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AND GOD MADE US TRUSTEES OF THE EARTH

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There is a prevailing, widespread notion afoot today in the Western, industrialized nations that Nature is merely a commodity to be exploited. We are here, according to Judeo-Christian religion, to master Nature, and as masters, to improve Her ability to function, to produce goods and services strictly for our benefit. There also is an emerging view in which human beings are seen as an artifact of Creation, as totally separate from Nature and thus as an unnatural intrusion into the world of Nature where our very presence defiles Her.

Regardless of what we have gleaned from the political sanctification of organized religions, we the human animal are still animals. We may not like being called animals or being thought of as animals, because we all too often look down on nonhumans; in fact, we too often look down on each other. Nevertheless, we are animals.

What sets us apart from the rest of our fellow creatures is not some higher sense of spirituality or some nobler sense of purpose, but rather that we deem ourselves wise in our own eyes. And therein lies the fallacy of humanity. We are no better than or worse than other kinds of animals; we simply are a different kind of animal — one among the many of God's creatures. We are therefore an inseparable part of Nature — not a special case apart from Her.

Consider that "natural," as defined in today's dictionaries, means to be present in or produced by Nature, such as animals, as opposed to being made by humans, which is seen as artificial. Consider further that we humans, by our very nature, are produced in a natural way, through sexual union, the joining of sperm and egg, and live birth; that human mothers produce milk in a natural way with which to nourish their offspring; that we grow in a natural way, through the division of our bodily cells; that we both eat and void our bodily wastes in a natural way; that we both wake and sleep in a natural way; that we reproduce in a natural way, sexually; that we die in a natural way; and that our bodies, if left alone, decompose in a natural way. We are, therefore, natural by virtue of our creation. And to be natural is to be an inseparable part of Nature, that from which we are created.

Thus, as a part of Nature, is not what we do natural? This is not to say that our actions are wise, or ethical, or moral, or desirable, or even socially acceptable and within the bounds of Nature's laws. This is only to say that our actions are natural, because we are natural, which includes converting the landscape from Nature's design to human society's, cultural design.

Admittedly, Nature's design not only may be more pleasing to our senses than are many of our cultural designs but also may function in a more ecologically-healthy way over time. One design, however, is as natural as the other — only different in context. And it is the context — spirituality versus materialism — that is knocking at the door of our consciousness.

Although I detect a definite psychological shift on the part of many people who are trying to reach back into human history,

back into consciousness to accommodate Nature, to recapture some primordial sense of spiritual harmony with Her, I still see most of us struggling with a sense of materialistic separateness — the context of our existence. Put another way, because we humans are a natural, inseparable part of Nature, an area managed as wilderness is just as natural as an area of forest that has been clearcut. They differ only in context.

When I speak to various groups throughout the United States and Canada, however, the audiences almost inevitably accept the area of designated wilderness as natural but not the area of forest that has been clearcut. Both, however, have been created by human society — a wilderness by the invention of a human law called the "Wilderness Act," which helps to feed humanity's need for spiritual renewal, and a clearcut by the invention of a human tool called a "chain saw," which helps to feed the timber industry's short-term, monetary motives.

The point is that most people seem to know what happens to an area of forest that is clearcut — a road is built, all the trees are cut down and removed, seedling trees may or may not be planted as a crop, and fire and unwanted vegetation and insects are controlled within the area. But these same people do not seem to know that it is legal, in the United States at least, to mine in a wilderness area, to graze it with livestock, to hunt in it, to trap fur-bearing mammals in it, to fish in it, to cut trails through it, to cut wood in it for camp fires, to trample it both by horses and by human foot, and at times even to control fire and epidemic outbreaks of insects in it. And in the long run, we can and do have a greater, cumulative impact on some areas of wilderness than we do on some areas of clearcut.

Both a wilderness and a clearcut are natural. The difference between them is only a matter of the perceived motive governing the type and the degree of human manipulation. In other words, the difference between them is the perceived degree of "naturalness" based on the context of the personal acceptability of the observable human disturbances to the environment.

And yet, because we still see ourselves as somehow separate from Nature, the connotation of "natural" is of something apart from human society, a purity without contamination by human activity or artifact. This connotation of "natural" is invalid, because humanity and human society are inseparable from Nature and therefore from the natural world.

The notion of "natural" and "naturalness" must now be taken a step further by introducing the concept of "native." "Native" is belonging to one by nature; originating, growing, or produced in a certain place; indigenous as opposed to exotic or foreign. Stated differently, a native is a natural part of the area; a native is an acceptable, accepted part of Nature in a given place in a given time. To understand what I mean by this, we must go back some thousands of years.

When the Bering-Chukchi platform was last exposed during the Wisconsin Glacial Stage, which began about 70,000 years ago, it formed a continuation of the Eurasian continent with North America. During the maximum glaciation of this stage, the sea was approximately 328 feet below its present level. The Bering-Chukchi platform, apparently exposed in its entirety, formed a flat isthmus about 994 miles wide between what is now northeastern Siberia and Alaska. And it remained open to migrating plants and animals, including human beings, until it was inundated by rising seas at the close of the Wisconsin Glacial Stage, about 10,000 years ago (Hopkins 1959, Pewe et al. 1967).

Crossing the Bering-Chuckchi platform from Siberia before its inundation at the close of the Wisconsin Glacial Stage, some of the "Native Americans'" ancient ancestors migrated south and east out of Alaska and arrived in the Great Plains of North America between 15,000 and 20,000 years ago (Stephenson 1967). These people represent some of the earliest human inhabitants of the New World, of whom there is very little specific evidence. They reached the southeastern United States about 15,000 years ago. They arrived in the northeastern United States and southern part of southeastern Canada about 14,000 years ago and occupied the southern half of the Lower Peninsula of Michigan 1,000 years later (Griffin 1967). Between 14,000 and 11,000 years ago, they inhabited what is now the area of Las Vegas, Nevada, and traveled throughout the Columbia Basin of northcentral Oregon and eastern Washington (Baumhoff and Heize 1967). They did not, however, cross the Cascade-Sierra Nevada Mountain Ranges and reach the coastal areas of northern California and Oregon until about 8,000 years ago (Meighan 1967).

Now, for the sake of comparison, let's cross the Atlantic Ocean to England, where Simmons (1988) will chronicle for us the culturalization of the English landscape: About 330,000 years ago, 310,000 years before the "Native Americans" crossed the Bering-Chuckchi platform, the humanoid *Homo erectus* was already living in what today is England, although England was still attached to the European continent. As the Pleistocene drew to a close, between 12,000 and 10,000 years ago, the ice withdrew, though not in a single, smooth recession. During this time, Palaeolithic cultures of "modern humans" (*Homo sapiens*) occupied the warmer places in the south, where they seem to have had an ecological impact with their selective dependence on wild horses and reindeer for food and raw materials. (Palaeolithic means "old stone-age," which occurred earlier than 12,000 years ago.)

Between 10,000 and 7,500 years ago, the climate ameliorated, and the trees

that had survived the glaciation in southern Europe and the Caucasus, a region in the Soviet Union covering 154,250 square miles between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, gradually returned until a climax, mixed deciduous forest was established about 8,000 years ago. Then, about 7,500 years ago, England separated from the mainland. Mesolithic hunter-gatherers still inhabited the newly-formed island, and they remained until the coming of agriculture, about 5,500 years ago. (Mesolithic means "middle stone-age," which occurred between 12,000 and 5,500 years ago.)

In contrast with the Palaeolithic and early Mesolithic cultures, there is considerable evidence to show that the earliest cultural landscapes, those purposefully manipulated with fire, were formed in middle to late Mesolithic period, between 7,500 to 5,500 years ago. That better data, representing earlier culturalization of the landscape, will be forthcoming is very likely, but for the moment, the first, well-documented cultural landscape in England is represented by the following: the conversion of mixed, deciduous forest into a mosaic of high forests, open-canopy woodlands, and grassy clearings with fringes of scrub and bracken fern, patches of wet sedge, and bogs of peat. Among these, groups of late Mesolithic peoples moved about gathering food, but with no knowledge of crop-based agriculture.

The coming of agriculture around 5,500 years ago was one of the great turning points in western Europe, the beginning of the Neolithic culture. (Neolithic means "new stone-age," which began with the advent of agriculture.)

For those people, there was no gradual emergence of specialized collection of raw materials, on-site husbandry, or the incipient domestication and then full domestication of plants and animals with its accompanying system of land use. As agriculture spread westward, the full complement of agricultural tradition and myth presumably came as a package, even if accessory hunting persisted. The model of the earliest agriculture in western Europe is a mosaic of small clearings that were abandoned as the fertility of the soil became exhausted or the weeds became too bothersome. As new clearings were made, the abandoned ones reverted to forest.

When Europeans, the Spanish, coming from culturalized, pastoral landscapes, first arrived in and began to settle the islands of the Caribbean in the New World in 1492, they considered both the forests and the people who inhabited them as both native and natural, and the natives initially helped the newcomers to survive. But by the time the Spanish arrived in and began to settle La Florida in 1513, now the state of Florida, everything had changed. The natives were now seen simply as "savages" who stood in the way of material wealth and had to be eliminated (Maser 1989).

The European invaders held this view, because they had already lost their spiritual connection with Nature. They had become almost totally materialistic and, therefore, saw not the land as an entity with which to connect spiritually, but

only the apparently "free" products thereof — including the "native peoples" — to be exploited in order to grow economically wealthy. To reap such wealth, however, they had to dispose of the native peoples, which they did, and which we in many ways are still doing culturally. Second, the Europeans brought with them Christianity, their Nature-condemning religion, and set about to practice it, much as we are still doing.

Over time, as our Europeans forbearers became more and more materialistically removed from the land through the process of development and urbanization, they lost their spiritual connection with the creation of Nature and with the nature of Creation. Their context with Nature changed from one of spirituality and reverence to one of materialism and exploitation and with it changed also their concepts of both "natural" and "native."

Now it is *our* turn to struggle with the concept of "natural"

and "native." Our struggle — spirituality versus materialism and the balance between them — too often takes place in the courts of the land rather than in our hearts and souls where such a battle properly belongs. In our struggle for a sustainable context within Nature, we must recognize and accept that human society has been converting Nature's landscape to a human-designed, cultural landscape for thousands of years and that we shall continue to do so in perpetuity. For there is naught else we can do simply because we exist and use the world as a whole.

Consider that the Native North Americans, who were in spiritual harmony with Nature for more than 10,000 years when the European invaders arrived, were in fact altering the landscapes in which they lived. But they did not change them in the same way as did the European invaders who colonized the New World with their Nature-condemning religion, their technology, and their wantonly-materialistic ways, which they forcefully superimposed on the spiritual ways of the natives.

Unlike the pre-European-settlement Native North Americans, most of us who are European-Americans from North, Central, or South America still feel and act as though we are alienated from Nature. We still don't have a clear sense of "natural" and "native" as concepts joining us with Nature, because we still see them as concepts that somehow exclude us as participants in the creative process of designing the landscapes in which we live and work.

What we are really talking about is a relative degree of "nativeness," which is thought of in the context of time just as a relative degree of "naturalness" is thought of in the context of human intrusion as expressed through alteration of landscapes. Therefore, the further into the past that one can trace her or his ancestry in a given place the more native and so the more natural she or he is thought to be, even within her or his own mind. And the more native we feel ourselves to be, the more natural we deem our alterations of the landscape to

be.

In the sense that we humans are a natural part of the ecosystem in which we live and that what we do in the way of converting Nature's landscape to our cultural landscape is therefore also natural, I see "naturalness" not as a definition but rather as a descriptive continuum of human intrusions, alterations if you will, which range from the most pristine end of the ecological scale to the most humanized end of the ecological scale. By the same token, I see "nativeness" not as a definition but rather as a descriptive continuum in time, which ranges from the most ancient, continuous habitation in an area to the most recent immigration into an area.

Bear in mind, however, that humanity's habitation in and alterations of the landscape are a natural part of Creation and that we are active participants in the redrafting of Nature's design simply because we cannot do anything else by the very fact that we exist. Thus, not only do we belong here and have a right to be here in context of our "nativeness" but also we have a duty to participate in the creation of our landscape in the context of our "naturalness." So, the question we must now ask is: As trustees endowed by God, how do we care for the Earth and sculpt and texture Her landscapes with "the mind of God" for the benefit of all the generations to come?

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