing, of loving. By following this logic, we free ourselves from selfishness by promoting the first and most essential form of ecology. From it, an attitude of respect for the natural world can be reborn and, at the same time, we can rediscover a deep sense of connection, respect and belonging to the Earth.

We are **called to unity with nature**, towards an ecology of relationships that celebrates and protects life in all its forms. It is up to us, now, to commit ourselves. The future of everyone and everything depends on it!