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Friendly Fire: When Environmentalists Dehumanize American Indians

DAVID WALLER

Environmentalists disagree with animal liberationists over how to repair the relationship between human beings and other species. While this often comes as a surprise to those not deeply involved in either movement (or those like me who identify with both movements), the fact is that the agenda and values of each group sometimes contradict those of the other. For the purposes of this paper we can summarize the basic, conflicting intuitions of environmentalists and animal liberationists as follows: Environmentalists often argue that human consumption of animals is natural, and what is natural is permissible, and therefore human consumption of animals is permissible (hereafter this will be referred to as "the naturalistic argument"). Animal liberationists often argue that pain and death are evil, and that it is incumbent upon humans to eliminate evil to the extent that they can; therefore, it is incumbent upon humans to eliminate the pain and death that accompany the consumption of animals.¹

In arguing against the vegetarian plank of animal liberation, some environmentalists have tried to strengthen the naturalistic argument with an appeal to the example of indigenous cultures in general and Native American cultures in particular. In this paper I will examine and criticize this strategy. However, I am not

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concerned here with defending animal liberationism. Rather, I would like to show how these arguments reveal—unintentionally, I am sure—an unflattering view of Native Americans and are damaging to Indians of the past, present, and future. It is my contention that environmentalists who argue by appealing to American Indian cultures tend to (1) characterize Indians of the past as noncultured, (2) characterize Indians of the present as culturally contaminated or nonexistent, (3) “disappear” important concerns of contemporary Indians, and (4) trivialize American Indian cultures. This critique is not to be construed as a denial of the power of American Indian cultures as models of environmental consciousness. Nor does anything written here against this particular line of argument imply the falsehood of the environmentalists’ belief in the permissibility of animal consumption (the fact that an argument is unsound or dangerous does not mean that its conclusion is false).

The bulk of this paper addresses arguments made by J. Baird Callicott, perhaps the most famous of the current generation of environmentalist philosophers. Callicott certainly must be given credit for environmental philosophy’s attaining some measure of respectability within the philosophical profession. He also has exhibited a sincere and sustained interest in indigenous cultures.² Furthermore, and most relevant here, his philosophical clarity gives us a chance to analyze the most lucid presentation of the kind of argument under discussion. I believe that this naturalistic argument is the implicit foundation of more obtuse New Age appeals to Indian culture. Therefore, after a lengthy examination of Callicott’s argument and a quick look at a more recent presentation by philosopher Ned Hettinger, I will briefly analyze the New Age version. The paper closes with some thoughts on the reduction of American Indian cultures by non-Indians.

THE MAIN ARGUMENT— “SAVAGERY” VERSUS “CIVILIZATION”

In his famous essay “Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair,”³ Callicott argues that we must follow Aldo Leopold’s prescription to reevaluate “things unnatural, tame, and confined in terms of things natural, wild, and free,” and that this

means, among other things, the reappraisal of the comparatively recent values and concerns of “civilized” Homo sapi-

ens in terms of those of our "savage" ancestors. . . . Savage people seem to have had, *if the attitudes and values of surviving tribal cultures are representative*, something like an *intuitive grasp* of ecological relationships and certainly a morally charged appreciation of eating [my emphases].⁴

Callicott concludes that this reappraisal will reveal that the most morally responsible diet consists of wild animals and wild plants—i.e., the traditional food of hunter-gatherer societies.⁵ Achieving that diet and lifestyle requires, according to Callicott, "a shrinkage . . . of the domestic sphere; . . . a recrudescence of wilderness and a renaissance of tribal cultural experience."⁶

I have found that it is helpful to arrange even the most straightforward argument semiformally; such an arrangement helps me to bring to the surface and distinguish one from another the assumptions imbedded in the premises of the argument. Here is such an arrangement of Callicott's argument:

1. We should reevaluate things unnatural, tame, and confined in terms of things natural, wild, and free.
2. If (1), then (2b) we should reevaluate the values and concerns of "civilized" human society in terms of the values and concerns of "savage" human society.
3. If (2b), then (4).
4. ∴ We should eat wild animals and wild plants.

Let's consider each premise in turn. In statement 1 (and thereafter), Callicott is not simply suggesting, by the expression *reevaluate in terms of*, that natural things become the units in terms of which we measure the value of unnatural things. After all, whether you evaluate, in the closing days of 1994, the American dollar in terms of the Mexican peso (6) or the peso in terms of the dollar (1/6), you still get the result that the dollar was roughly six times as valuable as a peso. What Callicott means, of course, is that a natural thing *x* is more valuable than an unnatural thing *y*—perhaps to the degree that *x* is more natural than *y*. Continuing in this train of thought, a wild thing is better than a tame thing (perhaps we should assume an "all other considerations being equal" condition), and a free thing is better than a confined thing (all other considerations being equal). By *better* or *more valuable* I

mean (as I am sure Callicott does) *intrinsically better* or of *greater intrinsic value* (intrinsic value being the kind of value that is not determined by usefulness). So, when comparing the intrinsic values of wolves and poodles, we get the result that wolves, which are wild, free, and natural, are of greater intrinsic value than poodles, which are tame, confined, and unnatural, because wildness is better than tameness, freedom is better than confinement, and naturalness is better than unnaturalness. We should probably note that an operating assumption implicit in the premise is that our evaluations have been upside-down, so to speak. We have been assuming not only that poodles are better than wolves, but that tameness is better than wildness, confinement better than freedom, and unnaturalness better than naturalness. The reevaluation Callicott is calling for requires a transposition of those evaluative assumptions.

The assumption in the second premise is that human society can be divided into two kinds, "civilized" and "savage." Making that division is tricky. On the face of it, the premise implies that the values and concerns of civilized society are unnatural, tame, and confined, whereas the values and concerns of savage society are natural, wild, and free. Now, what it would mean for a value to be *natural* I am not at all sure. Perhaps what Callicott means is that the things (and qualities) that civilized society values are unnatural(ness), tame(ness), and confined(ness). Or perhaps he means that, since savage society is more natural than civilized society, its values and concerns—whatever they might turn out to be—are better and should be emulated by the civilized. Since it might be fair to say that what it values and is concerned with defines, in part, any given society, the last two proposed interpretations might be practically equivalent: civilized society values and is concerned with things that are unnatural, tame, and confined; savage society values and is concerned with things that are natural, wild, and free.

The assumption in the third premise is that whether a human society values and is concerned with things that are natural, wild, and free is a function (in part) of the extent to which wild animals and wild plants are eaten by members of that society. Callicott believes that a hunting-gathering culture (which values and is concerned with eating wild animals and wild plants) is more natural, more wild, and more free than an agricultural, vegetarian culture (a culture that values and is concerned with eating domesticated plants) and therefore is better. I am not sure whether the "freedom" to which Callicott refers translates, in the case of

humans, to anything like political freedom. More likely, the three words *wild*, *natural*, and *free* are simply evocative expressions referring to a single property.

What that single property might be is a difficult question, and one that Callicott perhaps needs to address more directly. Without clarification on this point it is difficult to evaluate the plausibility of the first premise. However, for purposes of this critique it might be just as well to indulge our intuitions. The argument has problems, in premises 2 and 3, that are more directly relevant to my concerns here. Assuming that there is a tenable distinction between civilized and savage societies, does the Leopoldian preference for the natural over the unnatural translate into a prescription to adopt the diet of the so-called savage?

There does seem to be a problem with drawing the distinction in terms of each society's values and concerns. After all, civilized society must be concerned with and value things natural, wild, and free inasmuch as these are the raw materials for manufacturing things unnatural, tame, and confined. Civilized society might value such things intrinsically but sacrifice them in order to manufacture things of instrumental value. It might be more to the point to drop the references to the "values and concerns" of people and instead just speak of the *people* or *groups of people* or *cultures* themselves. This alters the argument somewhat, but I believe it is a change that Callicott would not consider unfair, for he also writes,

Leopold's prescription . . . does not stop . . . with a reappraisal of nonhuman domestic animals in terms of their wild (or willed) counterparts; the human ones should be similarly reappraised.⁷

What makes Callicott's proposal so interesting is that he is suggesting not only that we should become more wild than we are, but that we once were more wild and some of us are more wild than others. These wilder people serve as models that the rest of us should emulate. So who were/are these wild counterparts in terms of which we human domestic animals should be reappraised?

CALLICOTT REVIVES THE NOBLE SAVAGE

Remarks of Callicott's such as the following in Part IV ("American Indian Environmental Ethics") of *In Defense of the Land Ethic*

indicate that he would offer up Native American cultures as examples of the kind of "savage" societies (or "surviving tribal cultures") we should emulate:

I thus represent a romantic point of view; I argue that the North American "savages" were indeed more noble than "civilized" Europeans, at least in their outlook toward nature.⁸

Callicott regards Native Americans, and indigenous peoples generally as natural, wild, and free phenomena of the sort that Leopold approves, and he regards their environmental practices as exhibiting "traditional patterns of human-nature interaction."⁹ With this in mind, we can reformulate 2b to read, "We should reevaluate Euro-American culture in terms of Native American cultures" (although any indigenous group will do). This reevaluation will entail the devaluation of agriculture and the rejection of vegetarianism.

I will offer two rather simple and even uninteresting criticisms of Callicott's naturalistic argument.¹⁰ I hope that it will be evident that the criticisms succeed so easily precisely because of the superficial conception of Native Americans invoked by Callicott. The next section of this paper begins with an analysis of that conception.

First, our revision of 2b entails at least one important and questionable assumption: Callicott is, in effect, asking us to buy into assumptions reminiscent of the Tylor-Redfield "classical, unilinear evolutionary paradigm of culture":

Two relevant corollaries of this theoretical posture are, first, that contemporary nonliterate nonWestern societies are "primitive" in the literal sense that their cultures closely resemble the cultures directly ancestral to contemporary civilizations and, second, that there exist universal features that characterize all cultures at a given stage of development.¹¹

Callicott and co-author Overholt do not make clear what they think of this paradigm.¹² In any case, Callicott's argument would seem to demand that we consider as our model of humans' proper ecological niche a specific kind of human culture that cannot, I argue, claim the title of being the first, the original,

human culture—at least, not without evidence, which I do not think is forthcoming anytime soon. Were the original humans big game hunters? Three problems here are the sparseness of the fossil record, the difficulty of deciding who will count as that first human culture, and the difficulty of figuring out which patterns of behavior (so far as they could be determined from the evidence) were natural and which were unnatural innovations of culture; the success of Callicott's argument depends on this latter distinction and on being able to classify any human activity as either one or the other. If the original humans were actually herbivores and meat-eating was introduced as a cultural innovation, then we must drop the reference to Native Americans (due to the hunting tradition) in the revised 2b, and 3b becomes "We should eat nothing but wild plants." There is no reason to suppose that it is more probable that humans always ate other animals. On the contrary, throughout our biosphere's history, hominids have been notoriously ill-equipped to bring down almost any sort of animal, large or small. It is a fair empirical question to wonder whether human hunting began with the development of certain social structures and/or tools (weapons). It is no good speculating that perhaps (as seems likely) the original humans, like today's chimpanzees, ate easy prey like ants; this supposition will not support the kind of big game hunting that Callicott wants to defend. The latter activity may just be an unnatural augmenting of the former—the "fact" that humans ate ants would not justify the eating of anything else, if we stick to the assumptions of Callicott's naturalistic argument. The question of who will count as the first humans (*Homo sapiens*, *Homo erectus*, *Homo habilis*, a species of *Australopithecus*, or someone in between?) and the question of whether hunting was a cultural innovation become even more problematic in light of Callicott's liberal views (with which I agree) regarding where (i.e., among which sorts of animals) culture exists:

In the more flexible, more rapidly changing processes of cultural evolution information is inherited by means of social communication, which among animals may take many different forms. Predatory animals, for example, very often teach their young to hunt by demonstrative methods. Facial gestures, body language, and vocalization convey important "cultural" information among primates.¹³

Even if we grant Callicott the point that such a culture can be identified somewhere in the human past, premise 3 of his argument is still weak. We would not have a model of proper human ecological behavior outside of those areas in which the species originated. An ecological niche is not just a diet; a creature's ecological niche is better thought of as a hyperdimensional volume in which the dimensions describe not only what the creature eats but also the geographic and temporal locations of this and all the rest of its activities. So, for example, if we buy into the concept (I do not, but Callicott must) of a "proper" ecological niche, then we find that a giraffe cannot fill its proper ecological niche in North America because it has none in that particular place—it does not belong, so to speak, even if it could survive there. Similarly, human behaviors at a given place and time will not serve as a model for such practices at all places and all times. To use a science-fiction example: Suppose that there is abundant life on Mars, and people want to go live there. What is the morally responsible diet for humans on Mars, if we take *morally responsible diet* to mean, after Callicott, "the diet that the first humans ate?" Obviously, the answer is not Martian animals, nor is it Martian plants. The bottom line is, anything humans do on Mars will of necessity be completely ecologically innovative—and the same was true of the first Maori to sail to New Zealand six hundred years ago. If Callicott's argument were to succeed, then it would prove too much—not only would we be morally obligated to stick with the diet of our ancestors, but we would be morally prohibited from emigrating. Hence, not only would the Maori have been wrong, perhaps, to hunt the Moa to extinction,¹⁴ but they would also have been wrong to eat anything outside of their traditional eastern Polynesian diet, and wrong even to have left home.

Why do I offer these simple criticisms based on merely biological considerations? Because Callicott's argument is weighted down by two assumptions that together make it the case that he cannot help but approach the Native American as an almost strictly natural phenomenon upon which to construct an easily refuted naturalistic argument against vegetarianism. He weds the Leopoldian formulation of the problem of environmental ethics, a war of the natural versus the cultural, with the assumption that the American Indian environmental experience is a purely natural experience unmediated by the complications of culture.

HOW TO CONSTRUCT A SAVAGE

As noted above, Callicott portrays indigenous peoples as possessing a sort of intuitive grasp—versus rational or scientific knowledge—of their environment. Callicott devotes part of his book to Native American thought, but how does he describe the content of that thought? The answer is indicated by the title of one of his essays: “American Indian *Land Wisdom*”¹⁵ (my emphasis). Callicott invites us to consider certain conceptualizations of nature as definitive of the indigenous person’s experience as an indigenous person. Nowhere does he make this more clear than in his suggestions for tackling what he calls “the uncertainties of the descriptive ethnological approach to the verification of the hypothesis that there *existed* some sort of environmental wisdom among traditional American Indians”¹⁶—emphasis (mine) on the past.

His first suggestion is that we investigate historical documents that lie as close as possible to the “documentary horizon” (Native Americans’ first appearance in written history). This method is based on two assumptions: (1) Native American wisdom is exhausted by certain definitive conceptualizations of nature, and (2) native encounters with nature are more limited now than they were in the past. These assumptions in turn suggest the conclusion that native wisdom is trapped in the past—hence Callicott’s endorsement of the historical approach, which is predicated on the further assumption that readier access to Native American wisdom is available through European invaders of centuries ago (the source of any documents at the horizon) than through Native Americans living today.

Callicott’s second suggestion¹⁷ is that we analyze Native American languages. There is no denying the immense value of linguistic analysis to cross-cultural philosophical enterprises, but Callicott, by narrowly focusing on native encounters with nature, cheats himself out of the potential that lies within this technique.

Overholt and I undertook a reexamination of Hallowell’s analysis of Ojibwa semantic categories with an eye to applying them to the question of an Ojibwa land wisdom. According to Hallowell, the formal Ojibwa linguistic distinction between animate and inanimate (analogous to gender distinctions in Romance languages) does not correspond to scientifically informed Western intuitions. For example, some stones (flint), certain kinds of shells (the megis shell of the Midewiwin, for instance), thunder, various winds, and so on,

as well as plants, animals, and human beings fall into the animate linguistic class. Further, the category of person, according to Hallowell, is not coextensive with the category human being in Ojibwa semantic distinctions as it is in English and other modern Western languages. Animals, plants, stones, thunder, water, hills, and so on may be persons in the Ojibwa linguistic organization of experience.¹⁸

Callicott then points out that this personhood of nonhuman entities is naturally attached to their being included in social relations and hence being of ethical concern. But certainly these considerations will not suffice for an understanding of Native American environmentalist ethics, nor will they go very far as an explanation of why those ecological attitudes and practices are so different from those of Euro-America. True, Euro-American philosophy and culture emphasize the necessity of personhood for inclusion in the sphere of moral concern (hence, those in the slave trade found it morally convenient to deny that Africans have souls). However, it is all too evident that my acknowledgment of your personhood is not sufficient to guarantee my treating you equitably nor even of my believing that I should (hitmen, rapists, child labor exploiters, etc., do not usually need to be persuaded that their victims are not persons).

Callicott repeats this error in his comments on Lakota culture:

To speculate briefly on other Plains cultures, if the Lakota world view familiar to everyone from *Black Elk Speaks* survives critical scrutiny, then the Sioux pictured nature as more like a vast extended family than a congeries of societies. Such a world view appears to be corroborated by the Lakota mythic materials collected in the 1890s by James R. Walker. *An environmental wisdom is certainly immediately inferable from such a representation [my emphasis] but it would not be very precisely described as an ethic. One's familial duties, it seems to me, go beyond ethics. Ethics suggests, at least to me, a formality inappropriate to intimate familial relations.*¹⁹

Callicott characterizes his remarks here as "brief speculation," but, according to the method he employs in explicating Ojibwa environmentalism, his work on Lakota environmentalism is almost done. If we do not need an account of Ojibwa interhuman ethics in order to understand Ojibwa environmentalism (we need only know that nonhumans can be persons, too), then we should

not need an account of Lakota (human) family relationships in order to understand Lakota environmentalism (we need only know that nonhumans can be family members, too).

Callicott's descriptions of native "land wisdom" suffer from a lack of content, and I believe that this lack arises in part from a failure to share with his readership the material (and especially the social) contexts in which native environmentalist beliefs and practices appear. I am no sociologist, but I suspect it would be a similarly hopeless task to understand Western environmental destruction without investigating Western interhuman relationships, including economic relationships and their competitive structure. I suspect that the same holds true for the environmental destruction in eastern Europe; one would have to understand the dynamics of interpersonal relationships (including economic relationships), concepts of interpersonal rights and obligations, the traditional Marxist attitude toward nature, and the dynamics of bureaucracy. If we focus exclusively on a culture's conceptualizations of nature, then—and it seems ironic—we can only pretend to understand that culture's relationship with the environment.

Perhaps all I am doing is pointing out an oversight of Callicott's. However, I suspect that Callicott would deny this and deny that material considerations are essential in these kinds of investigations (although he does admit now and then that they are useful). He explicitly subscribes²⁰ to Stephen Tyler's conception of culture:

It is assumed [in cognitive anthropology] that each people has a unique system for perceiving and organizing material phenomena—things, events, behavior, and emotions (Goodenough, 1957). The object of study is not these material phenomena themselves, but the way they are organized in the minds of men. Cultures then are not material phenomena; they are cognitive organizations of material phenomena.²¹

Hence, all of the cognitive anthropologist's eggs are in the taxonomical basket. No doubt I should leave it up to the anthropologists to decide what makes a culture a culture, but I cannot restrain a naive urge to question the fruitfulness of any project that aims to understand a culture primarily through what comes down to (at least in the case of Callicott) linguistic analysis. If an anthropologist downplays the material experiences of a culture, how much can she communicate to us when she attempts to

explain how those material phenomena are organized in the minds of the participants in that culture?

Parenthetically, we can see a similar problem haunting claims such as the following in Overholt's and Callicott's book *Clothed-in-Fur and Other Tales: An Introduction to an Ojibwa World View*:

[Ojibwa] narratives certainly reflect and affirm a fundamentally economic relationship between human persons and animal, plant, and mineral persons. Animals, plants, and minerals are not, however, rightless resources, as is the case in Western economic assumptions. They are as it were trading partners with human beings, and are pictured as profiting, from their own point of view, from exchange with human beings.²²

No one who has read or heard these Ojibwa narratives will deny the contrast with Western economic assumptions, but neither can we deny a similar contrast between some traditional English and German narratives (just break open a copy of Grimm's) and Western economic assumptions. The information about a culture that is available in a culture's narratives, when not supplemented with knowledge about the material existence of the members of that culture, is limited. Speaking for myself, I do not find the Ojibwa narratives so different from some of our own in the appearance of animal persons, the moral content, and the use of the narratives in "the child's enculturation by elders."²³ Perhaps this point is exemplified in the fact that an audience of Ojibwa listeners reacted positively, rather than expressing puzzlement, when John Rogers, Chief Snow Cloud, regaled them with the story of Red Riding Hood.²⁴ Furthermore, it is difficult for the uninformed reader to know just how the moral lessons within the tales might differ (in this case, with respect to ethics and the environment) from the moral lessons in English and German tales. It seems to me that knowing the moral of a story one has never heard before requires at least some idea of the direction in which the storyteller is inclined to go. It is easy, I think, for a non-Indian to find morals in Indian stories not very different from those told in non-Indian society. This should not be mistaken for a claim that the Ojibwa regard their tales in the same way Euro-Americans regard, say, the story of the "Three Billy Goats Gruff." Whether the Ojibwa stories are regarded as fact or fiction and whether that distinction is of any consequence to the listeners are

examples of the deep and interesting questions that remain. I only suggest that the tales by themselves are not terribly strong evidence for the foreignness of Ojibwa culture nor even for an Ojibwa environmental ethic—although I do believe that, once someone knows more about the actual living conditions and material relationships of the Ojibwa, he or she will be convinced on both counts.²⁵

I conclude that Callicott's arguments and investigative methods contribute, albeit unwittingly, to an image of Indians as natural beings whose ways are easily understood and imitated due to the absence of the complications of culture.

A VARIATION ON THE NATURALISTIC ARGUMENT

The strategy of urging a naturalistic argument for hunting and then appealing to the example of American Indians sees another, more recent, incarnation in an article by Ned Hettinger in *Environmental Ethics*.²⁶ Here we have another example of environmentalists' overemphasis on Indians' ecological image at the expense of their social image. Hettinger's argument is based on the naturalistic principles of Holmes Rolston III and, formalized, goes something like this:

1. If human ancestors had not hunted animals and eaten meat, humans would not have evolved.
2. If (1), then (2b) hunting animals and eating meat affirm human nature.
3. If (2b), then (4).
4. ∴ Hunting animals and eating meat are morally obligatory.

Hettinger's argument has some difficulties in common with Callicott's, including an undefended emphasis on relatively recent hunter-gatherer cultures (not all of our ancestors ate meat—there was no meat in the primordial sludge). Also, Hettinger's argument, like Callicott's, gives the past carte blanche in determining the moral acceptability of future behavior: If the underlying assumption of the argument is to be taken seriously, then we should not wear shoes either. Also, Hettinger would have to

accept vegetarianism as morally obligatory for people in the thirtieth century if the intervening generations decide to go veggie. Less flippantly, since most of the current generation of African-Americans would not exist without the institution of slavery, consistency with premises 1 and 2 would lead us to the unacceptable conclusion that slavery affirms their nature, and therefore (the third premise tells us) we have a duty to continue that tradition.

Again, though, Hettinger tries to bolster the naturalistic argument by appealing to the example of American Indians. He tells us that, just as non-Indians cannot value their humanity while rejecting the killing and eating of animals, they also cannot "value the culture of Native American [P]lains tribes while rejecting their tradition of killing buffalo for food, clothing, and shelter." The appeal hints that animal consumption is the be-all and end-all of Plains cultures. Besides overlooking the fact that non-Indians might appreciate the context in which Plains hunting traditions occur,²⁷ it slights other aspects of Plains culture that deserve appreciation, such as political structures, the extended family, communitarian values, and general ethical principles.

HOW TO BECOME A NEW AGE SAVAGE

The naturalistic argument is just one way in which some environmentalists have simplified Indian cultures in order to argue for the permissibility of animal consumption. That argument also serves as the foundation for another strategy, which is to suggest that non-Indians who wish to consume animals simply borrow ritual or the attitudes associated with ritual. This seems to be the approach advocated by Karen Warren,²⁸ Nel Noddings,²⁹ Dolores La Chappelle,³⁰ and Pulitzer Prize-winning deep ecologist Gary Snyder. Snyder does the deep ecology movement a great disservice when he rides on the spiritual gravy train with an eclectic collection of non-Western traditions and peddles them out of context, New Age style. An excellent example of this is the essay that accompanies the following poem:

Song of the Taste

Eating the living germs of grasses
Eating the ova of large birds
the fleshy sweetness packed
around the sperm of swaying trees

The muscles of the flanks and thighs of
 soft-voiced cows
 the bounce in the lamb's leap
 the swish in the ox's tail
Eating roots grown swoll
 inside the soil
Drawing on life of living
 clustered points of light spun
 out of space
hidden in the grape.
Eating each other's seed
 eating
 ah, each other.
Kissing the lover in the mouth of bread:
 lip to lip.³¹

This homage to burgers, lambchops, and oxtail soup apparently derives its inspiration from "people who live entirely by hunting, such as the Eskimo, [who] know that taking life is an act requiring a spirit of gratitude and care, and rigorous mindfulness."³² But the eroticization of flesh-eating that continues in the essay following the poem is completely divorced from any considerations of context or differences in needs between Eskimos in Alaska and Iowans in the grain belt:

How to accomplish [an understanding of nonharming as an approach to all of living and being]? We can start by saying Grace. . . . To say a good grace you must be conscious of what you're doing, not guilt-ridden and evasive. So we look at the nature of eggs, apples, and oxtail ragoût. What we see is plenitude, even excess, a great sexual exuberance. . . .

Snyder's uninhibited disclosure of his feelings for the meat on his table is admirable. But do those feelings, or that disclosure, magically transport him into a native context? Snyder's essay reminds me of a couple who recently married. The ceremony took place in a vegetable and flower garden. They wore intricately designed clothes that they made for the occasion. Their vows were from an Omaha Indian wedding ceremony. Their friends read poems and performed music in a day-long ceremony incorporating still more elements of Native American culture. The affair had a very earthy, green-friendly sensibility. Then, for lunch, they roasted a whole pig on a spit.

At such moments the hollowness of New Age culture sounds like thunder. The general view seems to be that some crystals,

poetry, and nods to women and indigenous peoples will suffice to give a ceremonial stamp of approval to the consumption of animals (sort of like going to a notary public, only much more expensive, as anyone who has been in a New Age store knows). I agree with Dolores LaChapelle that ritual is or should be an important part of our lives. However, I am disturbed by the uncritical and naive way in which ritual and the attitudes associated with ritual are usually discussed in connection with animal consumption.³³ The mere presence of ceremony does not legitimate indigenous peoples' consumption of animals anymore than going through a funeral ritual would legitimate burying someone alive. A ritual is just one part of an entire context in which some action is appropriate. I am not living in an Eskimo-like context, and the borrowing of their rituals in order to somehow associate myself with their culture will not suffice to establish the propriety of my borrowing their diet. Indeed, Henry S. Salt anticipated Snyder more than one hundred years ago when he wrote,

It does not follow because an Eskimo, for example, may appropriately wear fur, or a Red Indian feathers, that this apparel will be equally becoming to the inhabitants of London or New York; on the contrary, an act which is perfectly natural in the one case, is often a sign of crass vulgarity in the other.³⁴

Worse than the gap in the argument, the assumption that the borrowing of Indian ceremonies will suffice to excuse the consumption of meat contributes to the erasure, in the minds of non-Indians, of the complex historical and social positioning of native cultures. Again we are left with the implication that the characteristic activity of Native Americans—or the only activity of theirs worthy of our attention—is the killing and consuming of animals.³⁵

SOME THOUGHTS ON THE GENERAL PROBLEM

Just before Thanksgiving break, a student in my Introduction to Ethics class defended her upcoming turkey dinner with the following remark: "But the Indians do it." This fixation on Native Americans' ecological activity—when those cultures receive any attention at all—is all too common among Euro-Americans. Typically, non-Indians possess images of that activity: The phenomenon of subsistence hunting of buffalo by Plains cultures is widely

known, and of course there is the “weeping Indian” image of the 1970s environmentalist campaign. We also have images of the native relationship with white America: the first “Thanksgiving,” the Little Big Horn, Wounded Knee, leaders like Chief Joseph and Sitting Bull, and, yes, even John Wayne movies. Such images—whether veridical or dangerously mythological and even racist—of these two facets of the Native American experience almost exhaust the non-Indian’s conception of all that is Indian. For many non-Indians, the Indian is a two-dimensional cartoon. What is missing, or at best uncommon, is a third kind of image: that of Native American relationships with each other. While there are a few icons such as the “chief,” the “squaw,” the “papoose,” and the “brave,” there is a paucity of images—real or imagined—of activity and attitudes within the community.

It is easy for a distortion of, or overemphasis on, the first image to arise in the absence of the third. A classic case was that weeping Indian television ad of two decades ago: A Native American man in traditional dress surveys environmental havoc. A tear runs down his cheek. The image should be ambiguous, but it is not. It should cause us to consider both the destruction of his environment and the destruction of his people, but it does not. We should think for a moment that he might be weeping in memory of all the cultural destruction that was predicated on land theft and environmental recklessness—the destruction of people and interpersonal relationships, the disease, the genocide, the boarding school terrorism, alcoholism, unemployment, the theft of language—but we do not. No, we see immediately that the Indian weeps because white people do not pick up after themselves. This advertisement represents the way in which environmentalism has marginalized the Indian.

SUMMARY

I hope I have shown that environmentalists have been doing no favor to Native American cultures by referring to them to bolster naturalistic arguments against animal rights. I hope I have shown that those kinds of arguments tend to dehumanize Native Americans and trivialize native cultures by implying that the ecological experience exhausts the native experience. I hope it also will be evident at this point that, by obsessing over the “original” or “authentic” Indian, environmentalists have tended to imply that contemporary Indians are not “real” Indians, thus contributing to

the (perceived) disappearance of contemporary Indians and their social, political, and economic issues.

Environmentalists are right to reach out to American Indians, and indeed original peoples throughout the world, for help in discovering less destructive ecological ideas and practices. However, we must not accept their aid and then cause their issues and their cultures to become the first casualties in our fight against environmental irresponsibility.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Hank Theriault and Joseph Yeh for comments and suggestions.

NOTES

1. The following sources are recommended for those interested in learning more about the dispute: J. Baird Callicott, "Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair," *Environmental Ethics* 1 (1979): 71–81; Mark E. Sagoff, "Animal Liberation and Environmental Ethics: Bad Marriage, Quick Divorce," in *Earth Ethics: Environmental Ethics, Animal Rights, and Practical Applications*, ed. James P. Sterba (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1995), 166–72; H.J. McCloskey, *Ecological Ethics and Politics* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1983); John Rodman, "The Liberation of Nature?" *Inquiry* 20 (1977): 83–145; Joni Seager, *Earth Follies: Coming to Feminist Terms with the Global Environmental Crisis* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Jim Mason, "Why Those Who Would Save the World Cannot," *The Animals' Agenda* 15 (September/October 1995): 5, 44–45.

2. See his *Earth's Insights: A Survey of Ecological Ethics from the Mediterranean Basin to the Australian Outback* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

3. Reprinted in J. Baird Callicott, *In Defense of the Land Ethic: Essays in Environmental Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 15–38. Further references to Callicott are to this volume.

4. *Ibid.*, 34.

5. *Ibid.*, 36. "Second best is eating from one's own orchard, garden, henhouse, pigpen, and barnyard. Third best is buying or bartering organic foods from one's neighbors and friends."

6. *Ibid.*, 34.

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*, 177.

9. *Ibid.*, 94.

10. I will forgo the point that many indigenous cultures practice agriculture (corn, for example, has been bred for so many centuries that its origins in the

wild are a matter of some dispute among botanists). Callicott would no doubt argue that indigenous cultures that practice agriculture are not as natural as those that do not.

11. Thomas W. Overholt and J. Baird Callicott, *Clothed-in-Fur, and Other Tales: An Introduction to an Ojibwa World View* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1982), 5.

12. On page 9 they write, "From the biological point of view there are no necessarily universal cultural characteristics distributed species-wide, nor necessarily any distinctly primitive cultural universals as the panprimitivists suppose." The context, though, makes it unclear whether they are expressing their own view or that of Dobzhansky.

13. Overholt and Callicott, *Clothed-in-Fur*, 8.

14. Assuming that they did, and that they did not have a good reason for doing so.

15. Callicott, *In Defense of the Land Ethic*, 203–19.

16. *Ibid.*, 212.

17. The third and fourth suggestions include the use of "nostalgic memoirs" and "disciplined and methodical modern ethnographic reports." Again, the emphasis is on the past—on "the reconstruction of an American Indian attitude toward nature" (*ibid.*, 179—my emphasis).

18. *Ibid.*, 214.

19. *Ibid.*, 216.

20. Overholt and Callicott, *Clothed-in-Fur*, 20.

21. Stephen Tyler, *Cognitive Anthropology* (New York: Rinehart and Winston, 1969), 3.

22. Overholt and Callicott, *Clothed-in-Fur*, 155.

23. Mary B. Black-Rogers, introduction to *ibid.*, xv.

24. John Rogers (Chief Snow Cloud), *Red World and White: Memories of a Chippewa Boyhood* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1974), 124–25.

25. The lack of a more holistic appreciation of Native American society endangers even the kind of direct cross-cultural research that Richard Brandt engaged in for his book *Hopi Ethics: A Theoretical Analysis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954). Brandt makes an error that complements Callicott's: He goes directly to the source—the Hopi themselves—but with no appreciation of the general metaphysical and evaluative principles underlying their ethical judgments. Hence he does not know what to make of the apparent Hopi (as well as Navajo) disregard for domesticated sheep and dogs (circa 1954) when Hopi respect for animals and nature was otherwise evident. Consequently, he cannot help but see a contradiction where there is none.

26. Ned Hettinger, "Valuing Predation in Rolston's Environmental Ethics: Bambi Lovers versus Tree Huggers," *Environmental Ethics* 16 (Spring 1994): 3–20.

27. The principles of vegetarianism and animal liberation are qualified by most proponents to take into account a variety of contextual issues—for example, immediate necessity.

28. Gary Snyder, "The Power and the Promise of Ecological Feminism," *Environmental Ethics* 12 (1990): 125–46.

29. Comment on Donovan's "Animal Rights and Feminist Theory," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 16:2: 418–25.

30. Bill Devall and George Sessions, "Ritual Is Essential," in *Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered* (Salt Lake City, UT: Gibbs M. Smith, 1985), 247–50.

31. Gary Snyder, "Song of the Taste" (and an untitled essay), in Devall and Sessions, *Deep Ecology*, 12.

32. *Ibid.*, 12–13.

33. Including LaChapelle's example of ceremony in connection with the consumption of salmon.

34. Henry S. Salt, *Animals' Rights: Considered in Relation to Social Progress* (Clarks Summit, PA: Society for Animal Rights, 1980), 83. *Animals' Rights* was first published in 1892.

35. For more reasons why deep ecologists should steer clear of the New Age movement, see Ward Churchill, "Sam Gill's *Mother Earth*: Colonialism, Genocide and the Expropriation of Indigenous Spiritual Tradition in Contemporary Academia," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 12:3 (1988): 49–67. Other critiques of the use of Indian cultures by philosophers include Greta Gaard's "Ecofeminism and Native American Cultures: Pushing the Limits of Cultural Imperialism?" in *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature*, ed. Gaard (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), and Andy Smith's "For All Those Who Were Indian in a Former Life," in *Ecofeminism and the Sacred*, ed. Carol J. Adams (New York: Continuum, 1993). See also Annie L. Booth and Harvey M. Jacobs, "Ties that Bind: Native American Beliefs as a Foundation for Environmental Consciousness," *Environmental Ethics* 12:1 (Spring 1990): 27–43.