The *Trumpeter*
ISSN: 0832-6193
Volume 23, Number 3 (2007)

On the Importance of Paul Shepard's Call for *Post-Historic Primitivism* and *Paleolithic Counter-Revolution* against Modernity

Frederic Bender

Frederic Bender teaches philosophy at the University of Colorado where he specializes in Marxism, critical theory, deep ecology, and Asian philosophy. His latest book, *The Culture of Extinction: Toward a Philosophy of Deep Ecology* (2003), is reviewed in the *Trumpeter* Vol. 20, No. 1 (2003).

We live today on a planet undergoing abrupt non-linear change, also known as overshoot and collapse, not least with respect to rapid rises in atmospheric carbon dioxide and equivalents, average global temperature, and sea level. The best science we have today, as represented by the Report of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) of February 2007, predicts, as a baseline consensus, that atmospheric CO_2 will at least double from pre-industrial levels of 280 parts per million, compared to 368 ppm in 2000.[1]

The 2,500 scientists from over 130 nations responsible for the report predict average global temperatures will rise by 1.8 to 4.0 degrees (3.2 to 7.8 degrees Fahrenheit), but warn that greater warming cannot be ruled out.[2] The global mean sea level will rise by 28 to 43 centimetres (11.2 to 17.2 inches) by 2100, with larger increases possible if ice sheets in Antarctica and Greenland continue their rapid thawing.[3]

Beyond reasonable doubt the primary cause of these changes has been industrialized humanity: *Homo colossus*. Ubiquitous toxic pollution and ever-rising atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide have been the by-products of industrialization since its inception, and have created pollution and climate change that is now so drastic as to define industrial civilization as the culture of extinction.

Sounding every bit like a supporter of deep ecology, French President Jacques Chirac stated, “faced with this emergency, now is not the time for half measures. It is the time for a revolution, in the true sense of the term. We are in truth on the historical doorstep of the irreversible.”[4] For further details see my analysis of industrial society’s ecological impact in *The Culture of Extinction: Toward a Philosophy of Deep Ecology* (2003). Besides global warming and rising sea levels, that earlier analysis focused on stratospheric ozone depletion, unsustainable human takeover of net photosynthesis, habitat destruction, ecosystem collapse, massive extinction, deforestation, ocean degradation, and arable land loss. Without belabouring the point, the changes currently occurring, particularly the melting of the polar ice-sheets and methane-releasing thawing of the permafrost, have proven to be far more rapid than even I believed possible just four years ago.

Headlines from the IPCC focus on sea levels and global warming. Rising sea levels are related to global temperature rise not just because of melting polar ice caps, but also because of the ocean’s own coefficient of expansion. Since water expands as heat is added, global temperature rise means that the oceans will expand for “more than a millennium.”[5] The predictable consequences for millions of humans living at or near current sea level are dire. Even with Herculean efforts to halt the increase of atmospheric CO_2, future ecological refugees from low-lying coastal regions and islands will dwarf the suffering caused by Hurricane Katrina or the annual flooding of Bangladesh.

Ecological change cannot be discussed without also addressing accompanying social stresses. Prevalent social networks, especially those associated with the globalization of capitalist industrial society, very likely will undergo non-linear abrupt changes of their own. Social breakdown, violence, and migrations on an unprecedented scale; widespread famine due to desertification, flooding or other causes of loss of agricultural fertility in many parts of the globe; the spread of disease as insect and other vectors migrate into territory for which they were formerly unfit; collapse of governments and crises of confidence in other institutions of civil society, are just a few of global warming’s predictable effects during the present century.

To mitigate the worst of such effects, humans will have to learn very rapidly to reframe their role on planet Earth and modify basic belief systems, behaviours, and institutions accordingly. Addressing this pending collapse of the legitimacy of the industrial paradigm is perhaps the most important role for deep ecology theory today. To the extent that deep ecology supporters can posit feasible and desirable post-

industrial ways of life suitable for a destabilized planet, they can contribute a uniquely important perspective as ecosystemic breakdown unfolds. If we can develop the deep ecological wisdom with which to ameliorate some of the most dire of industrialization's effects, then we may reasonably hope to *cope with collapse*. To the extent that collapse spirals out of control, deep ecology, I would suggest, can also help address issues related to how survivors might best *pick up the pieces* in the face of unimaginable suffering.

What does all this have to do with Paul Shepard? Simply, his ideas, particularly those developed in his essay, "A Post-Historic Primitivism," address issues vital both to coping with collapse and picking up the pieces. Shepard shows us the baseline for healthy lifeways for humans and Planet Earth—ideas upon which reflection will become increasingly urgent as the greatest crisis of humanity's evolutionary development unfolds. To the extent that we as a species fail to adapt, the tiny number of human survivors will return to the default position: hunting-gathering. However, to the extent that ideas like those of Shepard expand the terms of debate, the possibility of cultural development in the direction of *post-historic primitivism* opens —arguably not an unfavourable outcome of the dire situation in which we now find ourselves. This is not to say that Shepard tells us in any detail what post-historic primitivism is to be. Nor will I do so here, since this task requires a much more extended treatment. Yet Shepard knows where to look for solutions, that is, to the forgotten "primitive" in each of us. To the extent that Shepard argues cogently that the hunter-gatherer way of life is that for which humans are best suited, and the only known way of life thus far that is ecologically sustainable over the long run, his work (and that of others upon whom I draw) identifies those human potentials—many long forgotten by *Homo colossus*, or distorted perversely in our prevalent worldviews—that I hope in another place to develop into a full-fledged case for deep-ecological social transformation.

Shepard's Repudiation of History and Turn Toward Culture

Let me begin with Shepard's idea of *history*, a term he uses in a very particular sense. Basically, history is the result of alienation from Earth-centred belief systems, as typified by Judaeo-Christian religion and classical Greek philosophy, in which history's supposed meaning replaces myth as the basis of culture. According to Shepard, history creates discontent and alienation from Others, non-human life,

primitive ancestors, and tribal peoples.[6] Since history is a de-naturizing process, the more historical we grow, the stranger the world becomes; it becomes increasingly unfamiliar to us because of our urban isolation from the natural world and increasingly bizarre because our culture's basic worldviews are anti-naturalistic. History tells us that primal peoples live primitive lives, devoid of admirable qualities and, even if they were admirable, they are irrelevant to our situation, because "you can't go back." Shepard recommends we indeed recover pre-history and reconnect to mythos (sacred story), ancestors, and nonhuman Others. He believes that history's real lesson is that it is no guide to the future, because it is a declaration of independence from the deep past and its peoples, living or dead, and from the natural state of our being.[7] Despite these deep-rooted prejudices, we must study primal peoples (who are not primitive in any defensible sense of the term) so we can begin to think about living ecologically in post-historic and post-industrial ways.

To live ecologically is to learn that there is no isolated "I" set over against "it," that is, that no clear line demarcates self and other. As Gregory Bateson observes, to limit our notion of self to the region within our skin "is basic to the planetary ecological crisis in which we find ourselves."[8] The question is, how to get from here to there. Though certainly not alone, Shepard was a kind of spirit guide who has shown the way, revolutionizing our view of the allegedly primitive lifeways of hunter-gatherers, people who Gary Snyder terms *Old-Ways peoples*.[9] Though they often experience material hardships we of the culture of extinction would not willingly accept, primal peoples know how to live meaningful lives in harmony with Earth. The point is not to become hunter-gatherers again, if we can avoid so doing (the post-collapse default position), but to learn how to live in harmony with Earth, creatively applying Old-Ways wisdom to cope with collapse or pick up the pieces.

Following Shepard, Snyder and other sources consistent with the deep ecology literature, let us try to think outside the box about culture. The Old Ways are the wisdom of identifying with, and living in harmony with, the beings of one's place. "In the old ways, the flora and fauna and landforms are part of the culture."[10] Though humans have lived by the Old Ways over ninety-eight percent of the time, Shepard points out that ever since Plato and *Genesis*, Western thinkers have held that the quality or trait distinguishing humans from the rest of nature (e.g., spirit, reason, morality, alleged godlikeness) makes us into fundamentally non-natural beings, outside nature, and superior. This false pride, or hubris, in turn legitimates the reduction of nonhuman nature to resources for human exploitation. Accordingly, Western

philosophy has failed utterly to understand the roles of nature and culture in our humanity. In particular, it has ignored, denied, or devalued our own animality—the myriad ways our needs and behaviours resemble those of our fellow animals, and the many ways Shepard has shown in *Thinking Animals: Animals and the Development of Human Intelligence* (1998) and elsewhere that budding human intelligence derived from observation of animals and interaction with them. Yet, to imagine ourselves other than fully natural beings, that is, something other than animals with particularly human kinds of intelligences, is mere vanity. Humans are neither computers (purely rational intellects), nor deities (godlike), nor disembodied spirits (souls) trapped temporarily within bodies. Nor, very often, are we sapient, that is, rational, moral, or wise.

Humans are not only animals, but cultural animals, in two distinct senses. To actualize our potentials fully we require complex cultural expression unprecedented in nature. Human culture is "genetically framed and ecologically adapted," as Shepard puts it.[11] Second, we are capable of a degree of cultural variegation unknown elsewhere in nature. As Shepard argues, however, cultural variability is limited, since natural selection has hardwired certain tastes, dispositions, and needs into *Homo sapiens*, as into every species. To succeed over the long run, human cultures must allow these dispositions to be expressed and needs satisfied. That a culture is necessary to awaken our potentials does not preclude the judgment that some cultures do so better than others. Every human culture, as Ruth Benedict observes, attempts to fulfill the natural needs provided us by the human age-cycle and the environment. We pass down accepted solutions to succeeding generations as norms: each culture's norms a small subset from among the potentials latent in humanity. Benedict notes that a culture "that capitalized even a considerable proportion of these" would be "as unintelligible as a language that used all possible sounds."[12] Shepard adds that a culture's quality is measured by how well it eases the major life-transitions embedded in the human genome. These include mother-child bonding; separation from the mother; formation of primary social ties in early childhood; formation of our existential attitude, that is, whether we experience the world as caring, nourishing, instructing, protecting, vindictive, mechanical, and so on; passage through puberty and entry into adulthood, marriage, childbearing, child rearing, old age, and death.[13]

How, and how well, a person traverses these stages varies from one culture and individual to the next. Shepard argues that hunter-gatherer cultures suit human ontogeny best, because natural selection shaped the

human genome to hunting-gathering over a period of two million years. Historic cultures hardly can improve on the basic cultural style found among hunter-gatherers. When historic cultures fail to provide appropriate tutoring, testing, and ceremony for human development, a "slide into adult infantility" occurs.[14] In Shepard's view, the egoism, consumerism, and human chauvinism prevalent in the culture of extinction; our drastically shortened, acosmic sense of time; and our culture's rationales for refusing to live in harmony with nature, are all symptoms of such arrested development. I would add to this list the culture of extinction's denial of death.

Recovering the Old Ways

Jean-Jacques Rousseau's "Discourse on Inequality" (1755) marked the first time a Western philosopher took hunting-gathering as representative of our basic humanity. Voltaire (1694–1778), after receiving a copy from Rousseau, thanked him for his new book "against the human race." With characteristic wit, Voltaire added that "The desire to walk on all fours seizes one when one reads your work."[15] I cite this incident to emphasize that recovering the Old Ways is not about putting on loincloths or going on all fours, but about finding out who we really are. As Shepard notes, it is about recovering long-forgotten or long-repressed aspects of our humanity, since the archaic—the universally-human—is ever-present within us. The deeper we go into ourselves, the more we rediscover the long-repressed–latent-archaic within our own humanness.[16]

As Shepard notes, although twentieth-century cultural relativism exorcized anthropology of its Eurocentrism, it also prevented adequate appreciation of the Old Ways and blocked appreciation of the ill-effects of their abandonment. Now that the relativist tide is ebbing, however, the study of humankind's "universal cultural design," in anthropologist Roger Keesing's phrase, is receiving support from ethology, primatology, hominid paleontology, paleolithic archaeology, linguistics, cultural anthropology and, increasingly, the voices of living hunter-gatherers themselves.[17] Philosophers, however, routinely ignore all this, due to the dogmas that time and history are unreturning arrows, that the old is invariably inferior to the new, and that the past is irrelevant to the future. Like the aristocrat Voltaire, we dismiss the Old Ways as relics of an impoverished past now fortunately outgrown. The more we acknowledge them, however, the more obviously short-sighted the biases of Western philosophy become.

About twelve thousand years ago, climate change brought the paleolithic to a close, at least for the initial few who began tending plants and settling in villages. Up to that point, every human being who had ever lived had been a hunter-gatherer. People everywhere had used fire for protection and cooking; had made tools from stone, wood, or bone; had built shelters and clothed themselves as the climate required; had eaten varied, omnivorous diets drawn from a great variety of locally-available foods; and had led meaningful lives within complex cultures. Hunter-gatherers, however, were not ecological heroes. As biologist E. O. Wilson observes, Pleistocene hunters extinguished more than fifty per cent of the large mammal and bird species native to Africa, Australia, North America, Madagascar, and New Zealand.[18] Nonetheless, with so large and devastating an impact, surviving hunter-gatherer cultures would have had to learn to maintain environmental equilibrium. Thus, hunter-gatherers limited their ecospheric impact, chiefly through initiatory ritual, sacred cosmology, and fertility control (the latter chiefly through rituals that periodically tabooed sexual intercourse).[19]

Today, faced with imminent overshoot and collapse, we must make a comparable cultural leap, from *Homo colossus* to *Homo ecologicus*. Shepard's work helps us understand that to do so will require adopting nondualist sacred cosmologies, for example deep ecology, and other techniques. This is what I mean by returning symbolically Old Ways, also known as Shepard's "paleolithic counterrevolution" against modernity.[20]

Though Rousseau certainly didn't understand the Old Ways accurately, they remain the only human lifeways thus far devised that have successfully promoted long-term ecological sustainability, all the way down to modern times where they are still practiced. Shepard cites classicist N. K. Sandars for identifying the four bases of paleolithic culture, still cherished by today's remnant hunting-foraging peoples: 1. a strong sense of "diffused sacredness," which may erupt into everyday life anytime; 2. thought-patterns and practical relationships that "take no account of genetic barriers" between humans and other species, and that support ideas of inter-species metamorphosis "inside and outside this life"; 3. acceptance of "unhistorical" time, in contrast to Judaeo-Christian eschatological, and secular chronological, time; and 4. a common religious life based in shamanism.[21] However, that their metaphysical and mythological beliefs differ so much from our own certainly does not blind hunter-gatherers to the demands of praxis. Quite the contrary.

To manage ecosystems sustainably, primal peoples must know them intimately. Over millennia they have developed quite amazing taxonomic knowledge, through close observation of the plants and animals among which they live. As Bob Johannes said, modern biologists are only now beginning to realize that native peoples' knowledge is encyclopedic "and of major scientific value, particularly as it relates to natural resource management."[22] Anthropologist Milton M. R. Freeman adds that Inuit game-management practices, for example, are based on "the community's empirically based knowledge . . . awesome in breadth and detail, [that] often stands in marked contrast to the attenuated data available from scientific studies."[23] Similarly, anthropologist H. A. Feit describes the rituals of the James Bay Cree as manifesting "reciprocity between man and animals . . . includ[ing] respect for the needs of animals to survive as a population."[24] Where modern Western-trained wildlife or forest managers are taught to frame wildlife and habitat as resources to exploit for economic gain, native peoples, on the contrary, never treat animals or ecosystems as mere resources, but as strands in Earth's complex web of life.

Physically and psychologically the Old Ways suit us best, since genetically we remain virtually identical to our paleolithic forbears. This, incidentally, is why contemporary hunter-gatherers remain remarkably alike around the globe. We fear that, if modern society reconstructed itself for ecological sustainability, then we must regress to intolerably primitive, impoverished hunting-foraging. Such a simplistic, all-or-nothing approach in fact describes the consequences we should expect from overshoot and collapse (the default position), if we do not otherwise change proactively. Business-as-usual portends just such a dismal future. We are perhaps the last generation of *Homo colossus* with the opportunity, and responsibility, to prevent the default scenario—if it is not already too late.

By "going back" or "going deeply within" ourselves in awareness, we might learn how to "go forward" from today's unsustainable present to a sustainable future. In the culture of extinction, of course, most people recoil from such a suggestion in horror. This makes perfect sense, given their acculturation. Thus, a large part of the philosophical task is to delegitimate said presuppositions and to show how we might best adapt the Old Ways to our present situation so they can serve the goals of ecological sustainability and enhance quality of life. Quality-of-life judgments, of course, raise difficult aesthetic, moral, and religious issues, all the more intractable since the nihilism of our age repudiates serious value-discourse.[25]

According to anthropologist Stanley Diamond, industrial civilization frustrates many of our basic human needs,[26] causing us to compensate subconsciously by obsessing on material possessions, in the mistaken belief that goods-consumption can replace the now absent, archaic sense of nature's sacred interdependence and mythic identification. The subconscious realization that such compensation is futile, I might add, accounts for our well-known ambivalence about native cultures. We hate them, because they are so different; yet, paradoxically, we also admire and envy them, because, as Jerry Mander said, "they express the parts of our personal and cultural psyches that we must suppress in order to function in the world as we do."[27] Like us, hunter-gatherers often fail to live up to their own ideals. Yet, the virtues they try to make central in their lives are no less admirable for that. These include co-operation, sharing, good humour, gratitude, humility, modesty, generosity, cheerful tolerance of discomfort, unstinting work and play, physical prowess, appreciation of life's fragility, appropriate boldness, hunting skill, domestic skill, trans-generational and trans-species kinship awareness, love of children, respect for elders, acceptance of group-responsibility, conflict-avoidance, respect for nature, frugality that precludes (for example) being careless with or wasteful of the body parts of living things hunted or gathered, holistic, world-affirming spirituality, and enjoyment of our common humanity while accepting that we are but one strand in life's web. Such virtues, comprising what Snyder calls the etiquette of the wild world,[28] have served our species well for millennia.

Hunter-gatherers as individuals, of course, have many moral shortcomings, including small-scale cruelty and sometimes the inability or unwillingness to end conflict within, or between tribes. Nor, despite intense ecosystem awareness, are their lifeways without adverse environmental impact.[29] Like all living beings, Homo sapiens must take over some fraction of the ecosphere, that otherwise would be available to other species, to survive. Hunter-gatherers alter their environment, intentionally and unintentionally, by hunting, fire, migration, diffusion of seeds, and so on. Yet, their ideals discourage ecospheric drawdown beyond what is necessary. In contrast, we of the culture of extinction maximize ecospheric drawdown, heedless of long-term sustainability concerns, or the co-evolution of other species alongside humans. For over ten millennia, ever since the emergence of agriculture in the neolithic, the culture of extinction has waged war globally against native peoples and the ecosphere alike.[30] As Mander puts it, today native people everywhere

> share the perception that they are resisting a single, multi-armed enemy: a society whose basic assumptions, whose way of mind, and whose manner of political and economic organization permit it to ravage the planet without discomfort, and to drive natives off their ancestral lands.[31]

Today's hunter-gatherers know that the culture of extinction eventually must crash; their goal is to stay out of its way and to survive it as long as possible.[32] Many of them try simply to maintain their traditional ways of life, by which they can meet their vital needs, connect their lives with the sacred, and preserve the ecosystems upon which their lives and identity depend. They can also become our teachers, as Shepard suggests,[33] if only we'd listen. Consider, for example, what the Old Ways can teach us concerning economics, politics and spirituality.

Old-Ways Economics

For the most part, we of the culture of extinction imagine that indigenous peoples live lives of deprivation, while our machines free us from toil and make us wealthy and happy. Nothing could be further from the truth. Economic activity under the Old Ways not only ensures group survival and reproduction, but preserves its internal balance, its traditions, and the balance between humans and their surroundings. The lives of primal peoples are meaningful, leisured, and only rarely violent. Their lives are also a lot shorter than ours, which, though long are often banal, highly stressed, and systematically violent. We who live off the technological juggernaut may have many possessions, but we work far harder for them than hunter-gatherers do for theirs. As Mander observes,

> our devotion to gathering and caring for commodities has created an extraordinary modern paradox: a scarcity of time, loss of leisure, and increase of stress amid an environment of apparent abundance and wealth. A decrease in the quality of life and experience.[34]

Anthropologist Peter Farb adds that "high civilization is hectic, whereas primitive hunters and collectors of wild food . . . are among the most leisured people on Earth. . . . among the best fed . . . and also among the healthiest."[35] Anthropologist Marshall Sahlins discovered that Australian aboriginal males work on average three hours and forty five minutes daily, females three hours and fifty minutes.

> [H]unters and gatherers work less than we do; and, rather than a continuous travail, the food quest is intermittent, leisure abundant, and there is a greater amount of sleep in the daytime per capita per year than in any other condition of society.[36]

We, of course, work twelve or more hours daily, counting time spent at our employment, commuting, shopping, household work, automobile maintenance, family finances, and so on. Compared with aboriginals we lose to excess labour at least eight hours daily—half our waking lives. Despite our many possessions, most of us feel inadequate because we cannot afford everything that corporate advertisement and peer pressure brainwash us into believing we need.

Nor should we treat population as an independent variable. Today's global population of 6.5 billion is a product of the culture of extinction's reduction in the death rate through public sanitation, improved diet, medical intervention, and so on. Among hunter-gatherers, deliberate control of population growth and "deliberate under-use of the environment's full economic capacity" has kept the ratio of people to resources very small.[37] As Sahlins adds, hunter-gatherers avoid surplus labour because food is naturally abundant when human population is deliberately limited. The workday is kept short, the number of days off exceeds the number of workdays, and leisure activities occupy the greater part of one's time.[38] Nomadic by choice, hunter-gatherers view material possessions as burdensome. They guard against individual accumulation, hoarding, or unequal access to valued resources. When circumstances bring an unexpected surplus, the entire group quickly must consume it, for if they allowed surpluses to accumulate, hunters' cultural and psychological importance would diminish, undermining the traditional training of the young, encouraging laziness, and diminishing the importance of traditional skills.[39]

Primal peoples, in short, are wealthy because they have the wisdom to limit their economic activities through low-impact, steady-state economics. By deliberately minimizing labour and physical throughput, they leave themselves abundant leisure to enjoy life and pursue important, nonmaterial ends. Their great secret of economics is that real wealth is having all that you need and limiting desires, through shared cultural norms, to those needs that can easily be satisfied. Owning few, if any, private possessions, hunter-gatherers have few possessions about which to worry. Everyone has the things they really need. They share goods required for group sustenance, according to the system of usufruct (i.e., everything is freely available to all members of the group to use as needed). Under this system, acquisitiveness cannot arise, the accumulation of private wealth is impossible and poverty is inconceivable. Thus, Northwest Coast Indians enhance their social prestige by giving away their personal possessions in potlatch rituals. Hunter-gatherers become poor only if brainwashed by the culture of

extinction, when they discover that they lack the material means for lifestyles alien to their own traditions. This happened to the Yupik people of Alaska, who subsisted from the land and ocean for thousands of years. They had a hard life,

> but it had none of the frustrations and stigmas of poverty . . . Living from the land sustained life and evolved the Yupik culture, a culture in which wealth was the common wealth of the people as provided by the earth. . . . This sharing created a bond between people that helped insure survival. Life was hard then, but people found life satisfying.[40]

This ended in the nineteenth-century, when Russian fur traders brought the idea of wealth and poverty. Accumulation of possessions turned native people against each other, replacing co-operation with competition and sharing with accumulating.

For tens of millennia the Old Ways have met people's vital needs and sustained the sacred web of life in mutually reinforcing ways. Since, on the paleolithic worldview, we are manifest divine spirit just like our fellow creatures, it is inconceivable to primal peoples that land could ever become a commodity. Joe Sanchez, a young Western Shoshone, puts the point clearly:

> for most Americans, land is a dead thing. It means nothing. But to disconnect from land is unthinkable to Indians. The land is everything. It is the source of our existence. It's where the ancestors' spirits live. It is not a commodity that can be bought or sold, and to rip it open to mine it is deeply sacrilegious to all Indian people.[41]

Neither poverty nor its vices can arise when an entire society has a common stake in the Earth and what it offers. Land can neither be sold nor inherited; goods are produced co-operatively and for collective use; and private ownership, if present at all, is confined to personal and household goods. Although this may seem like a utopian fantasy to us, such was the norm for ninety-five percent of the time anatomically modern Homo sapiens have existed. Moreover, accumulation of property leads inexorably to ecological unsustainability. From the evolutionary perspective, capitalism is a deviant economic system and agrarian, urban, and industrial societies culturally deviant. The culture of extinction has forgotten to keep the ratio of population to resources low, to underutilize nature's affordances deliberately and to eschew maximum effort in favour of enjoyment. Hunter-gatherers' supposed poverty, it turns out, is a deliberate, rational quality-of-life choice.

Old-Ways Social Organization

Hunter-gatherer societies typically are non-hierarchical. Decision-making is usually based on interpersonal respect, interdependence, and co-operation, rather than raw power or competitive advantage. Many of their languages lack terms expressive of our notions of domination and hierarchy, yet they are often rich in terms emphasizing unity and mutual respect.[42] When possible, hunter-gatherers make decisions through ritualized, consensual processes involving the entire group, or at least tribal elders or chiefs appointed to specific leadership positions. Tradition defines the duties of chiefs, with each chief's responsibility confined to a specific area, such as medicine, planting, ceremony, or war.[43] Multigenerational, extended families prevail. Often families are matrifocal, with each gender and age-cohort having distinctive obligations and responsibilities. Since everyone knows the rules, the adversarial process is unnecessary. Disagreements are settled through ritual, with elders or chiefs acting as mediators, not judges.[44]

Japanese Shinto beliefs and practices are similar. As deep ecology theorist Dolores LaChapelle says, in Shinto, human existence exhibits no inherent dualism of good and evil: if a person's spirit is too rough, purification rites restore him to balance, or reconcile him to those he has harmed. If a person fails at something she has merely upset the natural balance, which can be restored by adjusting her behaviour as her understanding deepens. Thus, ritual and ceremony, not moral rules or the restraint of law, restore the harmony and well-being of the community, including the proper coordination of humans with nature or spirit. Since every being is a manifestation of divine spirit, no one need feel guilty, or feel the need to plead or bargain with the gods (or God). One just shows gratitude and respect for nature's powers, especially those of its sacred places.[45]

Again, although such arrangements may seem utopian to us, it is our institutions that are the exceptions to the long-standing Old Ways. Many will assume that such idyllic arrangements can work only in small groups. Though small group size is ideal for human relationships, the Old Ways also work well for large groups. As Mander tells it, the Iroquois democratically confederated six large tribes, whose territory covered much of Ontario and most of the United States east of the Mississippi and north of Tennessee. Yet, our standard versions of American history represent the native peoples as savages. We give them no credit for helping the European settlers survive. Nor do we acknowledge the important role the Great Binding Law of the Iroquois Confederacy played as the model for the United States Constitution. As

Mander observes, nothing in the colonists' European experience offered a successful model of the democratic federation of states. Despite modest democratic ferment in the writings of Locke, Montesquieu, and Rousseau, every European nation of the time was monarchical. Ancient Greece and Rome, at their best, were models of partial, intermittent civic democracy, not the longstanding democratic confederation of a large population occupying a huge territory. Yet, a living example of confederation flourished side-by-side with the American colonists, uniting the Onondaga, Oneida, Mohawk, Seneca, Cayuga and Tuscarora tribes under a single law that had been in force for centuries.

The Great Binding Law defined relations among the confederated nations as parts of a single body. It articulated the rights reserved to the individual nations, described their different legislatures, explained how each nation would elect its representatives to the Grand Council, and laid down rules of election and removal of chiefs. Most of us may be ignorant of these accomplishments, but the colonists were not. In 1754, trying to draft their first attempt at a confederation, the Albany Plan of Union, the colonists invited forty-two members of the Iroquois Grand Council to advise them. James Madison frequently consulted with Iroquois leaders; William Livingston was fluent in the Mohawk language; John Adams, who befriended Cayuga chiefs, advocated the study of Indian forms of government; Thomas Jefferson's papers refer to Iroquois governance and Benjamin Franklin's work is replete with stories about Indian ideas of personal freedom and government structures.[46] The message here is that the Old Ways can work for large groups.

Shamanic Religion and Old-Ways, Nondualist Spirituality

Anthropologist W. E. H. Stanner describes the aboriginal thought of Australia as a "metaphysical gift," a spirituality that frames a world "without inverted pride, quarrel with life, moral dualism, rewards of heaven and hell, prophets, saints, grace or redemption."[47] Old-Ways peoples frame nature through myth and ceremony, their worldviews integrating vital information about landscape, seasonal change, and so on, which they internalize by making the environing flora, fauna, and landforms central to their spirituality. Tribal territory always includes places perceived to be of extraordinarily high spiritual density, either because of notable profusions of plant or animal habitat, geomorphological anomaly, mythic connection with totemic ancestors,

et cetera. Myth enshrines such places as gateways through which people experience the numinous.[48]

Analogously, the Lakota ritual of offering the sacred pipe to the four cosmic directions situates humans within a world at once natural, sacred, and symbolic of important human virtues. The North is associated with the buffalo and the quality of wisdom; the East with the eagle and illumination; the South with the mouse and innocence; and the West with the bear and introspection. Thus, people come to see the world through the eyes of other beings with whom they share the environment and learn to appreciate their spiritual qualities. Primal peoples often say they received their ceremonies from spirits or animals more enlightened than they.

Ceremonies and meditative techniques reinforce identification with the energies of sacred landforms, the sky, the seasons, the animals and other beings of their locale, and with the community of all beings. Ceremonies are not magical techniques for manipulating nature, as Western observers once believed. They are psychological techniques for altering human consciousness, for example, by magically turning animals into people, thus socializing nature and naturalizing humans. Chanting, drumming, and dancing help participants lose their everyday egoistic and anthropocentric attitudes, opening levels of meaning at once both spiritual and ecological. For example, primal hunters everywhere start their hunt only after meditative, ritual, and magical preparation to intensify their participatory relationship with their intended prey. Such mystical participation seems evident in the dancing human figures in animal masks prominent in the cave art of aboriginal Australia and Magdalenian Europe of twenty five thousand years ago. Spiral mazes drawn at cave entrances represent the same idea, symbolizing the hunter's intricate passage into the world of the beasts before the hunt.[49] Such peoples believe that, once the hunter enters a state of consciousness allowing him to identify with his intended prey, animals simply give themselves away. Thus, Native-American hunters ritually become ravens or crows to obtain their far-sightedness, since scavengers often lead hunters to their prey in hopes of cleaning the carcass. Similarly, some Native American hunters ceremonially imbibe the coyote, to acquire its cleverness and cunning. Where primal hunters once entered such states of consciousness for successful hunting, we can do the same to develop the spiritual abilities needed to identify with our fellow beings-of-place and, in general, with the entire fabric of life.

Primal hunters look on their prey neither as objects nor as trophies. They hold them in high regard, treating them with respect, both ritually

and in practice. Native American hunters ask the animal for its meat before killing it. Among Namibia's !Kung Bushmen, to brag of a kill is blasphemy. After killing a large animal, they must sing the appropriate song of apology, or make other signs, to acknowledge and apologize for the temporary gap made in the fabric of life. Acknowledgment that humans are but one element in highly complex symbiotic relationships accompanies the hunt from the hunter's preparation and purification to the sharing of the food by the group. Such ceremonies instil awareness that is at once religious and ecological, helping people shed their anthropocentrism and limit their otherwise short-sighted assaults upon Earth. Thus, like hunter-gatherers everywhere, the Iroquois saw themselves as transient manifestations of an inter-generational flux, responsible for the needs of future unborn generations, "those whose faces are yet beneath the surface of the ground."[50]

Hunters' spirituality works only because of the world's perceived sacrality. Culturally, access to the sacred is chiefly the responsibility of the tribe's shaman, or spiritual specialist. Shamanic religion started at least a hundred thousand years ago, which would make it Homo sapiens's oldest form of religious expression. Shamanism is a religion of reciprocity between humans and animals and, more generally, between the sacred Earth and all its creatures. As Joseph Campbell suggests, shamanism probably originated to help hunters cope with the stress of daily risk-taking and the spilling of blood. It also served as a defence against the slain beast's revengeful magic.[51]

The shaman is the acknowledged mediator between human and spiritual worlds, to which she or he travels when needed on behalf of the community she serves. Once summoned to her vocation and properly instructed, a future shaman trains under an experienced master, learning eventually to tap the numinous power at will. She also must master her culture's techniques of magical healing. Shamans typically enter paranormal mental states, in which others believe they leave their bodies, ascend to the sky or descend to the underworld, to bring back the healing power. Like anyone favoured with mystic experiences, shamans are exceptions within their societies, in which most people find all the spiritual meaning they need through myths and rituals. However, for those with the shaman's gift, ecstatic, that is, out-of-body experience, is "the religious experience par excellence."[52] Native American religion, Japanese Shinto, and Chinese Taoism, for example, all retain important shamanistic aspects, offering us windows, as it were, through which to glimpse the Old Ways.

The Japanese call their archaic shamanic religion Kami Nagara, meaning "whatever is, is kami." Only after contact with the Chinese during the early centuries of the Common Era did the Chinese-based word, *Shin-to*, come into use: the syllable *to* coming from the Chinese word *Tao* or "way," *shin* carrying the meaning of divine spirit.[53] With their theistic bias, Westerners have mistakenly believed the word Shinto means the Way of the Gods; yet, properly speaking, there are no gods in Kami Nagara, nor in the shamanistic tradition generally, since the divine does not transcend nature. The divine Way (Chinese *Tao*, Japanese *to*) is simply the universe nondualistically conceived as self-creative growth. Western parallels are few: only Spinoza's *natura naturans* ("nature actively naturing") and Heidegger's interpretation of the Greek term *physis* as "self-standing emergence"[54] come close. Stripped to its essentials, what theists frame dualistically as transcendent deity (either in the singular or plural), Shinto regards as immanent Divine Process manifesting itself phenomenally:

> Not only human beings, but birds, beasts, plants and trees, seas and mountains, and all other things whatsoever which deserve to be dreaded or revered for the extraordinary and pre-eminent powers which they possess, are called *kami*. . . . It is not their spirits which are meant. The word applies directly to the seas or mountains themselves.[55]

Dualistic common sense and the grammatical structure of ordinary language lead us naively to frame the world as consisting of entities or objects, each independent of one another and of the cognizing subject. In contrast, the Old Ways frame entities nondualistically, as immanent Divine Process manifested phenomenally. In Spinoza's terminology, entities are substantively identical but modally distinct. They are substantively identical because they are all phenomena of one process, *natura naturans*. Yet, each entity appears phenomenally to common sense as if distinct from all others modally, that is, with distinctive properties. This parallels Kami Nagara in making no substantive distinction between creative, sacred process (*to*) and the (physical) universe, since the universe is nothing but kami or *natura naturans* extending itself as matter and life.[56]

Native Americans' idea of the web of life also illustrates this point. Everything that exists is an effect of something else, the myriad intertwined chains of cause and effect suggest the metaphor of a spider's web. In words attributed to Chief Seattle, "All things are connected. . . . Man did not weave the web of life; he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself."[57] Similar ideas are found in many Native-American prayers, which often end with the saying, "we are all related." We are related not only to one another, but

to the animals, the plants, the rocks, and all the rest of creation. Even when Native-Americans anthropomorphize the web of life, their idea of "god" remains nondualist. As Native-American philosopher Vine Deloria, Jr. observes,

> many tribes used the term "Grandfather" . . . but there was no effort to use that concept as the basis for a theological doctrine. . . . While there was an acknowledgment that the Great Spirit has some resemblance to the role of a grandfather in the tribal society, there was no great demand to have "a personal relationship" with the Great Spirit.[58]

In Black Elk's words, "at the center of the universe dwells *Wakan-Tanka,* and . . . this center is really everywhere, it is within each of us."[59] *Wakan-Tanka* is a Sioux word that translates into English as Great Mystery. A mystery, such as the web of life, is something unknown and unknowable. When we focus our attention on the web of life, the supposed independently-existing self and other entities recede in importance. Yet entities neither disappear nor cease to exist; rather, each is seen as existing in relation to all others.

The Old Ways teach that life and death are nondual: each is simply the Sacred Process sacrificing one part of itself to the rest of itself, in one unending, cyclical giveaway. Accordingly, as Snyder urges, while we must kill and eat our fellow kami, we should thank those who have given themselves today, so that others may live a while longer. Simultaneously, we should recognize that we who eat today soon must give ourselves to other kami, so that they too might live. Thus, hunter-gatherers generally do not view death morbidly, but as a temporary phase in the unending, reciprocal giveaway among all life-forms. Mythically, the divine animal gives people one of its material manifestations, exactly as humans give themselves to Earth and its creatures by their own deaths. Hunter-gatherers accept that the body's decay is necessary, if the Sacred Process or Divine Spirit is to undertake another of its spatiotemporal manifestations. By thus diminishing the importance of human death,[60] they show not to obsess about what might happen to the individual after death. In contrast, to put spirituality in the human soul alone, or to obsess on personal immortality, entails sacrificing identification with nature to our fear of the unknown—a poor trade-off indeed!

Primal peoples, with their nondualist worldviews know life's great secret: that death is not to be feared. Lacking anxiety over death, they also know how to enjoy life. As Shepard argues, the nondual sense of the substantive identity of all phenomena started to unravel with the development of agriculture, to degenerate almost completely later with

urbanization and industrialization.[61] Eventually, the ever-growing fraction of humanity broken to city living (which is what to be *civilized* means) lost all contact with the Old Ways, distorting them as we denigrate primal peoples as primitive and inferior. Thus, we of the culture of extinction now look on death as our individual destiny. No wonder we are afraid. Death-anxiety stimulated the earliest fantasies that framed humans as spiritual, not natural beings; as existing outside of, and superior to, nature; as divinely ordained to dominate nature; and—most importantly—as exempt from death because our souls are independent of our bodies. Nondualism, in contrast, shows neither death-anxiety nor human chauvinism. True, many Native Americans believe that the web of life includes other worlds, so that upon death a person enters another world temporarily. One might enter the Happy Hunting Grounds—the Native-American version of heaven—or one might be reincarnated as an animal or human, or remain in this world as a disembodied spirit. Such beliefs presume neither human superiority to nature nor any non-natural, human uniqueness. Everyone, human or otherwise, is a strand in life's web. The culture of extinction, on the contrary, is invested heavily in the metaphysics of adult infantlity—civilized humanity's dread of death.

Concluding Remarks

Like Paul Shepard, I believe Old Ways thinking, nondualism in particular, can help us aim toward a new and higher civilization, as measured both by ecological sustainability and quality of life. I take it as obvious that, if the latter is neglected, few of us would give up the culture of extinction voluntarily, no matter how difficult it becomes to cope with collapse. The payoff for a "paleolithic counter-revolution" against modernity is long-term survival, both human and nonhuman. I would suggest the main task for deep ecology theory in this respect is to bridge the gap between metaphysical and spiritual concerns—deep ecological wisdom—and the practical matter of outlining a line of march from where we are to where we'll need to be, not only to cope with collapse, but to avert it—sustainably, over the long haul. I have no doubt that one major key to the practical side lies in the territory mapped by Shepard.

References

Aston, W. G. 1905. *Shinto: The Way of the Gods*. London: Longmans, Green.

Badiner, Allan Hunt, ed. 1990. *Dharma Gaia: A Harvest of Essays in Buddhism and Ecology*. Berkeley: Parallax Press.

Bender, Frederic L. 2003. *The Culture of Extinction: Toward a Philosophy of Deep Ecology*. Amherst, NY: Humanity.

Bookchin, Murray. 1982. *The Ecology of Freedom: The Emergence and Dissolution of Hierarchy*. Palo Alto, CA: Cheshire Books.

Brown, Joseph Epes, ed. 1971. *The Sacred Pipe: Black Elk's Account of the Seven Rites of the Oglala Sioux*. Baltimore, MD: Penguin.

Campbell, Joseph. 1979. *The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology*. New York: Viking.

Deloria, Vine, Jr. 1973. *God is Red*. New York: Dell.

Diamond, Stanley. 1974. *In Search of the Primitive: A Critique of Civilization*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books.

Eliade, Mircea. 1964. *Shamanism: Archaic Technique of Ecstasy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Heidegger, Martin. 1973. Metaphysics as History of Being. In *The End of Philosophy*, trans Joan Stambaugh. New York: Harper & Row.

Hood, Marlowe. 2007. Global Temperatures Set to Rise between 1.8 and 4 Degrees C by 2100: UN Panel. AFP (February 1).

LaChapelle, Dolores. 1978. *Earth Wisdom*. Silverton, CO: Finn Hill Arts Press.

———. 1988. *Sacred Land, Sacred Sex, Rapture of the Deep.* Silverton, CO: Finn Hill Arts Press.

Levy, Gertrude R. n.d. *The Gate of Horn: A Study of the Religious Conceptions of the Stone Age and their Influence upon European Thought*. London: Faber & Faber.

Macy, Joanna. 1990. The Greening of the Self. In *Dharma Gaia: A Harvest of Essays in Buddhism and Ecology*, ed. Allan Hunt Badiner. Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press.

Mander, Jerry. 1991. *In the Absence of the Sacred: The Failure of Technology and the Survival of the Indian Nations*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.

Mason, J. W. T. 1935. *The Meaning of Shinto*, New York: Dutton.

Midgley, Mary. 1978. *Beast and Man: The Roots of Human Nature.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Ritter, Alan, and Julia Conaway Bondanella. 1988. *Rousseau's Political Writings*. New York: W. W. Norton.

Sandars, N. K. 1968. *Prehistoric Art in Europe*. Baltimore: Penguin.

Shepard, Paul. 1998. *Thinking Animals: Animals and the Development of Human Intelligence.* Atlanta: University of Georgia Press.

———. 1992. A Post-Historic Primitivism. In *The Wilderness Condition: Essays on Environment and Civilization*, ed. Max Oelschlaeger. Washington, DC: Island Press.

Snyder, Gary. 1990. *The Practice of the Wild*. San Francisco: North Point Press.

Van Matre, Steve, and Bill Weiler. 1983. *The Earth Speaks.* Warrenville, IL: The Institute for Earth Education.

Wilson, Edward O. 1993. Is Humanity Suicidal? *New York Times Magazine* (May 30).

Wynn, Gerard, and Alister Doyle. 2007. Mankind to Blame for Global Warming Say Scientists. Reuters (February 2).

Notes

1 Hood.

2 Wynn and Doyle.

3 Hood.

4 Wynn and Doyle.

5 Hood.

6 Shepard 1992, 40-42.

7 Ibid., 46.

8 Cited in Macy, 59.

9 Snyder.

10 Ibid., 37.

11 Shepard 1992, 79.

12 Cited in Midgley, 294.

13 Shepard 1992, 85.

14 Ibid., 85.

15 Voltaire to Rousseau, August 30, 1755, Ritter and Bondanella, 191–192.

16 Shepard 1992, 45.

17 Ibid., 52.

18 Wilson.

19 LaChapelle (1988), 254–256.

20 1992, 89.

21 Sandars, 26.

22 Ibid., 262.

23 Ibid., 259.

24 Ibid., 259.

25 Bender, 267–299.

26 Diamond, 172.

27 Mander, 214.

28 Snyder, 22.

29 Shepard 1992, 50.

30 Ibid., 57; Mander, 263.

31 Mander, 221.

32 Ibid., 221.

33 Shepard 1992, 89.

34 Mander, 255.

35 Cited in Mander, 255.

36 Ibid., 248.

37 Mander, 250.

38 Cited in Mander, 250.

39 Mander, 251–252.

40 Cited in Mander, 253.

41 Ibid., 223.

42 Bookchin, 45.

43 Mander, 227.

44 Ibid., 216–217.

45 LaChapelle (1978), 90.

46 Mander, 230–234.

47 Cited in Shepard 1992, 51.

48 Snyder, 37, 93.

49 Levy, 20.

50 Cited in Mander, 237.

51 Campbell, 349.

52 Eliade, 4.

53 LaChapelle (1978), 89.

54 Heidegger, 4–5.

55 Aston, 8–9.

56 Mason, 44.

57 Van Matre and Weiler, 122.

58 Deloria, 92.

59 Brown, 115.

60 Campbell, 348.

61 Shepard 1992, 59–61.