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Thinking Across Worlds: Indigenous Thought, Relational Ontology, and the Politics of Nature; Or, If Only Nietzsche Could Meet A Yachaj

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Thinking Across Worlds:

Indigenous Thought, Relational Ontology, And The Politics Of Nature

Or,

If Only Nietzsche Could Meet A *Yachaj*

A Monograph

By

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Abstract

This study undertakes a cultural critique of dominant, modern relationships to "nature" through a cross-cultural philosophical engagement with certain Indigenous American traditions of thought. This is done through a focus on questions of ontology: what kind of ontological presuppositions inform our own dominant, modern philosophical heritage? What kinds of relations do these at once enable and foreclose? And what alternate possibilities for thinking and living might be opened through different ontologies? I argue that grappling with modernity's legacy of anthropocentrism and ecologically disastrous relationships forces us to rethink an existential terrain set by an atomistic ontology that reflects a Christian interpretation of the world. In contrast to this dominant ontology and as a way of defamiliarizing ourselves from it, this study endeavours to think with and alongside what I argue are profoundly relational ontologies and styles of thinking expressed by different Indigenous philosophies and lifeways. It also poses the question: how might relational ontologies open up different ways of understanding and experiencing ourselves, of disclosing and relating to the nonhuman, of construing the nature of our ethical horizons?

As part of my exploration of this question, I bring Indigenous thought into conversation with two thinkers from the Western tradition who arrive, from their own directions, at somewhat analogously relational perspectives – namely, Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger. I argue that the critical arsenal these thinkers offer Western theory gives valuable insights concerning the potential that relational thinking might have as a counterdiscourse *vis à vis* our dominant culture – but that Indigenous thought pushes us much farther still in this direction. Accordingly, I try to explore how lessons from Indigenous thought might lead us to rethink or recuperate on different terms certain elements of Nietzsche and Heidegger's critiques. Rethinking counterdiscursive possibilities in this way, this study seeks to contribute towards a critical theorizing that is more consciously responsive to the intertwined legacies of colonialism, modern thought, and our present ecological crises; to connected political contours, tensions, and

possibilities within our present; and also better attuned to possible points of productive consonance, conversation, and allegiance therein.

Keywords

Acknowledgements

Dedication

For my friends and relations;

For my teachers;

And for those who still sing in the gathering night.

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Introduction

"The ecological crisis is a symptom of a deeper, metaphysical crisis in human consciousness and an accompanying crisis of culture."

-Freya Mathews[1]

0.1   Ecological Relations as an Ontological Problem

That we live today in an age of ecological crisis is a truth we can evade only at the price of our own intellectual integrity. From a Western, ecologically-informed standpoint, we might invoke the widespread extinction and depletion of species, pollution caused by extractive industrial projects and our associated capitalist economy and lifeways, the acidification of the oceans that are themselves increasingly crowded with plastic and other noxious garbage, global warming, deforestation, and so on, as only a few indices of the kind of situation we now face. Accompanying such signs as these, however, is the fact that the processes generative of this crisis continue altogether unabated, and have done so despite warnings and opposition that have come from numerous quarters for many years.

This ecological situation we face today did not suddenly occur overnight; nor did it arrive out of nowhere. The generally disastrous impact human beings are now having on the earth and its creatures has accrued as a direct consequence of transformations in social, political, economic, and other relations, that can be broadly associated with the phenomenon of "modernity" and processes of "modernization". The phenomena involved here are complex and multifaceted.

If we wish to name some of the especially relevant phenomena here, we might begin with shifts in patterns of subsistence and land use associated with the development of modern market capitalism, beginning in Europe and spreading elsewhere through widespread processes of privatizing enclosure, often under directly colonial terms. This

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[1] Freya Mathews, <u>Reinhabiting Reality: Towards a Recovery of Culture</u> (New York: SUNY Press, 2005), 8.

restructuring of relations to the land has actualized, in a generalized way, modern ideas of ownership as well as land improvement or "development" through the human reworking of a natural world conceived as passive material for human labour. Connected here has been the commodification of all manner of our worldly relations and activity and the general development of marketized, mass societies.[2] There is an intimate connection, in turn, between these phenomena and the growth of the modern state, and kinds of conceptions of human freedom (e.g., freedom of the market, and an associated body of liberal-democratic political doctrine) and the good life that this modern form of polity has both expressed and sought to enable. These processes, it is worth stressing again, are in turn tied to generalized processes of colonialism that have sought to erase diverse and pre-existing Indigenous lifeways, to draw a line in time that leaves behind such practices in order to establish and foster these new realities, new human-nonhuman and human-land relations, new collective and individual accounts of *the meaningful* way to live. Intersecting here are forms of technological rationality that have allowed us to think of ourselves, in ways often taken to be self-evident, as masters of the earth. This prevailing technological rationality also sets to work in processes of rationalization that have significantly reordered the terms of social life and worldly relations. The story of our ecological crisis is, as countless authors have pointed out, the story of the externalities and consequences and often unforeseen limits of these intersecting logics.

But all of these logics arise, make sense, and become meaningful, on the basis of a particular background of understanding, a philosophical framework of possibility; and because we continue to think on these bases, the usual conclusions also seem difficult to avoid. All the most important social dynamics we might link to our present ecological situation reflect and manifest, in other words, a particular, dominant, Western philosophical heritage as their immanent logic. Most particularly, they reflect distinctive shifts and developments within that heritage generally traceable to the last five hundred years. Dominant convictions and legitimating notions about the kinds of social projects that are meaningful or worthwhile, and what the central terms and problems of

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[2] For a helpful overview of the many of the processes involved here, see Karl Polanyi, <u>The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time</u> (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 35-80.

(individual and collective) life are, grow in crucial and distinctive ways from the soil of this thought.

When I refer to "modernity" in this way, I thus mean to signify a particular cultural, philosophical, and relational complex whose more immediate origins can generally be traced to relatively recent developments in Western European society, though this complex has since come to be, if not necessarily hegemonic, at least *dominant*, much more broadly. An essential part of the phenomenon of modernity is a particular mode of relating to what is identifiable as "tradition": it is a logic at some level of clearing away what came before in order to build from new and purportedly more rational foundations, and of reordering social relations accordingly. But the specific way this possibility is set up, undertaken, and understood to be meaningful, reflects a particular philosophical heritage and tradition whose consequences we continue to draw today. Quite despite all narratives to the contrary, modernity is at no time free of tradition: it is a story that casts itself in universal and culturally neutral tones, but in this it is expressing in fundamental respects a particular cultural and philosophical tradition, and certain longstanding assumptions made within it.

The initial point I wish to make is simply that the problem of responding to the mounting troubles of our ecological crises – which has become one of the most crucial demands of our age – requires that we revisit the assumptions and philosophies that have landed us here. Attempting to live differently, to bring forth futures that do not match our direst current expectations, requires not only that we understand the kinds of logics, assumptions, and legitimating arguments that have landed us where we are, and that continue to empower those processes we may wish to curb. But more than this, we need to ask how we might learn to think differently, to broaden the philosophical imaginaries on which we draw – and not just rehearse the same tired scripts to ourselves as comforting companions to a solipsistic grave.

A necessary task in the philosophical reckoning that is required of us today, I suggest, involves problematizing or putting to question many of our most fundamental and accustomed assumptions about ourselves and the world, about the basic nature and

structure of existence. It involves troubling our assumptions about what "nature" is and how we can/should relate to "it", about what it means to be a human being, and so on. That is to say, it is necessary to problematize our dominant ontology. The basic dicta of ontology inform how we live, the decisions we make, what alternatives we see, and what possibilities we imagine, in a way that is often invisible in everyday contexts. It is invisible because these dicta tend to be experienced even in the form of background notions we largely take for granted as common sense, and concerning which we often barely conceive that alternatives are possible. But make no mistake: many of the most consequential philosophical commitments we make transpire at this level; and these commitments are both fundamentally *interpretive* and *contestable*.

The major point here, in other words, is this: that without a rethinking of ontology, we are likely to only continue reproducing the generative conditions of our ecological troubles even as we try to address discrete issues as they arise. We will continue to conceive and experience our freedom, our technoscientific vocation, what civilization and nature are and mean, and so on, in ways that set us to collide ruinously with ecological limits.

At the broadest level, this is the task that my dissertation takes up: to defamiliarize these most basic elements of our thinking, to try to disrupt a certain tendency to monotony in our philosophical imaginaries and to develop a kind of broadened critical vantage-point on the dominant practices and understandings of our day. Most especially, I try to ask how beginning to think more relationally, and from out of more *relational ontologies*, might open up different ways of thinking and living, of conceiving the scope of our possibilities of being in the world, in relating to the nonhuman and what we tend to see as "nature". For reasons that I hope to make clear, I think that an especially good way to do this kind of work, to ask this kind of question, is to broaden the scope of our conversation beyond the confines of the Western tradition. Most especially, it seems to me that Western theory might learn a great deal on this point from Indigenous American philosophical traditions. In the following dissertation, I will endeavour to show some respects in which this is so.

0.2   Relationalities

This question of relationality can be said on many fronts to be "in the air" today, in ways that provide a general backdrop that informs my work here, and relative to which this dissertation might be of especial interest and relevance.

The idea that reforming our relations to "nature" must involve learning to think of ourselves not as disembedded from it, but as relationally constituted within it, has been one voiced in various iterations and for some time on the Western side of things. Such an influential thinker in the deep ecology movement as Arne Naess, for example, has made this claim.[3] Many authors have responded to this idea in one way or another from the "ecological philosophy" side of things – including for example Freya Mathews, who I draw upon a fair amount in this work. At the broadest level, this idea that relational thinking can supply philosophical resources better conducive to a more sustainable and less anthropocentric way of being is I think an immensely valuable suggestion.

At the same time, various thinkers in the contemporary Western theoretical tradition have offered versions of a more relational counterdiscourse oriented towards rethinking our ways of being in the world and the dominant terms of our existence. What we might broadly call "Nietzschean thought" – including not only Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger, but also Max Weber, Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault, and others – can be seen to have offered a great deal in this direction, in ways that have been tremendously influential in the circles of Western theory. In this dissertation, what I am above all interested in is *relationships*: the kind of relationships we currently enact as human beings relative to nonhuman ones, to the land, to what we think of as "nature", and so on. What kinds of relationships currently produce and structure our present-day ecological crises, and what might different relationships look like? One of the great values of these thinkers is that they can help us think about relationships – and, most particularly, help us think about the ways in which our dominant relationships can be seen to be *impoverished*. But as Nietzsche saw so clearly, an impoverishment in

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[3] See, for example, Arne Naess, "The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement. A Summary," in <u>Inquiry</u> 16:1 (1973), 95.

relationships also means an impoverishment in ourselves, in the kind of selfhood we experience, and in our accounts of what it means to live a good life. The ecological crisis, read in this light, must precisely be taken to be also a crisis in culture (as Freya Mathews claims above), a crisis that challenges us to rethink just who it is we think we are, and how we think we ought to live.

Hence, one can locate a broad trajectory of thought in contemporary Western theory that surfaces now and again (often drawing especially on thinkers like Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Deleuze – including in his partnership with Félix Guattari): attempts to rethink ethics and politics and what it means to live a good life – often the basis of more relational ways of thinking. Change your ontology, change your thinking, change your mode of being and doing. Evidently this present work takes up this orientation in its own way.

But it is not only from the quarters of Western theory and Western academics that one hears something like this. Indeed, the cultural, legal, and philosophical traditions of many Indigenous peoples throughout the Americas express, so far as I understand them, a profoundly relational way of thinking predicated upon profoundly relational ontologies. In the contemporary context, relational philosophies, ethical concepts, and so on, are also often articulated by Indigenous peoples as sources of critique in direct opposition to the colonial and resource-extractive projects of dominant, capitalist, modern/Western lifeways. This kind of thing is not new, but it is ongoing. Quite recently in Canada (as only one example), the question of relations and relationality has been vocalized by Indigenous thinkers and groups connected with the "Idle No More" movement, as part of ongoing processes of resistance to colonialism in general and land and resource expropriation efforts in particular on the part of the Canadian government and settler society.[4] In Ecuador, to take another example, a similar kind of relational counterdiscourse has been put forward in the Quichua notion of the *kausaj sacha* or

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[4] See, for example, Naomi Klein, "Dancing the World Into Being: A Conversation with Idle No More's Leanne Simpson," in <u>Yes! Magazine</u> (March 5, 2013), available at: <u>http://www.yesmagazine.org/peace-justice/dancing-the-world-into-being-a-conversation-with-idle-no-more-leanne-simpson</u>.

"living forest", that has been voiced especially in opposition to plans for the further "development" of the Amazonian region through oil extraction.[5]

All this raises questions about the possible linkages or conversations that might be made across Indigenous and Western philosophical traditions on the subject of what it means to think relationally, how doing so might invite us to reflect upon our dominant modern lifeways, and so on. It raises the question, relative to my own vantage point, of how I might begin to more thoughtfully absorb something, as a non-Indigenous settler and Western person invested at some level in the problems of philosophy and critical cultural theory, from the kinds of things Indigenous peoples tend to say, not least when responding to the action of modern settler societies.

And indeed, scholars and activists and elders and others will often suggest that there *is* a great deal that Western thinking might stand to learn from Indigenous traditions, especially on the question of what it might mean to live and relate more sustainably on the land and with the nonhuman, and with a closer sense of connection to these. This dissertation is in many respects my own attempt to think this kind of suggestion through as seriously as I can and in my own way. And indeed, scholars will often make this claim in a broad way by implying points of intersection between the kinds of things I broadly gloss as "Nietzschean" relational concepts and Indigenous ones – for example, in the notion that Indigenous thinking is "place-based", that it bears some affinity to the Heideggarian concept of "dwelling" in places, and so on.[6] The precise nature of these intersections, however, and what differences may still be involved between Western and Indigenous conceptions in this regard, is rarely explored in much detail or as a potential source of philosophical insight or lessons for theorists invested in Nietzschean critique.

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[5] See Gualinga, José, "Declaration of 'Kawsak Sacha, Living Rainforest." Available at: http://www.frontieredevie.fr/documents/Kawsak-Sacha-2.pdf.
[6] See, for example, Edward S. Casey, "How to Get From Space to Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time: Phenomenological Prolegomena," in Senses of Place, ed. by Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1996), 15; Tim Ingold, The Perception of the Environment: Essays in livelihood, dwelling, and skill (New York: Routledge, 2000), generally; Keith H. Basso, Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache (Albuquerque: Univesity of New Mexico, 1996), 106-107; and many more. The invocation of Heideggarian notions of place for thinking about and signifying what is going on in Indigenous traditions of thought is quite widespread – which, as we will see, is not altogether surprising, since the concept is indeed useful in this regard.

Moreover, the political and cross-cultural sense in which questions of relationality are "in the air" today entreats us to ask about relational ontology not as merely an abstract theoretical question. It is rather one richly rooted in a lived and contested political and colonial terrain, which those of us who might wish to critique the dominant dynamics of "modernity" from within the Americas both inhabit and must engage. In trying to think through questions of relationality and relational ontology in an explicitly cross-cultural way and *in light of this political context*, it is my hope to also do theory in a more politically engaged way.

That is: with a view at once to illuminating actual faultlines, points of tension and resistance, and so on, within the present political conjuncture, and in a way that is also useful for thinking about the more hopeful possibilities that might be found and nursed there. What possible philosophical, cultural, and counter-cultural allegiances and intersections might be made, and might be productively explored and engaged in the fashioning of alternative collective futures? How can we best understand what the philosophical and cultural import of some of these struggles might be, including from a non-Indigenous but critical perspective? What kind of critical vantage-point and theory might better serve such a political moment as ours, might help us learn and make the most from it, finding productive points of overlap, of common or at least consonant concern and so on? What connections might be drawn between Indigenous thinking and the kind of critical arsenal more usually drawn upon in the discourses of Western critical theory – and how might the latter be usefully provoked and changed through this engagement?

Problematization of ontology as such is a difficult enough move to make depending on the context; but it is rarer still to find this done, with sufficient rigour, in an explicitly cross-cultural way.[7] Such a project is an important one to engage in, not least in light of the kinds of questions I have just raised. In this dissertation, I argue that to undertake cross-cultural philosophizing with rigour requires precisely *that* we understand that the differences between the traditions in question extend to and include differences in

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[7] Although there are certainly people who should be named here, such as Tim Ingold, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, and Mario Blaser – whose styles of questioning here are probably closest to my own.

ontology. In other words, I wish to accept and generally argue for what Mario Blaser has characterized as a framework of "political ontology", which takes for granted that ontologies do exist in the plural; that the dominant modern/Western ontology should not be interpreted as supplying a kind of neutral and superior meta-discourse or most true ontology; and that the co-presence of disagreeing ontologies describes something essential in the contemporary political conjuncture.[8] But if Blaser is right in making this argument (and I think he is), there are nevertheless few who have tried to explore what cross-cultural philosophizing and critical re-thinking could then mean *within this space*, much less through an engagement with Indigenous relational ontologies in particular.

The foregoing, I hope, will help to give a sense not only of some of the ways relational themes are like to be encountered today, but also relative gaps in the conversations on this point that I wish to try to fill. But it may also fairly be asked, at this juncture, why I focus on Indigenous relational ontologies in particular. Are there more possibilities than atomistic and relational ontologies, amongst the non-modern? I am inclined to answer the latter question in the affirmative. Blaser, for example, has drawn on Philippe Descola to suggest that there are also "analogical" ontologies (as in Taoism, where an "originating dynamic . . . repeats itself from the micro to the macro and permeates the entire cosmos"), and "totemistic ones" (which allocate "a mix of humans and non-humans within ontologically distinct groups that originate from a common ancestor"), as presumably exist amongst Australian Aborigine peoples.[9] I should expect that there are more than these; and that such ideal types are only helpful to a point before we have to acknowledge a great deal of diversity that resists them.

I engage relational ontologies here for reasons that are to a certain extent circumstantial: these are traditions and inclinations that are both "around" in the places I live and amongst people I have met, and that I have had the good fortune to find myself thinking about in the course of my life and research. But then, relational thinking is also a direction gestured to as a counterdiscourse on a number of counts, as I have already indicated; and it happens to be one that I am convinced holds meaningful potential for

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[8] Mario Blaser, "Political Ontology: Cultural Studies without 'cultures'?" In <u>Cultural Studies</u> 23:5-6 (Sept.-Nov. 2009), generally.
[9] Ibid, 886.

thinking-otherwise in the present moment. But by no means do I wish to suggest that it is the only viable course one might take, most especially in cross-culturally exploring alternate and less anthropocentric ways of being in the world.

0.3   Some Clarification of Terms: "Modernity", "Nature", "Philosophy"

There is an obvious corollary to my claim that "modernity" can be understood, at least in its dominant guise, as entrenching and expressing a particular ontology, and my claim that Indigenous philosophical traditions generally presume a different kind of ontology (i.e., a relational one). Thus, there is a distinct sense in which I claim that Indigenous philosophical traditions – as these also continue to be lived today, including by people I have met – should be understood as "non-modern". There has been a good deal of writing in recent years that would dispute the validity of this gesture: not infrequently, we are told that the non-modern does not exist, or that we must abstain from using the term on moral grounds.

This is usually because it is assumed that referring to Indigenous traditions as non-modern must amount to relegating Indigenous and other non-Western peoples (who continue to practice and think within such alternate traditions and ontologies) to the undesirable end of a single binary. One can be either non-modern and hence inhabit *statically traditional* "islands" outside the reach of History's changes (in which History presumably is an unproblematically universal ontological structure); or one can be modern, reinventing oneself with the times, partaking in some way or another in the general project of Freedom. To my mind the issue is that the alternatives here are poorly devised, and tend to say more about the either/or categories of modern Westerners (which we avoid sufficiently problematizing) than anything else. Why assume that History is singular and more ontologically real than anything else? Why assume that the "traditional" – whatever that is supposed to mean in the singular – is static, never mind homogeneous?

The "modernity" I know, and which seems to me to be dominant but not universal today, is predicated upon and enforces a particular ontology and way of thinking that stems from European origins. But I have met many people who do not think and live in these ways – who continue to live, interpret changes, and dynamically cultivate themselves, on the basis of *other ontologies and philosophical traditions*. They all wear bluejeans, yes; but that is hardly the most important or interesting thing that could be said about them. And to assume from this that they must be "moderns" in any clearcut sense both effaces the specificity and fullness of the latter term and the actual differences involved in the way these people understand existence and the kinds of things that exist. To my mind – and here I follow in particular the suggestion of Mario Blaser – to construe the present only in terms of possible differences between *alternate modernities* effaces the very real sense in which the present also involves a struggle over the non-modern and indeed over the latter's very existence. It also effaces from our philosophical and political imaginaries valuable and real possibilities opened by the persistence of the non-modern.[10]

A second term I would like to elaborate on a little further here, and which I use pervasively in this text, is "nature". As it is used in everyday contexts, "nature" itself is a rather nebulous and somewhat fuzzy concept that accrues a wide range of meanings. And indeed, this fuzziness – or rather this accrued wealth of implicit meaning and associations – is itself an important characteristic of the way the nature concept functions in our dominant discourse and imagination. *And it does function.* The point here is that this conceptual nebulousness, this ever-present range of "background noise", itself informs the essential way the "nature" concept circulates in the dominant modern worldview, the kind of work it does in us and how it leads us to understand the world around us, the meaning of mundane practices, and so on. In this sense the power of broad concepts like nature is at some level their very indeterminacy.

My concern in this dissertation is not *with some thing called "nature" itself,* or any single definition of this, but with (problematizing) *the work that concept does broadly in structuring our relations to a range of things we signify* as *nature* – which I also point to, for example, through alternate terms like "the non-human", "land", and so

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[10] Blaser, "Political Ontology."

on. I have not abandoned the term "nature", however, because ultimately I think it is useful for signifying in a broadly intelligible way (at least to a Western readership) the kinds of "things"-in-relation I mean but whose identity I ultimately wish to question. What concerns me, in other words, are the relations we have *inasmuch* as the nonhuman, land, and so on, are sighted in this way and hence understood and encountered on the basis of this background of meaning.

Accordingly, I take it to be necessary – indeed as a matter of precision in my analysis – to approach the concept of nature with a view to its functioning in this way, to letting it be what it is *in* its cultural layeredness. Hence I endeavour to draw out some of the most important tones, as it were, within this kind of nebulous totality of resonance – which is not to say that these tones cannot be heard clearly sounded by particular thinkers and find their origins in particular philosophical analyses and associated ontological assumptions. But what is more important than any one articulation by any one thinker is a general set of dominant resonances that come to be felt between them, which is given voice in a variety of interlocking ways that take their thematic bearing from a variety of issues. To develop an analysis and understanding of "nature" along these lines, however, is not short work – is not the sort of thing you can do in two sentences devoted to "clarifying your terms" – which is why I devote much of Chapter One, and the bulk of Chapter Two, to the question.

A third term whose use in this dissertation I would like to clarify is "philosophy". This work attempts to establish a cross-culturally broadened vantage-point from which to undertake a critique of modern thought and culture with regard to our relations to "nature". Accordingly, my aim is also to explore a distinctively cross-cultural way of thinking about philosophical and ethical questions.

This mode of doing philosophy is I think relatively rare; it has perhaps its most obvious intellectual forebear in Paul Radin's *Primitive Man as Philosopher*. Radin argues there that philosophizing and philosophers, taken in an adequately broadened sense, should be taken as universals across cultures, and that every human society contains thinkers who grapple with certain shared, universal *problems* or *questions* (for

example, the nature of reality, the nature of freedom, right and wrong, the nature of the self, what it means to live a good life, the meaning of death, and so on). Answers to these questions, however, certainly are not universal.[11]

We should be careful, of course, in making assertions about "universals"; and we may even, with Nietzsche, have learned to take a certain disinterest in them. But however we may wish to put it, the point I wish to take here (and which the language of "universals" grounds in one way) is that it is fully possible to see *something like* the same questions being posed across different cultural contexts, though the precise way these questions will be posed and approached will itself undoubtedly reflect cultural particularities/interpretations. In other words, there is the minimum assumption or discovery of points of rough analogousness across cultures, of shared problems – which is at some level the condition of possibility of cross-cultural thinking at all.

As John Dewey himself recognized in his introduction to Radin's work, if we understand and approach philosophy and philosophical problems in this way, then our sense of what it can mean to do philosophy undergoes a change. We need no longer assume that this must or even necessarily should be a conversation that the Western tradition undertakes with itself. And if we wish to understand, say, what the self is – then we need not assume that the only or even the best answers to be had will come from the Western tradition.

We often seem to imagine that philosophy (and scholarship generally) is a singular, cumulative process. In the past this kind of idea has certainly given support to a reading of Western thought as the spearhead of universal history, before whose next step we now understand ourselves to be labouring. But the pluralization of philosophical traditions, and of ontologies operative within them, cuts into this narrative; it invites a pluralization of what serious thought and culture/cultivation can mean. It also opens up a different kind of possibility for *our own* philosophical work. Rather than interpret philosophy as a cumulative exercise (which might even make more sense if we were restricted more narrowly to engagements within the Western tradition), the point can now

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[11] Paul Radin, <u>Primitive Man as Philosopher</u> (New York: Dover Publications, 1957), generally, and at xxi.

become not so much to add to a singular body of what has been said, but to do the work of putting one tradition into conversation with another. This is a different kind of conversation, a different mode of "doing philosophy", that must be evaluated on terms proper to it and what it sets out to accomplish.

Where we are attempting to engage philosophical problems cross-culturally, we inevitably find ourselves preoccupied with concerns that more conventional and culturally insular theoretical texts do not have to the same degree. The relationship of Quichua to modern Western thought is not the same as the relationship, for example, of ancient Greek to modern Western thought. In this difference, problems of translation become paramount to an even greater extent, in response to which it becomes necessary to learn ways of thinking more familiar to the ethnographer than the philosopher. Perhaps most especially, one must learn to be relatively comfortable with the idea that there is a special kind of rigor that pertains to the unavoidable *imprecision* that accompanies cross-cultural engagements – which has to do with thinking about and thinking *through* conceptual "bridges" across traditions. In my text, the phrase "*something like*" will appear often and function as an important technical term: it expresses precisely this method of finding analogical bridges, and it is employed to signal the problematic or tenuous nature of such analogies. These bridges are necessarily points of *approximate analogy* rather than one-to-one correspondence or equation. One cannot even make the claim that X is to Y as seed is to tree or as ancestor is to descendent, which are connections that might be more plausibly posited between earlier and later thinkers in the Western tradition (though I would find the latter more compelling than the former). It becomes in turn a question of trying to do philosophy and reflect on philosophical questions from within a space that is opened through this different kind of imprecise but nonetheless illuminating play.

One of the ways this cross-cultural play is illuminating is that it helps to make conspicuous the kind of background meaning, basic assumptions, implicit ontological interpretations, and so on, that continue to separate the "bridges" we might invoke from their non-Western "analogues". To my mind an advantage gained is this: that it becomes possible to simultaneously open up a different view onto possibilities that would not

otherwise have occurred to us with regard to particular philosophical questions, defamiliarizing ourselves from our usual thinking. From a vantage-point broadened by cross-cultural reflection, it becomes possible to see how we might begin to think about particular philosophical questions/problems on the basis of radically different terms – the differences involved here, to my mind, exceeding those liable to be found only internally to the Western tradition.

Invoking Western thinkers as bridges, and bringing them into the fold of such cross-cultural terms of engagement, calls for a different kind of treatment of them than might be expected in the context of other sorts of academic conversations. Though my principle bridges in this work will be Nietzsche and Heidegger, my preoccupations are less those of clarifying precisely *what*, say, Nietzsche or Heidegger said in terms of the explicit and internal coherence of their thought – or what they would understand themselves to have said, or what a mainstream interpretation of their work would be. I am not intending to make a contribution to Nietzsche Studies or Heidegger Studies. I consider the philosophical space in which I move to have been opened in crucial respects by these thinkers. But beyond this, my concerns here are limited, first, to the extent to which they are helpful *as bridges*; secondly, to the kind of implicit background resonances that may be drawn out of them through this process; thirdly, to the extent to which, *having employed them in this way*, we can see more clearly some of the limits and *limitedness* of the help we can expect from them where the problem of nature is concerned; and fourthly, to the ways in which lessons from Indigenous thought might lead us to rethink or recuperate on different terms certain elements of the cultural critiques they offer us.

This kind of explicitly cross-cultural approach sets my work apart, for example, from recent works in ecological philosophy like Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matter*[12] or Freya Mathews' *Reinhabiting Reality*. Both of these do extremely valuable work on topics very similar to my own, in seeking to undermine key assumptions that inform our present mode of anthropocentric modern thinking. Most especially, they both focus on the ways our tradition has tended to conceive animacy and materiality and the ways this limits the

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[12] Jane Bennett, <u>Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things</u> (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

scope of our possible and meaningful engagements with the material and natural world. But neither of them tackles this problem in an explicitly or (accordingly) rigorously *cross-cultural* way. Mathews mentions Australian Aboriginal thought in passing, but more as an aside than as a focus of sustained reflection. In this sense the proximity she gestures to between these and her own counterdiscursive response to the Western tradition is not thought through in detail, nor are the differences involved engaged deliberately as potential sources of philosophical insight. It is interesting to speculate here that the very traits and delimitations that make Mathews' book more definitely recognizable as *philosophy* also make her book less thorough as *anthropology*.[13]

Thus, to my mind, neither Mathews nor Bennett fathoms the question of relationality – especially as it could pertain to a rethinking of animacy, or what relational ontology could enable as a counterdiscourse on the matters that concern them – to the depth to which Indigenous thinking could lead them. Alternate theoretical resources from *within* the Western tradition, including Nietzsche in Bennett's book and Heideggerian concepts of "dwelling" and "place" and "letting-be" and so on in Mathews', are engaged in a much more usual way – i.e., precisely *as* the kinds of alternate resources one might expect to draw on especially where the conversation is largely limited to the Western tradition. The work of this dissertation stands apart from this more standard usage in that it opens a cross-culturally-broadened vantage point from which *precisely these kinds of contrapuntal Western voices* are themselves also able to be questioned, reconsidered, provoked and stretched in less usual ways.

We "theory" scholars are more used to engaging contemporary problems, ecological and otherwise, I think, in much this way: we take a problem, identify our usual way of thinking about it, use one or several thinkers from the Western tradition to show how one might possibly illuminate/reframe the problem in different/more desirable ways, and draw the resulting conclusions. This kind of work, as for example Bennett or Mathews show, can be unquestionably valuable; and the Western tradition certainly contains room for a good deal of play on most points of interest. But then, if this is all we ever do, we are also likely to repeat basic presuppositions and assumptions (not least,

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[13] See Mathews <u>Reinhabiting Reality</u>, .47-48

those emergent from our usual Christian and atomistic ontology) about how one must think in order to think at all – simply because such assumptions become invisible when they are all we ever hear.

A final point might be included with the previous three insofar as these offer commentary on some of the methodological idiosyncracies of this dissertation and the limits of its focus. This point concerns the essential interdisciplinarity of this present work, and hence the kind of work it does and on which it should most centrally be judged. Mine is an argument that draws upon conversations in political theory, environmental studies, philosophy, and anthropology. But it also, for this reason, is situated in a space at some remove from each of these, and the kinds of foci and disciplinary conversations proper to them. At some level, my argument necessarily *begins* with a number of disparate interdisciplinary pieces, and attempts to show that these pieces can and should be engaged in proximity to one another, and then asks: "Given these pieces and in light of them, how then might we think?" One of the distinct contributions of this work, I think, is the way in which it attempts to bring often-separate conversations *together into dialogue* – conversations that, moreover, are not confined to the Western academy.

At the same time, the interdisciplinarity involved here also precludes me from, for example, undertaking a full review of all the literatures relevant to all the various elements I bring together here. It would be an impossibly large and also not terribly interesting project to flesh out how all the themes and topics I touch on in this dissertation have been engaged by literatures across the several disciplines that I draw on, or to contextualize all of the elements I employ here within the diverse and often multiple disciplinary academic debates that might at some level be relevant to them. Further, it would be somewhat beside the point since my aim here is not specifically to weigh in on any of these discrete debates.

Thus, for example, although I draw on critical analyses of sovereignty, modern politics, the history of modern thought and culture, the history of colonialism, or the theological underpinnings of our thought, I do not raise these matters because my aim is

to add something new and unthought-of to each of these discrete topics of analysis and scholarship. My point is not to suggest that we do not yet adequately understand something about – for example – modern sovereignty and its stakes; and I do not purport to lay out what that is and propose how to do better. I of course offer an account of modern sovereignty that I try to present as a defensible one, grounded largely in classical theorists of the subject – though a certain amount of detail and care in this must inevitably be sacrificed inasmuch as it is not the major focus of my work. Rather, it forms part of what I take to be necessary context and conceptual building-blocks – in order to understand the stakes, the consequences, and the nature of the problem I am trying to raise – and the situatedness from which I raise it. I endeavour to present such building-blocks in as much detail as is pertinent to my use of them.

At the same time, this dissertation, though it has involved ethnographic fieldwork on my part and has a good deal to say about different Indigenous traditions of thought, is not itself intended to be presented or read as ethnography, as making some new ethnographic contribution, which accordingly must take care to situate itself in a novel way amidst other such contributions. The "so what" that frames this work is not, finally, the generation of knowledge about one or several Indigenous traditions of thought. Rather, I am concerned precisely with the kinds of conversations we might have where we permit ourselves to engage ethnography seriously as a way of doing something distinct from it: that is to say, philosophy and cultural critique. This has to do with the interdisciplinarity of the work. But it also has to do with the *kind* of interdisciplinary work it is: an interdisciplinary philosophizing that is moreover a cross-cultural philosophizing. But I bring together all the various pieces I do here because I think that these provide the kind of grounding context necessary in order to have this interdisciplinary conversation in an adequately conscientious and informed way.

0.4   Chapter Overview

Let us hope the foregoing will suffice as preamble and introductory context. The rest of this work is divided into four chapters and a conclusion. These could in turn be

grouped together into two broad movements: the first two chapters opening up my problem and delivering relevant context and bases for comparison from the Western/modern side of things; and the last two chapters moving more directly into the domain of cross-cultural thinking with Indigenous traditions of thought.

The first chapter, in particular, attempts to introduce my project in a way that foregrounds its situatedness within a particular philosophical tradition but also within the (inter-)cultural and political terrain of (North) American settler-colonialism. Thus, on the one hand, I lay out my basic project of *defamiliarizing ontology* and of thinking alongside more *relational ontologies* as a way of grappling with the problem of how we can defamiliarize dominant modern ways of relating to "nature". On the other hand, I clarify my sense of the meaning and relevance I understand this project to have. I do this in part by being explicit about the kind of lived, intercultural, ecological, and political context that has provoked this project and that I am concerned to think "in light of". For it is relative to this context that the "so what" of this project must ultimately be gauged.

The second chapter turns more directly to the question of "nature" and the kind of meaning this has arguably come to assume within the dominant culture of modern life and thought. I work to draw out this meaning as it plays across a number of interlocking domains and philosophical projects: the philosophical problem of the modern Cartesian subject and a connected theorization of the problem of reality; understandings about the natural world that developed in association with the rise of modern science and particular connected construals of the meaning of technology and the technoscientific vocation; a consonant view of nature that in turn comes to underlie distinctly modern and influential notions of politics and political life, as expressed most especially in the modern sovereign state as polity; the view of nature that underlies distinctly modern notions of property/ownership, which becomes tremendously consequential in the structuring of dominant human-nonhuman relations. Throughout this process, I also work to show how a particular, Christianized, atomistic ontology can be seen to be operative across the contexts examined. In order to prepare the ground for the cross-cultural work of the next chapters, I lay out what I take to be a more acceptable alternative to the way that our dominant ontology invites us to think about problems *of* reality, ontology, and cultural

difference – or, to put much the same problem slightly differently, about the relationship between nature and culture.

In Chapter Three, "Ethnographic Meditations", I turn to focus on a selection of Indigenous philosophical and cultural traditions – most especially the Ojibwa, Amazonian Quichua-speaking peoples, and the Tlingit. On the one hand, I draw together the examples I do in order to provide a kind of introduction to the tenor of Indigenous relational thinking in different contexts, so far as I understand these and in ways that bear on the philosophical issues especially significant to my general problem. I try to show how selfhood, animacy, personhood, the non/human, and a good deal else, can be experienced, understood, and explored very differently when conceived on relational ontological terms. I furthermore try to show, through ethnographic examples, how relational ontology enables different possibilities in the experience and codification of different facets of everyday existence and social relations, on points whose usual delineation has become central to the modern experience of things. Many of the points covered in this regard stand in direct contrast to much of what was seen in Chapter Two: we then try to see what relationally-conceived understandings might look like concerning technology and skill, property relations, what it means to live a thoughtful life or make art or experience beauty.

In Chapter Four, I try to bring Indigenous relational thinking more closely into conversation with what I think are some of the better analogical "bridges" from the Western tradition: namely, Nietzsche and Heidegger. I draw out certain points of similarity between these Western thinkers and Indigenous thought. But I also and at the same time try to bring to clarity points of variance between them. And in these differences, I try to show how Indigenous thought tends to push the question of relationality much farther, and in ways that are especially worth thinking about in terms of what possibilities this opens where the problem of our relations to the nonhuman are concerned. Accordingly, I try to show that – to a certain extent and in the ways that Nietzsche and Heidegger bear traces of their origins within the Western, Christianized, and largely atomistic tradition – we can also begin to see some of the limitations of their cultural critiques for helping us grapple with the (modern) problem of "nature" and for

beginning to think sufficiently "otherwise". But we can also, and at the same time, begin to ask whether something like the critiques they offer might not be recuperated along different lines in light of alternate ontological and conceptual possibilities we might learn to "think with", in light of our engagement with Indigenous thought.

Chapter 1

1   Breaking Open the Face of the World: Rethinking Self and Nature in Light of (Onto-)Politics

"You think it's a stump, but that's my grandfather."

-Harry Robinson[1]

1.1   Sketching the Terrain: A View from the Heights

This dissertation undertakes a cultural critique of Western modernity and its dominant relationships to "nature" via an engagement with certain Indigenous American philosophies and traditions of thought. I employ what might be termed a cross-cultural philosophical procedure that engages and draws from Western philosophical literatures, Indigenous thinkers, ethnographies, and stories. I undertake this task with the understanding that what is at stake in the differences between those cultures I am engaging extends to and includes differences in ontology – what I will refer to as the *atomistic* ontology that characterizes Western thought, and the *relational* ontologies that characterize those Indigenous traditions with which I am engaging.

Thus, this dissertation is an experiment in problematizing, or more precisely in *defamiliarizing*, ontology – and in exploring what critical, political, ethical, and philosophical reflection might be, within a kind of between-space where ontology itself is up for grabs. My aim is to open up to question one particular ontology – that of Western modernity – and hence our accustomed and dominant ways of being in the world, of understanding the nature of reality, our nature as selves, the ethical horizons we inhabit and our position relative to others, most especially the nonhuman. But more than this, my aim is to explore alternate possible ways of seeing and thinking and relating, alternate

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[1] Harry Robinson, <u>Nature Power: In the Spirit of an Okanagan Storyteller</u> ed. by Wendy Wickwire (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2004), 35.

and intervening "games of truth", that might be enabled through an engagement with alternative ontologies.

Why embark on such a task, and why focus on the problem of "nature"? As I suggested in my Introduction, a crucial motivating reason here is that we live at a time of pervasive, interconnected, and deepening ecological crises that we are nowhere near adequately addressing. These are moreover indissociable from profoundly unsustainable and anthropocentric processes of modernizing "development", an *ethos* of world-mastery predicated on the domination and reworking of the "natural" world, and from associated aspirations, logics, and legitimating stories fundamental to modern life. The crises we now experience, in other words, are in a crucial sense expressions of where our dominant ways of thinking and being can be seen to land us – expressions of the limits, externalities, and consequences of these. This dominant worldview is structured in fundamental ways by particular ontological assumptions; and these assumptions have no small bearing on shaping what we experience as the problem of "nature" and our relations to it – as well as the range of alternatives we consider possible to these. Fundamentally, our present ecological crises present us with challenges we must better learn how to address; and it is in the nature of crises to call for thought and for revaluation of how we are used to doing things. If we are to ask what it might mean to live and think differently, it makes a good deal of sense to address and put to question these fundamental, accustomed assumptions of modern culture – that are often so familiar as to be invisible to us.

Let us linger for a moment with this term "defamiliarization": it is used quite deliberately here. It is a question of making the familiar strange by means of having sojourned somewhere else – of having learned to see the world, and reflect back on the familiar, with different eyes. The term is associable with methods of cultural critique though anthropological comparisons across cultures. And there are aesthetic overtones that are important. Indeed, the term also invokes distinctive perceptual and experimental effects produced for example in certain forms of literature or art, but also intoxication – effects of aesthetic estrangement or rupture, of seeing familiar things in a newly mysterious or unfamiliar way. Defamiliarization in this sense can signify experiences that

grow and stretch the self and thought, that send us back to questioning the sensible and perceptible in a renewed way, that de-realize the real and open the face of the world up differently – and all of this is pertinent to the efforts undertaken here.[2]

"Defamiliarization" is necessarily a practice that takes place from out of, and relative to, an initial vantage point or orientation, a particular localization of thought and understanding, a given sense of the "familiar". Philosophically, this initial location is delineated here by what I refer to as the dominant ontological contours of modern thought, and by the existential and comportmental modes that these entail. And our dominant modern ontology, I argue, can be characterized as assuming a particular resolution and distinction of *nature* as separate from *culture*. As one might expect, precisely what we understand "nature" and ourselves as human (cultural) beings to be *as such* and in distinction from one another, has no small bearing on the question of how we conceive it to be possible or meaningful to relate to the nonhuman world that we view as "natural".

The problem I raise here is a fundamental one, with far-ranging ramifications. The problem of how our dominant modern thinking leads us to understand ourselves in the world, to apprehend and relate to the nonhuman, is structured in crucial respects in terms of this problem of our relationship to nature. But at the same time, the way modern thought typically understands nature relative to culture is also itself constitutive of the way it understands what it means *to be modern at all*. That is to say, the nature/culture settlement precisely grounds many of our most foundational and familiar stories and aspirations concerning what it is to be mature, free, and reasonable – how we are and what our vocation properly is as beings in the world. The way we think about and relate to "nature" in this sense – as I will show more fully in the next chapter – informs and

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[2] It is notable in this sense that defamiliarization is often associated with the strategies and aims of surrealist art. Walter Benjamin's writings on drugs, and surrealism, are also noteworthy here as exemplary travelogues of a certain kind of defamiliarization: rife with moments of suddenly penetrating to hidden worlds of surfaces that had gone unnoticed before, but continue to resonate in subsequent inspection, of coming to perceive "the everyday as impenetrable, the impenetrable as everyday," and so on. See Walter Benjamin, On Hashish ed. by Howard Eiland (Cambridge: Belknap of Harvard University Press, 2006), 81, 85,133. For at least an introductory meta-disciplinary discussion of defamiliarization as a technique within anthropology, see George E. Marcus and Michael M.J. Fischer, Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences, 2nd Ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), beginning at 137.

structures complex and interlocking technoscientific, political, ethical, legal, etc., problematics that are constitutive of our dominant, modern lifeways, our rationalizations and codifications of social processes, and so on. For in its dominant guise, this nature/culture relation is not separable from the general problem of the modern subject, and the way the latter comes to delineate problems of knowledge and freedom, to experience the world.

The difficulty to be confronted, at some level, is the stubbornness, universalism, and exclusivity with which this all-too familiar and basic constellation comes to frame our sense of the possible and viable, the ways it makes sense to speak about the world and imagine ourselves in it. A particular enframing of reality delineates, purportedly for always and everywhere, the terms for grappling with the serious affairs of life: the one true game worth playing. But then, if the manner of our sighting and relating to nature resonates throughout the terms of life in Western modernity, it also tends to underlie and indeed delineate many of our most familiar ways of *critiquing and resisting/responding to* that dominant culture – our ways of attempting to think otherwise, to articulate and imagine the possibility of doing anything else. In diverse ways, we tend so often (and even unwittingly) to reproduce the basic dicta that land us back in the very problems we might want to evade. Thus whereas the problem of "nature" represents today, on numerous fronts, a rather obvious limit and set of concerns for our globalizing modernity, it also represents – to the modern Western vantage point – a peculiarly intractable problem. The question of ontology is a crucial one to raise here because this invites us to begin by problematizing precisely those fundamental and aprioristically presumed dicta that – often neutralized, naturalized, and variously disguised – continually entrap us within such familiar conclusions and consequences.

The crucial point to assert, however, is that the modern Western account of things, and its presumed ontological dicta, *are contestable, necessarily interpretive, and culturally and philosophically particular*, and do not indeed constitute the only story to be heard today. There remain today very different ways of thinking and being, predicated upon very different ontologies. As I have said, the sub-set of ontologies I will engage here, which clash visibly with modern Western ones in the part of the world I inhabit –

not least around the question of nature and our relations to it – are those expressed in the philosophical traditions of Indigenous American peoples.

My endeavor here, as I have said, is to learn, from a selection of Indigenous American traditions, something about what it might mean to think and live "otherwise" – to show how the relational ontologies expressed there can unveil the world, ourselves in it, the problem of what it means to live a good life, etc., very differently. In other words, Indigenous relational ontologies (and connected ways of thinking) levy meaningful and fundamental challenges and disagreements precisely on the question of nature and related problems. This is a point that indeed seems continually reaffirmed within the political landscape and struggles of the present – if we consider, for example, widespread Indigenous resistances to ecologically destructive resource extraction projects within Canada and elsewhere (for example, the well-publicized Indigenous resistances to mining in northern Ontario, to the Enbridge pipeline in British Columbia, to hydraulic fracturing in New Brunswick, to oil extraction in the Amazon basin, and so on).

Engaging in this kind of cross-cultural philosophical work employed here, in order to begin to begin to think between ontologies in a defamiliarizing way is also nothing less than to undertake a philosophical practice that aims to unsettle the face of the world as we typically see it: our dominant partitioning of what is visible, sayable, and sensible. It is to begin to see how it is possible to allow ourselves and others, and our existential possibilities, to be unveiled in different ways, to gain coherence along alternate lines. Defamiliarization must accordingly be differentiated from a process of simply tabulating differences in a removed fashion.

At stake in this opposition is something similar to what Friedrich Nietzsche identified in *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*. Namely: at stake is the difference between an engagement with otherness that seeks to remain within a sphere of spectatorial, "objective" knowledge, and so can change us in no way other than to give us further data to contain as "walking encyclopedias" – and an engagement that is lived philosophically in a transformative sense, that is absorbed relative to the domain of something like our own freedom, our own active questioning of existence and what it

means to live a good life – *and our efforts to live such a life*.[3] In this, it is not that we must give up altogether on asking the old and fundamental philosophical questions we have long recognized, but only to acquiesce to the possibility that something *like* these questions may be posed (and answered) quite differently, or approached from different directions.[4]

The kind of defamiliarization pursued here, therefore, can perhaps best be approached as a distinctive kind of transformative philosophical practice or truth-procedure – what Michel Foucault called an *askesis*.[5] The aim is above all to see how this kind of pathway can lead us somewhere different from where we started. Such a practice as *this* one can be a medicine in its own way – and one that today would seem to be called for in no small measure. For on many fronts, it can be said that our dominant ways of construing and relating to nature are *bad ones* that are in need of being disrupted, that these are constitutive of some of the most pressing worries and failings of our age.

For the rest of this chapter, I will endeavor to elaborate a little further on the nature and basic contours of the problem I have introduced above, and how I understand my theorizing to be structured and situated here. In this, I will further introduce some of the basic terms and concerns relative to which the defamiliarizing work of this dissertation is undertaken – and elaborate some of my basic motivations for doing so. But first, a word or two might be given in clarification of terminology.

1.2   Ontologies?

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[3]Friedrich Nietzsche, <u>On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life</u> trans. by Peter Preuss (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980), esp. 15, 24-25, 28-32.
[4] A similar claim and basic orientation is defended in Radin, <u>Primitive Man as Philosopher</u>.
[5] That is, a form of philosophical practice that implies a different kind of truth-procedure and relationship to truth, from that typical of e.g., Cartesian framings of the problem, which understand truth as something that the self must constitutively have access to as what she is. In the (much older) philosophical notion of *askesis*, rather, one finds postulated that "for the subject to have right of access of the truth he must be changed, transformed, shifted, and become, to some extent and up to a certain point, other than himself. . . This is a work of the self upon the self, an elaboration of the self by the self, a progressive transformation of the self by the self for which one takes responsibility in a long labor of ascesis (*askesis*)." Michel Foucault, <u>The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France 1981-1982)</u> trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), 14-16.

Ontology, Martin Heidegger reminds us, is fundamental to the activity and vocation of philosophy itself; it poses the question of the being of beings – i.e., of what is and the manner of its existence.[6] And in a certain way, Heidegger's own work on ontology, or rather *fundamental ontology*, will provide a basis, carved out relative to the terms of the Western tradition, for my own approach to ontology as a problem. It will therefore be necessary to briefly review Heidegger's thinking in this regard in order to clarify my own use of the term "ontology" within this dissertation.

For Heidegger, the question of being stands to be accessed through the way we are as beings, and hence through the way we find ourselves existentially and at all times within a world, or relational totality of meaning. It is only on the basis of our being-in-the-world that we are able to encounter entities *as something*, as understood and interpreted. The phenomenon of worldhood or being-in-the-world, in other words, constitutes the transcendental ontological structure on the basis of which phenomena come to pass and to self-showing, i.e., come to disclosure through language.[7]

As we see further in the next chapter, Heidegger's analytic of worldhood displaces the manner in which our prevailing metaphysical constellation has, most notably since Descartes, tended to conflate questions of ontology with those of epistemology. Our subjectivistic modern metaphysics, for Heidegger, covers over precisely the phenomenon of worldhood as the condition of understanding matters of reality as we do, i.e., by placing the problem of securing certainty for the knowing subject at the beginning of all that may be said.[8] But to displace the ground of modernity's epistemological foundationalism also undermines our tradition of understanding ourselves as finally ascending to *the* viable way of thinking to the exclusion of all others. Hence it undermines our habitual story of progress culminating in modern science as the supreme and exclusively valid speaker on behalf of what is, interpreted as universal nature; the ways this in turn supports a particular delineation of the human *qua* subject; and so on.

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[6] Martin Heidegger, <u>Being and Time</u>, trans. by Joan Stambaugh (New York: SUNY Press, 1996), 34.
[7] Ibid, 32-35, 50-71.
[8] Ibid, 21-22, 31-32, 186-190.

Especially important to note here is this: that instead of confirming our usual modern story where history amounts to a unitary and universal progression of understanding and reason, an ascendence of humankind from infancy to maturity, Heidegger offers something quite different in his concept of the "epoch". For Heidegger, an epoch is an age, characterized by particular ways of thinking, of seeing and knowing and understanding, that are grounded in a given metaphysics. In any given epoch, metaphysics frames the world and lets entities come to disclosure in the ways they do. What is especially valuable for my purposes here is that, following Heidegger's analysis, we experience a certain pluralization and equalization of these epochs, because it is simply accepted that being and beings are able to grant themselves differently to thought in each context. No one epoch can reign supreme over all others, however, because of the nature of world-disclosure as such: being only ever grants itself to metaphysical thought *while also withdrawing*.[9]

In this sense, each epoch can be understood at once to involve a viable questioning and investigation of existence in its own way, and yet also never constitute a final or absolutely true account of reality. Relative to these epochal pulsations of being, it makes no sense (because it would be an error in logical priority) to suggest that the positive understanding of the world characteristic of one is somehow more correct than any other, since the possibility of correctness can only be secured *within* specific constellations of metaphysical terms.[10] Heidegger' position here should be distinguished from that kind of crude relativism often projected in positivistic circles today, however, which would merely assert that the alternative to positivism is to assume that any

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[9] Martin Heidegger, On Time and Being trans. by Joan Stambaugh (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 8-9: "The history of Being means destiny of Being in whose sendings both the sendings and the It which sends forth hold back their self-manifestation. To hold back is, in Greek, *epoche*. Hence we speak of the epochs of the destiny of Being." (9)

[10] This basic way of thinking permeates Heidegger's later writings. For example: "Greek science was never exact, precisely because, in keeping with its essence, it could not be exact and did not need to be exact. Hence it makes no sense whatever to suppose that modern science is more exact than that of antiquity. Neither can we say that the Galilean doctrine of freely falling bodies is true and that Aristotle's teaching, that light bodies strive upward, is false; for the Greek understanding of the essence of body and place and of the relation between the two rests upon a different interpretation of beings and hence a correspondingly different kind of seeing and questioning of natural events." Martin Heidegger, The Question Concerning Technology and Other Writings trans. by William Lovitt, (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1977), at 117; but see also 115-154 generally; and Heidegger, Identity and Difference,trans. by Joan Stambaugh, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), especially 32-3, 66-7.

arbitrary thing is true quite regardless of what any attentive observation of anything might tell us. It is rather that one is only ever able to pay heed to beings on the basis of the light and the forms of coherence granted through language and modulated epochally (and which we do not merely "invent" by ourselves), and that in any such case it is a question of being attentive to the world *within* and *through* different constellations of possibility.

If we retain Heidegger's thinking here as a philosophical backdrop, it will perhaps now be possible to clarify my own use of the term "ontology". In this dissertation, I mean by "ontology" those fundamental and most basic dicta that, within a given tradition of thought and everyday experience of existence, lay out an interpretation of the basic contours of reality or "what is" as such. That is, the basic and most general dicta and first principles we assume concerning the fundamental nature, constitution, and structure of what is, *the coherences assumed by being and beings*. These delineate what it is to be an entity, what kinds of "entities" exist, as well as offer interpretations concerning our own nature as beings, the correlate contours of our basic ethical horizons.

Thus "ontology" is used here in a sense that is perhaps broadly enabled by Heidegger's reconfiguration of the problem as that of a transcendental analytic *vis à vis* problems of knowledge; but my concerns here are much more localized.[11] Unlike Heidegger, my interest here is not in simply stepping back from the terms of our own dominant constellation, or – like many modern and postmodern thinkers – in overcoming metaphysics as such.[12] Indeed, to my mind, something like metaphysics and ontology remains always an indispensable condition of thinking. But then, I am especially interested here in the way we might speak of ontologies in the *plural*, as fundamental delineations performed into worlds in the *plural* – and in the possibility of thinking across

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[11] Indeed, in the final analysis, whereas I take Heidegger's analysis as a helpful way of opening space relative to the Western tradition and limiting some of the latter's worst consequences, I also am inclined to locate Heidegger's work, and the kinds of questions it makes sense for him to pose, within and relative to a specific cultural-ontological tradition.

[12] Indeed, ontology and metaphysics are often associated retrospectively with the speculative philosophies of the Scholastic era; and one can identify a pervasive anti-metaphysical current running throughout much of the modern tradition, and finding expression not only for example in positivism, which presumes that modern knowledge and science now effectively grasp reality to such a degree that metaphysical inquiries have become essentially superfluous and discredited. However, this anti-metaphysical tendency is also visible in different ways in Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, and so on.

and between the modes and specific localizations of thinking these enable.[13] For if the presumption of particular metaphysical dicta gives us a kind of basic grammar according to which being and beings are able to assume coherences, are able to be let be, it is also the case that alternate ontologies enable alternate ways of attentively studying the world, of discovering coherences within it – alternate ways of thinking, engaging, investigating, dwelling in the world. Of course the very effort to pluralize ontologies in this way is itself a contentious manoeuvre that will no doubt encounter its share of opposition (it is much easier, perhaps because it is also far less consequential, to restrict oneself to speaking of plural *epistemologies*). Others have undertaken to defend a pluralization of ontologies more directly.[14] While building upon the efforts of such thinkers, it will be hoped that this dissertation will itself contribute to building a case for such a manoeuvre, not least by showing how it might be more satisfyingly employed in a critical reading of our own tradition and in an engagement with others'.

So "ontology" here is taken in a sense that asks about something like the terms of coherence operative *within* discrete constellations. As a plurality, ontologies or worlds might be analogized to Heidegger's "epochs", but with the provision that it is necessary to see that there are rather a plurality of actual "worlds" that are contemporaneous with one another rather than following in a singular historical succession.

At a basic level, in the conjunction of *ontos* and *logos* we hear the question of the manner in which being and beings become sayable, are able to be disclosed by speech and discovered.[15] (We might be inclined to invoke Heidegger's metaphor of truth as an "unveiling" in this connection. But then, perhaps it is more a question of allowing the world to show itself in alternate raiment, another guise of becoming-articulable – with the acknowledgement that all there ever is is more clothing, and never a final 'X' behind a veil.) If we take our cue from this, ontology must be seen to be itself inseparable from the

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[13] In this sense, I am indebted to the critique and modification of the concepts of world and ontology offered by thinkers like Mario Blaser, Jacques Rancière, and Alain Badiou, among others.

[14] See for example Mario Blaser, "Political Ontology."

[15] See Martin Heidegger's discussion of *logos* in the introduction to Being and Time, 28-9; Whereas *logos* has accrued a range of meanings through the course of the Western tradition, Heidegger asserts that "*logos* as speech really means . . . to make manifest 'what is talked about' in speech. . . The 'being true' of *logos* as *aletheuein* means: to take beings out of their concealment; to let them be seen as something unconcealed (*alethes*); to *discover* them."

problem of truth and the possibility of advancing an interpretation of truth, and of what it means to seek the truth with regard to being and beings. Indeed, it has become customary, within the terms of the Western philosophical tradition, to consider "ontology" as a branch, and occasionally as a synonym, for *metaphysics*; and it is worth noting that metaphysics is itself often defined in much the same terms I have used to describe ontology.[16]

A further point must be made here concerning ontology, and the kinds of issues and basic problems this tends to involve. In ways that will be more thoroughly explained in the chapters that follow, I understand questions of ontology to be closely intertwined with what we might roughly call questions of *theology* and *cosmology*.[17] Such words of course bring us to understand whatever ontological constellation is being discussed by way of analogy to the Western one, and the kinds of specific meanings words like *theos* or *cosmos* assume therein; and they root us within an analysis of the Western tradition and its conceptual language in the first instance. But this kind of analogical bridging can be acceptable, I suggest, as long as we remain sufficiently critical and mindful about the kinds of inferences these lead us to draw, and leave sufficiently open the question as to the greater or lesser suitability of these inferences for any given comparative case.

By these terms *theology* and *cosmology*, I mean to suggest that the questions of ontology tend to be bound up with, respectively, i) the kinds of interpretations,

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[16] See, e.g., the entry for "metaphysics" in <u>The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy</u> ed. by Robert Audi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 489-491. We see the overlap here relative to Heidegger himself, in that for him, "metaphysics grounds an age, in that through a specific interpretation of what is and through a specific comprehension of truth it gives to that age the basis upon which it is formed." (<u>The Question Concerning Technology</u>, 115). It can also be worth noting here that Heidegger identifies four central and interrelated questions that together comprise what is essential in a "fundamental metaphysical position", and which we can therefore take as indicative of the kinds of matters at stake here: i) "the manner and mode in which man is man"; ii) "the interpretation of the coming to presence . . . of the Being of whatever is"; iii) "the delineation of the coming of presence . . . of truth"; iv) "the sense in which, in any given instance, man is measure." (Ibid, 145.)

[17] My analysis especially in this paragraph and the next, and the particular gloss I give these matters, is indebted to Seth Asch, <u>Relational Ontology: An Exploration Through the Work of M. Foucault</u>. University of Victoria, MA Thesis. (2004) Available at: http://dspace.library.uvic.ca:8080/bitstream/handle/1828/1610/S_ASCH-FINAL-COMPLETE.pdf?sequence=1 , page 11; and to the work of the philosopher M.B. Foster, whose three articles in the journal *Mind* from 1934-1936 (issues 43-45) also inform the former's analysis. But I am indebted as well as to the work of thinkers like Friedrich Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Max Weber, in general; and to the work of scholars like Etienne Gilson, Karsten Harries, Walter F. Otto, and others.

commitments, doctrines, and philosophical decisions rendered on the basis of particular ways of conceiving and orienting thought relative to discrete construals of something like the divine and its relation to the world and to human beings (and hence different interpretations of all three of these as such). As contrasting "Western" examples we might name God or the Godhead in the Christian tradition, or the struggling eternal gods of Greek polytheism. Taken in this sense, these are of course very different "theologies" which, as Friedrich Nietzsche for example attests, offer (at least generally speaking) markedly different interpretations of the world and existence and what is worthy of reverence and what it means to live a good life, as well as different orientations towards the sensible and mortal life, and so on. It can be difficult, though potentially provocative, to explore points of possible analogy in this regard between Indigenous and different Western traditions – though once again it is clear that we must take care as we do so.

Relatedly, I understand ontological questions to be bound up with ii) the kinds of accounts that a given construal of the world offers concerning the world's coming-into-being or origin – or lack thereof, if for example the world is taken to be eternal and uncreated (as in Aristotle).[18] Needless to say, I wish to take this question sufficiently broadly, such that it can serve as a fruitful point of comparison between the Creationist story of Christian metaphysics and, for instance, origin stories concerning speciation or the withdrawal of non-human persons into differentiated bodily forms at the end of the "beginning times", found in Indigenous Amazonia and elsewhere.[19] But then, I will also invoke the term *cosmology* in a somewhat broader sense as referring to articulations of the overall structure of the world or "cosmos", the positioning of human beings and others within that general structure, and so on – in the sense, for example, in which Christianity or Platonism can be understood to advance a vertical cosmology of ascent (from the Cave of shadows up to True Being) by contrast with more "horizontal" possibilities.

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[18] This question of the origin of the world tends to be understood as an essential question belonging to cosmology as a realm of inquiry. See, again, the entry for "metaphysics" in The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy, at 489.

[19] See my discussion in Chapter Three.

Furthermore, it will be argued here that if a fundamental relationship can be seen to exist between theological, cosmological, and ontological questions and understandings, then these can in turn be seen to delineate and enable specific forms of knowing and understanding what the essential questions and problems for knowledge are. To say this relative to the Western tradition is of course to take issue with the ways that modern science and its vocation are often philosophically understood. Most particularly it is to take issue with the positivistic notion that metaphysics and ontology are forms of inquiry characteristic above all of the pre-modern era and Scholasticism, and have largely been bypassed or made redundant, as inquiries into the fundamental nature of reality, by the work of modern science and its supposedly superior methods for accessing that reality.

The work of modern science as a form of knowing is only possible on the basis of a prior and philosophically delineated "ground plan" (to use Heidegger's term) that determines the manner of knowablity of things, the kinds of questions it makes sense to ask of phenomena, the kind of "things" that are, the basic characteristics these have, and so on.[20] It is of the nature of such ground plans, that amount in effect to a philosophy of nature, that although they supply the presuppositions on which a given science will ultimately depend, they can never themselves be established by the methods of that science.[21] Yet it is at this prior and broader level that the consequentiality of given forms of knowing is secured (or made capable of being opened to contestation), including the manner in which and the reasons for which a given form of knowledge should be assumed to be communicable, transferable, exclusive or non-exclusive – due for example to the presumed uniformity of nature or lack thereof. It is also at this level that we see established dicta that prepare the kinds of ethical and comportmental conclusions it makes sense to draw relative to particular knowledges, what knowing can be taken to mean for us as a practice, and so on.

In this dissertation, I offer an interpretation of modernity's dominant ontology as fundamentally *atomistic*. By this I mean that we tend to begin our account of the world by assuming the existence of individual, bounded, atomistic "things" or substances

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[20] C.f., Martin Heidegger, The Question Concerning Technology, 118-123, and M.B. Foster, "The Christian Doctrine of Creation and the Rise of Modern Natural Science," in Mind 43: 172 (October 1934), 446-447.
[21] M.B. Foster, "Christian Theology and Modern Science of Nature (I)," in Mind 44:176 (Oct. 1935), 439.

possessed of properties – a tendency that attains its precise character for us within modern modulations of a fundamentally Christian interpretation of the world. I have said that what interests me here are the reflexive and imaginative possibilities that might be opened if we begin to think and interpret the world *relationally* – a point on which it strikes me that we moderns have a great deal to learn from Indigenous American traditions in particular. Perhaps most simply and at the level of ontology, "relationality" here means beginning with an assumption that *relations* are prior, that any atomistic "thing" is rather only a kind of (at least temporary) fixity or concrescence, a gathering constituted in and through these prior, dynamic, and contextual relations. It means learning to focus in a sense on what happens *between* (including between levels of structure) rather than focusing *on* supposedly individual things, and indeed to do so as a way of understanding what any particular thing is at any given time. Relational thinking can also and accordingly invite us to be mindful of small variations in context or assemblage that may affect nuance not registered through a more atomistic line of questioning – in this sense displaying a certain affinity with a philosophy of difference. And relational ontology also implies, as we will see, a different relationship to truth.

This dissertation accepts the diagnosis by a number of political theorists and anthropologists, that part of what is at stake in contemporary political relations between Indigenous and settler peoples in colonial contexts throughout the Americas is precisely what we might call disagreement at the level of ontology.[22] As such, one characteristic of these disagreements and what is at stake in them, is that they manifest precisely as disagreements over the different "things" that are at stake.[23] (For example, if a stump is a grandfather, as Harry Robinson suggested at the beginning of this chapter, then it is something quite different from a stump as understood by the logging industry, by environmental science, and so on, and it will be related to differently.) This kind of disagreement becomes evident in moments of conflict over resource development, in related differences between Indigenous and Euro-American normative and legal traditions in this regard, in everyday practices, and so on. This is so in part because the

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[22] For example, Mario Blaser, Bruno Latour, Tim Ingold, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, Sebastien Malette, amongst others. My sense of "disagreement" here is indebted in particular to Jacques Rancière.
[23] Blaser, "Political Ontologies," 879.

validity of reducing the land to "nature" *qua* fungible "resources" – and all the philosophical and ethical baggage this implies – is not a settled dispute here.

Thinking between or across ontologies in light of these kinds of disagreements – precisely my aim here – poses special kinds of challenges, which may have already begun to be apparent in one way or another. For where worlds are multiple, as I have already suggested, we must acknowledge that our thinking is always necessarily and irredeemably *local* and *localized*.[24] That is to say, that one never has full access to any absolute totality, just as there is never any neutral ground to which one can retreat, no possibility of thinking that is not already framed in some sense and at any given moment by some specific set of ontological contours. One always begins *from somewhere*, relative to a particular set of coherences. And any articulation of *why* we might pursue a given philosophical venture necessarily finds itself having to appeal in the beginning to terms already intelligible given *where we are*. Similarly, cross-cultural engagement of the kind pursued here requires that we seek out and employ possible interpretive conceptual "bridges" or points of analogy between ontologies (and the lived philosophical traditions these inform), even as we remain mindful of all the risks such acts of translation carry.

Though my aim here is a defamiliarization of ontology and of a particular terrain of thinking, therefore, it is nevertheless rooted in the first instance within Western theory, as a *version* of an immanent critique, an *askesis* relative to a specific kind of viewpoint. This is a viewpoint rooted in those special and distinctive experiences of malaise and ruin that draw out the latent consequences of modernity itself. In other words, it is rooted in those experiences with which Western modernity, perhaps rather like de Goya's Saturn, eats at her own children; and the provocations sought here are levied relative to those terms. What is at stake here is in the end a recognition that the terms of our nature/culture settlement are *internal* to the ontological matrix of modernity, and the possibility of exploring how one might begin thinking *otherwise than through our nature/culture*

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[24] This is a point also emphasized by Alain Badiou, in his attempts to theorize what thinking and politics might be in a context of what Badiou understands as multiple "possible universes" or *topoi* – which expresses a similar formal problem to the one thought here in terms of "worlds", or relational totalities of meaning and coherence, enabled by ontologies. See, e.g., Alain Badiou, Theoretical Writings ed. and trans. by Ray Brassier and Alberto Toscano (New York: Continuum, 2005), at 169-170.

constellation and relationship. But it is nevertheless necessary to emphasize that this dissertation takes the Western "problem of nature" as its starting-point and speaks *in the first instance to motivating concerns that arise from that context*.

This would seem to be the necessary condition of making any strong and initially intelligible claim, relative to our initial starting-point, as to *why* any given instance of thinking across and between worlds is important or valuable. Jacques Rancière's definition of politics as a relation that challenges the exclusion of one world by another by means of a form of *litigating* seems an apt metaphor for what I am trying to do here as a philosophical practice. That is to say, it is necessary to begin in a manner that is at once understandable within the terms of particular localization or partitioning of things – in this case, that of our dominant order of modern thought and ontology – and yet to simultaneously introduce into those terms what previously had not been (deemed) thinkable or sayable, leading thus beyond the initial terms of intelligibility. One begins by making a kind of formal claim to equality, by challenging the validity of an instance of exclusion (in this case, of Indigenous relational ontologies by and relative to our dominant, modern, atomistic one), even if it will be precisely the aim of that litigating discourse to produce a rupture of the previously dominant order, a reconfiguration of terms and of the sensible itself. [25]

Let us therefore turn briefly to describe some basic characteristics of what we might initially sight as the "problem of nature" and the kinds of worries, accordingly, which this work responds to.

1.3   Characterizing Our Dominant Relations to Nature

How then might we characterize the modern relationship to nature? One of the central words that is employed and becomes consequential in the history of modern thought on the subject is *domination*. Considering our present, and the basic contours of

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[25] See, on this point, Jacques Rancière, Jacques Rancière, "Ten Theses on Politics," in <u>Theory & Event</u> 5:3 (2007), Thesis 8; Jacques Rancière, <u>Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy</u>, trans. by Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 30; Jacques Rancière, <u>The Politics of Aesthetics</u> trans. by Gabirel Rockhill (New York: Continuum, 2004), at 3.

contemporary modern life, such a term seems an apt description. Everywhere nature is ordered and reordered, mobilized, and reworked to suit the ends dictated by human beings and most especially in relation to rationalized notions of our "self-interest"; it is continually reduced to exchange-value within a modern market society; the earth is torn asunder at great ecological cost for the sake of extracting the "resources" buried within. Phenomena are carefully and continually studied so that we may know them; but always at work in this is the fundamental drive to increase the extent of our control over the physical world.

This domination, I argue (and as others have argued[26]), is rooted in an ontology that sets the human self apart from nature, occupying a privileged position relative to the rest of Creation, and understood accordingly to be the autonomous and atomistic ground of its own action, *the* being uniquely endowed with language or reason or whatever else. In other words, we dominate nature by virtue of the way we understand it as such. Informing this understanding are a host of categories and what we take to be dualisms that oppose each other under the signs of nature and culture. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro provides a helpful list here: "universal and particular, objective and subjective, physical and social, fact and value, the given and the instituted, necessity and spontaneity, immanence and transcendence, body and mind, animality and humanity, among many more."[27]

Broadly speaking, it appears to be endemic to our dominant modern constellation that the freedom of the human being is always set up over and against material nature, which forms a more or less mute backdrop for human activities upon the world stage. And where it is only human beings who are moral persons in the fullest sense – having reason and free will, being made in the image of God and in this sense being "highest" among creatures – it is clear that our relations to the rest of the world are not subject to the same kind of ethical injunctions as our relations with each other.

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[26]For example, see Freya Mathews, Reinhabiting Reality, generally; Ingold, The Perception of the Environment, at 25; Gregory Bateson, Steps to an Ecology of Mind (San Francisco: Chandler, 1972), 467-468.

[27] Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, "Cosmological Deixis and Amerindian Perspectivism," in The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute 4:3 (Sept. 1998), 469-470.

The meditations of Heidegger, who construes the modern relationship to nature under the sign of "technology", are a helpful point of departure here. For Heidegger, what is characteristic of this relationship is the way we come to experience all extant beings, as *objects*, as so many resources before the human will – awaiting *our* planning and ordering, our valuations (understood as coming from us through acts of will), standing "on reserve" and available for our use and abuse, our mastery. On the one hand, this relation is structured and enabled by the way modern thought lays out the terms for modern physics to take shape as an exact science of a universal nature, and hence as a particular way of apprehending and "enframing" what is, in its reality, as calculable in principle. But on the other hand (though relatedly), it is a question of the way modern man comes to understand himself as freed to himself, newly self-responsible – determining for himself the criteria of valid knowledge, but moreover determining his own ends and giving direction to the world, seizing for himself the wheel of history. In other words, it is a question of the philosophical and cultural event of modern subjectivity, on the basis of which modern man comes to exalt himself "to the posture of lord of the earth."[28]

Another helpful and generally consonant point of departure here can be found in the diagnoses of the ecological philosopher Freya Mathews, that modern relationships to nature are essentially "monological" rather than "dialogical". The definitive phenomenon at one level concerns our endemic and solipsistic anthropocentrism: inasmuch as our goals, our ends, our interests, etc. come to form the beginning, and generally the ending, of any story worth telling. But this state of affairs is enabled, Mathews suggests, by a particular dualistic premise that entrenches a particular ontological, ethical, and epistemological line between ourselves and nature: that "there is nothing akin to mind in basic matter."[29] As such, within the monological relationship to nature, there can be no meaningful possibility of communication with the world *qua* physicality, nor any source of meaning within it. Nor can one experience, in one's relation to the nonhuman world, much in the way of ethical concern or obligation such as one has with other agents.

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[28] Martin Heidegger, The Question Concerning Technology,13-23; the quote is from 27.
[29] Mathews, Reinhabiting Reality, 8.

As I explain further in the next chapter, another way of expressing this development within the Western tradition is that nature comes to be seen as lacking intrinsic ends. As a result, it is understood to fall to human beings to posit these – since in the tradition of modernity's Christian metaphysics, we are alone amongst creatures in possessing free will and reason. The problem of ends is itself integral to how Christian thought understands problems of meaning – for example, relative to the overall historical direction of the world, its linearity and chronology, directed through God's Providence. Left now to ourselves and restricted within the terms of our subjectivism and its finitude, however (and hence at a further remove from God by comparison with the experience of Medieval thought), we come to experience that meaning flows one way, from us out into the world. Nature in this sense forms the passive complement to our own activity. As we will see, the whole modern technoscientific vocation of intervening in nature so as to manipulate "its" processes, to *improve nature* so as to suit our ends and bring about a life finally worth living, assumes its sense and takes its rooting in this basic context.

Inasmuch as the problem of our relation to the nonhuman is modulated through the problem of nature, it is notable that discourse on this problem tends to occupy a space of fluidity between the kind of baggage nature assumes as a pivotal ontological resolution for modern thought, and the sighting of particular ontic beings (i.e., entities) *as* "nature" – what we typically see as "wilderness".   We tend to think of the latter unproblematically: wilderness or nature is simply what is out there when you don't do anything to it – it is the physical, biological, and material world when simply left "untouched". But as such, the very meaning the "wilderness" assumes here cannot itself be separated from the broader ontological meaning of nature and its separation from culture within the terms of modern thought (which difference often tends to be spatialized in terms of the difference between wilderness and civilization). Far from being simply "out there", wilderness as such is inextricable from the frame of meaning we already carry with us wherever we go.

And so we cannot be surprised to find, as one writer has for example suggested, that even in the ways we will tend to defend spaces of wilderness and articulate their importance, the same basic *ethos* of anthropocentrism tends to remain untroubled. Thus, in our publicly intelligible defenses of the wilderness, the latter tends to appear for us

variously i) as a kind of *farm*, studied and managed by an elite of expert specialists, and productive in multiple, defined, scientifically validated and calculable ways – ranging from raw material for resource extraction to oxygen factory; ii) as a *playground*, on reserve as "wilderness experience" for the outdoor tourist industry, but once again a more or less mute backdrop to human recreational and economic activity; iii) as a kind of *prison*, the Other to the domestic, civilized realms of Rational Man – from which the non-human inmates occasionally escape, and to which these need to be returned.[30]

1.4   Visions of Worry

Now, the form of relationship sketched briefly above can be said on several fronts to be a *bad* and a *worrying* one. Let us take a moment to review some of the central aspects of how this might be.

Not least among the challenges faced today is what we might call the *ontic fallout* of modernity and processes of modernization – i.e., its impact upon beings. Articulated within the terms of modern environmental science, for example, we encounter this impact under the sign of the ecological consequences and limits of our dominant, modern ways of thinking and living – and the seeming ineptitude of our habitual theoretical, political, legal, and ethical tools to adequately respond to the dangers we face in this regard. It is more or less common knowledge today, all sham "debate" within mass-democratic politics and the media aside, that the logics of our dominant civilization are outpacing what we can (even within Western terms) describe as the capacity of our planet's webs of life to sustain themselves – and us. With the melting of the icecaps, the acidification of the oceans, deforestation, widespread pollution of the earth and waters, the accelerated extinction of species – and in general the demonstrably cumulative impact that modernity, its capitalist economy, and its vision of "development" is having – we occupy an ethical and "material" position today whose precedent can perhaps only be found in the development of the atomic bomb. That is to say, that it is becoming increasingly

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[30] See Max Oelschlaeger, "Reflections on the Wilderness Act: Three Decades and Counting," in Weber: The Contemporary West 12.2 (Spring/Summer 1995). Available at: http://weberjournal.weber.edu/archive/archive%20B%20Vol.%2011-16.1/Vol.%2012.2/12.2Oelschlaeger.htm.

difficult to meaningfully imagine how our dominant lifeways could lead to a future of *any* kind.[31]

It would be a mistake to raise this point as merely a managerial one – i.e., as presenting a set of discrete problems that call only for a more refined set of technical fixes within the established system that expresses precisely our technological rationality. To do so supposes that there is nothing inherently wrong or dangerous in the basic modern technological world-project as such, in our ethic of dramatically changing and re-ordering the earth and human societies as a process of "rationalization" on the one hand and as a project of freedom on the other. Leaving deeper assumptions untroubled, we tend to assume that we can and should keep up our basic anthropocentric and technological project while somehow fixing all the unintended consequences. We lay our bets that our level of mastery is or will be such that present and future unintended consequences (ecological devastation, climate change, growing extinction rates, or rather the sum of threats these events pose to *us*) will be solvable. The normative ideal of "responsible development", while at one level an indispensable one for ensuring that the problem of consequences remains on the table at all, nevertheless fails us insofar as it leads us to assume that we are or can be cognizant of all the repercussions of the interventions we make in our ecologies (and that all of the impacts to be assessed are cognizable within the framework of possible technical fixes within the domain of objects). There is something spurious about these kinds of assumptions, especially considering that many of our present ecological troubles have been produced precisely by past technical interventions aimed at "fixing" discrete problems.[32]

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[31] There is of course no shortage of literature establishing, within the terms of Western scientific thinking, the extremity of the situation in which we now live. Good and quite accessible overviews can be found especially within political ecology circles. See the first third or so of Fred Madoff and John Bellamy Foster, "What every environmentalist needs to know about capitalism," in <u>Monthly Review</u> 61:10 (2010), for a succinct overview of the present ecological situation.

[32] As only one set of examples, consider the well-known ecological impacts of modern agricultural practices, developed as purported to solutions to a variety of problems, not least that of maximizing and regularizing yield – from the use of herbicides and pesticides and their impact on a range of species, to toxic algae blooms from fertilizer runoff, dramatic reductions in biodiversity from the favouring of monoculture crops, impacts on water reserves, and so on . . .

There is a profound sense in which our present-day ecological crises do but draw the long-prepared consequences and show us the limits of modern ways of life, which are themselves generalized expressions of modern thinking. That is, these are expressions of where you end up given our subjectivism, our nature/culture split, and an associated body of legitimating stories and universalistic socio-political doctrine – and the lacunae, constitutive violences, and the "externalities" of these. In this sense, it would seem that we fundamentally eschew the kind of ethical, philosophical, and socio-political self-reflection invited by our present moment insofar as we leave such deeper matters untroubled, or simply take the fallout of modernizing processes as rationales for further entrenching those same logics.

One encounters a similar issue in the ways we might try to resist the anthropocentric logics of modernity through efforts of communing with "nature" *qua* the wilderness, or through efforts to preserve more of "it" from the ravages of industry in wilderness parks. It is not that, within a certain way of understanding the context of our present, such manoeuvres never do anything valuable. But the point is that the basic relationship characteristic of modern humanity *vis à vis* nature remains intact; that the preservation of wilderness remains only a domestic possibility within the terms of modern thought, politics, and society as such, another monological act where a human public *decides what to do with "its" land*. The legitimating stories, limits, and structuring dynamics of the modern state as a polity, and as an enabling structure for the freedom of modern subjects, continue to play out unchallenged in their essence. We remain altogether cut off from nature, just as we do not begin to imagine whether one might have "culture" or "civilization" predicated upon alternative, more dialogical relations. The deeper problems remain unposed.

A deeper cut, and a more valuable theoretical move, is to question this entire modern *relationship* – its necessity, inevitability, adequacy, and so on – and indeed the ontological terms that give the modern constellation the shape it has. In consonance with Heidegger, I am most concerned with exploring those possibilities for being and thinking that are occluded by the terms of our subjectivism – and, accordingly, the modern nature/culture settlement it is bound up with. But I raise the question of ontic devastation

– which *may* be sighted in the terms of ecological science, but also may be sighted in other ways – because this forms an element of concern that any conscientious reflection on dominant relations to "nature" must attempt to be responsive to in some way. But as the cross-cultural reflections of this dissertation will show, moreover, it would also be a mistake to assume that we must somehow cling exclusively to a rigidly technoscientific worldview and interpretation of human-nonhuman relations because this supposedly furnishes the *only* language through which to think about ways of caring for the land or exercising stewardship over it. As it happens, we moderns are not so special as that. There are ways of arriving at similar concerns through relational terms that are not predicated on an *ethos* of anthropocentric world-mastery – a truth we would do well to ponder.

Connected to the ontic devastations of modernity, but also not reducible to them, is moreover a broader question concerning a kind of impoverishment that can be seen to haunt our dominant modern lifeways, and to make its home in us where our relations to the world are reduced to the terms of a monological and technological framework. The problem here concerns the kind of people, the kind of selves we become, the experiential and comportmental horizons we come to inhabit under modern conditions. That this kind of impoverishment should be relevant as part of the "problem of nature" follows from the way what we are questioning here is a *relationship*: it is something that happens *between*, that in turn implicates what we usually think of as what goes on "in" ourselves as much as what is "out there".

On the Western side of things, thinkers in what we might call the Nietzschean tradition have been some of the most perceptive on this point. Martin Heidegger and Max Weber belong in this group – as do Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, and others. All of these will haunt this text, though Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Weber will appear most conspicuously. Though these thinkers begin from the terms of the Western tradition and various contrapuntal strands of possibility within it, they also contain elements of a movement towards more relational thinking – though I will argue that Indigenous traditions push us much farther in this direction. What is important for my purposes here, however, is simply to suggest that *from the vantage-point of a concern with relations and*

the ways these are constitutive of us as selves, these thinkers invite us to see how a certain poverty is cultivated under modern conditions in our relations with the (non-human) world around us.

For Heidegger, for example, there is something profoundly annihilating in our technological seeing that eviscerates and nullifies things in the richness of their presencing. In Nietzsche's story of our tradition as nihilistic and predominantly soteriological, as in Heidegger's renewal of the story of the "flight of the gods" or in Max Weber's famous diagnosis of modernization as the "disenchantment of the world", we encounter stories of a loss of reverence for the world and worldly existence, and indeed a festering resentment against it. What is resented is thought here, variously but relatedly, in terms of the body and sense, the poetic folds of our being in places, a richness of worldly engagement attuned with a lively plasticity to the rhythms of life, in ways that moreover "take on much", that open onto all the multitudinous registers of experience. In Weber for instance this is signified, in sociological language, by the gradual rejection of practices like dreaming and ecstasy from the serious affairs of the world by dominant elements in the modern tradition.[33] But then, what is thought under the sign of disavowed "enchantment" here may I think be interpreted more adequately as elements of alternate possible ways of attentively listening and interacting in the world, of letting things be disclosed and cohere, and be related with.

In a consonant vein Freya Mathews has described a kind of paucity or loss within contemporary Westernized life in this way:

> When the entire world is treated as raw resource, inert and unspeaking, then
> the fundamental modus operandi of society must . . . be one of callous
> insensitivity. To represent the world as brute and blind requires that we
> ourselves assume an attitude of bruteness and blindness. We must march
> through the world unseeing and unfeeling, turning away from the poetic

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[33] See, for example, Max Weber, <u>Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology</u> ed. by Guenther Roth and Hans Wittich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 1178; Max Weber, "Science as a Vocation," in <u>From Max Weber</u> ed. by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 156; Max Weber, <u>The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism</u> trans. by Talcott Parsons (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), 180-181.

order that unfurls about us, trampling underfoot the exuberant infinity of tendrils reaching out to us.[34]

In the kinds of people and comportmental modes that we excel in cultivating today as a consequence of our philosophical trajectory, Mathews locates a kind of learned aesthetic and relational deadness, a stunting of horizons achieved by first turning away from profound and constitutive relations within the world.

This deadness would seem intimately tied to the hardness – the exclusivity and finality – with which we experience the real itself, along with the basic ontological contours with which our vision of the real is tied. Consonantly, *the danger* that most profoundly assails us in modern relations to nature, for Heidegger, is that we should come to imagine that the (ontologically secured) framework of "technology" constitutes *the only valid manner of thinking, seeing, and being in the world.*[35] To think in this way ensures that no other language is possible, no alternate modes of exploration or ethical reflection – and no ability to see that there are relations that it is not given to the modern willful subject to experience.

The Weberian notion that disenchantment is a *process* is worth touching on here because it points to a particular effect of our metaphysical heritage and its understanding of truth as *demystifying*. Because we understand matters of truth in an exclusive and universal manner, we tend to understand nature in principle as something singular and universal.[36] Accordingly, we are apt to experience the rendering-calculable of nature undertaken by modern technoscience in a way that eviscerates competing and divergent ways of understanding the world. This occurs by submitting these to the test of factuality

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[34] Ibid, 15.

[35] Heidegger, The Question Concerning Technology, 31.

[36] The notion that knowledge of the world can or should be reducible to a single coherent "theory of everything" – a vocation not infrequently claimed by physics – is in this sense only one persistent expression of the notion that nature obeys a singular intelligible logic or *logos* to which we, in a triumphant thinking of God's thoughts after him, might one day ascend. On the question of the unity of nature as a problem within modernity's culture of science, see Stephen Gaukroker's history; through his narrative, one comes to see the image of a unified Nature, expressed in the positivity of knowledge, as a consistently unattained, ultimately unnecessary, and yet persistent desire of modern thought. See Stephen Gaukroker, The Emergence of a Scientific Culture: Science and the Shaping of Modernity 1250-1685 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) 16, 508.

. . . and seeing that they fail. Whatever is *really* going on at any moment, we are assured, can best be explained through our terms.

This occurs, moreover, in a way that invites us to assume that the kinds of questions modern natural science asks of the world are the *same* kinds of question asked by anyone else – though poorly. Thus even Weber, speaking of the general occlusion of "magic", practices of dream, vision, etc., from the terms of serious life in the modern West, understood the finality and the irrefutability of this occlusion in this way: that we now undeniably recognize that

> there are no *mysterious incalculable forces* that come into play, but rather that one can, in principle, master all things by calculation. This means that the world is disenchanted. One need no longer have recourse to magical means in order to master or implore the spirits, as did the savage, for whom such mysterious powers existed.[37]

In other words, the assumption is that alternate ways of understanding and relating to the world can effectively be reduced to the *problem of technical mastery* as it takes shape for modern science and is explicitly posed by it. It can hardly be surprising, of course, that the latter should be seen to emerge the indisputable victor: to do modern science better.

As a number of scholars have noted, if nature is singular, and Western reason and the science it grounds occupies a position of special access to it, it is the basic compromise with difference enacted by modern ontology (and the expression of that ontology and its consequences in political liberalism) to allow for many "cultures": in other words, a settlement between what Bruno Latour calls "mononaturalism" and "multiculturalism".[38] The peace this provides with different ways of being and alternate philosophical traditions is a false one in that this already contains a domesticating and colonizing ruse that hierarchically demotes the non-modern and non-Western.

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[37] See Max Weber, "Science as a Vocation," in <u>From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology</u> ed. by H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 139 (my emphasis).
[38] See Bruno Latour, <u>War of the Worlds: What About Peace?</u> trans. by Charlotte Bigg (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2002); a similar point is made in Ingold, <u>The Perception of the Environment</u>, 13-15; and Blaser, "Political Ontology."

One the one hand (so the story goes) there is Western Culture, which properly grasps the nature/culture split – and hence our true vocation as human beings within the world and relative to nature – as what it is. On the other hand, there is that cacophonous multiplicity of cultures that confuse and muddle nature and culture, that have not yet learned to draw the distinctions we do (the necessity of which is precisely prepared by way of our own ontological presuppositions). These cultures may no doubt be entertaining and fascinating in their "beliefs", exotic customs, cultural "values", "worldviews", and so on, but they are hardly edifying about the serious affairs of life. The essential phenomenon here is that these cultures undergo domestication (and hence forms of exclusion) as the condition of their inclusion into the terms of modern, Western ontology – i.e., into the nature/culture divide. (And it is my wager, drawn from writers like Mario Blaser and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro in particular, that speaking of cultures in terms of *multiple ontologies*, thought through, can provide an effective counter to this domesticating logic of mononaturalism and multiculturalism.)

But if this process, and this nature/culture constellation, comes to assail and domesticate all non-Western cultures and ontologies, all other possible worlds, it also can be understood to impoverish the culture of the West itself. In this connection, the whole set of cultural critiques concerning the "Death of God" in the birth of Man, and the cultural fallout of our subjectivism, becomes pertinent to my present problem and what is at stake in it. For this story of modern culture locates our own impoverishment within a set of manoeuvres from which any serious attempt to rethink ourselves and the horizons of our existence in the world must strive to be extricated. On the one hand, the domain of nature – the factual, real world "out there" – simultaneously gives shape to "cultural" side-structures where everything else that has no place there must be made to fit. As a result, we can experience the rather harmless survival of any alternate accounts of ourselves in the world within the sphere of fiction or literature, children's fantasies, and so on.[39]

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[39] See on this point Anthony Cascardi, <u>The Subject of Modernity</u> (Cambride: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 1-3, 103-106.

On the other hand, our delineation of the real/factual unveils what and where value must be – even as we come to understand that all the serious existential questions are unavoidably about *us* and *our values*. In a manner that is consistently Cartesian, "meaning" and belief come to be rationalized to assume a certain form, *viz.* as propositional assertions to which we assent. We might ask, of course: what if the devaluation of "meaning" has already begun in setting the matter up in these terms in the first place – not only in presuming this kind of rationalized propositional structure for it, but making it from the beginning something created and "believed in" *by us*, and where the terrain has already been set by the "facts"? Nietzsche observed that a meaningless nature requires redemption from a god; that we who have killed God and lost the meaning He once provided must attempt to assume the position of gods ourselves – though we must always already find that we are not up to the task.[40]

But apart from the specific problem of meaning as this becomes inflected by our Christianized tradition (and I understand our culture of modernity, and *the very way it conceives the possibility* of its secularism, to be precisely an outgrowth of Christian thought), there is a further question we might ask here. What if the possibilities of cultivating and being mindful of enriching relations with the land are something like this, inasmuch as they can only awkwardly be transposed into questions about "beliefs", or as something that involves *us* in a one-sided way? What if the "exuberant infinity of tendrils" that enfolds us richly in place can only be poorly thought under such terms, so that they can only shrivel beneath the lens of subjectivism? Must such relations not then suffer a similar fate of devaluation where rationalized under dominant construals of what constitutes questions of meaning, and what such meaning can and must be?

Certainly this would seem to be the case where connections of peoples to land become categorized (and atomized) as "cultural", "private", "spiritual" *values*, matters of "belief", etc. – and precisely dismissed from public life as properly private or idiosyncratic affairs. (It is worth noting, furthermore, that this entire practice of division between public and private becomes all the more problematic relative to Indigenous

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[40] Friedrich Nietzsche, <u>The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix in Songs</u> trans. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974), 181.

contexts – where one precisely cannot separate the individual from the community in these atomizing terms, and not least with regard to relations to the land.)

There is an additional structural and institutional point to raise here concerning the problem of devaluation in the context of Western societies. Where a broader public commitment to secular maturity in step with science holds sway, modern liberalism as a political philosophy understands it is our right to espouse our beliefs privately and takes steps to preserve a space for this *under those terms*.[41] But then, as Max Weber saw, the forcefulness of disenchantment, and much of its painfulness, comes to the fore especially as one enters into the engagements of public life and finds that one cannot possibly do justice there to the hard questions[42] and the things that most matter. Because important questions about meaning are relegated to the private sphere and, what is more, are made *formally* intelligible within a presumed, overarching legal and administrative framework, we come to understand the serious conversations of the day to occur at a level which procedurally enables, includes, and *stands outside* such substantive relations.[43] Speaking in the subjectivistic language of political liberalism, Weber expressed the correlate tension this way: "precisely the ultimate and most sublime values have retreated from public life."[44]

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[41] For a discussion of the way this kind of rationalization has both transformed Christian religiosity and informed certain anthropological conceptions of what "religion" is, see the first chapter of Talal Asad, Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

[42] One primary example which Weber gives in this connection, and which Heidegger will also pick up, is a growing meaninglessness of death within our contemporary public culture. For Weber, there were two elements involved here: on the one hand, the marriage of contemporary life to science and technical progress works to tie human beings to an ongoing, linear story of development, to the detriment of any capacity to be resigned to and satiated with the cyclical round of life. On the other hand, medicine itself becomes a technical practice oriented to maintaining the health and prolonging the life of patients; but accordingly, "whether life is worth while living and when – this question is not asked by medicine." One might readily see how pervasive and contagious this effective disavowal becomes, not least given the ways all manner of issues become readily "medicalized" within contemporary governmentalist discourses which help to frame the ways we typically understand what living is all about. See Weber, "Science as a Vocation," 140, 144.

[43] See Weber's description of the effects of formalistic rationalism in law in "The Social Psychology of the World Religions," in From Max Weber, 299; see also Bradley Bryan's discussion in "Postmodernism and the Rationalization of Liberal Legal Culture." Discussion Paper D98-9. Victoria: Eco-Research Chair of Environmental Law & Policy, University of Victoria. Available at: <http://www.polisproject.org/node/265>.

[44] Ibid, 155.

It has been argued (and I would suggest rightly) that at its worst, but not its rarest, our individualized search for meaning instead tends to degrade into the *ersatz* of consumerism, of a transactional existence removed from broader significance or any kind of deeper or less monological relationship to the nonhuman world around us.[45] And this process seems in turn only to reproduce the same basic, dominant mode of relating to the land, the nonhuman, and so on. Thus, for example, this process is tied to a particular cult of the new, of creation and invention *qua* the product of human activity liberated from the "territorialized" constraints of traditional limits, as well as the mobilization of nature as resource, an understanding of economic relations as primarily extractive relative to the land, and so on. The aesthetic deadness that Mathews describes seems only deepened by the speed of activity enabled and demanded by contemporary life. And so we witness the gradual disappearance of modes of being, "inefficiencies" or "irrationalities" in which different and more dialogical relations with the world might have had the space to develop, in which might have breathed more substantive ties to the non-human world which become so difficult to justify or articulate under the dominant frames of intelligibility.

Where the world assumes the intellectualized character of resource, it becomes difficult to even imagine how other ways of being could be conceivable as anything other than childishness or other impossible caricatures, or why one would even care to wonder about them. Experienced from the inside, that same deadness would seem to assume the character of a happy obliviousness, a life geared to the kind of banal modes of solipsistic enjoyment our consumerism requires of us. Herbert Marcuse's recounting of our technological society as at once cultivating an erotic disengagement from the broader landscape, *and* an intensification, localization, and valorization of the directly sexual, and other socially acceptable forms of (now subjectivized) "libidinal" fixation, might be taken as broadly consistent with this point.[46] The *ersatz* of consumerism, the thrill of speed, of racing the motor, etc., form loci of enjoyment that at once can entrench a self-focused,

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[45] I am indebted in this paragaph especially to Mathews, <u>Reinhabiting Reality</u>, 8-11, 17, 19, 35; and Martin Heidegger, <u>Poetry, Language, Thought</u> trans. by Albert Hofstadter (New York: Perennial, 2001), 122-127.
[46] Herbert Marcuse, <u>One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society</u> (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), 73-75. Freya Mathews, interestingly, offers a similar point in <u>Reinhabiting Reality</u>, 123-124.

mobilized, and unlistening comportment relative to the world – and, in the latter case, readily translate into and confirm feelings of monological and technological power over "nature", and enjoyment in that feeling. *"'We have invented happiness,' say the last men, and they blink . . ."*[47]

But in all this, I suggest that what becomes pressing is not only the need to counter or dismantle the demystifying, exclusive, and disenchanting logic of our universalism, but moreover to positively broaden and shift our own possibilities for thinking and experiencing. That is, what becomes crucial is the possibility of exploring or opening our thought through alternate languages, to redefine the parameters of possible thought, with and through which to understand, to aesthetically and affectively experience, to articulate and act in the world – for where our dominant language alone is left to hold sway, one also seems bound to come to no alternate conclusions.

1.5   On Seeking Alternate Languages

To experience modern relationships with nature as *impoverished*, and hence to experience something like the "disenchantment of the world" as *painful* and as a *crisis of relationships*, sets up a problem of re-enchantment relative to the disenchanted vantage-point. This problem, for reasons that will now be clear, is necessarily tied to a strategy of de-realizing the real, of breaking the singular hold of our dominant logics *and hence* our dominant ways of construing and relating to "nature". But, I have suggested that this might also be a question of exploring alternate languages for thinking the basic contours of existence, such as resist the very framing that allows for disenchantment as an experience, and indeed produces it as something inevitable, a mark of our maturity, and so on. It is a question of *opening alternate possible horizons, contesting and casting the terrain of coherences differently.*

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[47] Friedrich Nietzsche, "Thus Spoke Zarathustra: First Part," in <u>The Portable Nietzsche</u> trans. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin, 1968), 129.

From our starting-point here, such alternate positivities of seeing, saying, and interacting can be experienced as modes of disclosing and giving heed to the world as something much richer, in a sense more "enchanted", than our dominant modern ontology can countenance.[48] But then, in saying this, we must recognize that the entire dis/enchantment dualism, employed in the present manner, only makes sense within and relative to *the terms constitutive of the modern West*. To pursue "enchantment" seriously and in cross-cultural and cross-ontological context brings us to the point where we must necessarily see the whole terrain reconfigured. Such reconfiguration occurs in that the total referential frame of meaning undergoes expansion and change, relative to which particular contrasts and impressions, conclusions drawn, etc., must now appear differently. It is perhaps not unlike the experience of viewing a Gestalt picture: once one has seen the duck, for example, one can never quite go back to seeing only the rabbit.

Here we return to the question of defamiliarization, which in the present context must be understood as a de-realizing practice that is simultaneously argumentative and "poetic". That is, it is at once a discourse about the viability and validity of alternate coherences enabled by (in this case) relational ontologies, and a practice that opens up the sensible in alternate ways, and through altered modes of perception and interaction.[49] In this regard, I argue that learning to think relationally, and specifically from out of Indigenous relational ontologies, can be one way to disrupt the terrain whose layout secures our own disenchanted impoverishment and separation from the nonhuman world, to levy provocations relative to the fundaments of the modern constellation, and to put to question many of our accustomed and aprioristically presumed dicta in a uniquely powerful way.

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[48] In this I must emphasize again that my orientations here are strictly situated and localized. Nietzsche, it may be noted, recurrently suggested one possibility for understanding a role of philosophical and cultural critique that *does not begin from a God's-eye perspective*, from a view of singular and universal totality: namely, in terms of the work of a physician. It is fully possible, Nietzsche at some level suggests, to think diagnostically and medicinally in a strictly situated and perspectival sense, always relative to a particular vantage-point. I mean to invoke the problem of dis/enchantment here in this sort of way. See, for example, Friedrich Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil trans. By R.J. Hollingdale (New York; Penguin, 1990), at 32.

[49] This is also precisely how Jacques Rancière, who theorizes "politics" precisely as a matter of relation between multiple worlds, understands the effects opened by litigating against specific instances of exclusion by the dominant (but always irredeemably local) "distribution of the sensible". See Jacques Rancière, Disagreement, 56-58.

I take relationality and relational ontology, then, as a counterdiscourse; it is my sense that relational thinking can be enriching – can be a kind of medicine – relative to where we moderns now find ourselves. That is, it has the capacity to open ways to think that are contrastingly "richer" and also more dialogic relative to the nonhuman. But as we will see, it also does so without assuming a concept of "nature" that matches its sense in modern English – and so avoids many of the endemic pitfalls of that concept in its familiar guise.

On this point, I shall return briefly to a suggestion made earlier. That is, that many of the ways we might typically critique, resist, or open up possibilities relative to our dominant constellation nevertheless so often end up repeating precisely the constitutive gestures of that constellation. Not least, we so often end up repeating all the essential moves to land us back in our usual relationship to "nature". For this reason, our multifaceted "problem of nature" becomes especially intractable in that we find that we lack the tools for thinking-otherwise in an adequately comprehensive and fundamental way, i.e., in a way that redefines the field of coherences itself.

We see this for example in the way we might be inclined to interpret and separate out several elements within the worries detailed above and to see these as necessarily distinct, or even as calling for responses that must come into tension with one another, insofar as we retain our familiar, presumed and ontologically determined categories of intelligibility. Interpreted within the terms of our dominant ontology, I have already noted, the problem of the ontic devastation invites treatment as a managerial problem, a problem precisely *concerning nature* and *what we who stand outside of nature as its willful masters are to do with/to "it"*. The problem of the richness or paucity of modern life, on the other hand, and the experiences of ossification or cultivated deadness or stultifying rationalization that can be connected here, might be traditionally posed in terms of the problem of human freedom – which belongs to us as atomistic, willful, self-inventing, creative beings.[50]

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[50] Weber himself is exemplary in this connection: in his *Vocational* lectures, for example, our disenchanted present stands to be redeemed in some sense by way of a renewed commitment to decision, to the value-positing of the willful human subject. (From Max Weber, 126-128, 152-156.) But examples abound on this point, which ultimately only the classical story of modern freedom itself, and can generally be found

The same kind of parsing can be seen at work in the ways we often approach problems of colonialism. At some level, it is precisely the business of our dominant order to ensure that the issues involved here are (only) countable within *its* terms of intelligibility. Thus, for example, the marginalization of Indigenous peoples and culture might be made to "count" ultimately as a problem that *only* concerns the freedom or equality of other human beings. One potential implication here is that an adequate solution to everything at stake could be supposed to involve only the inclusion of excluded Indigenous peoples into the domestic order of the state and its economy, a more equitable modernization, or even through a greater "accommodation" of Indigenous concerns. Such concerns, however, nevertheless figure in this *as only another set of formally identical (monological) "claims"* over and against the backdrop of a mute nature. (In this way, "nature" is also preserved as a distinct and separate field of concern, which in turn sets up an aporetic tension between what it must mean, in the last analysis, to care about the nonhuman *qua* nature, and what it must mean to be supportive of Indigenous struggles.[51])

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wherever "politics" or "art" stands to be reclaimed as a revitalizing force under modern conditions without grappling first with the problem of ontology itself, most especially of nature and its relation to the willful human. Critiques of technological ideology by Frankfurt School thinkers tend to do much the same thing: the problem always comes down to the ossification of our own thought *and hence* the smothering of our own freedom – which is also why someone like Marcuse can recuperate a kind of Marxian technological vision where the automated satisfaction of vital needs enables an alternate and genuinely liberating modernity (One-Dimensional Man, 16). Even *Foucault* would seem caught by this problem of willful freedom: insofar as critique is understood precisely as part of an ongoing modern practice of autonomy, of the self-invention of ourselves as subjects, whereby we must understand ourselves to be the ground of our own action, the creators of contingent etc. See, e.g., Michel Foucault, "What Is Enlightenment?" in Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984: Vol. 1 ed. by Paul Rabinow, (New York: The New Press, 1997), 312-313.

[51] An *aporia* experienced in various convoluted ways, for example within the discourses of contemporary environmental politics in places like British Columbia, where the fight to preserve spaces of "wilderness" (i.e., natural spaces devoid of culture) unavoidably enters into tension with e.g., the fact of prior and longstanding Indigenous presence on the land. Bruce Willems-Braun, for example, has argued that one solution within environmental discourse has been to lump Indigenous peoples in with "nature", as people who live(d) close to it. But then, Willems-Braun himself articulates what is wrong here only by further resorting to modern/Western ontological categories and related timelines: to conflate Indigeneity and nature mandates that Indigenous peoples be "traditional" to be authentic; and thus they are trapped by the colonial discourse of environmentalism *in the past*, not permitted to be Indigenous *and* modern, to be free agents continually reinventing themselves and so on. This may be so, but then why should this singular axis of history, of tradition-modernity, and the correlate modern/Western problem of self-creative *freedom*, be taken unproblematically as the ground for articulating everything at stake here? Might a better (and, in the end, *less colonizing*) move not be to disrupt the neutrality of that very ground? C.f., Bruce Willems-Braun, "Buried Epistemologies: The Politics of Nature in (Post)colonial British Columbia," in Annals of the Association of American Geographers 87:1 (1997).

To come to the concerns I am raising here in this way, I have suggested, precisely ensures that we reproduce their generative terms, that we remain internal to a game already rigged so far as the problem of nature is concerned. For where we continue to think either the problem of nature or the problem of freedom in our accustomed, anthropocentric way, the problem of developing alternate and less dominating or anthropocentric relations with the nonhuman, remains stubbornly difficult to adequately raise. In the same way, the question of richness in contrast to the kind of cultural paucity or crises named above remains unposed as one concerning constitutive and dialogic *relationships to the nonhuman*; rather, we insist on construing the matter as a problem that can be addressed relative to the domain of the free human in atomistic isolation, the problem of positing new values, etc. And so our monological dance can but continue.

I should stress that it is not that all that is named with reference to the problem of freedom, or anything like the kinds of critical possibilities orbiting that problem for the Western tradition, should simply be abandoned or rejected altogether, that these articulate nothing of importance. For freedom as a problem grounds valuable possibilities for articulating counterprinciples, and hence making objections to a number of threatening tendencies within the modern scene (which are also not irrelevant to the problems raised here). We know these tendencies from any number of social and cultural theorists from the last hundred years: the oppressive closure of thought and imagination under the terms of late modernity, the reduction of ourselves to the kinds of people we must be to be functional job-holders and consumers in an increasingly marketized society, and so on. The problem of "freedom" enables a certain capacity to play a game of difference against that of identity, of dynamism of the self against forces of ossifying stultification, etc. It is rather that *in the ways we habitually articulate these matters*, everything remains tangled up and interpreted through a very particular set of ontological assumptions, which in turn shape the kinds of conclusions and inferences it becomes possible to draw at any point. It is my suggestion that something not unlike many of those concerns can be articulated along different and *relational* lines.

Part of what is at issue in problematizing modern ontology and thinking between ontologies, then, is the extent to which our usual ways of compartmentalizing these

problems into different ontological and "value-" spheres, into separate issues, and so on, is necessary or indeed desirable at all. While such elements may appear discrete by virtue of the (nature/culture) categories through which to think them, it will become evident through the course of this dissertation that an ethics and philosophy grounded in relationality must challenge the inevitability of any such separations. (Accordingly it will also challenge the implication that these worries can only properly be addressed through the terms of that separation, or that one must somehow pick sides in a tradeoff between caring about what can only be thought as "nature", and caring about freedom or Indigenous peoples or anyone else).

An engagement with relational ontology, in other words, allows us to see how by stubbornly insisting that our accustomed way of seeing, interpreting, and partitioning is the *only* viable way of doing so, we are apt to remain in the grip of what are effectively false problems, or rather the false assumption that anything like these matters can only ever be posed and responded to in such-and-such a (familiar) way. Thinking across ontologies has the capacity to sharpen, by way of contrast, our own abilities to recognize and defamiliarize many of our most basic assumptions that otherwise go unnoticed, *and the precise interpretive manoeuvres that underlie these.* And in this, it opens a capacity to reflect in renewed ways about the possibility of a medicine, about the kind of philosophy, the alternate truth-games and ethical practices, of which we who are moderns stand today in need.

One final point might be made here. That is, it should perhaps be emphasized that my aim here is not simply to present my readers with some sort of stark choice: are you to believe in ontology A and reject ontology B, or in ontology B and reject ontology A? This is already too Cartesian, too Hobbesian a setup insofar as it relies in the end on an act of will, and on the presumption that the logic through which the world might be engaged *must be singular.* We are presented with a set of alternatives in a manner not unlike a blackmail: *either* A *or* B; and there is no alternative but the alternative. Let us rather try to give up on thinking in blackmails, to learn to distrust the very inclination to do so, and avoid moving always so fast and along such well-worn tracks of association. Let us rather limit ourselves, for the moment, to seeing how it is possible to learn to think

and be shown something different, to discover the world from a different vantage point, through processes only awkwardly reducible to something like acts of will. The essence of defamiliarization concerns the sense in which to have sojourned through *two* ways of thinking (or more) leaves you in a different place than having only over encountered *one*; and what is important here is the *askesis*, the transformation this brings, as a phenomenon that shines forth in its own positivity.

It is a strange impulse, I think, to assume that such new and previously unthought positivities as one encounters in this way, such new coherences as one has learned to think through, must in the end be put to the singular test of one ontology's truth-games – and so that it is a mark of "higher" thinking to see these nullified, reduced to a nothingness, to illusion, etc.[52] It is a question of seeing the terrain – and the face of the world – change, and then seeing how our ethical questions accordingly appear in a different light. And even just to begin opening such a horizon, relative to the beginning-points sketched here, achieves I think a great deal.

1.6   A Note on Political Context and Situatedness

In coming to my questions in the way that I do, I am also attempting to "do theory", to ask for example the philosophical questions of ontology and ethics, in a way that strives to be responsive to the present, to *think in light of the kind of context where I find myself situated*. Thus, my reflections here arise in light of the dangers, but also the possibilities, that arise within what we might call our contemporary "conjuncture" – i.e., the present as configured by the coincidence of "cultural"/ontological structures in the ongoing encounters of colonialism.[53] In returning to many of the cultural critiques of modernity levied by thinkers like Heidegger, Nietzsche, and Weber, I am trying to

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[52] A problem that points us again in the direction of our metaphysics, and the ways in which, e.g., the Cartesian story of reality and of belief *qua* acts of will requires that we think in terms of a truth-logic of correspondence, where the alternative is presupposed to be between a singular, universal reality/being and illusion/nothingness. The challenge is accordingly to assure ourselves that we have placed our anchors, as it were, on something solid, where so much is unreliable and deceptive. But to my mind there are alternatives to this kind of setup, as I will hope to show in the following.

[53] In my use of "conjuncture" here I am drawing directly on its inflection by Mario Blaser in "Political Ontologies," though the term most directly recalls the work of Marshall Sahlins. See Marshall Sahlins, Islands of History (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), introduction.

(re)think many of their provocations in light of openings, but also contextual circumstances that they did not experience in the same way. Our current and deepening ecological crisis is one example of these circumstances, but another is the social and political dynamics of settler colonialism and Euro-Indigenous relations within the Americas. These matters are not as separate as we might think even under conventional terms, since the dynamics of colonialism are indissociable from the universalizing spread of modern relationships to nature (as expressed in capitalism and associated legal, social and political structures, for example). Such contexts colour my reflections on the Western tradition in obvious ways, but they are also at some level what makes it possible for me to engage Indigenous American philosophical traditions at all and in the way I do. In that settler-colonialism (as experienced for example in Canada, where I live) forms an implicit psycho-social and political backdrop to this dissertation, it will perhaps be worth a few words here to elaborate on the way I understand my present inquiry to be situated relative to that backdrop and its dominant logics, and hence to offer response to it.

On the one hand, my aim here is precisely to explore possibilities for renewed self-reflection and philosophical thought in ways that occur within and through a particular political scenario – which is to say, one marked by the co-presence of multiple and disagreeing ontologies – and the kinds of possible interrelations this gives rise to. But to do this, and to attempt to think in a more open, non-colonizing, non-hierarchical, and cross-cultural way within such a context is on the other hand to resist and counter specific and dominant logics that *do* continually insist upon such colonizing, hierarchical relations. This problem lies especially close to my subject matter here; for the problem of nature, its singular universality, and our monological nature/culture relations *is precisely* a central pillar of the legitimating stories and logics of the modern (colonial) state, and the kinds of codifcations and self-understandings it entrenches. Or rather: the latter are precisely political expressions of where one ends up when the ground is prepared by our modern ontological settlement and related philosophical developments. The logic of the blackmail proposed by Descartes or Hobbes is also none other than that continually operative within the logics of the modern, sovereign state itself.

For indeed: one could say that the logic of modern sovereignty is nothing other than the dominant and politically authoritative articulation of the appropriate relation between Western/modern and all other possible modes of thinking and being – and those of the Indigenous peoples it has worked to supplant, not least. Though I can elaborate only briefly on the matter here, modern state sovereignty is enacted in and through practices of demarcation between the inside and the outside, between the modern and the primitive in such a way as to produce both spatial and temporal delimitations expressive of the philosophical problems constitutive of the modern itself.[54] On the one hand, what is enabled on the inside is nothing other than our classical story of modern freedom, and the authoring of laws that make it possible to balance our freedom with equality within the domestic space of the state, to cultivate the kind of rational maturity proper to us as human beings, and so on. But what is moreover authorized here, and enforced within lived situations internal to the spatiotemporal self-framing of the state, is precisely the singular terms of our modern ontology itself, and its nature/culture relation. In this sense, sovereignty politically grounds the sighting of the nonhuman and the land within the frame of nature: as mute territory claimed for (willful) dominion, as natural resources or wealth belonging to the nation, as a physical expanse chartable in the mathematized universal space of the map, and so on – a point that has been of no small significance for the specific dynamics of modern settler-colonialism.[55] In the next chapter, I will show more fully the ways in which our political and social codifications express a monological relationship and ontology, and the ways our stories of freedom and so on are inseparable from our concept of nature.

On the other hand, what are excluded here are not only all other possible worlds, but moreover the kinds of pre-existing jurisdictional relationships that other peoples had and continue to have with the land, which express such alternate ontologies within the space of everyday social life and interaction. This exclusion precisely takes the form, *within the dominant logic of sovereignty itself,* of a blackmail. We find the general stakes

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[54] For a more thorough exploration of this point, see R.B.J. Walker, <u>After the Globe, Before the World</u> (New York: Routledge, 2010), generally, as well as Karena Shaw, <u>Indigeneity and Political Theory: Sovereignty and the Limits of the Political</u> (New York: Routledge, 2008).

[55] For a good study of the ways this has been the case in the history of colonialism in British Columbia, where I live, see Bruce Willems-Braun, "Buried Epistemologies," and also Daniel Wright Clayton, <u>Islands of Truth: The Imperial Fashioning of Vancouver Island</u> (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000).

of the problem expressed in Thomas Hobbes: *either* one must draw the sharp lines of the state, and have security, certainty, and so on, after the modern manner – *or* one must have *effectively nothing* that is thinkable or habitable, a life of insecurity, uncertainty, hopeless ephemerality, brutishness.[56] And in this, Hobbes does but offer a political correlate of Descartes: either one has certain knowledge built on new, solid foundations, and hence a grip on *reality*, or one is lost to the abyss of error *qua* non-being. And where one does not speak with certainty, one should keep *silent*.

Writing that blackmail into the space of lived situations, the Hobbesian story of sovereignty is none other than that of leaving behind all the disqualified lifeways and traditions, everything we will now dismiss as "fairy stories" – of leaving the insecurity and the unruly multiplicity (and its alternate narratives and timelines and struggles) *back then*. One draws the lines for a new beginning, and clears away what came before. It is on the basis of this enabling condition that sovereignty is then able to authorize a new domesticity, within which the singular law of the state can now reign exclusively, can hold extensively and intensively within its bounds, can grant the terms which now structure everyday life. Played out in the context of colonialism, we see that sovereignty is asserted, and the State assumes the monopoly on violence, the authority to parcel out the land, to give laws. In principle, what came before was *terra nullius*, or needs now in any event to be regarded as such, forgotten.[57]

Hobbes (and so many others like him) of course caricaturizes his outsides, rendering them into unthinkable and unlivable absurdities, projections constituted through dualisms that always favor the modern West[58] – but in the end, so the logic goes,

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[56] See Thomas Hobbes, <u>Leviathan</u> ed. by Richard Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), esp, 88-89.

[57] Of course, this basic logic becomes more complicated once the principle of *terra nullius* is disavowed in law; but it is not for this reason undone, insofar as the prior grounding of the State's sovereign authority can never itself come under question within the law itself. Thus even a relatively sympathetic Supreme Court of Canada decision like the appeal in *Delgamuukw* maintains , (and in principle must maintain) that the central problem for us today must be one of reconciling "the prior presence of aboriginal peoples with the assertion of Crown sovereignty". See *Delgamuukw v. British Columbia***,** [1997] 3 S.C.R. 1010, at 9. For a history of the *terra nullius* concept within Canadian jurisprudence, see Michael Asch, "From Terra Nullius to Affirmation: Reconciling Aboriginal Rights with the Canadian Constitution," in <u>The Canadian Journal of Law and Society</u> 17:2 (2002).

[58] E.g., between the "state of nature" and the state of the commonwealth and social compact; transience and insecurity against stable security, ignorance and unworkable multiplicity as against solidly founded

it hardly matters. What matters instead is that we get on with it, on with the singular history that counts and has universal significance: i.e., that of the state, of modernization as the route to maturity, to living the way that is properly ours as human beings.[59] Disrupt *that* logic, and its unification of authority – and one has chaos.

Within the temporality of the state, Indigenous peoples in principle come to appear as anachronistic hangovers, as holdouts on the magic moment of sovereignty and hence as those who refuse to play *the* meaningful collective game. A particular framing of temporality justifies a host of exceptional violences: the future must be modernity, must be the temporality of the state and its society; *ergo*, one can draw all the obvious (and grotesque) conclusions concerning what is to be done in the present.[60] It is hardly surprising in this context that Indigenous peoples come to be viewed as an "Indian Problem" to be solved – through genocide, through "civilizing" missions of one sort or another, through the eventual assimilation of Indigenous peoples into the modern body politic. *Kill the Indian, save the man*. All this is of course eminently familiar; where I live, these same self-legitimating stories are repeated now much as they were at the beginnings of the colonial period, with apparently little variation. And then as now, such stories would seem to serve above all as self-righteous apologetics for a culture of tremendous violence and callous thoughtlessness, of seething resentment towards difference, to a steadfast closure of the mind against anything Indigenous peoples might have to say.

But then, here is the rub: as a statement of how things *are*, the stories of the state are always engaged in doing actively political work within a much less settled terrain, reaffirming altogether contestable divisions and distinctions, rigging all subsequent conversation in their favor. For in different but widespread ways, alternate forms of law,

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knowledge, agreed definitions, a life based on illusory fairy stories or one based on reality – in Hobbes case, this means being grounded in a mechanistic natural philosophy that already sets up distinctly modern existential problems. See, on this point and for the passages relevant to the rest of this paragraph, the first ten chapters or so of <u>Leviathan</u>.

[59] For a good expression of this problematic of forgetting in the Hobbesian story of sovereignty, see Michel Foucault, <u>Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France 1975-1976</u> trans. by David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), 90-103.

[60] This temporality, it may be noted, is also precisely consonant with the way moderns come to structure their political imagination in terms of the "new", the coming and shifted horizons that can only have passed *through* the terms of modernity, and so on.

alternate relations to the land, alternate philosophical traditions, and so on, continue to persist not least within the colonial spaces of the Americas – to take but one example. Witness the way Indigenous nations have continued to oppose unilateral claims to the land on the part of the state (and, subsequently, capital): what is at issue is at one level the very validity of the state's initial claim, its unilateral sovereign moment.[61] This opposition concerns, moreover, the validity of presuming *at bottom* a singular, modern/Western, ontological-political field. For what one encounters in many of the sayings of Indigenous peoples to the settler state is rather a form of disagreement presented by alternate and co-existing ontologies – and the kinds of overlapping jurisdictional relationships these inform and give rise to.[62]

This dissertation attempts to think within the relational and interactive space constituted by this contested terrain. At a basic level, it begins with a refusal of the above forms of blackmail and its associated projections of temporality. It is an attempt rather to acknowledge that there is a great deal more going on than Hobbes might like us to admit, and indeed to show that there are a great many enriching possibilities for thinking that might be explored when one does not begin by accepting his terms and alternatives. Rather than repeat the assumption of a singular linear temporality, sweeping us all *through* modernity and to futures meaningfully articulable only *from out of modern terms*, and a related fixation with new future*s* *we* might invent *for ourselves*, I am inclined more to listen to *what else is already here*. For "already here" is capable of levying provocations more fundamental, and also more meaningfully "otherwise" than

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[61] The sovereign moment and hence the absolute and unilateral power of the state within its claimed territory has, in much of Canada, for example been challenged by (re)assertions of the treaty relation. The challenge consists in the fact that one signs treaties not with an empty *terra nullius*, nor with an uncivilized pre-political people, nor with domestic citizenry: treaties rather are signed *between nations* that recognize each other sufficiently as such. In this sense the assertion of the treaty relationship provides one route for challenging the logic of *terra nullius* and its associated unilateralism in a way that is intelligible even *within* the terms of Canadian state law, and of continuing to assert a continued and independent status and relation of "claim" to the land. (Though we must also be careful here, inasmuch as the very notion of *claim* would seem to imply a kind of nominalist position already favorable to the logic of the state and reproducing of modern ontological premises; I do not think that the Indigenous point of view and set of relationships are sufficiently expressed by that term.)

[62] See, for example, the eloquent opening pages of Gisday Wa and Delgam Uukw, <u>The Spirit in the Land: The Opening Statement of the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en Hereditary Chiefs in the Supreme Court of British Columbia 1987-1990</u> (Gabriola, BC: Reflections, 1992); but one might also gesture here in a general way to recent articulations made in contestation of the proposed Enbridge Northern Gateway pipeline, broader discourses circulating in connection with the "Idle No More" movement, and so on.

many more familiar ways of disputing the dominant terms of our present. An ethics of listening and respect, then, as a counter to colonizing and blackmail logics; an attempt to open oneself to learning where Hobbes would tell us nothing at all can be learned; and a recognition that the differences we traverse in this way extend to the very fundamentals of our thinking, and are capable of growing our thought *beginning at that level*.

Of course, there is a sense in which those of us who inhabit the colonial spaces of the Americas are already claimed and interpellated by the structures of modern thought and politics, and by Hobbes, in ways that are not easily shrugged off. At the same time, however, we can see that the question as to whether a less banal and impoverished way of being might be possible today is far from being only a question individual thinkers must be called to tackle for themselves, but is instead one that is very much alive in the present context of our colonial politics. This poses the problem of calibrating our ethical/philosophical work with political action. In this respect, the kind of theoretical work done here can in a sense only be preparatory for more direct political and interactive engagements, to the work of disrupting colonial logics, decolonizing settler-Indigenous relations, etc., more broadly and within the specific places we live.

My theoretical work here nevertheless aims to be meaningful as at least a partial response to the political scenario and logics of subjugation described above, not least in insisting upon redefining the onto-political space in which we move. For the ordinary functioning of everyday life under the singular onto-political field of modernity hangs upon and continually reinforces our particular, dominant accounting of reality, a particular partitioning of what is sayable, visible, sensible, and so on. The game of sovereignty, and the finality of its "magic moment" of self-authored new beginnings, in this sense follows us wherever we go, calling for continual reproduction in concrete and daily practices and interactions. To begin to resist the kinds of exclusionary logics that render Indigenous thinking as pre-modern "noise" rather than viable discourse, to disrupt the terrain of the real through a kind of defamiliarizing philosophical litigation that argues the equal viability of Indigenous relational ontologies[63]: it is my hope that this kind of work will contribute to the cultivation of ameliorated and transformed relationships of

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[63] See, for example, Rancière, <u>Disagreement</u>, 26-31.

settlers with Indigenous peoples. Jacques Rancière has suggested that any politics challenging a concrete exclusion of alternate worlds within the space of our dominant world, must involve "first and foremost an intervention upon the visible and the sayable."[64] The appropriate political concern and endeavour, in this sense, concerns above all a modification of the political, ontological, and aesthetic field of possibility. That is, one must begin by breaking open the face of the world, and the symbolic armor by which our dominant order continually reaffirms itself and its false peace of mind. And if the arguments of this dissertation hold, we will also see how engaging and working in support of Indigenous political struggles can not only be a logical extension of caring about/rethinking *our* nature-self relations, but also a means of actualizing this possibility politically.

It is crucial to note that better relationships here are unlikely to develop without those of us who are settlers doing serious reflexive, critical, and transformative work on ourselves. Such work is also unlikely to happen where the pride and world-historical self-importance of settler society is permitted to persist undisturbed: for this pride also presumes to make the exclusionary violence done to Indigenous peoples into perhaps regrettable but *necessary violence* if we are all to better our ways of life, to carry ourselves up the historical climb of progress. And this dissertation will have a great deal to say to such pride.

As a work of theory, this dissertation is concerned primarily with cross-cultural thinking as an ethical and philosophical practice – that is, it is invested in the work of thought and in the kinds of disruptions and transformations of the self, the world, and our relations therein, that this can enable. It is written from, and speaks largely relative to, a particular vantage-point and position within the settler-colonial relation. But I am convinced that such an orientation can do important work. For responding to the demands of our present in a decolonizing way, I think, cannot simply be a matter of withdrawing into ourselves so that other – marginalized –voices may speak; for there is a sense in which this can also be a way of learning nothing and changing nothing in ourselves. One listens for a moment, perhaps, and then goes back to whatever one was doing; for one has

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[64] Rancière, "Ten Theses on Politics," Thesis Seven.

not come to any serious alternative for oneself in the process. But we must always and unavoidably *be* thinkers in our own right, must meet the fate of the times with the tools and the stories that we have; and so we cannot give up on the value of our own thought, and of thinking differently.

At some level, the endeavor here is to ask what alternate pathways might be opened if, instead of regarding our being-together as settlers with Indigenous peoples in the Americas as a problem to be "solved", an inconvenience with regard to our unilateral (and monological) aims, etc., we might instead begin to ask *what might we instead learn* insofar as everything is *not* so sewn-up*?* How might we begin bettering, working on, transforming *ourselves* within such a context? If the problem I have delineated brings us to appreciate the value, even with regard to ourselves, of a strategy of de-realizing the real, then we might ask: can we do this in a way that is rooted in, responsive to, and that draws upon the faultlines and the more "actual" possibilities of our present conjuncture and lived political terrain? And indeed, I argue that we stand to learn a great deal from Indigenous relational ontologies – from the ways these invite us to apprehend and struggle with many of the impoverishments that haunt us through our dominant lifeways, and to explore alternate possibilities.

1.7   Conclusion

In this chapter, then, I have introduced the general problem and task of this dissertation: namely, an attempt to defamiliarize how we moderns tend to think about ourselves in the world and most especially in relation to the non-human, and to explore how listening seriously to Indigenous traditions of thought can open up alternate possibilities in this regard.

Before we can pursue that task cross-culturally, however, it will be necessary to clarify a little further our starting-point. That is: the precise nature of our dominant, modern ontological constellation, the ways this brings us to understand and relate to "nature" in the ways we do, and the kinds of ethical, socio-political, etc., problematics this comes in turn to delineate. How *precisely* might we understand the kinds of relations

described by terms like *monological* or *willful mastery* to be characteristic of our modern scene? Let me turn now to elaborate on this point.

Chapter 2

2   On the Nature of Western Modernity

This chapter has two broad aims. The first is to establish, with greater clarity and detail, something of the accrued meaning of "nature" within the dominant strains of Western thought, its role within the modern ontological constellation, and the ethical/comportmental horizons that can be seen to consequently arise and predominate. This provides a basis for comparison on the "Western", modern side of things when we turn to consider different Indigenous traditions of thought in the next chapter. It will also allow me to more fully substantiate my characterizations of the modern *modus operandi* as monological, anthropocentric, "technological" in Heidegger's sense, rooted in a story of the will and a consequent *ethos* of domination, and so on.

To this end, I will touch on four interrelated "events" of significance in the provenance of our contemporary scene and our dominant ways of understanding ourselves, "nature", and what relations with the nonhuman we take to be viable. These are: i) the philosophical emergence of the modern subject, as we see most notably in Descartes; ii) the development of a distinctly modern mathematical view of nature, as distinguished from the neo-Aristotelianism that preceded it, and the connected development of what we might call the modern technoscientific ethos; iii) the emergence of certain understandings of politics as exemplified/expressed by the modern sovereign state, which bears an essential relationship both to the theory of the subject (and its understanding of human selfhood and freedom), and the modern view of nature; and iv) the emergence of distinctly modern understandings of ownership or property, which offer expression (as enforceable codifications of social relations concerning extant beings) of the modern monological and technological relationship to the nonhuman *qua* "nature". And they at once enable, underlie, and legitimate the emergence and spread of contemporary capitalist forms of economy, and associated practices land use, processes of commodification, and so on.

My second aim here is to show that the above events transpire, on the one hand, within a philosophical field of possibility that is established by particular ontological resolutions and presuppositions. On the other hand, I try to show some of the ways in which this ontology is informed by distinctive *theological* and *cosmological* interpretations. In other words, I try to establish that modern thinking – and our distinctive ways of construing ourselves and relating to nature – emerges from, carries forward, and indeed retains its full persuasive force within a particular and decisively *Christian interpretation of the world*.

I elaborate some of my reasons for making this claim, and the lessons I mean to draw from it, in the last section of this chapter. Not least in significance here is that tracing our ontology to its theological roots allows us to appreciate to a greater depth many of the fundamental interpretive manoeuvres characteristic of our contemporary tradition. This allows us to reflect more adequately on what is ultimately at stake in many of the basic philosophical points on which we find that Indigenous traditions of thought tend to differ from ours. But it also opens up another line of questioning, which hearkens to Nietzsche: that is, we can begin to ask about *what is at stake* in these basic interpretive manoeuvres, about the kinds of evaluative or "moral" orientations relative to worldly existence that are operative here, and so often unproblematically pushed forward in neutralized terms.

Focusing on the events I do, much of this chapter will find itself drawn back to thinkers the early modern period (though indeed, within these are notions that send us further back still in the history of Western thought). My aim here, however, cannot be to give a comprehensive history of modern thought. Neither is it to suggest that nothing of significance for our self-conception and relations to nature has occurred since early modernity – which would be patently untrue. But an event, as I understand it, is important in that it somehow crystallizes a shift, sets the terms and a field of possibility for much that comes afterwards, to which that "afterwards" must find itself responding. This is not least because such developments often come to be expressed/codified in law, in structures of authority and socio-political order, and so on. But events are fruitful for us to explore because they allow us to see more clearly what was at stake in first

establishing elements of the terrain we later take for granted. It is not necessary to assume that nothing of importance happens after Descartes or Bacon. But I have elected to discuss these because I think we can recognize more clearly in them much that continues to hold sway in our own thinking, that in one way or another remains preserved even in the wake of more recent developments.

With this in mind, let us now turn to the first development under discussion: the event of the modern subject.

2.1   Of Subjects and Objects

Much that is essential in distinctly modern modes of understanding and relating to the world and the nonhuman is expressed in what we might call the philosophical event of the modern subject. Of course, this suggestion is nothing new; it is the thrust of Heidegger's argument when he describes the modern age as unique in that the world emerges therein as a kind of "world picture" for and before human beings. "Man becomes that being upon which all that is, is grounded as regards the manner of its Being and its truth."[1] And this shift, we well know, is bound up with particular ways of coming to apprehend and interact with what we think of as the world "out there"; and much that is at stake here is laid out in the epistemological project that Descartes situates at the beginning-point of all that can be said. My own intention in the first part of this section is on the one hand to review a few of the central characteristics of this philosophical development and indicate some of the ethical and relational consequences that can be seen to arise from it. On the other hand, it is to show how this development, for all its purporting to begin everything anew in self-consciously erecting new epistemological foundations, nevertheless entrenches a very particular and presupposed ontology, crucial features of which are hardly new at all.

Many aspects of this ontology, indeed, have longstanding roots in the Western tradition, and can be traced back as far as the Greeks if we have a mind to do so (not least, in a commitment to an atomistic ontology, to the investigation of beings in

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[1] Heidegger, The Question Concerning Technology, 128.

accordance with the principle that identity belongs to being, and so on – even though changes in the precise nature of this atomism do occur from Greek to modern thought). But much that is distinctive, and distinctively *modern* in the ontology presented by our subjectivism can moreover be seen to derive from Christian theological sources – and in the second part of this section, I will indicate briefly some of the ways this is so.

The classic philosophical point of reference here, it has already been noted, is René Descartes. In Heidegger's gloss, it is here that we see the pure thought of the human "I think" come to stand as *subjectum*, as the aprioristic that-which-lies-before upon which can be grounded our certainty concerning the reality of anything at all, and relative to which we are then in a position to establish certainty concerning the external world.[2] But this whole movement begins with a process of withdrawing from that "external" world in radical doubt, from which the self-certainty of the *cogito ergo sum* is to rescue us: I must first pretend that everything I think I know or that has ever "entered my mind" is an illusion, a deception of the senses, a falsity. This doubt enacts a methodological principle (and the question of truth here becomes above all a question of method): "that I should withhold my assent no less carefully from things which are not plainly certain and indubitable than I would to what is patently false."[3]

We already begin here, it will be noted, with a presumed atomism: that it is possible for the self to withdraw itself from its engagements in the world of sense, and then apprehend itself in its own self-shining indubitability. The being-ness of existing as a thing here is grounded in the notion of *substance*, from which it is possible to speak of particular substances in an atomistic sense – for example, I think therefore I am; and this means, *I am a thinking thing*. Descartes moreover introduces, as a modulation of this atomism, a particular distinction between body and mind in the differentiation between the *res cogitans* (which the self-thinking mind is), and the *res extensa* (of bodily things within the *material* world).[4]

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[2] Heidegger, The Question Concerning Technology, 148-153.
[3] René Descartes, Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy, trans. by Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1986), 17, 57.
[4] Ibid, 63-64.

This atomism is inflected through a metaphysical view of the self as a being that has within it a will, an internal and autonomously spontaneous organ of efficient causality – such that the human being can be understood to be the ground and author of his or her own action. We see in Descartes that the whole meditation running through self-withdrawn doubt to new foundations hangs on the possibility of acts of will, with the understanding that my will's action lies anterior to the thinking I do and possesses the power of assent or denial. Knowledge concerns judgment, and the will grounds my capacity, independently and for myself, to suspend *my belief* in things in the sense of withholding my assent from propositions that make judgments whose truth I cannot be certain about. To remain in error, to believe in things I am not certain about, is thus no less than to eschew the proper use of my freedom – and, knowing that we are free in this, we also know precisely who is to blame.[5] In this way, the foundationalist and self-reflexive manoeuvre of the *dubito* comes to place problems of knowledge close to the heart of modern construals of maturity and self-responsibility[6], and indeed sets up a certain opposition between a modern self-liberating attitude as against (a particular construal of) a "traditional" one.

This ontological separation of the self from the world, which ensures that the essence of the self is most properly located in the soul *qua* thinking thing, makes possible the drawing of an *epistemological* line between the self and nature. (This self-location in the soul occurs even though it is clear that we are, in this life, a mixture of body and mind. The latter forms a privileged locus for the self in a way that the body does not: which is why if we can ground ourselves in the *cogito*, this process is able to rid of us our fear of death insofar as the soul is shown to be immortal and independent of the body.[7]) There can be no longer the real adequation of intellect and thing characteristic of medieval realism.[8] The important questions come to center around the relationship

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[5] See René Descartes, Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy trans. by Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1986), 82-84 (fourth *Meditation*).

[6] For an excellent elaboration of this question of self-responsibility, see Charles Taylor, "Overcoming Epistemology," in Philosophical Arguments (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 1-19.

[7] Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy, 32.

[8] Not least because the extended world is now reduced to matter. Aristotelian epistemology had understood that things *were themselves* enmattered essences, i.e., a conjunction of matter and intelligible form, and that in knowing something, the mind becomes identical with what is thinkable (i.e., the form) within its object (Aristotle, *De Anima*, Bk III, Ch. 3, at 15). But it is notable that this epistemological closing-off of the

between what we experience as representations that are in some sense ours "in here", and what is *really* "out there" – a relationship structured in term of truth as *correspondence*.[9]

These manoeuvres are of no small consequence for modern thought and the worldly relations it delineates. Beginning with the problem of us and *our self-certainty* enables an experience of ourselves as independently and autonomously freed to ourselves, self-responsible for setting up the criteria of knowledge, thrust into the center of our worldly stage. Though Descartes will still require God explicitly in his reasoning, he nevertheless sets the terms by which we experience ourselves as left to ourselves in our finitude, cut off from God as much as from nature. (We see this rift deepened with Kant, for whom e.g., God's providence, the idea of a universal law, etc., become precisely *regulative ideas of our reason*: which Nietzsche will eventually call *values*.) And in this independence, we also experience what Heidegger called our "secret goad", which prompts us to secure the full development of the "manifold modes of modern [read, human] freedom."[10]

Furthermore, we might note briefly that the Cartesian manoeuvre is also bound up with grounding a certain way of coming to knowledge concerning the world it takes as being "out there", i.e., a world of material objects. That is, it is bound up with a specific kind of mathematical project – in the broad philosophical sense of the Greek *mathesis*, as determining what is knowable about beings. ("The mathematical" in the more common sense of the numerical is in this sense only a particular and exemplary instance of *mathesis* – though it is precisely one that, as it happens, comes to be privileged in modern thought as a language especially appropriate for the scientific knowledge of nature).[11] To explore this point much further would anticipate too much the next section of this chapter. But it is worth noting simply how Descartes' privileged language for thinking

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human being within his finitude and reflexive self-responsibility marks a change in the relationship between thinker and world. Previously, Aristotelian thought had left the thinker open onto an intelligible world in a way the Cartesian manoeuvre now precludes.

[9] We can see again the atomism here, on both sides of the inner/outer divide, as well as enabling that divide as such – since we are asking about the reality of something presumably subsisting out there by itself.

[10] Martin Heidegger, <u>Nietzsche: Vol. IV: Nihilism</u> trans. by Frank A. Capuzzi (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), 98-99.

[11] C.f., Martin Heidegger, <u>Basic Writings</u> ed. by David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper Collins, 1993), 275.

what is learnable about beings expresses a particular hierarchy of body and mind. For it belongs to mind, and not the mind/body composite, to know; and, indeed, the presence of the bodily within us is but another way of describing our finitude, our peculiar capacity for being duped by the senses. Given that I experience things in a muddled way *as* a composite, how am I to speak with confidence about the reality of material beings? The solution favoured by Descartes, and many other Western thinkers since the seventeenth century, has been to establish a distinction between primary and secondary qualities.

Though at some level we can see here an iteration of the longstanding philosophical theme of the relationship between the intelligible and the sensory, the precise configuration involved is specific to the modern framework. Primary qualities can be understood as determinable characteristics which can be recognized as belonging to all matter, and which delineate the formal structure relative to which the operation of universal causal laws can be apprehended.[12] For Descartes, these supply a more solid language for viable knowledge of physical reality because they correspond to the rational intuitions of the mind[13] and can be derived from the first principles that ground the self-certainty of the *cogito* (i.e., they are simple, clear, and distinct). Primary qualities can accordingly be separated out from those qualities we understand objects to have in everyday consciousness which, in their simple form, arise from sensory experience.[14] "The task of drawing up a list of primary qualities," one author on the subject has written, "is not dissociable from the project of specifying the single fundamental essence or nature of materiality."[15] On this point I can offer no objection; but then it is also vital to see that this particular project encodes and expresses a particular construal of body and

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[12] A.D. Smith, "Of Primary and Secondary Qualities," in <u>The Philosophical Review</u> 99:2 (Apr. 1990), 232-233. This article is also especially helpful in itself expressing the logics by which this distinction is able to remain compelling today, as structuring *the* way to think about reality. "The majority of philosophers today, at least in the 'Analytical Tradition'," the author writes, "would endorse a distinction between primary and secondary qualities." (221)

[13] The primary qualities named by Descartes are: "magnitude, or extension in length, breadth, and depth; shape, which arises from the limit of this extension; position, which the various shaped things possess in relation to one another; and motion, or the alteration of this position; to these can be added substance, duration, and number." (<u>Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy</u>, 72-73.)

[14] The secondary qualities for Descartes are "light and colors, sounds, odors, tastes, heat and cold and other tactile qualities – [which] are thought . . . only in a very confused and obscure manner, with the result that I do not know whether they are true or false." Do these belong to things as they really are, or do they stem from me in my bodily experience of them? Does something real cause these sensations to arise? (Ibid, 73.)

[15] Smith, "Of Primary and Secondary Qualities," 233.

mind and their appropriate relation within the terms of how we think about problems of knowledge.

In the foregoing, then, I have tried to explore some of the basic contours of the complex and multifaceted event of the modern subject in our philosophical tradition. Some of the factors that I have touched upon here, that become central in structuring our subsequent sense of being in the world, and the horizon of our dominant modes of apprehending/relating to "nature", include: i) an ontological atomism; ii) a conception of the self as willful; iii) a framing of problems of knowledge in terms of a correspondence between "in here" and "out there", i.e., in terms of an ontological terrain laid first by our atomism.

To this we might add two further points. The first is simply that the problem of the real is framed here in terms of an ontological alternative between being and non-being. For the problem with illusion and error is that it is precisely *not real*, i.e., it does not anchor us in what is in being, but rather partakes in nothingness. The second point here is simply that the problem of reality and certain knowledge here is posed from the beginning in a universal way. On the one hand, this universalism is evinced in the way the problem is posed relative to our possibilities and faculties as a universal class of beings – in terms of the question of how it is that human beings may have (certain) knowledge, *as such*. Here again we see a certain species of atomism: we start by imagining ourselves as fixed and bounded, stable and subsisting entities, which can then be understood to be necessarily endowed with certain capacities or faculties such as free will, and presuming that all human beings as a class are created in this same way. (The Christian notion that humans as beings are created in the image of God, and must be understood universally in that way relative to the universal optics of God, is not difficult to tease out here.) On the other hand, we can see how there is a universalism here in the way we think about reality as such: namely, that there is *one* – a singular, universal nature.

But if the way we thus think the subject, and reality, only makes sense in this way given that we first presuppose a particular ontology, we might well ask: how does such an

ontology arise? How did we come to think this way, to understand that *these* are the basic contours and problems our thought must be shaped by?

1.1.1 Theological Contours (I)

The answer I think we must offer to the above question is that the ontology presumed by Descartes, and that continues to live thereafter in modern subjectivism, is not dissociable from a specific theological and cosmological heritage – namely, that of Christianity. Tracing the provenance of this heritage brings us to sojourn in the domain of Medieval thought, and the lengthy effort by Patristic and subsequent philosophers to articulate and defend Christian doctrine within the language of Greek metaphysics, and eventually to purge the latter of its identifiably pagan elements. Let us try to see briefly some of the ways this is the case.

We might begin for example with the very set-up of the structuring problem of being/reality and non-being as such. It is the Christian doctrine of Creation, for example, that first leads us in a newly radical way to pose the question of the existence of the world, which as existing must be rationally created, between the alternatives of being and *nothingness* or non-being. For ancient Greeks like Plato or Aristotle, the world was not created *ex nihilo* but as produced or fabricated through the mixing of principles that are themselves eternal. Plato's demiurge in the *Timaeus*, for example, *creates* neither matter nor form, but only brings these together in the crafting of things; for Aristotle, similarly, the world is eternal and uncreated. Accordingly, the problem of knowing tended to be thought more in terms of ascertaining the principles according to which nature as *physis* was self-showing, according to which beings emerged or shone forth as what they were, and passed away.

The Christian doctrine of Creation shifts the matter so as to introduce precisely such a radical contingency into the heart of beings, such as makes the existence of things hang absolutely upon the creative and preserving power of God's will.[16] And it is

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[16] In other words, "Not only does it remain true to say that all that is, save God, might be other than it is, but it now becomes true to say that all save God might possibly not exist." By contrast, Plato's Demiurge,

precisely this cosmological alternative that would seem to frame the Cartesian imaginary: how can I be sure that I remain anchored in what is in being, and which as existing must be an expression of the omnipotent rational activity and coherence of God's intellect, which I must attempt to recapitulate within myself so far as my finitude will allow? If error or illusion is a form of sin for Descartes, it is precisely because this is an epistemological iteration of the way sin has been figured in the Christian metaphysical tradition at least since Augustine: as prideful turning away from God towards the material, as rebellion against God.[17]

Why and how does Descartes come to imagine the problem of *reality*, and hence the whole construal of knowledge as a problem, as he does – i.e., as relative to a reality that is universal, singular, bound up with a mind/body problem, and so on? Once again, this is a problem experienced and delineated in the wake of Christian thought and its interpretive requirements. It is not only that posing the problem of truth in terms of certainty has its precedent in the Medieval search for certainty concerning individual salvation, and in the way God as what is most real/in being is able to anchor the possibility of certainty *qua* absolute truth held in God's infinite intellect, the *logos* that grounds and determines all things.[18] Moreover, the problem of reality as structured by a singular, universalistic logic, is something that Descartes is able to arrive at by virtue of Christian onto-theo-cosmologically-determined dicta. His invocation of the old Christian image of the "great book of the world,"[19] for example, is no mere fanciful turn of phrase.[20]

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for example, "endows the universe with everything except, precisely, existence." Etienne Gilson, <u>The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy</u> trans. by A.H.C. Downes (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), 68.

[17] See, e.g., Augustine of Hippo, <u>Confessions</u> trans. by Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 27.

[18] C.f., Martin Heidegger, <u>The End of Philosophy</u> trans. by Joan Stambaugh (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 20-25.

[19] Descartes, <u>Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy</u>, at 5.

[20] It is not that there can be no alternative construal of things relative to distinctively Christian problems, or that it is impossible to offer alternate logics that subvert the Cartesian logic on crucial points within the possibilities of Christianized thought. Though proving this point here would take us too far afield, one might for example mention Spinoza, or Heidegger, as delineating markedly different ways of approaching the problem of the real – though both nevertheless continue to work in crucial ways *within the domain and the space opened by Christian thought*. For there are of course numerous and often conflicting philosophical strains that have come to in one way or another be Christianized, or to speak within Christian terms; and not all of these lead us where Descartes would have us go. See my discussion below on the

To understand what is involved here, it is necessary to see that what is presupposed from the beginning is an *ontological gap* or difference between God and Man: we are in our essence finite, imperfect, a composite mixture of body and mind, *not self-causing but dependant on God for our existence* – as against the infinite and eternal perfection, the infinite will and intellect of God the Creator who is Spirit and who is *self-causing*. The old Anselmian proof that God is a being whose essence implies existence – that He is a being who cannot not be since to exist is more perfect than to not exist – in Descartes sets Him resolutely apart from us who could very well not be but for the will of God.[21] The beginning context here is one of *equivocity*, or difference in substance between a transcendent God and the materialized and Creaturely. This equivocity, however, frames a *universal* logic.[22]

Where everything hangs for its existence on a Creator who is omnipotent and rational, we also know that nothing that exists can lie outside of God's plan, that everything is ordered by reason. Because that plan is anchored in the infinite knowing of a transcendent God, the standard Christian problem here lies in navigating the inevitable gap between God's perfect understanding and our own. In this, the Cartesian logic presumes a singular and unified being-true for what is in its intelligibility – precisely, a uni-verse: if we take "versal" in the sense of a logical "turning" of the Word of God from

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Heideggerian analytic of worlds as *one* alternative way of thinking that, while continuing to accept a basic orientation towards "being" and to the God's-eye question of the transcendental conditions of existence (and hence to respond to questions that can be traced to a Christian heritage), nevertheless offers a profound refutation of the Cartesian logic.

[21] Ibid, 75. It is also worth quoting from René Descartes, <u>Selections from the Principles of Philosophy</u> trans. by John Veitch (Pennsylvania State University, 2007), at 41 (L1): "By substance we can conceive nothing else than a thing which exists in such a way as to stand in need of nothing beyond itself in order to its existence. And, in truth, there can be conceived but one substance which is absolutely independent, and that is God. We perceive that all other things can exist only by help of the concourse of God. And, accordingly, the term substance does not apply to God and the creatures *univocally,* to adopt a term familiar in the schools; that is, no signification of this word can be distinctly understood which is common to God and them."

[22] In this paragraph and the next, and especially in my description of the Cartesian logic of the real in terms of a connected structure of equivocity and universality, I am drawing directly upon what I consider to be an especially helpful expression of the problem made by Bjorn Ekeberg, <u>The Metaphysics Experiment: Modern Physics and the Politics of Nature</u>. (2010) PhD Thesis. University of Victoria. Available at: http://dspace.library.uvic.ca:8080/bitstream/handle/1828/3024/MetaphysicsExperiment020910.pdf?sequence=1 , 111, 121, 122, 134.

primal and inarticulable voice into a coherence of intelligible signification.[23] Where there is a singular divine *logos*, turning as a singular "book of the world" (and expressed within whatever I might correctly represent as being "out there"),[24] the problem becomes one of ascending towards God so far as is possible. Because God is Spirit, our ascension toward Him is possible for us through that which is highest and most Godlike *in* us: namely, the rational mind *and not the body*. It is thus precisely a question of being oriented from the beginning towards a godlike optics, a *mathesis universalis*, whereby we stand to ascend to our utmost potential in thinking the thoughts of God after him through the rational study of his Creation. In this, human beings reprise their traditional role within Christian ontology, as mid-way between beast and God, highest of God's creatures in possessing reason and free will, and in this sense being made *in the image of* God.

In this sense, Descartes will begin ostensibly from the isolated position of the human doubter and *cogito*; but the entire game has already been rigged in ways that are inextricable from a prior and longstanding onto-theological discourse. Even the willful self-responsibility of the modern knowing subject in this sense reprises the selfhood reworked by Christian thought. Previously, it had been necessary to insist upon the spontaneity of a free will internal to the atomistic Christian self, since this supplied the ontological condition for individual salvation and good acts oriented to a point *beyond the world*, as much as for individual guilt for one's sins.[25] It is only, as I have already

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[23] Ibid. In Giorgio Agamben's text Language and Death: The Place of Negativity trans. by Karen Pinkus (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), Agamben argues that in the language of Medieval theologians, the vocal must be distinguished from the domain of intelligible signification, which following Agamben and Ekeberg I suggest we identify as the *versal*. The vocal is in this sense can be distinguished from what can be grasped by the intellect (traditionally connected to the presence of form or intelligible essence): it is, Agamben suggests, experienced as a pure intending-to-signify whose meaning nevertheless eludes our grasp, but after which thought continually strives. (Theologically, Agamben suggests, the name of God must be pure voice and accordingly must be experienced by human thought in this way – an experience which Augustine understood as an act of love. (28-30, 33.) But what concerns me here is the singularity of the logic of intelligibility established by Cartesian metaphysics, a singular uni-versal turning, by which what is can be viably intelligible to human thought. The metaphysical problem of the relation (of equivalence) between signifier and signified, and what Baudrillard has called the "reality-effect" of the colluding notions of signified and referent, can be taken in this sense but another way of expressing the problem of uni-versality. (C.f., Jean Baudrillard, "The Political Economy of the Sign," in Selected Writings (Stanford University Press, 2001), 84-87.

[24] C.f., Descartes, Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy, 11: "there being but one truth for each thing, anyone who finds it knows as much as one can know about that thing."

[25] On the one hand, our thought is oriented to the perfect and eternal peace, final rest, highest love and beatitude which God as pure being is, and which cannot be experienced or sought in the goods of worldly

suggested, that Descartes transmutes this problem into the domain of epistemology: error, the belief in things that are false *qua* overextending my belief beyond the pale of the intellect, the misuse in this way of my freedom – this constitutes precisely a form of sin that it is our business to do away with.[26]

The above discussion suffices for the moment to identify some of the basic stakes in what we might call the "event" of modern subjectivity and the framing of the world in terms of objects over and against us who are subjects. Though the foundational discourse of a thinker like Descartes purports to begin things anew through epistemology, I have tried to show that this entire gesture attains its possibility and its meaning through a particular confluence of (Christian) metaphysical and theological dicta. Having assumed the basic contours of the subject attained here, of course, subsequent philosophical discourse could broaden the distance of the modern self from God – as for example through Kant's refutation of the Anselmian proof, and his transmutation of God, His universal law, etc., into regulative ideas of practical reason, and thus effectively as values distinct from facts, and so on.[27] But even in this, it would seem that the most essential metaphysical decisions in the basic constitution of self and world have already been presupposed.

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life; nevertheless this highest good provides the model for our thinking of worldly justice, of peace on earth in adherence to the universal moral law imposed by God Himself. On the other hand, moral evil (which is to say, evil in the most proper sense of the term) in this story is precisely something *we* do, which enters into creation through the *defect* or *revolt* of precisely those beings capable of such – i.e., free and finite human beings. But it is precisely in this connection that the individual person is able to assume a distinctive kind of importance and sense of worth, as the condition Christianity's personalistic doctrine of salvation. Just as it is only the atomistic, self-identical, willful human being who can properly be guilty of sin in the Christian sense – that is, to stand behind sin as its author – so is it this same atomistic being who is able to care for the future of his immortal soul beyond the confines of this world, and perchance be lifted from his wretchedness by the grace of God. For the moral life now unfolds a rich drama within the internalities of the soul, since the essence of the good or evil act must now be sought in the will and the movement of intention which animates it. Connected to this understanding are the whole series of Christian ascetic and confessional practices and the role these came to play in the development of a sense of self and con-scientious self-scrutiny. Not only is there a question here of unifying the self in submitting one's conduct to a constant rational judgment; this judgment requires an always-unfinished exegesis which sorts through the intentions and internalities of the soul which are obligated by the moral law which follows from its singular source in God. Hence the familiar practices for sorting through and recognizing temptation, of denying the flesh, of dispelling illusions, of scrutinizing the movements of the self, and so on. For a good discussion on some of these points, see Gilson, The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy, 304-308, 330-338.

[26] Descartes, Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy, 82.

[27] See, e.g., Immanuel Kant, Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals 2nd Ed. and trans. by Lewis White Beck (Upper Saddle River: Prentice-Hall, 1997), 25.

In ways I have already briefly indicated, the kinds of manoeuvres specific to the emergence of the modern subject are moreover bound up with the emergence of a particular view of nature. The manner in which this is so, and the precise view of the world that emerges, is of central importance for the problem of the kind of relationships with the nonhuman typical of modern thought and society and specifically entrenched by these. Let us now turn to this matter more directly.

2.2   Shifting Natures and the Technoscientific Ethos

In the last chapter, I made reference to a collection of thinkers whose cultural critiques of modernity emphasized the role of our conception of "nature" in defining our present ways of relating to other (especially nonhuman) beings, and understanding our ethical horizons in this regard. Freya Mathews, we recall, offers a gloss of the modern ethical *zeitgeist* as "monological", predicated upon a reduction of the physical world to matter and the expulsion of mind from it. Classic theorists of the modern scene like Max Weber and Martin Heidegger focus not least upon the related phenomenon of the physical world's becoming something calculable and hence susceptible to technical mastery by us. These developments do, I think, express something of central significance for the modern sense of ourselves in the world. But to understand better how this is so, and how these phenomena are related, let us attempt a somewhat closer investigation.

Much of what is at stake here can be grasped in the shift in early modernity towards a materialistic and mechanistic view of the physical world, in contradistinction to the view presupposed by the rational science previously dominant in Western Europe – namely, the neo-Aristotelianism that held sway there from the Scholastic era up until roughly the sixteenth century.[28] Nature's reporting itself in either way is only possible on the basis of a number of assumptions that it is the business of a philosophy of nature to delineate. In the case of modern natural philosophy, this forms what Heidegger calls a prior, axiomatically projected mathematical (in the sense of *mathesis*) "ground-plan".[29] Central in the emergence of this distinctly modern projection, *and hence the basic way*

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[28] Gaukroker, The Emergence of a Scientific Culture, 119.
[29] See Heidegger, "Age of World Picture," 118, and Heidegger, "Modern Science, Metaphysics, and Mathematics," 275-281.

modern thought understands nature, are changes (relative to Aristotelianism) in the doctrine of motion, in the kind of causality understood to be relevant to a scientific investigation of nature, and in the nature of entities.

In Aristotle, motion – which completes itself in rest as in the fulfilment of an end – is thought in terms of a distinction between the natural and the violent. Natural motion is natural because it belongs to a thing, as a *telos* or final cause[30], in virtue of being the kind of thing it is. Hence it is to the essence of the thing itself and its attributes that we must look in order to understand and explain what it does (and we can see how, in its own way, even this science presupposes an atomistic ontology – beginning with pre-existing, bounded, individual things *qua* substances and asking after their predicates).[31] Fire has the property of being carried upwards just as stones, being heavy, will fall as heavy things do unless something prevents them.[32] Violent motion (e.g., throwing a rock upwards) is essentially against the nature of the moved thing in question. As this can occur from any number of extrinsic causes, it is of less interest for a science directed to universals as they show up in the study of enmattered essences – which is what Aristotle understood things to be. And because position is determined in natural motion by the nature of the body in question (fire has its place above, earth below, etc.), the Aristotelian cosmos is divided between celestial and sublunary realms; and the bodies that belong to each, being of different natures, move differently.[33]

By contrast, we see in many of the foundational figures of modern thought[34] a concern to show that these kinds of *final causes are not operative in nature*, and hence that an inquiry into what a thing is, is not an effective way to understand the principles according to which it moves – i.e., to explain it. Francis Bacon argued that, if anything,

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[30] In Aristotle, a cause is simply something to which a thing is indebted in being what it is. Aristotle distinguishes four kinds of causes: final (the end to which something tends); formal (the form or intelligible essence which makes it what it is); material (the individuating matter from which a thing is made in being united with form); and efficient (that which directly brings something about, the immediate cause). See Aristotle, *Physics*, Bk. II Ch. 3.

[31] Aristotle, *Categories*, Ch. 1-6.

[32] Aristotle, *Physics*, Bk. VIII Ch. 4.

[33] See also, on this point, Martin Heidegger, "Modern Science, Metaphysics, and Mathematics," in <u>Basic Writings</u>, 283-286; and Stephen Gaukroker, <u>The Emergence of a Scientific Culture</u>, 166-167.

[34] Including, for example, Descartes, Hobbes, Bacon, Newton, and others; and the basic view of nature that accordingly emerges remains preserved in Kant (who will for example begin by asking how we must be constituted such that the mathematical science of nature *qua* Newtonian physics is possible), and beyond.

we should concern ourselves precisely with violent motions as employed in mechanics, and hence the laws by which all of the effects seen in nature are brought about, i.e., as *efficiently and externally caused*.[35] Mechanistic motion – as articulated for instance in Newton – now becomes thought in terms of an axiomatic which determines the laws of motion *such as govern and hence explain the behaviour of every body*. Any given body can accordingly in principle be in any spatial position, such that space becomes a kind of universal field or empty container wherein such reordering occurs. If the event of the modern Cartesian subject had served to shift philosophy from ontological questions to epistemological ones, in the field of natural science itself questions shifted from *what* something is to *how* an effect has been produced, grasped in terms of causal relations which trace the transference of external force acting upon bodies; and motion becomes thought in terms of a quantifiably measurable change in relative position.[36]

To come to beings in this way, however, has the effect of flattening the qualitative distinctions between them. No more the distinction between celestial and sublunary realms; particular things now come to be understood as existing in substance but as explicable in their objectivity as effects, configurations of a uniform materiality, determined in their nature by forces external to them. "That which moves," as one author has put it, "is reducible to a force that acts upon it from the outside, and that force is reducible to a law that governs the application of such force."[37] It is here that we see the problem of calculability arise in its familiar guise: entities now stand to be analyzed with a view to ascertaining principles of constancy that rule over quantifiably measurable change in the form of laws, which we understand to be impersonal and to bear universally. And in this particular configuration of the relation between the principle of identity (identity and hence non-contradiction belongs to being) and the principle of

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[35] See Gaukroker, The Emergence of a Scientific Culture, 167-169; c.f. Francis Bacon, "De Dignitate et Augmentis Scientarium," in Francis Bacon: A Selection of His Works ed. by Sidney Warhaft (New York: MacMillan, 1982), at 397 (Book II Ch. 2).

[36] See Heidegger, "Modern Science, Metaphysics, and Mathematics," at 286-288; see also the first chapter of Freya Mathews, The Ecological Self (Oxford: Routledge, 1991). And though e.g., Descartes and Newton are at variance on a great deal, they nevertheless both hold to a species of mechanism; and the language in which a mechanistic natural philosophy speaks is moreover precisely consistent with that privileged in the Cartesian primary/secondary quality distinction.

[37] Bradley Bryan, "Reason's Homelessness: Rationalization in Bentham and Marx," in Theory & Event 6:3 (2002), # 38.

sufficient reason (there is a sufficient explanation for everything that exists), we can also see a basic and novel form of "intellectualized" and universalist perspective through which fungibility is extended to things in the very nature of their being. For the Greeks, even though every A was the same as itself and a realization of a universal idea, that realization was always imperfect due to the individuating presence of matter. But we can note what happens once identity is approached through the framework of universal *law*: every A is the same, always and everywhere. This is what makes things calculable across contexts.

Now, this shift in the understanding of causality – from a doctrine resting upon a science of final causes to one which assumes cause to be efficient and external, operative in the transference of force from one body to another – brings with it tremendous consequences for the modern understanding of things. Mathews' diagnosis that modernity rests on a materialistic theory that assumes that nothing like mind belongs to basic matter is one way of expressing what is involved here. For in a Cartesian representational epistemology, there can be no real adequation of the intellect with the intelligible essence or form of a thing – which would ascribe something like mind to natural things inasmuch as they are enmattered essences.[38] (Since a final cause is the end towards which something moves, to say that natural objects move by virtue of a final cause is to attribute to them characteristics that modernity ascribes exclusively to the work of the soul – for instance, that they are capable of being moved as by love, which is one way Aristotle describes the action of final causality.[39])

But where nature lacks final causes, it follows that it does not make sense to speak of a "natural" way of letting things be – as if left to themselves, natural beings come to

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[38] It should be noted that nominalism or "Ockhamism" in particular is generally understood to have played a key role in this transition into modernity, by construing the problem of universals in terms of a logical function attributable to *our mental activity*, as in the construction of general terms which could only be said to have meaning in referring back to individual, particular things – and it is with such things, and not a world informed by transcendent essences, that we now find ourselves. See F. Copleston, A History of Philosophy, Vol. 3: Late Medieval and Renaissance Philosophy (New York: Continuum, 2003), 125, 153, 164. C.f., on the subject of Medieval realism, see Gilson, The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy, 236-247.

[39] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Bk. XII Ch. 7. It is for this reason that a thinker like M.B. Foster will describe Aristotelian rational science as "animistic", i.e., as presuming that natural objects are "ensouled" in this sense. But for Foster, a Christian, this also means: that Aristotelian science is essentially "pagan" in that it bears the traces of a conception of divinity such as fails to distinguish this from nature. See Foster, "Christian Theology and Modern Science of Nature (I)," 442, 452.

rest at anything like an end proper for themselves. Indeed, in the final analysis there can be no guarantee that nature has intrinsic ends, or sustains itself in this way, at all. Neither does nature qualitatively speak to us what and how it is in the same sense. A host of relationships that had once been viable with "nature" under the terms of Aristotelianism now stand precluded.[40]

In an essential respect, this sets up precisely what we might call the emergent technoscientific *ethos* of modern relationships to nature. That *ethos*, following Heidegger and Mathews, assumes its shape by virtue of a relationship between a willful humanity and a calculable nature of mute materiality. Though nature may lack intrinsic ends, the selection of ends nevertheless remains pivotal to the action of the will: as the soul's internal organ of spontaneous efficient causality, the will operates in a way that is linked with *intention* – that is, to having an end or object and freely turning to that end in preference to others.[41]

The operation of the will in action is intelligible in terms of power or force acting externally on a thing; and accordingly, as Francis Bacon for example asserts, there is no essential difference between action wrought by nature and that wrought by man.[42] And so we find ourselves in a special position relative to the rest of creation: of being able to lay bare the workings of nature[43] so as to intervene ourselves in them, so that we may even *improve* nature and subject it to *our ends*.[44] And few would seem to express more iconically than Bacon the kind of monological conclusions that stand to be drawn from this metaphysical nexus. For the language of the will and of power has a longstanding connection to metaphors of *rule*, of dominion, of command and "power over" in the European imaginary – a connection grounded at once theologically (in the notion of God

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[40] C.f., Michel Foucault, The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences (New York: Vintage, 1994), 17-44, for an overview that touches on some of these modes of relation.

[41] Once again, this is a formulation with long roots in the Christian metaphysical tradition. See Gilson, The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy, 306, 346.

[42] Bacon, "De Dignitate et Augmentis Scientiarum," 397.

[43] Once again, this works in an atomizing way in that it presupposes the repeatability of experience and the validity of isolating particular causal variables from the more complex contexts in which they are found operating in everyday experience.

[44] Ibid, 397-400; see also William Leiss, The Domination of Nature, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994), 57-61. This basic schema would seem in no way compromised even where human willful action, considered objectively (that is, empirically) as behaviour, is itself considered as manipulable and hence not autonomous.

as willful ruler of the universe) and politically (in the godlike image of the king). And it is precisely in accordance with this image of the will that Bacon draws the conclusions for our (ontologically) appropriate relationship to nature: that human beings have a right "over nature", an "empire" and "dominion" over the universe "by divine bequest."[45]

Finally, we might note that these changes in our thinking of nature correspond to a change in the criteria relevant to cognitive success and the value of natural science. The ancients in the West, by virtue of the distinctive forms taken by their metaphysics, could understand the rational study of the world as part of a life of wisdom, of "life according to nature". But under modern conditions, where nature of itself becomes meaningless, such a dictum itself loses its sense. At the risk of anticipating arguments to come, we can note that even a generally contrapuntal thinker like Nietzsche does not seem to escape the world this creates, as we sense in his own refutation of Stoicism:

> You want to *live* 'according to nature'? O you noble Stoics, what fraudulent words! Think of a being such as nature is, prodigal beyond measure, indifferent beyond measure, without aims or intentions, without mercy or justice . . . To live, is that not precisely wanting to be other than this nature?[46]

This point we must leave to one side for the moment. But more generally, we can note that in dominant elements of our tradition, what we come to value instead of wisdom in the study of nature is, as one author has put it, "the discovery of relevant, informative truth, where the criteria of relevance and informativeness derive from the ability of that truth to take us beyond our present state of engagement with natural processes to one in which our degree of control over those processes is increased."[47] And here, no doubt, we can hear articulated familiar refrains that speak volumes as to our own self-understanding and dominant manner of being-in-the-world, the kind of doing and the kinds of relations with "nature" we come to valorize under modern conditions.

2.2.1 Theological Contours (II)

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[45] Bacon, "The New Organon," in <u>Francis Bacon: A Selection of His Works</u>, 374.
[46] Friedrich Nietzsche, <u>Beyond Good and Evil</u> trans. by R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Penguin, 1990), 39.
[47] Gaukroker, "The Emergence of a Scientific Culture," 228.

If changes in the theory of motion and causality are indicative of much that is essential to the modern view of nature and consequent relations with it, it is once again the case that this new philosophy does not arrive suddenly out of nowhere. Rather, the case can be made that not only does this distinctly modern philosophy of nature leave us squarely within the heritage of a Christian metaphysical tradition, but moreover that the distinctly modern view of nature emerges here precisely *through* the rigorous application of Christian theological principles to the domain of natural science.

This is the argument made by Miles Beresford Foster, for example.[48] Though I cannot review all the relevant points of his complex argument here, touching on a few may serve well enough for my purposes – to show how, for all its self-neutralization as a universal story of human self-maturity, modern thought remains profoundly embedded in a distinctly Christian interpretation of the world and phenomena. If the emergence of the modern theory of nature depends on the assumption that final causes are not operative in nature, then we might well ask: *why* was this doctrine rejected, and on what grounds? Later philosophers could rely on pointing to the distinct successes of modern science once these had been well established; but if we look for example in Descartes, we find that the initial argument is something else entirely. According to Descartes, we must assume that final causes are not operative in nature, and that such a doctrine is useless for us, because to know the ends operative in nature would be tantamount to knowing the ends of God, and this knowledge is necessarily denied to us (and becomes, in effect, an impiety) in our ontological finitude.[49]

But then, there is of course more to the modern view of nature than a negation of Aristotelian principles. What of the positive differences advanced, for example, in the view that intelligible order governing change must be apprehended at the level of

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[48] Foster, "The Christian Doctrine of Creation and the Rise of Modern Natural Science," at 448. Foster asks: "What is the source of those un-Greek elements in the modern theory of nature by which the peculiar character of the modern science of nature was to be determined?" And his answer is: "the Christian doctrine of Creation."

[49] Descartes, Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy, 80 (Fourth Meditation). Foster makes this point in "The Christian Doctrine of Creation," 452.

impersonal and universal laws, bearing always and everywhere? Here again, Foster
suggests, the matter must be traced to Christian theological principles. Aristotelian
doctrine evidently did not understand phenomena in terms of deterministic laws
governing every case; "accidents" and monstrosities, where the end natural to a being is
somehow interfered with or interrupted, were an accepted part of the cosmos that
required no further explanation. Indeed, in principle matter must always corrupt the
intelligible form within individuated beings.[50] Furthermore, Aristotle "could assert that
there are fresh beginnings (*archai*), not confined to human agency, without supposing
that there is a deterministic causal nexus occasionally interrupted by undetermined
events, for he simply did not see the question in these terms."[51] This manner of thinking
had not sat comfortably with Christian theological premises, since where God is the
omnipotent and rational Creator of all that is, nothing can lie outside of God's total
plan.[52] Material cannot be an impediment to God's reason because that material was itself
created by God. And though a knowledge of God's ends is out of reach for us, a
knowledge of His *laws* is not. And "the laws of an omnipotent lawgiver," as Foster
writes, "cannot be related to the objects of his creation as ideals to which they more or
less conform, but as rules to which their submission is complete."[53] A rational science of
nature that admits of this finds its proper object precisely in the investigation of such
laws; it looks to find these at work and fulfilled always, everywhere, and absolutely.

A similar point might be made with regard to the shift in favour of analyses
concerning the operation of actual and efficient causal relations in the world, such that
causal relations become *external*: one body transfers force to another, entities are acted
on by external forces, and so on. Such an image of causality is appropriate, for example,

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[50] Etienne Gilson, The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy, 368.
[51] Gaukroker, The Emergence of Scientific Culture, 460.
[52] A kind of compromise can be seen however in the way that the rationality of the world for Medieval
thought remained understood relative to the finite/infinite split: though wholly rational from God's
perspective, the reason of things would always be mysterious in the last analysis so far as the human
intellect was concerned. Nevertheless, for a discussion of the way Aristotle's indeterminism was already
troubling for Medieval thought, see Gilson, The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy, 364-382.
[53] M.B. Foster, "Christian Theology and Modern Science of Nature (II),", in Mind 45:177 (Jan. 1936), 15.
Max Weber's discomfort at the disenchantment of the world would seem to be an experience that reflects
this change: insofar as disenchantment means that "there are no mysterious incalculable forces" operative
within the world – and that this is a cage from which we do not escape, insofar as *all things are susceptible
to technical mastery by calculation*. (Weber, From Max Weber, 139.)

to the acts of will by which God, transcendent and external to nature, is understood to create and govern the universe. The supplanting of final causality by the efficient in this sense is analogous to the supplanting of the Aristotelian conception of "God" *qua* Unmoved Mover with the Christian conception. The Unmoved Mover was precisely a final cause: as pure actuality, absorbed in eternal contemplation of itself, the Unmoved Mover moves things by way of *their* love for *it* – and so is, in a sense, impotent. The motion that Aristotle's mover initiates is that of moving things from potentiality to actuality – that is to say, the fulfilment of motion in an end.[54] Such an image of divinity may be appropriate for an eternally existing and uncreated nature; but is clearly insufficient for a philosophical conception of God as omnipotent Creator who is the Author of all things as such.[55]

One might well go on here. But perhaps the above suffices to clarify some of the ways that, for all the pretensions of early modern writers to rely on "reason alone", this modern manner of thinking and relating to nature is inseparable from the assumption of a particular, Christian metaphysics, and the application of Christian theological principles to the domain of a mathematical projection of nature. In the next section, I turn to consider some of the ways this modern view of nature in turn sets up and buttresses distinctly modern forms of political authorization and experiences of freedom *qua* self-sovereignty. But in this, we would do well to remain mindful of the ways referring to "nature" and to modern "common sense" understandings of this can serve as what Foster calls a kind of quasi-independent "datum" for later thinkers.[56] From this, a variety of distinctly Christian interpretive decisions concerning ourselves, the nature and structure of the world, and the kinds of questions worth asking, etc., can in turn be redrawn in

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[54] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Bk. 12 Ch. 7.

[55] We might also make the point that Aristotle's God seems not separate from nature in the same way the Christian is: for Aristotle, "the actuality of thought is life, and God is that actuality" – and the actuality of thought is something manifest *in* the world and capable of being possessed by the intellect *in* it. (Ibid.) The difference at stake here would seem similar to that played out between Christian and pagan thinkers concerning the possibility of Aristotelian *eudaimona* or "flourishing" as something belonging to *this life*; a possibility that Christian thinkers like Augustine could not countenance. For a classical statement to this effect, in the form of a polemic against the classical Greek thinkers and the Stoics, see St. Augustine of Hippo, <u>The City of God,</u> Bk. XIX Ch. 4.

[56] Foster, "The Christian Doctrine of Creation," 446-447.

neutralized fashion, effectively smuggled through the back door – a matter of no small relevance for the ways we continue to think about politics and political freedom.

2.3   Monological Politics

The modern "problem of nature", as I have been trying to show, is not something that only concerns "nature" exclusively, or something that can be easily separated out from a relation with other spheres of modern life. It is rather a question of a whole constellation, a basic structuring through which any one part of that whole comes to be what it is. Such is the case as well with our modern experience and construal of politics. We might otherwise tend to think of this as a distinctly "human" domain – as concerning questions about human freedom; about the consequent struggle between human beings within and between polities; as concerning the problem of the aporetic and yet mutually constitutive relation between human liberty and logics of security, law and rule; as therefore concerning the problem of establishing relations of compromise between principles of (human) identity and difference, unity and diversity, and so on. But precisely this human interactive domain, in the dominant ways we come to think it, presupposes certain ways of understanding and relating to nature, grounded in what will by now be a familiar ontological framework. And indeed, it can hardly be surprising if we consider how, historically, the colonial spread of the modern polity (i.e., state) has always been bound up with a particular sighting and codification of the land (as natural territory) in ways that reproduce standard modern views thereof. For nature, in a particular guise and relation to culture, is itself an integral and constitutive part of the dominant, modern political story, and consonantly of the domestic logics modern polities have been concerned to enable situationally.

Much that is at stake in the constitution of our dominant, modern politics, and the relation with nature this involves, can be made clear with reference to the modern problem of sovereignty. This is an especially important problem to consider in this light because it allows us to see what is at stake in the stories of freedom typical of modernity and broadly consequent upon the story of the modern subject. Moreover, it allows us to see what is at stake in establishing the political and legal conditions, the forms of

collective and worldly order, etc., requisite for enabling the modernization of selves *qua* subjectivities.

Let us consider, for example, the way this problem is delineated by that classic and influential theorist of modern sovereignty, Thomas Hobbes. In light of the relationship modern thought has tended to accept between epistemology and self-responsibility, one encounters a continual and dominant imperative: that any mature self-understanding of human beings in the world must remain tied to and in step with science, that one must begin by asking about the conditions of possibility of knowledge and only then proceed to other questions. And indeed, Hobbes' political thought (and its continued salience and self-legitimating stories) is not dissociable from this general context. In effect, his argument in *Leviathan* works to show how *given modern conditions* – which is to say, given the problem of the modern subject, its familiar representational epistemology, and connected views of (a mechanistic) nature – one can arrive at no other conclusion than the necessity of the modern state.

This is precisely how *Leviathan* begins: i) by asserting the problems of a representational epistemology at the starting-point of what can be said; and ii) by repeating the familiar gesture of rejecting the Aristotelian doctrine of final causes in favour of a mechanistic natural philosophy.[57] This philosophy of nature establishes a context where neo-Aristotelian natural hierarchies can no longer tell us how to live,

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[57] Hobbes, Leviathan, 13-15. It is interesting to note that Hobbes' argument against Aristotle here is less overtly theological than that of Descartes. But it is not for this reason independent of this heritage; his argument is merely to depend upon a presumed atomistic, Christianized ontology: insofar as a doctrine of final causes amounts to "ascribing appetite, and Knowledge of what is good for their conservation (which is more than man has) to things inanimate," which is manifestly absurd. (15) In other words, it is absurd because it is contrary to what we already know about the nature of things, of the human selfhood in its uniqueness, about how one must think animacy and inanimacy, and so on. Not surprisingly, Hobbes goes on to repeat most of the essential dicta of Christian metaphysics – including the (ontological and epistemological) finitude of human beings (23). The notable exception here is that Hobbes rejects the notion of the free will in favour of reducing the activity of the human subject to mechanistic physics (14-15, 20, 38). But for all ethical intents and purposes, the structure of the will remains; and indeed, it is difficult to see how Hobbes would be able to think the problem of setting new foundations, etc., without effectively inhabiting the kind of worldview and ethical sense already established by Christian and Cartesian thought *on the basis of a doctrine of the free will*. Carl Schmitt's observation that our significant, modern political concepts pertaining to the state are all secularized theological concepts – and hence in effect that the problematic of modern sovereignty repeats within the human, terrestrial terrain the same structural, foundational, and self-grounding role that God plays in Christian cosmology – is worth remembering here. See Carl Schmitt, Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty trans. by Georg Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 36.

where human beings are in this way cut off (epistemologically) from nature.[58] And Hobbes accordingly draws the conclusions: that it falls therefore to us to decide definitions and meaning for ourselves, to set our own foundations, which include the securing of new *political* foundations from out of such doubt. The political problem of security and order in this sense recapitulates the epistemological problem of certainty, and indeed establishes the possibility of certainty in lived situations. But what is moreover noteworthy here is the universalism implicit in this problem for Hobbes: the problematic of sovereignty, as a solution to what our politics must be, pertains to human beings generally – because it is rooted in the problem of how human beings can have knowledge at all and as such. (As we saw with Descartes, this is in turn grounded in the assumption of a certain atomism on the one hand, and a singular and universal nature on the other.)[59]

It is interesting to note here how the capacity of the sovereign to ground and establish the conditions for certainty and security are in turn understood to enable precisely the kind of self-development most proper to human beings. For it is only on the basis of sovereignty that one is purportedly able to cultivate culture, knowledge, arts, and so on (and here again is Hobbes' blackmail: that in the absence of sovereignty, one can have *none of those things properly speaking*).[60]

This is a theme memorably reprised by Kant – who is able, in his writings on politics, to reproduce a recognizably Christian view of what kind of cultivation is proper to us not by relying directly on Christian doctrine, but on the modern view of nature and its presuppositions.[61] For if the *Critiques* and the *Prolegomena* show how we must be constituted insofar as a mathematical science of nature (i.e., Newtonianism) is possible, and the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* shows how the categorical imperative belongs to us as so constituted, Kant's political writings theorize accordingly the

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[58] C.f., R.B.J. Walker, "On the Protection of Nature and the Nature of Protection," in The Politics of Protection: Sites of Insecurity and Political Agency, ed. by Jef Huysmans et al (New York: Routledge, 2006), 189-191.

[59] Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, first thirteen chapters or so.

[60] Ibid, 89.

[61] And so we can nevertheless see a certain circularity here. C.f., Foster, "The Christian Doctrine of Creation," 447.

possibility for fostering the moral maturity of human beings, given a widespread context of immaturity. Thus the state system arises both as a consequence of man's freedom, and of the need to inculcate universally in humanity a mode of living in accordance with general laws. Cosmopolitanism arises as a political ideal because such a civil union would be most in keeping with the ethical demands of reason – i.e., to act only in such a way that the maxim of one's action might be willed as universal law.[62] But the point here is that this story, as a universal history, re-enacts much the same form of blackmail. It is a story of the development proper to *man as such*, whose cultivation to a full and worthy life demands that one quit the only alternative – a live of savage and individualistic freedom – and submit to the ordered security of a lawful civility, that first rung along a unitary route upwards. It is by this route that a greater, mature freedom becomes possible – a freedom in accordance with law and hence capable of co-existing within certain limits with the freedom of others.[63]

But what is especially important for my purposes here is simply to note that in the story of sovereignty, we witness the self-inventing, creative powers of the willful human subject repeated isomorphically at the level of the state – and moreover in such a way that either one can be seen to enable and reinforce the other. And in either case, that freedom is set over and against nature as a mute and intrinsically meaningless backdrop. (If Kant will suggest a teleological theory of nature as universal history, this is nevertheless precisely only something *we* can *assume as a regulative idea of reason* – once again, because we must critically admit to ourselves that any such ends necessarily lie outside of our ken as finite beings.[64]) And it is hardly difficult to see that sovereignty, as an enabling logic that establishes the limits of modern political domesticities, sets the terms by which our dominant understandings of freedom continually play out in familiar stories of liberal democracy as the actualization of freedom and self-rule and so on. The commonplace understanding of politics and political programmes as concerning the way we as beings strive to bridge, through willful action, the perceived gap between the way things are, and the way reason tells us they ought to be, can also readily be seen to inhabit this same

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[62] See, e.g., Immanuel Kant, <u>Political Writings</u> trans. by H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 42-46.
[63] Ibid, 44-48.
[64] Ibid, 44, 52.

basic ontological terrain (insofar as we see a subjectivistic iteration of a Christian soteriological ethics in this manner of thinking about normative problems.)

And here too, in the domain of politics, of course, it is possible to detect everywhere the impact of our Christian ontology upon the ways we think and experience ourselves, and imagine what living a full life most proper to us must be. "All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state," Carl Schmitt has written, "are secularized theological concepts. . ."[65] After all that has been said concerning the onto-theological provenance of the modern self-authoring and self-responsible subject, it will perhaps not be necessary, for my present purposes, to go much further into the matter to begin appreciating how this is so. Perhaps especially notable is the way that, under modern conditions, freedom appears as self-same with the problem of sovereignty and self-authoring. For is this not precisely how it makes sense to think of freedom once we understand that this must be modelled after the image of an omnipotent Creator God? Similarly, the very notion of power here as something attributable to acts of an atomistic and free will, and understood in terms of the alternative of either subservience (under another's power) or of active dominion, of power-over, would seem to take its sense for us from a secularization of God's position of dominion as the benevolent ruler of all that is. As Hannah Arendt has emphasized, such a notion of power and or freedom makes little sense within, for example, polytheistic modes of thought. This is not only because one encounters here a different vision of the "psychological" structure of the self relative to the world, of the problem of its relative unity and multiplicity, etc. Moreover, no Greek god could ever be sovereign or offer such a model for thinking power, because any god was always only ever one in agonistic struggle with and amongst others.[66]

Parenthetically, it should of course be noted that not all modern ways of thinking about politics are reducible to the problem of the state or of liberalism, or are such as could find their fulfilment therein. Though I can only touch on the matter briefly here, Marx for instance provides an obvious example of a modern thinker for whom the

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[65] ". . . not only because of their historical development – in which they were transferred from theology to the theory of the state, whereby, for example, the omnipotent God became the omnipotent lawgiver – but also because of their systematic structure . . ." Schmitt, Political Theology, 36.

[66] Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition 2nd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 235.

problem of freedom – though also being oriented towards a universal historical struggle and hence a *kind* of cosmopolitanism – necessarily sets us at odds with the terms of liberal law and statehood. In his basic ontology, however, we nevertheless encounter much the same set of contours as we find *in* liberalism: the classical Marxian story in this sense is precisely a humanistic one, rooted in our altogether familiar modern ontology. It is by virtue, for example, of a metaphysics of willful human agency, and a distinctly modern materialism, that we understand that the vocation of the human, the actualization of our species-being, is precisely to (monologically) work over objective nature so as to become at home in the world. Though I cannot go further into the matter here, it will perhaps be sufficiently invocative to note that this way of thinking sets the ground for the precise way the Marxian problematic of alienation takes shape, and for the political programme that follows.[67] But we can moreover recognize a basic theme here that becomes pervasive in the modern imaginary: art as freedom, as a specially human freedom whose actualization is the *creative* transformation of the world.

I emphasize one further point here with regard to the problem of the modern state and the space this enables. Insofar as the modern state both presupposes a particular view of nature, and unsurprisingly reproduces this view through the generalization of modern forms of order, we can simply note that these same constitutive limits and basic suppositions concerning nature and culture and their proper relation continue to form the barriers one runs up against even where one strives to "protect" nature through the politics authorized therein. We may consider certain contemporary environmentalist discourses as exemplary in this regard – of which Bruce Braun, in particular, has I think provided an important analysis. He has shown how (at least the more mainstream of) these remain an altogether *domestic* possibility within the terms set by the modern state. Frequently the problem is posed as that of saving "natural" or "wilderness" spaces, in their wilderness (i.e., the absence of culture), from the intervening power of human agency (industry). But the appeal to save nature here first of all involves sighting the land and nonhuman others *as* nature – which possibility is itself part and parcel of the logic of

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[67] Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts," in <u>Karl Marx: Selected Writings</u>, ed. by David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 89, and the following few pages.

the (colonial) state, its claims to sovereignty, and so on. Visualizing the land as nature, as mute territory claimed for dominion, as natural wealth to survey and bring to account, and so on, we simultaneously bracket away as separable any prior "cultural" presence on the land – i.e., in colonial places like Canada, Indigenous peoples. The subsequent possibility of lobbying the state or its authorized body politic to decide in favour of preserving *its* "natural heritage", etc., does but reaffirm and remain internal to this basic enabling structure, and the conceit that the land is something that it is the public's vocation to decide (monologically) over.[68]

And indeed: though one might complicate earlier modern views of "nature" through (e.g.,) more contemporary forms of natural and ecological science, this complication seems to remain always bounded within specific limits, especially as one attempts to make this knowledge efficacious through the collective apparatus of the state. That is: such science remains bounded as a privileged knowledge of what remains sighted ontologically *as nature*. And nature *as such* stands to be engaged in its relation to the human/cultural – and hence in relation to rationalized managerial problems, the configuration of the political domain and its constitutive concerns, etc., as already delimited in their essence by the classical contours of modern thought. Thus we slide in our political reasoning continually back to the anthropocentric rationales vouchsafed by our subjectivism: to problems of balancing "environmental" concerns with a range of other (human) "interests" and with the demands of economic and political rationales already delineated on the basis of longstanding ontological, epistemological, and ethical assumptions; to divergent notions of what "managing" "natural resources" to best

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[68] Braun, "Buried Epistemologies," 23-24. Michael Asch has offered a similar point through an analysis of the meaning of "wildlife" within Canadian law and management practices. Asch argues that as a definition of what (game etc.) animals are, "wildlife" is intrinsically connected to the notion of wilderness – as that which is the opposite to the domestic, standing outside of relations of cultivation and ownership by human beings *qua* private individuals. As Asch shows, however, this concept of the wild serves to entrench the fundamental claim of the Crown to the land and the animals on it in the contexts of negotiations with First Nations concerning outstanding aboriginal rights claims. For as wildlife, i.e., *prior to capture by an individual*, animals cannot be individual property; rather they are the property of the state, who therefore assumes responsibility for managing populations, issuing hunting licenses, and so on. The inclusion of Indigenous "rights to wildlife" within the language of agreements between First Nations and the state, accordingly, serves in its own way to fundamentally undercut Indigenous understandings of the nature of their relationships to land and animals and of proprietary relations. See Michael Asch, "Wildlife: Defining the Animals the Dene Hunt and the Settlement of Aboriginal Rights Claims," in Canadian Public Policy 15:2 (June 1989), esp. 206-212.

advantage means; and so on. The possibility may well arise here to appeal to a more sophisticated management, *but not a change in the basic established framework and relationship.*

The foregoing should suffice as a brief overview of some of the fundamental respects in which modern politics expresses and enables monological possibilities of thinking/relating, as delimited in its essential structure by the modern ontological settlement. Let us now turn to one final site of tremendous importance in the delineation of distinctly modern views of nature and nature-self relations: namely, that of modern conceptions of property. For in this, we encounter perhaps *the* dominant set of codifications operative *within* (neo)liberal state law, and the forms of life this enables, of the appropriate relationship between human beings and the nonhuman, "natural" world. These codifications are moreover essential for understanding the way we monologically experience the world as fungible and calculable "standing-reserve".

2.4   Modern Property as a Manifestation of the Monological Relation

Modern property is often described as a "bundle of rights", or a legal relationship that governs social relations between people with respect to (tangible and intangible) things.[69] It is an enforceable claim in being grounded in the state and its sovereignty; and it moreover forms a central pillar of contemporary forms of (globalizing, modernizing, neo-liberal, capitalist, etc.) political-economic order *and the kinds of worldly relations that characterize and sustain these*. Indeed, the scope of "things" being assimilated to the proprietary relationship would seem to be growing: as we witness a continued, widespread, and globalized enclosure and privatization of land and "resources", an intensified commodification of "things" (including genetic code and biological processes)

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[69] Bruce Ziff, et al. <u>A Property Law Reader: Cases, Questions, and Commentary, 2nd Ed.</u> (Toronto: Thomson Carswell, 2008), iii, 1-4, 10.

through patent and intellectual property law, and so on.[70] One author has eloquently suggested, on this account, that contemporary (neo)liberal law expresses an understanding that "all existents, as actual or potential property, are subject to one or another individual's rightful, transactional power."[71] If therefore we wish to ask after the kinds of relations to the nonhuman and "nature" cultivated by modern liberal society and dominant within it, property in its Western, liberal-capitalist form constitutes a necessary site for consideration.

What is moreover essential for us here is the way Western understandings of property – and the elevation and generalization of the proprietary relation within contemporary Western/modern life – express, foment, and enforce particular understandings about what it is to be a human being in the world, what beings are, what it means to live a good life, how it is meaningful and authorized to relate to extant beings *qua* "nature" within everyday life, and so on. Specifically, it privileges a largely transactional and economistic view of existence; a reduction of beings to calculable fungibility under the sign of exchange value; and a profoundly anthropocentric evaluation of nature and relation to it. Let us try to see a little more closely some of what is involved here.

"The most revolutionary modern contribution to the concept of property," Hannah Arendt once wrote, was that "according to which property was not a fixed and firmly located part of the world acquired by its owner in one way or another but, on the contrary, had its source in man himself."[72] An emblematic thinker for us to consider relative to this development is John Locke. And indeed, in Locke's theorizing of property as having its source in man, we would seem to find a particular transmutation of the general modern view that nature is intrinsically meaningless, combined with the view that it is human beings who furnish meaning. In this instance, however, the problem of

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[70] Becky Mansfield, "Introduction," in <u>Privatization: Property and the Remaking of Nature-Society Relations</u> ed. by Becky Mansfield (Blackwell, 2008), 1-3.
[71] Andrew Wender, <u>The Juridical Prism: Modernity's Transmutation of the Religious, as Refracted Through Secularist Law</u>. (2006) PhD Thesis. University of Victoria. Available at: <<u>https://dspace.library.uvic.ca:8443/handle/1828/1952</u>>, 161.
[72] Hannah Arendt, <u>The Human Condition</u>,70.

"meaning" stands to be posed in terms of *worth*, which is implicitly worth for, and originating from, us.

For Locke, nature left to itself is conceived as lying in waste, given by God to man in common. In this state, nature of itself is worth little until appropriated, removed from nature and transformed through human bodily activity, understood as labour: "'Tis *Labour* then which puts the greatest part of Value upon Land, without which it would scarcely be worth any thing: 'tis to that we owe the greatest part of all its useful Products."[73] It is in being *mixed with my labour*, imbued with my own activity and hence an extension of myself, that nature gains value and becomes productive. And this process simultaneously grounds my right to something as property, which is to say as exclusively enclosed from the commons and subject to my own right of use and possession, to be ordered and disposed as I see fit.[74]

It is important to note here that by framing nature as common, and by setting up the alternative between common nature lying in waste *and property* qua *objects appropriated and reworked by willful labour*, Locke also sets up a blackmail whose colonial consequences are drawn out quite explicitly and deliberately in his text. Land unappropriated in the modern sense (and it is clear that Locke is thinking of English-style enclosure and agriculture here), and thus not monologically reworked, must be viewed as lying in waste. Such land is held by human beings (as a general class of beings) in common, and this means nothing other than that Indigenous relations to the land (especially, we presume, those of hunter-gatherer peoples) must be null and void. "In the beginning all the World was *America*," Locke asserts: which is to say that America now can be viewed as *terra nullius*.[75]

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[73] See John Locke, <u>Two Treatises of Government</u> ed. by Peter Laslett (Cambridge University Press, 1988), at 298.

[74] Ibid, 290, 295, 306.

[75] Ibid, 301. We can also recognize how, at the same time, the Lockean framing of things prepares for a particular species of workaday colonial moralizing: for where we accept the Lockean framing of ownership and valorization of productive labouring *qua* reworking the land in modern European fashion, Indigenous peoples must appear indolent and unproductive as well as propertyless. Such a construal would seem to have had no shortage of life within colonial consciousness where a sense of arrogant civilizational self-superiority dovetails with an increasingly economistic (and accordingly impoverished) worldview. If we recognize the basic tenor of Locke in contemporary colonial sentiment, it has been no less present historically. Consider the following statement by a Canadian Indian Reserve Commissioner to an

The labour of our bodies, for Locke, is an essential human behaviour; but it also furnishes an original model of the proprietary relationship and source for it more broadly. In the first instance, human beings can be said to be the proprietors of their own person, and of the labour of their bodies. From this, Locke reasons that we must accordingly have a right of property in whatever our labour has been "joyned to".[76] This proprietary relationship has its roots moreover in the way we can be said to properly be the *masters of ourselves*.[77] We can see again the centrality of a metaphysics of the will and its constitutive metaphors of rule and dominion here: as laying the very possibility for me to be the self-directing master of myself, i.e., the commander and author standing behind the labour of my body.[78] But these metaphors extend into our relations with things: in labouring, we *subdue*[79] nature; in ownership, the freedom to "order and dispose" similarly returns us to a willful relation of rule. (And, it hardly need be said, we can see how a Christian vision of the ethical and existential uniqueness of human beings as godlike, persons in the fullest sense, etc., is reproduced here.)

It is interesting to see how the proprietary relationship here, grounded in labour, dovetails with the conception and valorization of technoscientific mastery articulated for example in Bacon. If in the latter, subduing and commanding nature, compelling "her" to obey our ends, etc. is to be the route to material progress and the assumption of our proper vocation in the world, in the former the same activity (intervening in and subduing nature, reworking it through our own self-authored activity) grounds precisely our right of ownership over extant things, their individualized enclosure under human dominion. (And we can also see the atomistic ontology at work here, both in the identification and hence appropriation of objects, and on the side of the human proprietary and labouring

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Indigenous audience on Vancouver Island in 1876: "Many years ago you were in darkness killing each other and making slaves was your trade. The Land was of no value to you. The trees were of no value to you. The Coal was of no value to you. The white man came he improved the land you can follow his example—he cuts the trees and pays you to help him. He takes the coal out of the ground and he pays you to help him—you are improving fast. The Government protects you, you are rich—You live in peace and have everything you want." Qtd. in Cole Harris, "How Did Colonialism Dispossess? Comments from the Edge of Empire." In <u>Annals of the Association of American Geographers</u> 94:1 (2004), at 170.

[76] Ibid, 288.

[77] Ibid, 288, 298.

[78] That Locke thought about question of mastery and wilfulness in this way would seem evident from the rest of his text; see, for example, ibid, 269, 283-4, 306.

[79] Which is furthermore done by God's decree: such is precisely the right God gave to Adam. Ibid, 291.

subject.) Needless to say, understanding things in these terms ensures that the relation of "mixing" (Locke) that occurs between people and things is something that occurs in a monological, one-way fashion.[80] But most importantly, we can see here how – turning from the domain of Cartesian epistemology, to technoscientific discourse, to politics, to ownership – the same basic relation to the world, grounded in a metaphysics of the will and an effectively materialistic and hence mute, intrinsically meaningless nature, comes broadly to prevail and to be enforced.

Beyond the anthropocentric relationship established by grounding ownership in use and labour, however, it is also necessary to consider here the role of wealth-production as the defining economic goal of market capitalism in coming to define the nature of property and hence the way we apprehend the nature of worldly objects/entities under modern conditions. Much of what is involved here takes us, not surprisingly, well beyond Locke. Bradley Bryan for example has argued in this vein that changes in the legal understanding of property should be understood to reflect the way the law has evolved in application to, and relative to the needs of, capitalist society. Most particularly, these shifts reflect the kinds of contexts in which property rights come before the law – namely, in matters of contract, tort, and succession.[81] For Bryan, what is essential here is the way that "'use' comes to be subsumed in the capacity to contract and bargain that goes with the [proprietary] entitlement to use and enjoy;" and through this development, we see a slide occur through which "what something is," insofar as it is understood in terms of its being property, "is not determined by who owns it but by what it is worth." The "use" value of something, in other words, tends to be occluded by questions about the value of something as it can be bargained for, about the monetary value of appropriate remedial compensation for damages, and so on. Accordingly, property comes to be increasingly understood in terms of the value for which it can be exchanged – at the same time as *we*, through generalized processes of commodification,

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[80] And though Bacon will speak of first being a student of nature and following its workings, in order to later command it, the materialist metaphysics underlying his technoscientific *ethos* (and that of modernity generally) ensures that this mathematized "studying" cannot and precisely must not mean dialogue in anything like the sense one has, e.g., with other subjects, or with world of natural imbued with anything like "mind" in the neo-Aristotelian sense.

[81] Bradley Bryan, "Property as Ontology: On Aboriginal and English Understandings of Ownership," in Canadian Journal of Law and Jurisprudence 13:1 (2000), 12-13.

come to understand the relations we have to the world and to each other in increasingly transactional terms.[82] Arendt offers this diagnosis of what is at stake here:

> In the progressing transformation of immobile into mobile property . . . eventually the distinction between property and wealth, between the *fungibles* and the *consumptibles* of Roman law, loses all significance because every tangible, "fungible" thing has become an object of "consumption"; it lost its private use value which was determined by its location and acquired an exclusively social value determined through its ever-changing exchangeability whose fluctuation could itself be fixed only temporarily by relating it to the common denominator of money.[83]

This development, which is also not separate from the growth of "consumer society" generally, says a great deal about how we as moderns come to understand ourselves, the world around us, and what constitutes "real world" relations *with* the "real world". Owned things (and we can recall the suggestion here that *all extant things* now seem to stand as actual or potential property) lose their uniqueness, their essential emplacement in the world, their *irreplaceability* and the substantive ties we might have with them: since the fundamental assumption in reducing anything to the terms of market value is that things *are precisely exchangeable* (this is precisely what reducing things to monetary value within the capitalist market does).[84] And it is this being-replaceable, for and before other humans *qua* transactional agents, that determines their value – in ways that moreover come to expression and enforcement through the rationalizations of law and everyday social life.

It is also interesting to take note here of a concurrent phenomenon, which is the slide in everyday usage from understanding property as a right *in* something (to use, enjoy, exclude, etc.) to simply taking property to mean the things themselves. As one text on property law in Canada has put it:

> [This change] came with the spread of the full capitalist market economy from the seventeenth century on, and the replacement of the old limited rights in land and other valuable things by virtually unlimited rights. As

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[82] Ibid, 13, 14.
[83] Arendt, <u>The Human Condition</u>, 69. This passage is also quoted in Bryan, "Property as Ontology."
[84] This is a point also emphasized by Arendt. Ibid, 165-166.

rights in land became more absolute and parcels of land became more freely marketable commodities, it became natural to think of the land itself as property.[85]

We can return at this point to Heidegger's diagnosis, that under the terms of modern thought *qua* "technology", things themselves come to disappear, even to *cease to concern us in their own right*; what matters rather is the story of us and our will, *our values*, and hence the availability of things before us for use and abuse.[86] This availability now determines things as what they are – resources, related to exclusively as "standing-reserve". And in this we can also feel the danger of solipsism that attends our subjectivism: that in the end we come to encounter in the world only ourselves and our self-authored activity, which is at best elevated to concern with the (no less atomized) aggregate of human social relations managed by the state. And property would seem to be a crucial site in which to see how this occurs in far-reaching and consequential ways – especially in the continually expanding conflation of object and marketable property (i.e., as commodities, or things produced for sale) under modern conditions. Beings disappear on the one hand into a story of human freedom (to imbue with value through labour, to use, enjoy, transact, etc.) on the one hand, and calculable fungibility (i.e., monetary value and hence exchangeability) on the other.

2.5   Singular Nature or Multiple Worlds?

Having covered the ground we have, it will hopefully be possible now to clarify my reasons for dwelling on the theological and cosmological roots of our dominant, modern ontology and the fundamental interpretation of the world this lays out. What lessons are to be drawn here?

At one level, I emphasize the theological heritage latent within our thinking as one way to undermine the guise of neutrality in which modern universalism tends to present itself. A key component of that sense of neutrality stems from the way modern

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[85] Bruce Ziff et al, A Property Law Reader, at 5.
[86] Heidegger, The Question Concerning Technology, 27. A similar point is made by Bradley Bryan, "Property as Ontology," 16-17.

thought has understood itself as secular – as marking the self-freeing of humanity to itself independently of its former religious and theological tutelage, and so on. By identifying and separating out fact from value, and science from religion – and connectedly, the public realm (purportedly) in step with science from the private realm of belief – modern thought and society enact what are effectively strategies of containment that localize "the religious" while preserving the domain of a universal, "real world" as that which is of common concern. (The meaning of the word "secular" as connected to a this-worldliness and temporality *that only makes sense* as opposed to matters of faith or otherworldliness, and so on, is indicative here of its own constitution *within* a Christian framing and its domestic dualisms.) In ways touched on briefly in the last chapter, this containment of the religious within a separate sphere (as being eminently a private matter pertaining to the cultural realm) furthermore sets the conditions for a generalized disenchantment by providing the terms through which alternate ways of thinking and being stand to be domesticated within the modern order – i.e., by structuring the categories through which these are able to speak and be identified (e.g., cultural as distinct from natural, as "values", "beliefs", and so on)**.** Here is, in other words, the false peace of multiculturalism, where *one nature* is preserved.

From what has been said, however, it will be clear that this containment is always something of a ruse. For it can only ever occur within the context of a basic framework, a prior construal of "the world", of nature and culture and the human and so on, that is *already determined* in its basic features by the distinctive interpretations and ontological decisions wrought by a particular tradition of inextricably religious thought – i.e., by Christian metaphysics. As I have traced it, many of the ontological dicta crucial to a distinctively modern way of seeing must be understood to first gain prominence through the acceptance of terms set by Christian revelation over those emergent from Greek paganism.[87] And the interpretive differences involved here are moreover *of central*

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[87] Indeed the predominant story of European philosophy through the Patristic and Medieval periods could be glossed as a more or less explicit attempt to systematize Christian doctrine in the language of Greek metaphysics – and to adopt and reform the latter through the exclusion of what could be identified as pagan elements within it. Inasmuch as a rational science of nature forms a crucial part of the philosophical endeavour enabled by any metaphysics, it is not surprising to see this dispute eventually come to be played out on that field. See Foster, "The Christian Doctrine of Creation," 448.

theological importance – i.e., they concern the relation of the divine to the world, and to the human, and accordingly the character assumed by all three.

Etienne Gilson, in tracing the origins of much that is distinctive in our accustomed (modern) thinking, offers a helpful gloss here concerning what is at stake in the Christianization of our thought. For him, medieval (and hence modern) Western philosophy is, crucially, *Christian* philosophy precisely because, in its emergence, "the Christian revelation [was] an indispensible auxiliary to reason."[88] That is, Christian revelation decisively presented philosophers with new possibilities and new horizons for thinking, opened through the presentation of new onto-theological dicta/presuppositions that had to be accepted first of all *as* a matter of revelation, known through faith. Only subsequently could philosophers then set about the task of knowing what had thus been accepted through reason, and working out all the consequences. And it was precisely in adopting Christian principles in this way that Western metaphysics has come to assume a distinctly changed character, and has come to understand the world in terms of problems whose primacy or necessity would not at all have been obvious to Greek thinkers.

The neutrality of modern thought, predicated upon a universal nature and *its* neutrality, in this sense must be taken as undermined: insofar as the *isolation* of nature from "cultural" matters in the first place must now appear much less convincing, as must the neutral authority with which nature is then to be made to speak, in being brought back to the cultural domain to authorize specific forms of political order and relation and so on. Approached more adequately, many of those points we are accustomed to take as more obviously questionable (matters of culture, of "value", of religious belief and interpretation, etc.,) are seen to escape from the safeguards of their neutralizing confinement and take up their proper residence within the fundaments of our thought. For this reason, though, they also grow restless, circulating and surfacing now here and now there, traversing in manifold and extensive ways the domain of the sayable, thinkable, and sensible.

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[88] Gilson, The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy, 37.

A second point might be made here, anticipated somewhat in the last chapter. Namely: that to reflect in this way upon the presuppositions of our dominant thought, as *irreducibly interpretive* and in a sense always "experimental" or "problematic" conditions for understanding and speaking about reality, opens up the possibility of relating to these in a critically reflexive way, of experiencing them as *questionable*. In other words, my interest here is in the possibility of viewing these not as necessary presuppositions for understanding the world "as it is", for apprehending the identity of the given exclusively in its being. Rather, it is in understanding these simply as dicta that have opened up *one set of ways* for thinking about the world *amongst others*, *one way* of letting what is assume coherence and be investigated, and so on. But to construe matters in this way requires a certain opening-up of the grounds upon which our dominant thinking rests – which is precisely what I take the insistence upon interpretation, thought relative to an analytic of worlds, to do.

It is of course possible to avoid taking such a path as the one I encourage here, even while admitting the essentially "revelatory" or "evaluative"/interpretive provenance of the basic contours of our thought. To describe the initial acceptance of such ontological dicta in the manner of Gilson may well admit a certain obscurity as to the initial grounds on which e.g., the Christian set of dicta must be taken as final and exclusive. But then, it is fully possible to take our familiar and basic assumptions simply as "decisions" that we can or should continue to stick by, with an untroubled conscience (and don't all *decisions* admit of a certain mysteriousness of origins, thought within a metaphysics of the free will?[89]). Such a position has the advantage of being able to draw its legitimacy from the purported successes of our familiar ways of thinking, to which it can profess its faithfulness. We can see again, however, how a basic blackmail is apt to enter in here – along with, I think, an undue limitation of our capacities for critical

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[89] I.e., thought in terms of a metaphysics of the will, "decision" (like those of the sovereign, or that of God in the Creation of the universe) refers us to an initial voluntary and free power, relative to which we can understand the resulting action to be *contingent*. C.f., Gilson, The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy, 71. Structurally, we can see how this problem, taken *in this particular metaphysical guise*, is ultimately identical with the problem of sovereignty and the necessarily exceptional foundation of law, what Derrida has called the "mystical foundation of authority," that is, the problem of the ultimate groundlessness upon which the exceptional and autological act of founding the law, of pronouncing forth its discourse, etc., must rest. See Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law," in Acts of Religion (New York: Routledge, 2002), esp. 241-243.

reflection and ultimately a difficulty in avoiding the repetition/reproduction of all the basic problems and positions outlined in my opening chapter. While one can certainly provide retrospective arguments as to the rationality of such commitments that draw on criteria established or enabled by them, neither is it difficult to see the circularity that threatens such an exercise.[90] Set up the initial parameters, and move on; however these have come about, we must now leave them to hold the field undisturbed. And certainly, if we accept the Cartesian (or the Hobbesian) story of the real on its own terms, and as sufficient, we can come to no other conclusion.

This is why, in thinking from out of the modern, Western tradition, I consider extremely valuable[91] the manoeuvres by which the problem of worldhood displaces the initial logical grounds of Cartesian epistemology through what Heidegger calls the "ontological difference" – i.e., the difference between being and beings. As Heidegger shows, Descartes covers over the phenomenon of worldhood or being-in-the-world because he thinks the existence or being of something *as though this were a kind of being* – namely, as *substance*. The existence of something is accordingly taken to be thinkable through those terms by which our tradition has tended to understand what is cognizable about beings (i.e., as having identity in their enduring presence). For Heidegger, it is this that enables "the [Cartesian etc.] opinion that the supposedly strictest ontic *knowledge* of

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[90] We might consider the case of M.B. Foster himself, who takes the modern view of nature *and* the connected Christianized understanding of divinity *as more true* than those of the Greeks. But in what can this "more" consist? The essence of Foster's position in this regard seems ultimately to be: it is more true simply because we know that it is; and this "more" means, *more like the truth as we think it*. We can recognize that Greek thought is less true than our own, because "our possession of certain truths is so secure that we take them for granted, [such that] we cannot conceive that they were not equally obvious to men precluded from the sources of our own enlightenment." ("Christian Theology (I)," 455.) But how is it possible to establish the conditions of such certainty, or indeed establish its desirability and universal exclusivity, *outside* of precisely the enframing of thought we already familiarly accept, many of whose central contours Foster himself traces to Christian theological sources? Foster at least is helpful in drawing the full conclusions here: continually in his own argument he will return to the position that what is incomplete in the Greek understanding of nature follows from their inadequate conception of the divine, and their inadequate separation of the divine *qua* God from the world. But clearly this position only holds if one accepts the fundamental teachings of Christian theology from the beginning, deriving exclusive certainty on key philosophical points *from* that theology: and thus we experience the ultimate self-referentiality of such an argument. Hence we find ourselves again back at the same basic question, though in the process we have *avoided an experience of the questionability of these interpretive assumptions that this problem potentially opens*. (c.f., Foster, "The Christian Doctrine of Creation," 456-457.) C.f., on this point, Heidegger, The Question Concerning Technology, 117.
[91] Though I certainly accept that there may be other ways of accomplishing similar philosophical effects or grappling with much the same set of problems. I offer here only one possibility to which my own thinking tends to be attached.

a being is also the possible access to the primary being of the being discovered in such knowledge."[92] In other words, it enables a distinctive conflation of ontology with epistemology.

To think through the ontological difference, however, undermines the Cartesian equivocity grounded in substance, and the particular kind of universalism this gives rise to: which arises from the assumption that, from a godlike point of view, the truth for each (substantive, atomistic) thing must be one – that each substance is created and held in being and as knowable by God.[93] Rather than understanding being as infinite substance (or indeed substance at all), then, Heidegger thinks being as *that on the basis of which we encounter things in a worlded way, such as is inseparable from the horizon of time*. But the worldhood of the world is that *it is that world*; and our being-in-the-world is nothing other than the event of truth *qua* worldly disclosure as such. And if being itself always withdraws from the terms of identity (or more broadly, perhaps, the terms of metaphysical coherences which delineate the what-ness of beings), it precisely cannot ground a godlike optics of uni-versalism in the Cartesian sense (which first secures the possibility of apprehending reality in approach to a transcendent, unconditional vantage point *through* a metaphysics of substance). The Heideggarian thought of being rather opens a capacity to understand our thought as at any moment irreducibly "thrown" – i.e., conditioned, worlded through language, enclosed within the hermeneutic circle of interpreted-ness.[94]

As such, Heidegger's thought of worldhood here admits us not to a universalism, so much as to the acknowledgement of a positive multiplicity of possible and viable

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[92] Heidegger, Being and Time, 88-92.

[93] It is interesting to note in this connection that in a certain respect, traditional Christian metaphysics comes to sharpen the ontological atomism attributable to things. As Gilson has it: [for Aristotle,] in order that things should change, as we see they do, it is not sufficient that, stable in themselves, they should simply pass from one state to another as, in the Cartesian physics, a body passes from one place to another without ceasing to be what it is; on the contrary, as in the Aristotelian physics, even the local displacement of a body marks the intrinsic mutability of the body which changes place, so that, in a way, the possibility of ceasing to be where it is attests a possibility of its ceasing to be what it is." (Gilson, The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy, 66-67.) But then, we can see how important a sharpened atomism becomes especially for the Christian idea of the self – which must necessarily be self-identical through a great variety of changes as the condition of its doctrine of personal salvation, the self-unifying requirements of the Christian moral life, and so on.

[94] C.f., Heidegger, Being and Time, 143-144; Martin Heidegger, The End of Philosophy, 26, 41. See also Ekeberg, The Metaphysics Experiment, 134.

"versal" turnings of what is to intelligibility and coherence.[95] And because the way is opened here to think matters of truth not, from the beginning, in terms of certainty concerning the real, but in terms of interpretive disclosure, we can see the possibility for a different kind of relationship to the metaphysical delimitations of our thought than that found in Descartes, and thereafter. Rather, the way is opened for a certain reflective stepping-back and mindfulness of the (necessarily interpretive, and therefore contestable) conditions under which certain vistas rather than others become possible. And with this, we also open the possibility of a more sympathetic exploration of alternate possible framings. And along with this, it is to be hoped: a certain *ethos*, a thoughtful or questioning reconsideration of ourselves and/in the world.

This brings us to a final question. How do we begin to think about what goes on in such "interpretation", and what is at stake in it? How might we attempt to gauge any one specific interpretation relative to others? If we admit to ourselves that there is no escape from localized interpretation, I think we might nevertheless take some guidance from Nietzsche here – who himself asserted that (perspectival) interpretation is all there can ever be. Within this context, he invites us to think about divergent interpretations in terms of divergent typologies ultimately referable to questions of morality, or "evaluations" of existence – that can be seen to be operative *within* them. Nietzsche differentiates here between more affirmative, active evaluations, and more reactive ones, which begin by saying No towards existence. And it is the latter that, for Nietzsche, finds expression in soteriological moralities that judge existence with reference to a standard *outside* it. One first defines the world, and the good, in such a way that it can make sense

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[95] Obviously this is my own adopted terminology. To admit of this possibility, it must be emphasized, is not the same thing as to simply suggest that anything anyone might ever say is true in the same sense, or that one might as well ignore "the world" or be inattentive to it. The alternative can no longer be between one universal framing/turning and blind nothingness. There is an essential difference, I wish to suggest, between thinking poorly or with manifest ignorance within the space that is delimited by, say, *our* dominant framing of what is, and being a sensitive or attentive thinker within the space of an *alternate framing of the world and existence*: the two are not simply "different ways of thinking" in the same sense. The former is more precisely a version of *not thinking at all*, which can not at all be said of the latter. These two possibilities are, quite precisely, *worlds apart*; to annul this and simply conflate them as analogous forms of "difference" is simply another iteration of the standard modern blackmail: that all that matters is one's orientation to a singular and universal historical trajectory, lawful ordering, etc.; hence that children and underdeveloped adults, criminals, and Indigenous peoples, for example, can all be characterized summarily under the unitary sign of immaturity.

to take our orientations beyond the world, and then one works to correct existence in the image of how we imagine it *ought* to be, but *is* not.

The basic question we might ask, then, in finding that our thinking is fundamentally interwoven with a specific theology in its basic contours, is: what kind of morality, what mode of being and evaluative sensibility, speaks here as a symptom, in the ways our presumed dicta interpret the world, and in the various paths by which we carry this particular theology forward? Nietzsche's diagnosis is precisely this: that the dominant terms of our Christianized tradition, and its manner of distinguishing the real from the apparent world, of setting up our dualisms of mind and body, being over against becoming, perfection as against our ontological imperfection, our search for a universal God's-eye perspective, etc., evince within themselves precisely a soteriological spirit.[96] But so too does our conception of the self and of others, as atomistic self-subsisting doers framed through the metaphysics of the will, unified through an ascetic hermeneutics of moral judgment and salvation. Indeed, in ways that will by now be fairly obvious in light of what has been said in this chapter, one could well work through all the central ontological dicta and epistemological orientations I have discussed here – and trace these to soteriological imperatives in the Nietzschean sense. It is also not difficult to see a certain "progressive" soteriological ethic, rendered within the (now) mundane sphere of the world, active in the ways we continue to understand what our freedom is about – moving nature willfully across the gap we presume there to be between "is" and "ought" – within our politics, our technoscientific ethos and its development schemes, and so on.

It will also be obvious, moreover, that the problem of soteriology (and hence the kind of moral imperatives latent within our thought) is of no small relevance to the problem of *our relationship to "nature", to the nonhuman, to our bodily being-there amongst these and so on.* And the problem accordingly becomes: what might a more affirmative way of thinking/relating to the world be? This is a question I suggest we carry with us in our engagement with Indigenous relational thinking; and it is one that will come to preoccupy us in Chapter Four.

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[96] C.f., for example, Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Anti-Christ," in Twilight of the Idols/The Anti-Christ trans. by R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Penguin, 1987), 121-129.

Once again, however, it is not (for either myself or Nietzsche) a matter of simply decreeing that the understandings of the world that emerge for us from our dominant intellectual history are straightforwardly *false*, nor is it a matter of precisely *refuting these*.[97] It is more a question of disrupting the seriousness with which we purport to know and master and ratchet down a singular reality, to wed ourselves to our disenchanting technoscientific ethos and our universal history of "progress", and see all alternate framings *nullified*. It is a question of asking ourselves what it is that we are doing when we *insist* upon such terms and manoeuvres – of asking whether there is not something of what Nietzsche calls a "life-denying" *ethos* that comes to live and act within us in such moments, and to harm us. For what is crucial is to see that this kind of universalizing seriousness can be *worthy of disdain*.

For Nietzsche, this is because this kind of *ethos* springs as a symptom of an initial impotence, a slavishness, a smallness of self – not being "up to" the struggle, the difference, the heights and depths and also ferocity of a nobler, life-affirming existence. And what lives within us in our universalizing seriousness is nothing other than such pettiness turned active in resentment and revenge-taking upon a world found terrible in the first instance.

We can begin to see how this might be so through Nietzsche's story in *The Genealogy of Morals*. On the one hand, he recounts how the thwarted strength of the slaves turns inward to rage, to learn the masochistic joy of punishing the difference and "animality" within, of stretching oneself upon the atomizing and ascetically self-scrutinizing rack of existential guilt before a transcendent standard of how one ought to be but *is* not. On the other hand, however, this cruel joy has its counterpart in the sublimated punishment of others judged guilty by a law understood to be universal and hence neutral. Nietzsche's aristocratic pagans, whose own life-affirmative strength had proven daunting in the first instance, could now be made to suffer through an indirect agency: for they become transmuted under a slavish valuation into criminals, sinners

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[97] Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Genealogy of Morals," in <u>The Birth of Tragedy and the Genealogy of Morals</u> trans. by Francis Golffing (New York: Anchor, 1956), 152-156.

before a universalized law.[98] Subsequent punishments visited upon such "criminals", purifying tortures for the godless, and so on, are not however viewed explicitly as vengeance fuelled by hatred. Rather, such hatred hides cloaked and sublimated as the triumph of an impersonal justice, of a moral law that understands its ordering as progress towards an ideal of peace and love.[99] For all this, however, it is the slavish will here, with its seething resentment, that develops the cruellest imagination, a love of punishment and a whole fantasia of tortures for its enemies; in this it goes well beyond the (admittedly considerable) violence that any aristocratic, life-affirmative valuation and *ethos* could give rise to or condone – for it precisely does not grow from the soil of health and strength.[100]

The image with which Nietzsche leaves us, then, is of a pettiness and smallness of the self grown ugly and vengeful, in a profound coupling of the will to abuse with the will to order. In light of the ground covered in this chapter, it will likely be easy to see how this spirit can find all manner of surreptitious pathways – not least, in the transference of the language of law to the language of nature, *and then back again* to structure our questions and imperatives *to establish/enforce our universally-valid order in political, economic, and social relations, and so on.* And Nietzsche's insight here, I think, is of no small relevance to the problem of opening up non-colonizing and respectful relations with Indigenous peoples and traditions, of grappling with our universalism in *this* connection.

For indeed, throughout the literature and experience of modern European colonialism we encounter the same paradoxical unity of a logic of order on the one hand, a mission of making the world reasonable and civilized, married on the other hand with a monstrous excessiveness of violence and brutality, torture for the sake of sport. This latter might explain itself as "necessary violence" within the rational economy of order –

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[98] Nietzsche, "The Genealogy of Morals," 181-182, 208. The invention and appeal to such a law, for Nietzsche, is rooted in a spirit of No-saying not only because it denies the basic condition under which we might say anything at all – which for him means *perspective, interpretation.*

[99] Nietzsche, "The Genealogy of Morals," 181-185, 226. Nietzsche's passages quoting Tertullian are especially notable here.

[100] Ibid, 174-5.

but this kind of confinement of violence by reason would seem belied by experience, by the excess, by the sadism of cruelty.[101]

This is the legacy we find ourselves having to respond to – and which should perhaps never be far from our thoughts as we strive to do things differently – which this dissertation strives to do in its own way. And neither is this problem separate from that of attempting to disrupt the logic of our own universalism, which has for so long necessarily drawn its limit conclusions, and its zones of exceptional violence in the enforcement of its norms, in the space of relation between itself and Indigenous peoples and lifeways. And indeed: are we not all-too familiar, in our dominant colonial culture, with the way a simplistic and unproblematizing acceptance of our dominant sense of ordered reality – the world "as it is", spoken even in the most platitudinous workaday language – dovetails with a resentful sadism and *schadenfreude,* a barely-cloistered rage at difference *in its more meaningful sense,* as that which does not play *our game* but demands instead that this game be rethought?

But I think we do well to remember Nietzsche's other suggestion in this context: that slavishness is not the *only* possible mode of being we might imagine or come to enact – even for us late moderns who inherit the trajectory we do. Might not something like the Nietzschean invitation to more affirmative ways of being and thinking be of pertinence, then, not only as we strive to respond to the question of our relationships to "nature", but to the connected problem of our (colonial) relationships to *other ways of thinking and being in the world?* If we are serious about extricating ourselves from a vengeful, reactive form of moral interpretation and action, we might ask: why insist upon a universal reality at all, a singular logic of the identifiable referent as against multiplicitous appearance and (non-Western) cultural fictions? Why not, as a basic orientation, simply affirm difference of the (cross-cultural, cross-ontological) kind raised here *as* difference? Why not – and here is *my* question – begin by accepting a multiplicity of worlds and ontologies, and reconsider our ethical questions from within the space of

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[101] An especially noteworthy and thoughtful study on this point is Michael Taussig's, <u>Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing</u> (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). See especially page 52 of that text; but also 23-135 generally.

intercultural thinking this opens? Why not begin to ask what a less resentful and more affirmative way of being and thinking might be, within *this* space – granted altogether that we necessarily begin philosophically localized where we do?

2.6   Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored some of the basic contours of the way our dominant modern tradition has tended to understand nature and frame various key problems accordingly. I have elaborated on some of the interlocking logics by which a certain view of "nature" – and accordingly problems of knowledge and technology, of the self and its freedom and worldly vocation, and of ownership relations, come to be folded together within a singular self-supporting constellation. I have also tried to show how these logics are enabled by a particular set of ontological resolutions, and to foreground some of the specific interpretive (and in this, moral/theological) manoeuvres that make these possible and arguably sustain them.

It has been my intention, through this effort, to lay out a sufficiently detailed point of comparison on the dominant-Western side of things, for the defamiliarizing work to come in the next chapters.   For it is only on the basis of such a grasp of our starting-point that we will be able to think about what kinds of interpretive and philosophical differences are at stake as we turn to Indigenous traditions of thinking and being, and in particular as we begin to ask how Indigenous relational ontologies might open possibilities different from the terms and the alternatives that we are accustomed to.

Having covered the ground we have, let us now begin this second phase of my argument.

Chapter 3

3   Ethnographic Meditations

The aim of this chapter is to begin a process of defamiliarization from the kind of "monological" and "technological" understandings I have been describing as essentially modern. We are no doubt mindful by now of the way these dominant dicta come to show up for us within everyday contexts and interactions, and purport to supply *the framework* through which to understand what living involves and is about, how we are in the world and how it makes sense to engage other, worldly entities. But while one might be disinclined to accept the hard logics of the modern story, and the notion that these supply the only grounds from which thinking and living is possible, it is another (and potentially, I think, more transformative) matter to begin more meaningfully exploring what other possible premises for thought and ethical existence might be available. A beginning point would be to see that the blackmail of modernity is *false* – that is, we are not caught in a "choice" between modernity and incoherent and impossible nothingness, "no Knowledge of the face of the Earth," no arts, society, or stability on the other (Hobbes)[1], nor between modern property and industry and its fictive negation of nature lying in waste (Locke).[2] But more interesting still, I would suggest, is for those of us who are accustomed to thinking in modern/Western terms to explore how we might begin to think with *different terms*, and so become greater strangers to ourselves in order that we may begin reflecting upon matters in ways we otherwise would not have.[3]

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[1] Hobbes, <u>Leviathan</u>, 89.

[2] Locke, <u>Two Treatises of Government</u>, 296-7.

[3] Evidently, this present chapter (like this work more generally) is written from and primarily relative to a particular kind of vantage-point – i.e., a vantage-point similarly localized, or more or less akin to, that of the author (a non-Indigenous settler trained to think primarily with the modern Western tradition, and so on). In other words (and to largely reiterate a point made in Chapter One), this present chapter – which invites the reader along for a defamiliarizing process – is necessarily focused in ways that make fairly definite decisions and assumptions about the kind of audience to which it is most directly pertinent and which it is primarily intended to impact. Of course, I take for granted that not every reader will occupy this position, and hope this work will nevertheless be of use to those who do not. But such decisions and assumptions are nevertheless necessary, especially given the kind of meditation this is – that is, insofar as this philosophical process of *defamiliarization* (which must assume at least primarily a certain audience for which the familiar is identifiable in a certain way) is my aim.

This chapter is an attempt to begin such an exploration by means of a series of brief engagements with diverse Indigenous American traditions. I have selected three "sets" of traditions, in particular, for discussion in this chapter: Algonquian traditions of thought as evinced especially amongst the Ojibwe and related peoples in central Canada; Northwestern Amazonian traditions in South America, focusing on lowland Quichua-speaking and related peoples[4]; and North Pacific Coastal traditions in North America, focusing most on the Tlingit. Each set will offer an opportunity to engage philosophical and practical traditions which stand in marked contrast to modern Western ones on decisive points, and hence invite us to begin imagining how other ways of seeing and engaging the world – of letting beings be – are possible.[5]

In particular, the section on Algonquian traditions will allow an exploration of alternate ways of thinking about what it is for something to be "animate" and, accordingly, to be a person. This will bring us to broach as well the closely-connected concept of "power". But in these will be found suggestive openings onto a radically different vision of existence and of the world. Perhaps most importantly, this vision is informed by a relational ontology and style of thought in contrast to our traditionally atomistic one, and expresses a correspondingly different sense of human beings' ethical and comportmental horizons in relation to "nature". Accordingly, it will begin to be possible to make sense of how the world might plausibly be understood to be full of

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[4]The language spoken today in much of the Ecuadorian Amazon is Quichua. But the underlying cultural stratum of the peoples I am describing here is Shuar and Záparo; and a great many cultural and philosophical affinities exist between these peoples and a number of other groups in present-day Ecuador, Peru, Columbia, and Brazil – e.g., the Aguaruna and other Jívaroan peoples, the Cashinahua, the Achuar, the Piro, the Airo-Pai, and a number of others. The adoption of Quichua, the language of the Incas, within this region has largely been a consequence of Christian missionary efforts in the twentieth century – since missionaries, pushing further into remote lowland areas (in the Amazon forests east of the Andes), found it prudent to bring with them an Indigenous language with which they had greater familiarity from Andean contexts.

[5] A word of clarification should perhaps be offered at this juncture. I do not mean to suggest here that all of these Indigenous traditions together, or even these sets of traditions by themselves, constitute a monolithic cultural grouping or tradition. But I do think that there are sufficient commonalities or family resemblances between the examples used to justify bringing them together in the way I have. At the broadest level, our examples here share recognizably similar ontological suppositions: for example, all of them understand the world to be composed of a plethora of human and non-human persons, think relationally, and extend the notion of personhood in a manner which also includes beings viewed as inanimate by Western thought. Broadly similar notions are held about what it is to communicate with non-human persons, what bodies are, and about the viability of dream as "real" experience. In the case of the sets themselves, I must simply hope that the differences I overlook will be indulged as forgivable omissions in the service of drawing out consonances adequate for the context of the present discussion.

other-than-human persons, and of corresponding understandings about what it is to be a self within it.

The section on Northwestern Amazonian thought will further pursue the question of what it might mean to live within and engage a relational world of other-than-human persons. In particular, this exploration of lowland Quichua thinking will flesh out more clearly some of the possible implications of such alternate ontological understandings, while indicating some of the ways these show up within everyday contexts and practices. Modern metaphysics, as we have seen, has led us to conceive of the human, the self, order and maturity, knowledge, skilled or "instrumental" practices, and human "creativity", in certain (interrelated) ways – which together frame and inform our dominant relationships to "nature" in the context of everyday life. I will accordingly attempt to show here how alternate conceptions on roughly comparable points might live and breathe within an Indigenous and relational ontology. In order to let such matters assume coherence in an appropriate light and more closely on their own terms, they will be broached in the course of an exposition of what has been called Amazonian "perpectivism", focused around the central question of what it is, for lowland Quichua thinking, to become *yacharishka* with (accustomed-to, having come-to-know) something.

For reasons of economy, the section on North Pacific Coastal peoples will focus most directly upon one people, inhabiting the northern reaches of this broad "cultural area"[6] – namely, the Tlingit, whose traditional territory straddles portions of northwestern British Columbia and southeastern Alaska. But I will also draw some examples from other peoples within this broad cultural area, where these offer roughly consonant, suggestive, and illustrative variations of themes under discussion.[7] My aim in this section

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[6] As defined classically by Franz Boas, this area extends from Yakutat Bay in Alaska to the Juan de Fuca Straight south of Vancouver Island. Others have extended this cultural area to roughly the middle of California. Franz Boas, "The Indian Tribes of the North Pacific Coast," in Indians of the North Pacific Coast ed. By Tom McFeat (Toronto: MacMillan, 1978), 1; c.f. Philip Drucker, Cultures of the North Pacific Coast (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 7-8, 105.

[7] E.g., examples which refer to Gitxsan, Wet'suwet'en, and Nuu-chah-nulth contexts. Between these examples, a vast area is spanned; the Tlingit, for example, inhabit the northwestern reaches of British Columbia, while the Nuu-chah-nulth reside close to its southern reaches, i.e., on much of the west coast of Vancouver Island. But it must be stressed from the outset that appreciable differences exist between peoples within this broad area – not only in terms of the land involved and interacted-with, but in terms of significant linguistic and cultural differences, including differences in kinship structures. For a helpful

will be to explore one set of variations on what ownership or "property" relationships can look like and comprise, given philosophical grounds not dissimilar from those elaborated in the first two sections of this chapter. This will provide a point of poignant contrast with the way in which liberal notions of property crystallize the kind of technological and anthropocentric ontology with which we are now familiar.

It should be noted that my aim here is not to try to account for all Indigenous traditions, nor is it strictly speaking to make an argument about similarities or differences between them. Rather, my concern here is to offer a kind of sampling of philosophical, defamiliarizing provocations that Westerners like myself may encounter by taking Indigenous traditions seriously. It is intended to be not the end of the conversation, but a beginning; and in this I prefer to leave open the question of the degree to which distinctions and understandings operative in any one of my examples may be taken as transferrable to the others. The Indigenous traditions included here are, quite emphatically, not identical to one another, and substantial differences exist between (and within) them. But I do think that any one of these *can* be helpful for puzzling though how it might be possible and viable to say the kinds of things the others do. And even to begin this process of puzzling, I think, can be sufficient for our purposes.

3.1   Animacy, Power, and Relational Personhood: Algonquian Examples

Modern thinking, we know, has tended to be framed by a metaphysics that entrenches certain themes. Of especial importance for our purposes here are: i) an understanding of the human being as willful and free. As we have seen, the endemic image here is one of the atomistic human who, closed off within himself, is the autonomous author of his own actions. ii) This image of human personhood is, furthermore, imbued to its roots with a very distinctive moral framework which situates the human being, rational and created in the image of God, over and against the rest of

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discussion of some of these differences ranging from the Tlingit in the north to peoples like the Nuu-chah-nulth and the Makah to the south, see Robert Bringhurst, <u>A Story as Sharp as a Knife: The Classical Haida Mythtellers and Their World</u> (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2000), 156-159. See also, on this point, Bradley Bryan, "Property as Ontology," 17-29.

Creation as his dominion. For if humanity has both freedom and reason, the other beasts of nature have neither; it is humanity who, grasping the plan of the world, is able to complete Creation by directing it to rational ends. iii) The pursuit of rational knowledge is classically understood to be tantamount to epistemologically ascending an ontological ladder towards a universal viewpoint. The theological resonances here have not been absent from modern, more secularized variants of what is effectively an epistemological morality; iv) since at least Plato, dominant elements within the Western tradition have also tended to understand beings atomistically – e.g., as individual substances possessed of properties. Questions about what is "alive", for example, still tend to be framed in this way, such that life is a property of objects: thus modern taxonomic methods can accordingly arrange disparate beings into animate and inanimate categories; and those *classes of beings* that are animate can be grouped according to similarities and differences in traits, etc.

But what is most important for my purposes is that understanding "aliveness" in this way, within the context of this general metaphysical complex, has worked to reinforce familiar assumptions about the proper relationship between human and other beings, and the kinds of moral considerations we find ourselves owing to the non-human. A materialist, atomistic, Christianized (and then secularized) ontology, framing modern epistemological premises, gives rise to certain ways of partitioning phenomena such that only certain kinds of beings can count properly as beings. One has the mathematical projection of objectivity on the one hand; any remainders here (e.g., "gods", "non-corporeal spirits", etc.,) become phantasms ontologically relegated to the internalities of the subject. Of those beings recognized, mineral ones such as mountains and stones are worth no special moral consideration in themselves, being inanimate matter. But then, neither particularly are plants and animals, for though these are alive they lack the moral status of personhood. Some animals may or may not qualify for "rights" or moral considerations depending on how similar they are to *us*, and our special (e.g., rational, and hence instrumental, advanced "cognitive", etc.) faculties/behaviours, which we take to be the index of personhood in the proper sense. This kind of anthropocentrism, which comes to underlie our apprehension and categorization of other beings, plays no small

role in rationalizing the modern slide to viewing all things as mere and mute "standing-reserve".

Our dominant sense of the superiority and reality of such premises, interestingly, has also structured the way modern thought has tended to encounter and dismiss non-modern ontologies which understand matters differently. Thus, since the days of E.B. Tylor, accounts of "animism" have propagated tales of supposedly primitive peoples understanding everything as "alive", believing in the existence of anthropomorphic souls "behind" all natural phenomena (presumably in the same way *we* understand the will to lie behind our actions, hidden within the noumenal depths of the atomistic self), or confusing subjective mental phenomena with things happening "out there", or being unable to distinguish at all between animate and inanimate beings, etc.[8] The "animism" concept, in other words, has not infrequently been one further site in which the logical blackmail of modernity has become entrenched, not infrequently by fitting "animist" thought into the early stages of an evolutionist trajectory crowned with modern man and science. And if one assumes that something's being-animate *must* be thought as described above – that the singular nature/culture division and all the other standard modern metaphysical dicta are unproblematic – it indeed becomes difficult to imagine how thinking in "animist" terms could be possible or to give rise to meaningful insights about what it is to be in the world. But a more careful listening to Cree and Ojibwe thought, however, reveals something quite different from this projected image. Accordingly, we can also find in a more careful engagement an invitation to imagine differently not only animacy or personhood but the very nature and structure of existence and our ethical horizons within it.

In Ojibwe thinking personhood is extended to include things that we would classify as inanimate beings – for example, certain stones have been said to be alive, to answer questions put to them, to change form. Indeed, the occurrence of phenomena generally tends to draw questions not about the work of impersonal forces, but about

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[8] For a succinct history of the "animism" concept in anthropological discourse since Tylor in the 19th century, see Nurit Bird-David, "'Animism' Revisited: Personhood, Environment, and Relational Epistemology," in <u>Current Anthropology</u> 40, Supplement, (Feb. 1999), S67-S71.

personalistic actions: *who* has done *X*?[9] In this world full of persons, no sharp line can be drawn between the personhood of human beings, or of animals, or of other-than-human "grandfathers" or *ätisokának*. Moreover it is assumed that it is both possible and desirable to develop a range of social relationships – including relations of exchange, of empathy and nurture and obligation, and so on – with many of these persons.

Parenthetically, it can be helpful to note here (for the purposes of getting a general flavour of thinking) that that many Indigenous traditions conceive the relationship of human and other beings almost inversely to the Western hierarchies. Rather than being the rational animal above all others, many traditions tell stories which begin by setting all beings on the same plane: all are persons like us; but at some point something happens which introduces bodily differentiation and the emergence of distinct species. It might be more accurate to say that in the case of animals and plants, something is *added* to a basic condition of humanity rather than *subtracted*. Needless to say, though the bodies in question hamper subsequent easy communication between species under normal waking circumstances, the notion that animals remain persons would seem to set the ground for the understanding that, given the capacity to transform, communication again becomes possible.[10]

But to understand the conception of personhood involved here, at least in Algonquian traditions, it is necessary to take a detour through Algonquian conceptions of animacy. Tim Ingold has argued, in this connection, that animacy for the Ojibwe is not understood as a *property* of *atomistic objects* which endure as self-identical through time, but rather as a *condition of being*.[11] And as such, to say that a particular thing is animate is less to embark upon a taxonomic venture than to describe the positioning of something

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[9] In this, and in much of the account which follows, I am drawing upon A.I. Hallowell's classic ethnographic essays, as collected in Contributions to Ojibwe Studies: Essays 1934-1974 ed. by Jennifer Brown and Susan Gray (University of Nebraska Press, 2010), especially "Ojibwa Ontology, Behaviour, and World View" (535-568).

[10] Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, "Exchanging Perspectives: The Transformation of Objects into Subjects in Amerindian Ontologies," in Common Knowledge 10:3 (2004), 464-465. See also Umeek, E. Richard Atleo, Tsawalk: A Nuu-chah-nulth Worldview (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), 59-63. Versions of this kind of origin story are also found in the Amazonian Quichua context.

[11] Ingold, "The Perception of the Environment," 97.

"within a relational field," in which the speaker herself is always presumed to be immersed.[12]

Let us try to see how this might be the case. Across Algonquian languages generally, nouns grammatically assume either an animate or inanimate gender. And it has, I contend, been compellingly shown that a more or less coherent set of semantic criteria inform grammatical assignment in this regard. Regna Darnell and Anthony Vanek, in particular, have argued with reference to the Plains Cree (a people closely-related, culturally and linguistically, to the Ojibwe) that at its simplest, animacy lies in something's having power. That is, something is animate if it stands in a relation of effecting others, if it manifests "the ability and freedom to act and interact."[13]

Some examples are helpful here: a rosebush's animacy is evident in its having thorns, and hence the capacity to protect itself; other shrubs, however, such as blueberries, are inanimate. Animals are always animate, but lose their animacy when dead or rotting; similarly, a tree may be animate but a piece of wood from that tree, having lost its capacity for growth, will be inanimate. Spoons are classed as animate, because they *contain and give shape to* the inanimate liquid they hold. (Forks and knives are inanimate.)[14] The case of the spoon here is especially interesting because it underscores how animacy operates as a *relational* concept: it is by virtue of its effecting something else (i.e., that which it holds), it is *in its relationship with the liquid*, that the spoon's animacy is manifest. (And it also here that we can see, I think, an edifying instance of power showing itself as power: that is, in *containing* something else. And indeed, as we go on to think about what it is to take on or familiarize gifts from non-human persons, it seems to me that this image of containment will prove especially helpful.) Tools like canoe paddles or hunting bows are also animate in that they add to the strength of a human arm by being employed in relationship to it.[15]

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[12] Ibid.

[13] Regna Darnell and Anthony L. Vanek, "The Semantic Basis of the Animate/Inanimate Distinction in Cree," in Papers in Linguistics (Special Issue: Language Use in Canada) 9:3-4 (Fall/Winter 1976), 163-4.

[14] These examples are drawn from Darnell and Vanek, "The Semantic Basis of the Animate/Inanimate Distinction in Cree," 164-170.

[15] Ibid, 170.

It should be noted, moreover, that it is possible for a particular thing to pass from animacy to inanimacy; but it is also possible for the reverse to happen. Something that generally has power associations can be referred to as inanimate as a way of indicating that it has lost its normal power. Furthermore, "any inanimate thing may, under certain conditions, come to have a power association, and will then become animate (although the usage will be restricted to that situational context.)"[16] The key here is experience, and whether or not a particular thing has displayed animate characteristics. And we can expect, accordingly, that not everyone will necessarily refer to a given object with the same gender, and that variations in this regard can in part be imputable to differences in direct, personal experience with it.[17]

It is worth recalling A.I. Hallowell's well-known anecdote here: asked whether all stones are alive, Hallowell's Ojibwe interlocutor answered that *some* are.[18] From what has been said, it should be evident that this more abstract and taxonomical question, *are all stones alive?* falls rather beside the point for an Ojibwe thinker, as does the question of whether stones display animate properties (e.g., speaking, moving) outside of our relation to them. Just *who* has seen something, or who one has heard something from, tends as a rule to be specified in Indigenous speech patterns[19]; and we can infer from this that an occurrence spoken about is implicitly an occurrence-as-witnessed-by-someone, a happening *within that relationship*.

What is interesting and important here are the positions and interactive capacities of things relative to each other, within (or, rather, *as*) situations. And more broadly, the environmental world in which one is so immersed is always, in effect, composed of such relational situations; indeed the cosmos is understood precisely to be moved and held in

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[16] Ibid, 164.
[17] This is a point also made by Terry Strauss with reference to another Algonquian people, the Cheyenne. Terry Strauss, "The Self in Northern Cheyenne Language and Culture," in Semiotics, Self, and Society ed. by Benjamin Lee and Greg Urban (New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1989), 55.
[18] A.I. Hallowell, Contributions to Ojibwe Studies, 44.
[19] Relative to the Tlingit, see Thomas F. Thornton, Being and Place Among the Tlingit (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008), 135. In Quichua, this tendency is manifest in the grammatical use of perspectival markers in the making of any statement: what is being recounted was seen by *someone*; and it is necessary to take care in specifying one's own relative proximity or removal from that relational happening.

balance *by power*. And "balance," Darnell and Vanek write, "in this instance is not passive, but a dynamic tension of forces" which is nevertheless susceptible to change.[20]

We may leave open, I think, the question as to whether some things are more animate than others, i.e., whether animacy *per se* necessarily implies personhood. But persons *are* animate, and so should I think be understood to arise and be experienced in this same kind of relational way. Ingold has argued that to be a person in this context is to be something like a relational gathering or focal-point of power.[21] Different persons have different amounts of power; some have less than human beings, and many have more. But to experience something as a person opens up certain kinds of ethical and interactive possibilities, not in terms of engaging that being as a person capable of its own agentive actions, and of entering into relationships and conversations with it.

This claim is perhaps an especially difficult one for moderns, raised on our classic nature/culture divide. But we must acknowledge, first, that understanding "natural" phenomena like the sun or the winds as agentive persons cannot seem so strange if we do not assume from the beginning all the classic Christian dicta: that the (natural) world must be governed universally and by necessity, but that nevertheless the person must be recuperated as the (quasi-miraculous) locus of spontaneous freedom therein. To see "natural" phenomena as persons is not to blind oneself to them, but to approach them and pay attention with a view to different questions and a different assumed framework for interpreting occurrences. For we can expect and notice that other persons, like ourselves, will generally have predictable habits. But habits can in principle be subject to change, and we can anticipate that patterns will not repeat exactly. The whole problem of ir/regularities in the world can thus be approached and given a space in which to assume coherence *without* from the beginning posing the problem of the in/calculable.[22]

Secondly, and in ways that will become clearer, it is important to stress that the Ojibwe view of personhood as such is not the same as our own, and so does not imply the

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[20] Darnel and Vanek, "The Semantic Basis of the Animate/Inanimate Distinction in Cree," 163. The authors helpfully emphasize here that power in the indigenous conception does not carry the same connotations of domination that we might bring to it. See, on this point, my discussion in the next chapter.
[21] Tim Ingold, The Perception of the Environment, 97.
[22] A problem whose cultural particularity *as a problem* should by now be clear.

same kinds of assumptions that we are wont to import into the matter. A person as a relational focusing of power is not the Christian moral person or the unique, self-subsisting and individual soul endowed with a creative power of free will after the image of its Creator. And thus to attribute personhood to non-human beings here is not the same as to presume everything modern thought holds to be essential to human beings and then generalize these attributes throughout "nature".

Thirdly, it is important to emphasize here that to attribute personhood to non-human beings is *not* the same thing as to anthropomorphize them. To see the mark of a non-human person's agentive action is nothing other than to see it doing what it does: e.g., the sun shining and giving orientation to the trees; the winds moving boughs; the thunder thundering.[23] Does the caribou reveal itself to the hunter, or is it hidden away? But then, does not agentive personhood at a minimum imply a point of view, an awareness rooted within the body, which senses and engages the world through it and as it were from the "inside"? Ojibwe thinking would seem to hold such a view.[24] But how can this be said of stones? Again, the notion of *relationality* is key here, I think, in framing the problem. If we think about an interpersonal recognition of others in this way, it would seem above all to involve, from the "outside", a claim not about what something

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[23] Ingold, Perception and the Environment, 98. See as well Hallowell's discussion, Contributions to Ojibwe Studies, 368-371; 546.

[24] Certain Ojibwe terms relative to personhood have traditionally been identified and translated as "soul" and "body". (Hallowell, Contributions to Ojibwe Studies, 524-528) The "soul" can detach from the body and travel elsewhere, as in dream, and it persists after death; but then death is itself conceived as a *transformation* (i.e., not the abdication, but the *changing* of one's bodily form), and the soul whose doings are discussed in dream assumes/*inhabits* another (dream-)body, just as the soul of others is never directly perceived, but is only experienced in connection with a body. (528) In other words, a body of some kind seems to be the condition of perspectival being at all. But if this is so, then the whole theological baggage implicit in our notion of the soul as a noncorporeal substance destined to be liberated from the material would seem ill-suited here, in a way that is analogous to the unsuitability of the natural/supernatural dichotomy for Indigenous thinking. In light of the cultural and metaphysical problems inherent in grappling with the soul/mind problem, it is not surprising to find a number of authors in other, similar contexts adopting a different language. Thus Sergei Kan, writing about the Tlingit self, speaks about an "inside" as opposed to an "outside", which would seem to give much more the sense of two inverted views or perspectives relative to a bodily surface – a gloss which might prove helpful for thinking about what it might mean that Indigenous peoples often describe themselves as having multiple "souls" (an eye-soul, hand-soul, etc.). (Sergei Kan, "The 19th-century Tlingit Potlatch: A New Perspective," in American Ethnologist 13:2 [1986], 196). Elsje Lagrou describes the "material" bodies in Cashinahua thought as the "vehicles" of "spirit" or *yuxin*, but moreover suggests that our tendency of separating the material and spiritual ill fits Cashinahua understandings, categories, and practices. (Elsje Lagrou, "Sorcery and Shamanism in Cashinahua Discourse and Praxis, Purus River, Brazil," in In Darkness and Secrecy: The Anthropology of Assault Sorcery and Witchcraft in Amazonia ed. by Neil Whitehead and Robin Wright (London: Duke University Press, 2004), 251.

is "in itself" but about the ways in which something can be seen to be interactive *as it relates to me and as I engage it situationally*. As Nurit Bird-David has put it: "I am conscious of the *relatedness with* my interlocutor *as I engage with her*, attentive to what she does in relation to what I do, to how she talks and listens to me as I talk and listen to her, to what happens simultaneously and mutually to me, to her, to *us*."[25]

But we can gain a sense for the way an "internality" can be understood to be present here insofar as Ojibwe (and, generally, Algonquian) thought understands it to be possible to share in what such perspectives *are* "internally" to the extent that it is possible to transform, to become "*x*" by taking on and inhabiting another's mode of being and seeing (more on this below). Alongside this possibility of becoming, however, it must be noted that there is a pervasive concern not to impose upon the freedom of others to act and interact as they do, and little willingness to attribute states of mind to other persons (human or nonhuman). Transformation, as we will see, opens up the possibility of interpersonal communication and of approaching an empathetic condition of "seeing like others" – but this is emphatically not the same thing as being able to judge that another person's experience of meaning is identical to one's own.

The question of transformation gains clarity in connection with a further question: what of non-human persons speaking, or answering questions – when and how can they reasonably be said to do *that*? This is a complicated question that requires us to touch on Ojibwe understandings of dream and the body, and of the kinds of relationships that Ojibwe peoples generally pursue and understand to be possible with powerful non-human others. For understanding the sonic "doing" and hence manifestation of phenomena like the thunder (which is a powerful person, the Thunderbird) *as speech* requires work, namely the development of a special relationship with that being in question. The prior occurrence of such work can largely be taken for granted where individuals are able to speak with e.g., the Thunderbirds: for one can only do this where one has dreamed the Thunderbird and hence has established and deepened a relationship with it. By the same token, not everyone can be expected to be able to speak with a given (nonhuman) person, to be able to establish such relations.

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[25]Bird-David, "Animism Revisited," at S72.

The way a particular being speaks, acts, moves, and sees – in short, its mode of being – is determined by its body; and Ojibwe thought understands communication to normally be transparent between beings who share the same bodily equipment. If under normal circumstances I can understand what humans say but not what bears say, it is the case that bear seem to understand other bear. But Ojibwe thought – like all the other Indigenous traditions touched on here – assumes that under certain circumstances it *is* possible for beings to transform and so open different channels of communication. Indeed, it is precisely another mark of powerful beings to be able to transform easily. (Ingold offers another gloss on "power" which is relevant here: as "the potential of the life process to generate beings of manifold forms.")[26] As a rule this is more difficult for humans (who are by no means the most powerful beings in the cosmos), but transformation for us becomes easier in dreams, and so generally it is *in* dreams that one is able to see other beings in their more transparently agentive and communicative guise – e.g., appearing to us as humans. Indeed, another word used for the *ätisokának* (other-than-human grandfathers), in Ojibwe, is *pawáganak*, "dream-visitors", "that-which-is-dreamed"; and it is in the course of practices such as puberty vision fasts that Ojibwe individuals hope to establish communicative and tutelary relationships with these.[27]

Dreaming here is not understood as a realm of unreal hallucination, or the phantasms of the self withdrawn into itself, but rather as a viable mode of experience and one for which awareness is cultivated. This view of dreams can be understood to follow from the way the Ojibwe self is *relational* rather than *atomistic*. That is, one cannot assume the kind of purely private, atomistically isolated, internal experiences of the self; the self is not closed off and outside/over-against the world but embedded and opened out into it. Terry Strauss has suggested with regard to the Cheyenne, another Algonquian people, that "thoughts, the 'internal dialogue,' like dreams and visions, and all internal mental activity, always connect outside the self and are in some aspect always understood as 'messages,' communications from another (human or other-than-human) person."[28]

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[26] Ibid, 98.

[27] Hallowell, <u>Contributions to Ojibwe Studies</u>, 374, 381 n. 11. Given what has been said here about personhood in Ojibwe thought, however, we might perhaps do even better to make it "that-WHO-is dreamed".

[28] Strauss, "The Self in Northern Cheyenne Language and Culture," 65.

Understood in relational terms, dreaming is especially valuable as a way of engaging, opening up and revealing the world beyond what is ordinarily seen, though what is unveiled in this way might be confirmed through subsequent investigation.

And so, when one says that human beings cannot ordinarily communicate with bear, for example, or with thunder, one must also add that it depends entirely upon who it is we are referring to. *Some* people may have learned to do so perfectly well, on the basis of relationships developed through the cultivation of dreaming, and on the basis of gifts received in and through such interactive contexts. (The greater challenge, indeed, might be for the rest of us to communicate easily with such people.) But what is involved in such communicative interaction, in such gifts, such that they can carry over into waking life and be understood *as speech* within it? Part of what is involved is that the dreamer, in communicating with *pawáganak*, has learned to take on another mode of being, to understand their speech "*not through translation but through metamorphosis*."[29] That is, under conditions of a more fluid dream-self, it is possible to develop a kind of empathy with particular non-human beings – which arises on the basis of a transformative becoming, an education in other ways and registers of being. Hallowell gives the example of the man who, hearing a rumble of thunder, asked his wife if she had heard what was said.[30] But the thunder precisely *does not cease being thunder here*; nothing else is expected of it. Ingold suggests, instead, that what is important here is that "the thunderbird [as the thunder] . . . invades the perceiver's consciousness, whence it becomes generative of his or her own capacity to see."[31]

It is generally understood, however, that the knowledge gained in such communications is of a kind that one keeps to oneself. To reveal what one knows casually is a misuse of the knowledge; there is a certain ethic of secrecy at work here. At one level, we might conjecture that this follows naturally where personhood is expanded beyond the human: it is not a question of there being a Book of the World neutrally open to all, but of specific and intimate relationships, divulgences, gifts and transformations. To share knowledge casually and too explicitly: would this not be something akin to a

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[29] Ingold, <u>The Perception of the Environment</u>, 106.
[30] Hallowell, <u>Contributions to Ojibwe Studies</u>, 549.
[31] Ibid, 279.

betrayal of confidence, that also cuts out the agency of others (including nonhuman persons) to enter into relationships on their own terms? But we might also wonder, perhaps, whether one reason for secrecy here might be that such knowledge *does not translate well* into propositional terms or casual conversation, or indeed straightforwardly into human language at all.[32]

To return to the example of stones speaking or answering questions put to them: it is probably easiest for us to assume that such claims refer to things that happened in dreams. But we can also, perhaps, begin to imagine how something like this could occur in waking life as well, in interactions with a particular stone claiming our attention, in a situation of sensory engagement which gives rise to a whole unfolding play of thought and empathetic listening, which is itself not separable from the relational being-present of *this stone*. Recall that there is no primary distinction between the "internal space" of the atomistic perceiver apart from the "external" world of objects perceived. Taking into account the reverberating echoes of past dreams and interactions called forth by what is present, the ongoing work of a cultivated and transformative listening, and the murky encroachments of myriad possible "states of consciousness" from which waking life in turn is never fully exempt, it will perhaps begin to seem less strange to speak of moving and speaking stones.

And further, we might intuit a challenge levied to us here by Ojibwe thinking: though we readily recognize the phenomenon of "internal dialogue", why are we so insistent that it *is* something purely "internal" – as though it were something spontaneously grown one-sidedly from us, and unmoored from one's bodily relations in place and to others? Where precisely does one draw the lines between my bodily being and the "outside" world, or between my body and my mind – and why are we so certain

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[32] See Ingold, The Perception of the Environment, 99. Relative to a different ethnographic context (the Wishram on the Northwest Pacific Coast of North America), Dell Hymes also offers an intriguing suggestion here: that secrecy can be understood to concern the problem of certainty. In other words, one refrains from speaking too directly on matters that are not "certain", or that come to play precisely in open-ended and uncertain contexts such as prevail in hunting or fishing trips, or indeed generally in navigating and surviving in the world. But this point is I think perfectly complementary to those offered above: since the uncertain or only-ever-"probabilistic" nature of life can be understood to refer us to the freedom of non/human persons. C.f., Dell Hymes, "Two Types of Linguistic Relativity," in Sociolinguistics: Proceedings of the UCLA Sociolinguistics Conference, 1964 ed. by William Bright (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1966), 156.

that these must be drawn at all? Is there not a whole particular metaphysical (as Nietzsche will tell us, moral[33]) securing at work here? Might "internal dialogue" not instead be inextricably bound up with one's emplaced, bodily engagements with other particular and sensuous happenings, and a whole complex interplay which gathers together the resonances of memory, quality, allure, feeling and affect?[34] It is perhaps in light of this challenge that we can glimpse more adequately the space in which Ojibwe thought moves and in which such claims begin to show their coherence, and relative to which we can witness here a tremendous cultivation and sensitivity, as especially in practices for *deepening* the conversation involved, following it to its profundities.

Opening out onto the world, the crucial problem for the Ojibwe self is the development and cultivation of helpful relationships within it. Because non-human persons are attributed the power of agency and action, positive relationships with them are understood to be necessary in order to receive favours and gifts required successfully navigating the dangers of life. Among the examples of powerful *ätisokának* that Hallowell mentions in this connection are especially "bosses" or "owners" of plant and animal species (for instance, Birch, Bear, Caribou, Golden Eagle, and so on) as well as phenomena such as thunder (the Thunder Bird), or the winds.[35] They can be associated

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[33] Friedrich Nietzsche, <u>The Will to Power</u>, trans. by Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1968), #487, 488.

[34] For an interesting exploration by a sympathetic Western thinker of the way engagements with place might be understood and deepened as "dialogic", see Freya Mathews, <u>Reinhabiting Reality</u>, 111-112. Dennis Tedlock and Bruce Mannheim also offer the valuable suggestion, from the Western side of things, that dialogue be understood as a form of *logos* that transpires within a relational and interactive field, something irreducibly shared and multivocal; this field, they argue, should itself be seen as the site of emergence of language, thought, culture – though we might later try to access this by isolating individual speakers. In this sense, dialogue is irreducible to monologues added together, but is also prior to monologues as such. See Dennis Tedlock and Bruce Mannheim, eds., <u>The Dialogic Emergence of Culture</u> (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 1-4.

[35] Hallowell, <u>Contributions to Ojibwe Studies</u>, 367, 374-5. These "bosses" are to be distinguished from the individual bear of caribou one might kill, in that they are stable interlocutors with whom one can have an enduring relationship across one's particular encounters with individuals. Whereas one might be tempted to explore parallels with Platonism here (e.g., in talking about Bear as opposed to bear), it seems important to stress that the similarity is only passing. There is perhaps a sense in which the theory of animal bosses reifies an idea of species or occurrences like thunder across discreet instances. But then what seems interesting here is that we find a language in which one can acknowledge something like "identity" across contexts (of bear, of thunder, etc.), but do so in a way which reflects the general orientations and inclinations of Indigenous thought towards direct and experiential relations. For what is important here is not one's capacity to grasp bearness intellectually as an idea so much as to develop a specific empathetic and nurturing relationship that is lasting and can be appealed to throughout the course of one's life; insofar

with the ownership of particular "skills"; and an animal "boss" *pawágan* may be moved to help a hunter e.g., by gifting skills or sending his "pet" animals to him.[36] But soliciting and receiving such gifts from one's relations involves on our part cultivating the capacity to transform and hence become communicative with them, as we have seen. And it is not for nothing here that the Ojibwe word for non-human persons is *ätisokának*, "our grandfathers". For grandfathers precede us in the world and nurture us, help to raise us into what we become; they are older and have more experience, and therefore more power and wisdom – to which we do well to listen.

3.2   An Amazonian Study in Knowing-Becoming

Let us turn now to a different context, and another set of traditions, in the Northwest Amazon. Here, I draw from other ethnographers[37] but also from fieldwork with Quichua-speaking people in the Amazonian lowlands of Ecuador, in order to flesh out more fully one set of possibilities for what it might mean to understand oneself as a relationally-constituted person engaging a plethora of other-than-human persons. In this, I will attempt to indicate something of how Quichua understandings play out in everyday contexts, and give rise to alternate ways of thinking about various problems that, construed in modern ways, form central pillars of our self-supporting sense of things (e.g., what knowledge, maturity, art, skill, selfhood are, etc.).

But in order to let Quichua thought and practice assume something of its coherence, my central concern must be to clarify the nature of (one variant of) what has been called Amazonian "perspectivism". This term refers to a basic set of ontological understandings upon which many of the central concerns and aspirations of Northwest Amazonian thought hinge. A central problem here, as I understand it, concerns the possibility of playing-across-and-yet-preserving the boundaries that delimit the perspectival orders of being. The basic ontological relationality which frames this concern suggests that i) what we might call "atomistic" individuals or beings are

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as it is possible to do this it would seem that a notion of animal bosses could quite plausibly suggest itself as a working solution which stands to be confirmed by dream experiences, and so on.
[36] Hallowell, Contributions to Ojibwe Studies, 375.
[37] Most of the other writers cited here work with linguistically different but culturally similar groups within the same broad region. See supra, note 3.

constituted as what they are *from out of a prior network of relations* which one already encounters as distributed across a range of speciated[38] and perpectivally differentiated bodily forms; and ii) change to the self and to other beings continues to be possible in the unfolding of ongoing relational engagements, which life consists of. My strategy for approaching this perspectivism and seeing it at work will be to try to understand a set of concerns which frame and give nuance to the problem of what in Quichua is called becoming *yacharishka,* or "accustomed to" something.[39]

As a problem, becoming-*yacharishka* is especially interesting because it allows us to see something of what comprises local understandings of what it is to know (*yachana*) and be knowledgeable; and it is significant in this regard that the Quichua word generally translated as "shaman" (i.e., *yachaj*, "one who knows") stems from the same root verb. By tracing what is involved in becoming *yacharishka*, and in other concepts that connect closely to it, we will see something of how lowland (i.e., Amazonian) Quichua thinking understands what it is to be an attractive, mature, cultivated and thoughtful person. And all of this will prove profoundly indissociable from the normative problem of developing a thoughtful and sensitive relationship of "listening" to the non-human world we think of as "nature", and the cultivation of meditative and dialogic techniques to that end.

But we will also see how what is involved here is no naïve "Romanticism" which imagines the world of "nature" as benign or simply cultivates identity or one-ness with

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[38] I use the word "speciation" here to describe the way beings within our everyday world are understood by Amazonian thought to have withdrawn from an original human-ness in "beginning-times" into the various differentiated bodily forms of animals and plants as we now encounter them. However, it should be stressed: i) that indigenous identifications of something like "species" in this sense cannot be assumed to overlap with Western biological taxonomies, and often in fact do not; and ii) that, as we might expect from our above discussion of Ojibwe thought, we likewise cannot assume that indigenous and Western traditions share assumptions about the kinds of things that are "animate" and hence in some sense "alive" as persons. In other words, the kinds of entities Amazonian thought will understand as persons and hence as "speciated" in the sense used here also includes beings we assume to be inanimate, e.g., stones used in gardening who must be fed, who have been reported to speak to their human "owners" in dreams, who are capable of fighting with one another, and so on.

[39] The root verb here is *yachana*, to know. *Yacharishka* is a past participle form of *yacharina*, which modifies *yachana* with a reflexive *–ri* suffix, which generally indicates that an action of a verb is being undertaken by the subject of a phrase, though this will also alter the meaning of the verb in question. In this case, becoming *yacharishka* has the meaning of something like "becoming accustomed" to something. One might use the word in a phrase such as, "*Pai sachawa yacharishka tukun,*" – i.e., "s/he is becoming *yacharishka* with/accustomed to the forest," – where the word *tukun* here is a verb that means something like "becoming" or "happening", and often connotes transformation.

"it". Nor is it the ontologically transcendent cadence of mystic self-dissolution, nor an emancipatory search for an unfettered and infinite becoming. What one finds instead is rather a complex set of ethical, philosophical, and aesthetic practices normatively ordered around the problem of living well *as a relative and amongst relatives* and giving rise to distinctive modes of flourishing.

The term "relative" here would seem to imply a smaller subset within a larger ontological category of "relations", insofar as it implies a certain degree of fixity and discipline, and also of a certain degree of shared transparency with others who are one's relatives. But to be in a relationship is not necessarily to be in a transparent relationship. (And indeed, some degree of differentiation or opacity would seem to be a necessary condition of dialogue or communication at all and in any circumstance, even amongst relatives, as much as transparency *per se*.)

What living well as a relative requires is developing a mature and "contained" becoming, a kind of moderate, dynamic fixity within the ontological scenario described above, and within an existential horizon where the world is understood to be fundamentally ambivalent and dangerous, to always and of necessity contain a "dark" side. This refers us on the one hand to relations of predation and accordingly the promise of (violent) death. But it also refers us, I think, to particular dangers that arise on the basis of a more relational and dynamic ontology and ethical horizon. There is always the risk of an uncontrolled becoming-otherwise, which can be fatal. Transformative becomings with the nonhuman, which break down borders of relative fixity and bring us to see the world closer to their point of view, often have a sense of being spooky or even outright frightening. On the other hand, there is always the danger (not unconnected to the possibility of becoming-otherwise) of a breakdown in social relations, of envy and anger and offense overtaking bonds of empathetic caring. But such "dark" elements of existence are not viewed as something to be cosmically vanquished as such but rather as a set of contexts and possibilities set by structuring relations that make the world we must navigate what it is and sustain it as such.

3.2.1 Sharing Bodies and Perspectives

Eduardo Viveiros de Castro has argued that Amerindian thought generally tends to assume that different beings occupy different viewpoints which understand the world in ways that are structurally similar, but that shift according to that being's situated position relative to others. Whereas *we* see animals as animals (under normal conditions), a given animal – say, a fish – will see other fish *as people*. As people, and to their own way of thinking, other animals engage in much the same kinds of activities we do, and see the world as analogous versions of the way we see it. But they will not see other specific beings in the same way we do; rather the ontological identity of something is determined by its position relative to the viewer.[40] Thus what *we* see as a spirit being might view other spirits as humans, but see human beings in the same way *we* view birds – i.e., as prey; and so to that spirit-being, human beings *appear as birds*, and so as something to hunt.[41] An underwater cavern might be a longhouse to a fish, and riverbed stones might look like stools. This kind of play between perspectives also characterizes the way particular entities might be named or "classified" on the basis of this kind of relational logic. For example, a plant that looks like a domestic plant that humans use but is either poisonous or useless for us might be a version of that domestic plant for or relative to another being, e.g., that of the forest spirits.[42]

A basic presumption found amongst Indigenous peoples throughout much of the Americas, but also specifically amongst peoples of the Northwest Amazon, is that it is nevertheless possible to transform to be like other beings and so not only to communicate

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[40] Viveiros de Castro, "Exchanging Perspectives," 468-473. De Castro rightly emphasizes that Amazonian "perspectivism" is not rooted in anything like the kind of representational epistemology that informs our familiar versions of "relativism" or postmodern perspectivism. To paraphrase de Castro's suggestion, human beings ontologically *are birds* relative to spirit-beings in a way analogous to how kinship terms identify people by functioning as relational pointers. That is, we are birds for spirit people in the same manner that Liam might be at once *my nephew* and his father's *son*, without either term being any less *what he is*.

[41] This example is taken from Belaunde, "The convivial self and the fear of anger," 215.

[42] For example, manioc is a cultivated, starchy tuber that is central to the local diet. Quichua speakers might call a particular forest plant "*sacha lumu*" or "forest/wild manioc". This is a way of saying that it is similar to the "*alli lumu*" or "good manioc" which is cultivated in gardens, but does not actually produce edible tubers and so has no use for us; but such analogies are often understood on the basis of a perspectival ontology which presumes that *sacha lumu* very well *might* be useful for someone else (e.g., the *sacha runa* or forest spirits) and so appear like *alli lumu* to them.

with them *but to share their way of seeing, to occupy their perspective on the world*. As with the Ojibwe, meaningful dialogic interaction with other beings is only properly possible on the basis of such becoming-aligned, and thus through co-habitation of what we might call shared planes of transparency or modes of perspectival being. As we will see, becoming *yacharishka* with something precisely involves this process. And so "knowing" or "understanding" something in this sense takes place within an ontological and philosophical context which involves bodily change, and accordingly a taking-on of another way of being, a transformation of one's aesthetic and moral horizons, and a transformation of one's sense of what is beautiful and good.

But what then is a body, in this sense? De Castro's gloss is helpful here: the body is something like an "assemblage" or "bundle of affects and capacities", "dispositions", "ways of being", that delineates a particular perspective but also and accordingly forms a kind of equipmental set defining possibilities for acting within the world. The body, in other words, expresses and enables the uniqueness of a person in terms of "what it eats, how it moves, how it communicates, where it lives, whether it is gregarious or solitary."[43]

However, to understand the kind of normative and relational horizons in which such cross- or inter-species metamorphoses are undertaken, it is necessary to see that becoming-*yacharishka* is something that one can always find already taking place in a multitude of ways as the condition of possibility of successful living, eating, taking medicines, and so on. And it occurs, in a crucial way, *between* human relatives – and this forms the condition of collective living-together. And so if one image of becoming *yacharishka* might be a spider who has come to take on the camouflaging colour of the flower it hunts upon, and another is the hunter who has learned to become-boa and learn the boa's mode of hunting and killing-desire and ability to attract and deceive prey,[44]

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[43] Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, "Exchanging Perspectives," 474-5.

[44] C.f. Elsje Lagrou: "Hunters are said to imitate the hunting techniques and qualities of the boa much more than those of the jaguar. The boa is famous for seducing its prey, attracting it through the emission of a high-pitched sound and the hypnotising power of its eyes, and also through its charm (*dau*), incorporated in the design on its skin." In Elsje Lagrou, "Homesickness and the Cashinahua Self: a reflection on the embodied condition of relatedness," in The Anthropology of Love and Anger: The Aesthetics of Conviviality in Native Amazonia ed. by Joanna Overing and Alan Passes (New York: Routledge, 2000), 158.

another is quite simply the way husbands and wives living together and caring for each other will start to share traits, think alike, and finish one another's sentences.

Let us pause here a little longer to consider the way becoming-*yacharishka* is understood and cultivated in terms of human kinship relations. The problem of sharing a body with one's kin and taking part in caring and mutually-supporting relations with them constitutes in many ways the prime point of orientation relative to which Quichua people understand the dangers of uncontrolled becoming (and hence the value of discipline, moderation, and so on). In becoming-*yacharishka*, one comes to share a body and to *occupy a shared body* with others. This notion of a shared body reflects a basic ontological supposition, it seems to me, that relations come *first*, constituting the individual as a kind of concrescence or fixity which nevertheless always retains a certain transience and mutability about it, which is constantly "becoming" in a range of ways and requires deliberate work in order to retain its stability and identity. Elsje Lagrou consonantly suggests, with regard to the culturally-similar Cashinahua in western Brazil, that "paths followed, experiences shared, and food eaten mould a being into what it is, an identity that nevertheless has its ephemeral side."[45] And accordingly, Lagrou describes a whole series of practices intended to shape the individual as he or she is brought up within a network of kin relations. These effectively imprint a set of relations bodily upon the child and in so doing entrench him or her within shared planes of communication, seeing, and empathy with the kinship group. Babies' faces are moulded and straightened at birth in a way which transmits a certain likeness to the infant of the one moulding them, just as care is later given to transmitting to children good posture, in painting their bodies with specific designs, and in introducing particular (bitter) foods understood to harden their bodies against unduly strong outside influences and seductions to dangerous becomings, and so on.[46]

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[45] Lagrou, "Homesickness and the Cashinahua Self," 152.

[46] Ibid, 156, 165. The sweet/bitter duality here, for the Cashinahua as with Quichua peoples, is a central one for schematizing bodily and emotional states, and qualities of character. Sweetness carries a connotation of sociability, warmth, openness; bitterness is the taste of medicine and is understood to harden the body, and in this sense to close oneself off or at least become resistant to undue external influence or dangerous and uncontrolled becomings-other. Shamans tend to have a lot of bitterness about them due to the frequent and prolonged ingestion of bitter substances (e.g., tabacco, hallucinogens like *ayahuasca* or *wanduj*); but all human bodies are understood to benefit from and require some degree of hardening bitterness. This is particularly interesting and apparently paradoxical if we recall that bitter hallucinogens are nevertheless

This shared body of the kin network or (in Quichua, the *allyu*) is something that is in a sense constantly being cultivated, reaffirmed, held together. But the most important element of the "glue" which holds family relations together – which both reflects and cultivates the shared "fixity" of the kinship grouping, and ensures that family relations are relations of shared *transparency* – is called, in Quichua, *yakichina*. This word, which is either used as a verb or a nominalised verb, is derived from the verb *yakina*, "to love". *Yakichina*, however, contains the suffix *–chi* which modifies an action to be something one causes somebody else to undergo or experience.[47] *Yakichina*, thus, means something like causing another to feel love for you; but this more properly has a connotation of making-sad about it. A better translation might be "causing another to feel empathy or compassion towards you", if we keep in mind here the etymological connotations of feeling another's suffering.[48] In the Amazonian way of thinking, this often involves seeing others in their aloneness and helplessness whereas *they should be multiple*, i.e., part of a network of supporting relatives. Accordingly one becomes concerned for the wellbeing of others, remembering them and caring about them both in immediate interactions and when spatially distant from them.

To see others in this way (as I have suggested) is to be fixed within a particular way of seeing, a plane of transparency amongst persons – i.e., in a position from which we are able to see another being as a relative *and hence as a person in the fullest sense*. It is significant in this connection that the Quichua word for person or man, *runa*, does not properly have the same kinds of universalist connotations which our "person" or "human

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precisely a means for opening up the world in a manner which subjects the taker to an increased intensity and scope of possible communications with other-than-human persons, not least by making one's sense of self more fluid. But I would speculate in turn that what is at play here is precisely an example of the delicate ambivalence with which Amazonian peoples tend to regard communicative interaction with the non-human: it is necessary in order to live well and be a thoughtful and knowledgeable person, but it carries its risks that, for example, one might be carried away into a non-human world and abandon one's prior human relations. There would seem to be here a sense in which if one makes it through such interactions, however, one is *stronger* for it, one has obtained gifts and knowledge which will help them as a human being without being carried away.

[47] Thus, for example, the verb *wañuna* means "to die", but *wañuchina* means "to cause another to die", i.e., to kill.

[48] See Peter Gow's exposition of an analogous concept amongst the Piro, *getwamonuta*, which he translates as "to compassion-ate" (which reflects the way the verb refers to a feeling *caused in another* in a manner which corresponds to the Quichua use of the *–chi* suffix), in "Helpless – the affective preconditions of Piro social life," in The Anthropology of Love and Anger: The Aesthetics of Conviviality in Native Amazonia ed. by Joanne Overing and Alan Passes (New York: Routledge, 2000), 47-51.

being" has – for example, as a class of beings made everywhere in the image of God. *Runa*, instead, has the connotation of being a term most properly for one's kinship network – that is, for relatives, who are relatives by occupying a particular relational position with reference to one's own. In a sense moving outward from one's human family, the word *runa* (and its coupled term, *warmi*, or woman) is also used for the persons which plants, animals, and certain minerals are – but this is precisely, I would suggest, because these are persons with whom relationships analogous to the familial type are possible. As with the Ojibwe, the whole style of thought here is not to begin with a God's-eye view, sorting all classes of beings into their places within a universal taxonomy, identifying what it is to be a human being as against other beings as such, and so on. Rather, one begins where one is, immersed in the world and starting with the specific kinship networks one has and inherits therein.[49]

This attracting and aligning *yakichina* occurs in qualitatively differentiated ways ordered in terms of the kinds of sentiments and affective bonds ideally appropriate to various specific kinship relations. Examples here might be to see another as cute or cuddly (as one might regard a baby), or after the manner of fondness that a grandparent might have for a grandchild, or in the manner in which one might care about a lover for whom one feels sexual attraction. To feel *yakichina* is to be made to care about someone, to be part of the fixity and shared multiple-ness of the kinship grouping by being emotionally moved by it and bonded to it. And *yakichina* in this sense is something one must cultivate as the positive, affective condition of living together with relatives, and which is manifest precisely insofar as co-habitation with others is possible.[50]

Of course it is always possible for such ties to weaken and become undone – and here we see part of the danger of uncontained becoming. Luisa Belaunde, writing about the Airo-Pai in Peru, has described how anger can be understood as a transformational

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[49] The term Quichua-speakers use for their own language, *runa shimi*, in this sense might be translated as "the language of our relatives", or the way one speaks as to relatives, to one's *allyu* (kin relations) as opposed to *aucas* (outsiders) – and it can be noted that non-human persons are also addressed in Quichua. See Tod Swanson, "Singing to Estranged Lovers: Runa Relations to Plants in the Ecuadorian Amazon," in Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature, and Culture 3:1 (2009), 62; Viveiros de Castro, "Cosmological Deixis and Amerindian Perspectivism," 475-476.
[50] Gow, "Helpless – the affective precondition of Piro social life," 51.

force which changes one's perspectival way of seeing such that it becomes possible to think of one's relatives as enemies or prey and so be moved to do (potentially lethal) violence to them.[51] Conversely, to feel the pull of homesickness while away hunting is a good thing and part of what it is to be a relative; we might say that, in Quichua terms, it is a manifestation of *yakichina* at work. But to cease feeling the bittersweet pain of homesickness is precisely to cease being a person properly speaking, to have moved on and become a wandering outsider, something untrustworthy and unsettling.[52] And this moving on can also be characterized by developing other relationships, becoming-something-else. Lagrou gives the example of an old man who, despondent with grief and wanting to die, was described as now being "called" by rootless, wandering spirit beings "without fixed abode" or form. The appropriate countermeasure, Lagrou recounts, was for relatives of the man to gather and remind him about all of his living relatives who cared about him and would mourn the loss of him, and in this way to *make him care about them again and come back to them*.[53] In Quichua terms, they re-established and strengthened a weakened bond of *yakichina*.

As we will see, it is both possible and desirable in lowland Quichua thinking to develop relationships of *yakichina* – as part of becoming-*yacharishka* – with beings other than one's human relations. But as I have already suggested, the thrust of Quichua ethical thinking is that the orienting "set" of one's specific *allyu* or human relatives lays the terms relative to which excess or lack of discipline, and dangerous becoming, stands to be understood. What is important is that you be a good relative; and you should not allow yourself to be distracted from the kind of work appropriate to you insofar as you are a relative and hence part of a domestic system of roles and exchanges. To be carried away too far – to become something else entirely, to abandon your own work and try to be someone else, to be seduced into forgetting your own spouse and family and your duties

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[51] And this, as we might now expect, is understood precisely in terms of shifting to another perspective which simultaneously "dehumanizes" one's relatives – as in the example of seeing them from the perspective of spirits called *huati* who feed on human beings and accordingly see them in the way *we* see birds. See Luisa Elvira Belaunde, "The convivial self and the fear of anger amongst the Airo-Pai of Amazonian Peru," in <u>The Anthropology of Love and Anger: The Aesthetics of Conviviality in Native Amazonia</u> ed. by Joanna Overing and Alan Passes (New York: Routledge, 2000), at 209, 215-16.
[52] See Lagrou, "Homesickness and the Cashinahua self," 154-155, 160.
[53] Lagrou, "Homesickness and the Cashinahua Self," 162.

to them, and hence to forget *who you are*: this is to be *quilla*. Being *quilla* carries the sense of being lazy, undisciplined, lacking judgment, but also of being sexually "loose" or promiscuous; and it is a tremendous moral fault that is understood to threaten the breakdown of healthy marriage and kin relations.[54]

Now, the whole problem of developing more transparent relations with non-human others is fraught with this danger of being *quilla*. To be a successful person at all, to be able to respond to the uncertainties and contingencies of life, requires becoming *yacharishka* and developing bonds of *yakichina* with a plethora of non-human others. It is in this way that one gains strength and attractiveness, that one obtains medicines, that one is able to do the tasks of hunting or gardening, that one is able to do and make beautiful things. The key here, as we will see, lies especially in developing a kind of disciplined sensuousness and sexuality, an ability to be alluring and also be allured, to enter into sensuous registers of interrelation, care, and interplay without being swept away and forgetting oneself. Quichua stories recurrently feature human characters who go too far in this – who are *quilla* and disregard too much the barriers between species, who thereby undermine the separations and differentiations that allow normal life to function. For speciation is not of itself a bad thing; in many respects it is the necessary condition for the kinds of positively contributing, non-*quilla* relationships that other-than-human persons now have with us.[55]

And yet, it is just as much a mark of being an unthinking and unknowledgeable person if, in encountering a medicinal plant in the forest, one cannot see a person there (or, more precisely, a speciated person[56] who used to be human but has since withdrawn into the privacy of other speciated bodily forms). And so it is upon this edge between unthinking insensitivity and uncontrolled becoming that so much of Quichua

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[54] Swanson, "Singing to Estranged Lovers,"47-50.

[55] See, on this point, ibid, 53-54.

[56] Tod Swanson uses the term "ex-person" in "Singing to Estranged Lovers," e.g., at 63. This is useful insofar as it allows expression, within the space of a single term, of a kind of temporalized, liminal quality to the kind of person that e.g., a tree presents itself as being. Namely: as a person-that-has-withdrawn relative to us and so must be approached and treated in a certain way; "ex-personhood" in this sense specifies a kind of relationship and also sets the context from which a deeper relationship might be developed. For the purposes of consistency with my own usage, however, I will tend to employ the terms "nonhuman person", drawn from Hallowell, and "speciated persons" – which have the advantage I think of emphasizing in the context of my discussion that, e.g., a tree is still a tree-person.

philosophical practice plays. As I understand it, the mark of maturity here is to be capable of inducing *yakichina* and becoming-other in such a way that, perhaps rather like an Ojibwe spoon, one is still able to *contain* powers obtained in this way. Thus one is able to have a breadth of seeing that is attentive and drinks deeply from the surrounding world, and to receive gifts from non-human others, but without travelling so far as to lose one's own rootedness or directedness.

3.2.2 Coming to Know Non-Human Persons

Becoming *yacharishka* with the plethora non-human persons which, for example, the domestic garden or the surrounding forest are, is not something that occurs without effort. Neither is it something that occurs one-sidedly, hanging only upon the agentive actions of a human "knower". It is no less significant that the garden-plants and the forest also become *yacharishka* with you. Women relate to their manioc plants as to children they care for and nurture; but this relationship is dialogic. Manioc plants might speak to their gardener-mother (most directly, in dreams) and express their needs; and other women will be wary of inserting themselves unwarrantedly into this special relationship or taking over another woman's garden. Consuming medicines from plants is also something that requires becoming-yacharishka. Medicine is not understood to work in a causally necessary or calculable way, but through a communicative relationship that requires the co-operation of the plant-person in question.

The medical example is also helpful here because it affords us another instance in which to see how becoming-*yacharishka* makes sense within the space of a middle-ground between non-communication and uncontrolled becoming. The Quichua word for medicine, *ambi*, means at once medicine and poison.[57] At one extreme end, in the case of poisoning, we have an image of an uncontrolled becoming-other, the "invasion of strange

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[57] It is also notable here that the flavour of *ambi*, which is associated with its strength, is bitterness (*ayak*); a *certain* (we might say moderate) *amount of which* is understood to harden and strengthen the body. Shamans, indeed, as exceptionally strong (*sinzhi*, i.e., powerful) individuals, are especially associated with bitterness. See supra, note 32.

elements in the body"[58] such that the body cannot become accustomed to and contain. Tod Swanson has similarly described how entering into a relationship with the powerful hallucinogen *wanduj*[59] involves opening oneself to an "erotic contest of power" where one of the parties involved will be taken by the other; and to lose this struggle is to be pulled into a dehumanizing transformation into the *wanduj* world – i.e., for us, death.[60]

By contrast, a successful taking of medicines – which is something Quichua people typically do in a habitual and preventative way and not only to combat symptoms when they occur – allows qualities to be transferred from other non-human persons to oneself, in a way that is ultimately *strengthening*. You come away having received gifts and not having lost yourself. For example, successfully ingesting an infusion from the bark of the *amarun caspi* (*Cespedizia spathula*) tree is understood to make one strong and hard like the tree itself, difficult to knock down, and to induce a vital feeling of wakefulness and mental acuity associated with the healthy red "skin-colour" of the tree's inner bark.[61] Similarly, just as the *samai* (breath) containing a *yachaj*'s power may be passed to another by his blowing over a cup of water or of *ayahuasca*, so can the *samai* and hence power of a plant be passed to a person by means of steam-baths or smoking.[62] But this kind of successful becoming-*yacharishka* is always bound up with a series of communications with the plants themselves. Plants are meditated upon as persons; they are spoken to and their permission is sought before taking medicine; it is generally expected that, if approached properly, the specific plant-people in question will appear in one's dreams, often giving instructions as to dosage and so on. Learning to dream well, with focus and mindfulness, as we might expect, requires work; it is an ability that is

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[58] Elsje Maria Lagrou, "Homesickness and the Cashinahua self," 160.

[59] Norman and Dorothea Whitten identify *wanduj* as *Brugmansia suaveolens*, previously classified as a species of Datura. See Norman E. Whitten and Dorothea Scott Whitten, Puyo Runa: Imagery and Power in Modern Amazonia (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 72.

[60] Tod Swanson, "Singing to Estranged Lovers," 44, 60.

[61] One can see this explained in a video uploaded by Tod Swanson and filmed at the Andes and Amazon Fieldschool in Napo Province, Ecuador: "Amazonian Quichua Women Harvest Medicinal Bark," available at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tCQ9MpK9ntw (Accessed September 6, 2012).

[62] This power also tends to be thought, as we might by now expect, in a bodily way. One story, for example, describes how the jaguar acquired his camouflage pattern and hence his especially deadly hunting capabilities by fanning himself with leaves displaying that same pattern and hence by having their *samai* pass over his body.

cultivated throughout one's lifetime.[63] And dreaming *of a plant person* already shows that, quite beyond this, one has already begun to be *yacharishka* and hence communicative with the plant in question.

In addition, it should be noted that much as the becoming-*yacharishka* involved in taking medicine is a continual part of everyday life, so does the relational constitution of the self, in and through engagements with non-human others, show up in all spheres of social and personal existence. For example, the qualitative and affective natures of the forest and its beings can be seen to play and weave together even in the most domestic of human actions and interactions. The iconic laughter of Quichua women together, for example, is a kind of ideophonic repetition of the sounds of the *oropendula* bird.[64] The bird itself appears in large groups and is also thought to attract other species to it; in this sense it exhibits a power of sociability and social allure that Quichua women themselves aspire to exude. It is likewise a sign of a healthy and happy domestic environment to pass by a house and hear this laughter ringing out from the women inside. But there is also a particular toucan that is often remembered and felt akin-to in times of sadness and aloneness; and I have mentioned already the hunter who takes on the power of the boa. In other words, we can see from these examples that although the human kin network provides a basic orienting fixity for the Amazonian self, the texture of human life is absolutely permeated from the beginning with the non-human – and this in the form of affects or modes of being acquired through relations encompassing a crowded and diverse world of persons. The specific fixities of the self, and of dwelling-place as composed through the situational being-together of such persons, are intimately linked.

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[63] One helpful way of glimpsing what might be involved in cultivating dream in this way (for us, in part because it has been more extensively documented and in this sense textually rationalized through its history) might be by looking at the kinds of yogic practices found in Tibetan *Bön* Buddhism. One glance at Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche's The Tibetan Yogas of Dream and Sleep (New York: Snow Lion Publications, 1998), for instance, can show something of the wealth of ways in which dream-awareness may be honed, refined, imbued with meditations, etc., in ways that extend in quite different directions from the ways we moderns are used to engaging and understanding the value of dreams and what goes on in them.

[64] The stereotypical female laugh tends to approximate something like, "hoohoohoohoooiiieeeee" or "ahaaaaiiiiiiiiieeeeeeee". Interestingly, this laugh is not a "realistic" *imitation* of the *oropendula* so much as an ideophonic *invocation* of it, in a manner not too unlike the way abstract geometrical designs on pottery tends to invoke and make-present the sense of other beings without being exact figurative representations of them (see my discussion on Quichua pottery further below).

Seeing and learning to see non-human others as persons typically involves a complex set of practices which bring together acts of remembrance and mindfulness, modes of listening to the world and to stories which disclose a communicative and agentive face "within" the forms of speciation. Upon entering the forest, one should generally be quiet and avoid making noise – and this is at once a sign of respect and, it seems to me, a way of calling up or sinking into a particular kind of attentive mindfulness conducive for letting the work of becoming-*yacharishka* happen. Attentiveness to one's surroundings and the beings in it, in minute and often hidden detail, is cultivated. Seeing a particular medicinal plant might trigger practices of remembering what stories of "beginning-times" say about it – about the kind of person which it was before it withdrew into its present form. I would suggest that this reflecting on the "past" here is not simply a historical recounting, however, but a powerful, evental practice of making-present, of seeing-as-present and rendering-visible the personhood of a speciated person as it may here and now be engaged. One might reflect, to similar effect, upon autobiographical details of past engagements with this plant, songs one might have been taught to engage it with, the histories and teachings of one's human relatives and ancestors concerning the plant and its uses, as well as other species connected in one way or another with it.

The word for this kind of practice, and this continual unfolding of reflection, is *iyarina*;[65] and *iyarina* is central to what it is to be a thoughtful person and move through the forest thoughtfully. And in this kind of reflection, there is a sense in which a whole chain of remembrances serves to gather up as present the whole multiplicity of one's shared body (which includes one's ancestors) and mindfully experience it as the condition of one's living engagement with the forest (or indeed with anything). "One" in this sense is never just "one" – but a whole network of kinship and relational constitution which remains present within the isolated part.

I have mentioned already that dream practice is important here; it must be emphasized once again that dream-experiences are not any less "real" for Amazonian

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[65] *Iyana* means to think; *iyarina* includes the reflexive *–ri* suffix which changes its meaning slightly to denote a kind of remembering-thoughtfulness. It is also interesting, for speculative purposes, to note that the root verb here (*iyana*) can carry a sense of lively attentiveness; *iyangui!* for example is a second-person imperative form of the verb that means, as in warning, *watch out!* C.f., Tod Swanson, Napo Runa Shimi: Introduction to the Kichwa Language of the Napo Headwaters. Unpublished manuscript (2012), 202.

peoples than are waking ones. Included (indeed, pre-eminent) here are those "dreams" one experiences as the result of ingesting hallucinogens. These enable more intensely agentive, face-to-face communications with non-human others; but it is also important to see that there appears to be no strict division in kind between the sort of listening which one is able to develop and deepen through the use of hallucinogens and that which characterizes "normal" consciousness. What is learned through the ingestion of *wanduj* reveals the world in a way that then carries over into everyday life and informs the way things now show up and are known – the way they stand to be thoughtfully remembered, engaged, drawn upon. But what is involved here is perhaps more a difference in degree of intensity than anything else. Nevertheless, it is the case that one can expect to deepen one's understanding and one's relationships through the use of hallucinogens, and to open up channels of communication and registers of the phenomenal world ordinarily unseen.

Again, this is not a solipsistic practice. For example, I have heard accounts from Quichua people of taking *wanduj* in the forest and coming to see trees as people, and saplings as children, and of meeting the *wanduj* people, i.e., the humanlike form of the persons which the *wanduj* plant is.[66] More interestingly still, my interlocutor (a somewhat older *yachaj* with a vast knowledge of the forest and its medicines already) recounted being introduced *by* the *wanduj*-people *to the rest of the forest* and the beings in it, and shown medicines which the taker *had not previously encountered*. Such a notion must seem strange for us who expect nothing like an engagement between agencies from the taking of medicines like *wanduj*, and view hallucination as fantastical, an exploration if anything of a subject's "inner space" and "consciousness". But it follows quite naturally as a possibility within a world of other-than-human persons who would have wisdom and relationships of their own that we are not necessarily privy to.

Perhaps we ought to dwell a moment longer on the kind of seeing and affective becoming that we might imagine the use of hallucinogens and the cultivation of dreaming

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[66] Interestingly, and (from what I gather) somewhat unusually, I have heard *wanduj* described not as one but as *two* people, a man and a woman who work together. This description however came from one individual; and in truth I cannot at this time say how idiosyncratic or generalized such an account of *wanduj* would be. In describing her experiences with *wanduj*, however, this person directly explained this as a process of learning, of coming to know, of becoming *yacharishka* with the forest – at the same time as the forest becomes *yacharishka* with you.

to facilitate. If one is serious about gaining in capacities, about becoming someone who is properly *sinzhi* or strong – whether in hunting, in making pottery whose designs carry the force of beauty, or in healing, etc. – it is necessary to undertake such work, to study the forest under the influence of hallucinogens such as *ayahuasca*[67] and, less frequently, *wanduj*.

Writing about *ayahuasca* use in Amazonian Columbia, Michael Taussig beautifully describes an experience which "is awful" and yet "wondrous" and "unstoppable". Moments of stark terror arise, washed up viscerally in waves of nausea and shitting. But there is also tremendous joy that in its own registers strains the self to the crazed edge of bursting; also moments of hilarity, interruption, ambivalent unease, lucidity and "drunkenness", tremendous tension. A montage of feeling unfolds in the emergence and oscillation of vivid scenes, vistas, patterns, colours; in creatures laden with an intensity of moodiness, sentiment, agentiveness. In Taussig's telling, snakes and alligators, frogs croaking out from the muddy slime, flowers and birds and others, enter together into an alternating play of "laughter and death" carried out through zones of sensuous particularity;

> Thoughts become feelings and feelings thoughts . . . in a friction-filled rasping of planes of different types of experience grinding on a sort of no-person's-land where concept and feeling fight it out for priority, leaving a new space where the sensation lives in its glowing self. It is also the case that, associated with this, the world "outside" trembles into life and unison with the world "inside".[68]

The world "without" inseparable from the world "within": here is relational selfhood in vivid relief. This trembling unison opens as a world of *intensity* amped up by the power of *ayahuasca*: "feeling sensations so intensely that you become the stuff sensed."[69] And this intensity, inseparable from the qualitative registers of the senses, rushes onward in a modulating and dynamic unfolding whose aliveness and *movement*, I

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[67] A vividly potent hallucinogenic brew made from the combination generally of at least two ingredients: the vine *Banisteriopsis caapi* and the leaves of *Psychotria viridis*.
[68] Taussig, <u>Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man</u>, 406. My overall gloss here of Taussig's account paraphrases especially from 406, 438, 444-5.
[69] Ibid, 443.

think, ought not to be overlooked here. We are familiar, elsewhere in Indigenous America, with masked dances where the dancers "imitate"[70] – or more precisely, I think, *become* – particular animals and spirits in and through partaking in and "internalizing", immersively taking-on, *living-through* their bodily movements.[71] Perhaps something similar occurs here – not least in the hallucinatory slippage between passively experiencing visions one does not control, and finding oneself actively involved in the "doing" of these visions – a doing which strangely is, and is not, one's own (not unlike in experiences of "inspiration" so seductive for Western thinkers). As one is caught up in the unfolding-revealing of visions, might there not be a heightened sense in which one finds oneself partaking, to the profundities of one's being, in the movement of its deepening and self-showing, experiencing it as it were "from the inside"?[72]

Insofar as one's attentions are directed dialogically upon the sensuous fabric of the forest, opening up a special participatory sensitivity to qualitative zones and loci of dynamic power within it, all while a shifting and destabilizing fluidity is lent to one's feeling, one's sense of self, to the surface of the world – might not hallucination in this sense quite plausibly be a mode of "studying" the forest and its beings, and exploring new bodily assemblages? I have heard from one *yachaj* a story of seeing stingless bees suddenly proliferate all over her arms and body after drinking *wanduj*. Afterwards, she was able to feel an empathetic warmth towards them, a sisterly kinship, seeing them *as (speciated) persons* though they did not cease being *bees*, and feeling the joy of their company when otherwise alone in the forest. We might wonder, perhaps, whether the learning of this empathy was not something that occurred in part precisely *in and through*

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[70] There are dangers, of course, with using more common words like "imitation" here – and not least is the implication that one must choose between an alternative of either being or imitating something, which only entrenches an *atomistic* way of approaching the matter. As should be evident from the language I have been employing, it is my sense that the notion of "becoming" and "becoming-animal" (i.e., as a transversal, relational, ontogenetic process, more akin to a contagion than a strict *imitation*), as elaborated by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, is much more germane to describing the dynamics involved here, and preserving the sense of "realness" accorded such dynamics in Amazonian ontologies. C.f. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia trans. by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 237-243.

[71] See, on this point, Tim Ingold's description of masked dances amongst the Inuit and Yup'ik peoples of Alaska, in The Perception of the Environment, 124, 128.

[72] And indeed: if the self is not the Cartesian subject standing apart from what is "out there", but a self immersed within the world and extended out bodily into it, constituted from out of its relations, then might not "transformation of the self" be a perfectly valid way to describe what happens in hallucination?

the very participatory movement of this proliferation itself, a covering-over which was also an alteration of the surface of her own body.

From what has been said, it will perhaps not be surprising that the experience of seeing non-human persons in their more agentive guise is expected to be unnerving. Swanson offers this gloss on Quichua descriptions of seeing non-human persons, or *supai*, face-to-face: "They are overwhelmingly attractive, mysterious, and terrifying (words that Mircea Eliade, following Rudolph Otto, used to describe an experience of the sacred)."[73] But it should be emphasized here that such experiences are not tied to a vertical cosmology of mystic flights as towards a supramundane and infinite deity, but fundamentally to a horizontal cosmology[74] of this-worldliness – and hence to specific engagements and becomings with the trees, with the rivers, the animals, the insects in all their strangeness.[75] It also seems suggestive in this regard that the word *supai* can also generally be used as a superlative form for something – in the way of remarking upon an unusually strong downpour of rain, for example. This would seem to further support an interpretation of vision not as otherworldly journey but as an opening up of *this world*, facilitating an engagement with others in more *intensified*, agentive forms.

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[73] Tod Swanson, "Singing to Estranged Lovers," 60.

[74] Which is not to suggest that there are not different "domains" of Quichua cosmology; one can for example speak of *kai pacha* (this world), *uku pacha* (the world "inside" the water or the mountains, entering which through the use of hallucinogens means entering the house or *wasi* of spirits), and *awa pacha* (the world above). Missionaries have attempted to encode the latter two as Hell and Heaven, respectively; but the fit is fundamentally a poor one, and not only because the dualistic moral connotations of the Christian vertical cosmology do not match those of Quichua culture. For neither do Quichua preoccupations with, e.g., *uku pacha* seem to make much sense described as an "otherworldliness" in the Christian sense – it is rather an integral part of engaging the forces and persons of the phenomenal world. I concede that one could also, accordingly, describe contemporary Quichua culture (in which most speakers will identify in one way or another as Christian) as evincing *a very different kind of Christianity,* which it does; though I prefer to understand this as a Christianity incorporated and reworked within a ground prepared by Indigenous Amazonian thought, and a profoundly shamanistic ontology and cosmology and so on.

[75] And indeed, if we are to speak in terms of the holy, perhaps a more fitting inflection of this might be a comparison with the emanationist meditations of Kaballah. One example here might be the study of the ten Sephiroth, where one ascends gradually and variously into unison with the many, *qualitatively different* faces of God – the faces of majesty, love, judgmental power in its sternness, and so on. But again: the play of qualities in Amazonian thought is set by the speciation of non-human persons in a horizontal cosmology, and is directly dialogic with them in ways we might expect of an *oral* culture rather than a textually-centered one: one engages *these* trees, *this* river. On the Sephiroth, see Gershom Scholem, <u>Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism</u> (New York: Schocken, 1995), 211-217.

And though the *supais* are "frightening, deceptive, or dangerous," Swanson suggests, "they are also attractive and regarded as sources of life."[76] Life – i.e., power, vitality and capacity in the context of a dangerous world in which other beings may seek to feed upon us and consume our strength.[77] We can intimate a connection here between such vitality and experiences of such awesome intensity, akin perhaps to the electricity we might associate with the presencing of a god, as described above. But in and through becoming *yacharishka* with other persons, such intensity seems always qualitatively differentiated: it is the seductive and fearsome hunting power of the boa, the sociable and magnetic exuberance of the *oropendula*, the vitality and focus of the *amarun caspi* as against the sleepy feeling of dying.[78]

At the same time, it is also the healing power that would seem latent within the dialogic introspection associated with the use of hallucinogens like *wanduj* and *ayahuasca*. For such medicines are often taken in times of trouble, unease, and anxiety, in times of illness when other medicines seem not to work. They are taken as a means of gaining clarity about situations that are worrisome, of enlarging one's understanding and seeing. Through the effort of clarifying the present, one works to open up different possible futures, to heal. *Wanduj* and *ayahuasca* at once make visible things that are unseen, and enable human beings to transform, to interact and speak with the other-than-human beings. To understand the healing power of such interactions it seems necessary to see that they occur within the context of particular troubles. The appearance of other beings in this sense would occur within a background of understanding and meaning that would inform the kinds of interactions and conversations that follow. Accounts of interactions with other beings on *wanduj* or *ayahuasca* often describe individuals being brought to moments of realization or insight, having been prompted by their interlocutors

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[76] Swanson, "Singing to Estranged Lovers," 38.

[77] To understand this context of predation properly would take us too far afield here; but suffice to say that it forms a widespread element of Amazonian thought which characterizes its general sense of the fundamental ambivalence of the world. Mountains from whom shamans seek power, for example, must also be fed and will from time to time take human life e.g., in landslides. Manioc plants, which supply the staple starch of the lowland diet, are also understood to get thirsty and drink the blood of passing individuals if they are not given an adequate substitute – as do various forest plants, powerful stones used in gardening, and so on. Various precautionary measures are taken to neutralize this danger relative to different relationships; and this general problem also informs local shamanism/witchcraft practices.

[78] Supra, note 59.

to reflection upon their own lives. Might we propose that these individuals would precisely have gained, through that relationship, a different perspective on things? Furthermore, insofar as visionary experiences facilitate processes of transformative learning-becoming (becoming-*yacharishka*), we can perhaps begin to imagine how in the context of worry and anxiety these processes might be pursued as sources of capacities or powers, registers of vitality, necessary for turning the tides of the present.[79]

3.2.3 *Yakichina* and *Yacharishka*: Attraction, Caring, and the Relational Play of Sentiment

Because engaging non-human others and becoming *yacharishka* with them is not a solipsistic affair, it involves opening a communicative and often dangerous engagement with other agentive powers that retain the capacity for refusal. The key, here as with all persons *qua* relatives, lies in establishing bonds of *yakichina* – and once again, we recall that the register of a particular instance of *yakichina* will be different depending on the kind of relationship it belongs to.[80] But one pre-eminent (though not the only[81]) mode of engaging, for example, plant persons in this regard is in terms of the kind of seductive, cross-gendered *yakichina* which bonds and draws together romantic lovers.

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[79] See Regina Harrison's thoughtful study of a Quichua woman's interactions with a snake-woman through the use of *wanduj*, precipitated by a debilitating back pain but subsequently connected to feelings of loneliness and fear of abandonment by her husband and children. Regina Harrison, "The Metaphysics of Sex: Quichua Songs from the Tropical Forest," in Signs, Songs, and Memory in the Andes: Translating Quechua Language and Culture (Austin: University of Texas, 1989), esp. 148-157, 166. And to reflect further on the example of our *yachaj* and her stingless bees in light of this: it would seem reasonable to assume that the comfort she now feels at seeing these bees is bound up with the emotional context in which she would have likely taken *wanduj* and encountered these bees in her vision. On *ayahuasca* healing sessions, see also Taussig's wonderful study on the subject, in Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man.

[80] Notably, Quichua words for relatives specify the gendered position of the speaker in ways which allow one to be clearer about the precise nature of the relationship involved. For example, the word for *sister* is different depending on whether the speaker is male (in which case, the word is *pani*) or female (in which case, the word is *ñaña*). It is understood that a *pani* relation will be and *feel* quite different from a *ñaña* relationship; and we can extrapolate that the kind of *yakichina* operative within either will also be different.

[81] For example, the relationship between manioc plants and women gardeners is akin to that of child and mother; the *lumucuru* or manioc caterpillar, understood to help manioc grow and produce tubers, is engaged by women gardeners like a daughter-in-law – or, in other words, like the lover of one's child. Evidently the kind of care, attentiveness, and *yakichina* appropriate to each will be different; e.g., it might make sense to say that the *lumucuru* is cared-for perhaps less for its own sake than because it makes one's child happy.

Amazonian origin stories typically recount how a breakdown in normal and successful relationships in "beginning-times" precipitated the withdrawal of once-human persons into the privacy and relative incommunication of different species-bodies. Reopening lines of communication is accordingly a delicate business not only because of the strength and allure these persons can themselves have (recall: to be overtaken by them means to be pulled into irreversible transformation and death), but because it involves re-opening a relationship that has already gone badly. And so, in a way befitting their status as speciated persons, plant and animal *supai* are often engaged as *ex-lovers* who are, accordingly, likely to be moody.[82]

The gendered, sexual element connoted by romantic love here is notable for several reasons – and not least because, to us Westerners, it is liable to seem strange to speak about relationships with plants or animals in this way. But we should not forget how the conversation is initially set here by the terms of differentiation: *ex*-lovers, *ex*-human persons. Indeed, sexual attraction makes sense to us most readily with reference to other human beings, and the Quichua would say rightly so; it is part of the communicative interpersonal play characteristic of *shared planes of transparency*. Other beings, inhabiting different bodies, seem too strange to us for this: they are beautiful perhaps, but in a different sense from a desirable man or woman. And yet, it is perhaps instructive, as we try to understand Amazonian thought, to meditate upon the apprehension of beauty in this way as another mode, a transmutation of the same "kind" of feeling as that which draws us in sexual attraction. For here we have another language through which to poetize the localized "powerfulness" and allure of powerful persons, and the kind of charismatic charge interpersonal engagements with them can give rise to. This connection between power and attractiveness would seem to be essential. And we might hypothesize that the further one goes in becoming-*yacharishka* with something, and hence the more one gains in capacity through relations with the non-human, the *closer* such engagements might begin to feel to the kind of charge we associate with the erotic.[83] But we are also afforded another instance in which to see how being *quilla* can

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[82] Tod Swanson, "Singing to Estranged Lovers," 44, 58, 60, 62, 63.

[83] Certainly this is easier to understand in relation to other beings appearing *as* humans e.g,. as dream visitors. But it is perhaps not surprising in this regard to hear of especially powerful individuals who report

constitute a danger here, as encountering *supai* means opening oneself to a flood of emotional attraction that can be overwhelming and carry one away.[84] But if being *quilla* is a danger, what does one aim for?

Engagement with non-human (as with human) others involves the communication of emotion and feeling and its "causing" in others through *yakichina*; and as such it frequently involves what Michael Brown has termed "technologies of sentiment".[85] And it is, I think, in the use of such "technology" that one is able to apprehend one instance of a disciplined or mature sensuality of the sort necessary for becoming-*yacharishka* and successfully engaging other persons. One example is the use of *song*, which is sung *to* the (human or non-human) person in question. Parenthetically, though I (after Brown) speak of "technology" here, and while the use of song might suggest comparison with the kind of purposive rationality we associate with the "technological", it should be clear that such analogizing is also awkward. For the relationships involved are not the same; and the difference can be conceived as growing not least from a difference in underlying ontology: e.g., there is no assumption of the human agent as atomistically self-sovereign over and against a calculable nature, playing an instrumentally rationalized game of ends and means here.

Let us try to see, then, what is involved in such songs. The songs have words; and it is necessary, if not to sing them aloud, at least to do so in one's mind while the melody

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precisely having *sacha runa/warmi* ("forest men/women"), or *yaku runa/warmi* ("river men/women", "water spirits") with whom sexual relations akin to those between human beings takes place, and who are treated as husbands or wives. In a related way, Philip Descola has described how, amongst the Achuar of Ecuador and Peru (but also, I would suggest, more pervasively in Amazonia), sexual abstinence is a normal protocol at certain times where commerce with non-human beings is necessary – e.g., at planting time in the domestic garden. These kinds of prohibitions, Descola suggests, are partly thought to be necessary in order to marshal vital energies for other tasks, not least dreaming and communicating with non-human beings. For my part, I am inclined to speculate in this vein that the invocation of sexual energy here is also perhaps not so far from its use in systems of Tantric meditation – i.e., as a gathering of forces capable of being directed and marshalled into forms of heightened concentration, sharpness of focus, intensified awareness. But then, it also seems quite fitting that Amazonian thought should meditate so deeply upon relationships of gendered and erotic allure, insofar as this also constitutes one of the primary ways of establishing inter-agentive bonds of attraction between beings who are in a sense "strangers". C.f., Regina Harrison, "The Metaphysics of Sex," 170; Swanson, "Singing to Estranged Lovers," 60-61; Philippe Descola, In the Society of Nature: A Native Ecology in Amazonia (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1996), 210.

[84] Swanson, "Singing to Estranged Relatives," 34.

[85] Michael F. Brown, Tsewa's Gift: Magic and Meaning in an Amazonian Society (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1986), 133.

is played, e.g., on a flute. Such words tend to be rich with imagery densely rooted in local understandings and associations. They often dramatically position the singer relative to their interlocutor, and make possible specific explorations of that relationship on the basis of the imagery used. Within the qualitative space of such exploration, songs can facilitate a marshalling of efforts germane to particular aims. (Swanson gives the example of one song in which they words sung work to position the singer as a lover relative to the *Matiri* tree, identifies the plant's reticence to share its gifts in terms of a sexual coyness, and invites the plant to offer his gifts in the same way a husband would offer meat to his wife after returning from the forest – so establishing an exchange relationship precisely akin to the ideal of human marriage partners.[86]) One important element here is the way that, as Brown has suggested, words become powerful as part of a meditative and disciplined interlocutory practice insofar as they are "indices of powerfully structured thoughts" which, if done properly, have the potential to manipulate the emotions of others.[87] Regina Harrison similarly suggests that for the lowland Quichua, songs are "a specialized kind of 'thinking'"; on our end, she suggests, *contemplation* (*iyarina*), "a gathering of forces, is necessary to begin the process."[88]

Another word frequently used to describe such a mode of gathering forces up into one's own self, "summoning" "creative energies", is *shayana*, which means to stand, but also can connote having a stable selfhood, a "presence" or "stature"; a variation, *shayarina*, carries the sense of "standing-up", "standing-appearing".[89] "To appear standing," suggest Norman and Dorothea Whitten, "is to be poised, to be ready, to be capable, to feel power."[90] Variations of the verb *shayana* can also be used to describe the appearing of non-human persons and the way they exert their allure.[91] For human beings, *shayana* connotes a kind of sensuous gathering of oneself into a standing-forth, which at once "draws inspiration from the vivid imagery of the tropical forest" and is, in so doing, a "contemplative process which remembers and calls forth the repetition of sexual

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[86]Swanson, "Singing to Estranged Relatives," 5-7.
[87] Michael F. Brown, Tsewa's Gift, 169.
[88] Harrison, "The Metaphysics of Sex," 167.
[89] Ibid, 161.
[90] Norman and Dorothea Whitten, Puyo Runa, 67.
[91] For example, *shayana* describes the dangerous but attractive appearance of the *wanduj* man in a song recorded by Tod Swanson, in "Singing to Estranged Relatives," 10.

attraction."[92] But such a *repetition* entails precisely a kind of containment and directedness, a mature marshalling and employment of energies and capacities – we might say a disciplined gathering of relational (and by no means atomistically commanding) selfhood.

But it is perhaps further worth emphasizing how song constitutes a special kind of saying – i.e., a *musical* one. For much has been made, even in our own tradition, about the way music, especially *done well*, plays upon, enlivens, and *influences* emotional feeling. Indeed, music might be said to communicate (and with tremendous capacity for nuance) *within the registers of feeling itself*, to give rise to particular "morphologies of feeling".[93] For Amazonian thinking, a beautiful melody can call forth emotions of sadness, joy, mournfulness, good humour, etc., in a listener, as we might expect; but in so doing it actualizes, makes tangible, and thus gives "proof" (*camai*) of the capacity or power of the singer (and the beauty they might feel within themselves) in and through impacting others.[94]

Notably, songs can also be learnt *from* (human and non-human) others; and such learning similarly requires having opened such channels of empathetic communication, and thus involves the sharing and establishing of a perspectival plane. It is pertinent that the songs an individual might sing to others (human or non-human) might in turn have been learnt and passed down from kin relations, or learned on one's own through visionary interlocutions with non-human others. In Quichua, songs are figured precisely as an instance of the *samai*, or breath, which I described earlier;[95] and as such, they can transmit capability, as "gifts". And here, I think, we can begin to understand the sense of how, quite broadly within the Amazon, songs function as exchangeable forms of agentive

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[92] Ibid, 161-2.

[93] Tim Ingold, <u>The Perception of the Environment</u>, 23. It is interesting to recall, in this connection, the role music has had in the history of the Western tradition in inducing various (often "ecstatic") states of being, as in the Dionysian rites, but also in healing anxiety, and so on. See E.R. Dodds, <u>The Greeks and the Irrational</u> Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), 78-80.

[94] Norman and Dorothea Whitten, <u>Puyo Runa</u>, 60.

[95]On the connection between *samai*, song, and the function of *camai* or proof, see Norman Whitten and Dorothea Whitten, <u>Puyo Runa</u>, 60.

intensity.[96] But we can also begin to appreciate how singing songs in subsequent contexts can be a way of meditatively gathering-forth and remembering past visionary and communicative experiences, lessons and modes of being learned, and of calling up the charge of vital energies and feelings of beauty as have been gained relationally.[97]

3.2.4 On Knowing-Thoughtfulness, and Flourishing

In the foregoing, then, we have come to see something of what is involved in becoming *yacharishka* with others. I have tried to show how this problematic involves cultivating modes of contained becoming, a careful and disciplined play along a thin line between being knowledgeable and gaining strength, and death, being *quilla*, undergoing uncontrolled becomings-other and the dire consequences this can mean. But we have also, I hope, come to see something of the stark differences between Amazonian and modern/Western, "technological" ways of understanding the world. Standard logics of disenchantment would have us see Indigenous practices such as the use of medicines as muddled versions of our own, "folk" remedies that have somehow chanced on real causal effects while remaining oblivious as to why, as though beneath the superfluous layers of culture we glimpse the distilled and refined version modern technoscience makes available to us.[98] But it should be clear by now that to come to Amazonian practices in this way is to uncritically import too many assumptions about the kinds of relationships that can possibly or meaningfully be involved, about what "ends" direct behaviour, and about what it is to be a self within the world.

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[96] Working even on the other side of the Amazon, for example, Carlos Fausto has argued that songs "are packs of agency, *quanta* of intentionality," and that songs are in this sense a partible part of others which can be familiarized or received by dreamers. But to learn a jaguar-song, for example, is to familiarize something of the mode of being of a jaguar, and to begin to change so as to adopt a jaguar's perspectival way of seeing the world. See Carlos Fausto, "A Blend of Blood and Tobacco: Shamans and Jaguars among the Parakanã of Eastern Amazonia," in In Darkness and Secrecy: The Anthropology of Assault Sorcery and Witchcraft in Amazonia (London: Duke University Press, 2004), 164-5.

[97] See Harrison, "The Metaphysics of Sex," generally.

[98] A good account of the various ways anthropological studies of "magic" have been dogged by this problem, and some reasons for seeing this as unsatisfactory, is offered in Brown, Tsewa's Gift, 20-26; 162-177.

Instead, I have tried to develop an appreciation more on its own terms for the complex horizon of meaning and practice that is gathered together in the Amazonian understandings of becoming-*yacharishka*. We have seen how these practices serve to continually emplace individuals within an extensive network of living relations, and in turn how navigating the demands of day to day life requires continually remembering, actualizing, and deepening the various registers and communicative possibilities of one's multiple and relational selfhood. And in this we can sense in outline, perhaps, an intriguing and remarkably sensitive intuition as to what it is to be thoughtful, wise, and to develop and cultivate oneself, which is profoundly relational and rooted in emplaced interactions with non-human "nature".

The kind of knowing involved in *yachana* is deeply connected to understandings of power, to the problem of becoming strong or *sinzhi* – and the more one knows, the stronger one is. Knowing in this sense involves the whole of one's being – it is a deep and immersive, embodied knowing, perhaps not too unlike the way the ancient Greeks would say that someone knew virtue precisely insofar as they *were virtuous*.[99] And it is a knowing that draws upon the surrounding world with a basic orientation to being up to the challenges of life – but in a way that comes to bloom, not least, in distinctive and rich experiences of beauty and (we might say) flourishing that can be seen to permeate everyday life.[100]

Regina Harrison has suggested that *purina* (walking) is a privileged metaphor in Quichua for thinking about existence; to have travelled far but well (i.e., not aimlessly or

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[99] E.R. Dodds, <u>The Greeks and the Irrational</u>, 16-17.

[100] It is also the case that precisely *what* "beauty" is, and how we are to think about beauty and describe/interpret it as an experience, becomes something that the cross-cultural engagement of this chapter aims to open to question in a renewed way – for it is clear that the kinds of associations and concepts we might bring to the matter from the Western tradition cannot be unproblematically transferred to e.g., Quichua contexts. It is my hope that, in light of the material covered in the previous sections of this chapter – especially what has been said about power and its connection to attractiveness, about the fascinating/alluring quality of *supai*, etc. – enough will have been given that Western/modern readers may at least begin to ask and puzzle through, in a more nuanced way, the question of how beauty might be conceived otherwise than through our accustomed terms, and particularly within Amazonian Quichua philosophy. The same general problem of course surrounds any of the "bridge" concepts employed here – including discipline, flourishing, and so on. The point I wish to move towards is precisely one where a questioning/rethinking of such seemingly basic but consequential terms becomes possible in light of asking what they mean within the contextual constellations of Indigenous thought; and indeed to start upon such a movement is precisely one of the aims of this chapter.

in a fashion that is *quilla*) is to have a broad understanding, to have seen and taken in much.[101] But on occasions when I have gone walking in the forest with traditional Quichua people, it has always been immediately clear that such travelling is not simply a movement through space, but a whole immersive and engaged interactivity – an occasion for singing, remembering and developing relationships, calling forth capacities, which is richly folded in layers of *iyarina*. To walk through the forest is to move through a community that is deeply familiar, in which one finds companionship – and through which one also continually recognizes and rediscovers, in all the many registers of *pathos* and joy, the multiple faces of one's own selfhood, one's shared body. It is in such practices, I think, that we gain an inkling of what living fully means in Quichua thought. In the image of travelling far but not carelessly, one intuits the outline of a piety alive within the dual intuition that living well demands a careful balance between drinking deeply from the differential and interactive registers of perspectival being, while still preserving one's orienting situatedness as a particular relative.

In a connected way, we can also appreciate one further sense in which walking through and dwelling upon the land carries a kind of pedagogical force. Not only is it a process of stretching and growing the self, and one's (bodily) capacities for thinking and feeling. But one simultaneously makes a study of the land and its (seasonal, etc.) rhythms, of the interplay and interconnections between all the range of persons and beings therein (including oneself); and one learns to understand oneself with reference to, and as embedded in and constituted by, that broader context. And one comes to cultivate, through this process, forms of timely (and stylistic, and courageous) response to the happenings that transpire there.[102]

Let us close this section on Amazonian thought with one final image that I take to be indicative of a kind of flourishing indigenous to Amazonian lifeways – namely, the making of "art", in the form for example of beautiful designs painted on pottery. In the modern Western tradition, of course, art is commonly taken to be the distinctive site of human creativity, an activity where the uniqueness of the human spirit and the freedom of

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[101] Harrison, "The Metaphysics of Sex," 160.

[102] See, on this point, Tod Swanson's thoughtful commentary in "Weathered Character: Envy and Response to the Seasons in Native American Traditions," in <u>Journal of Religious Ethics</u> 20:2 (1992), 279-308.

the individual artist become manifest. Such notions have a long and familiar affinity with modern political concepts and programmes which place man at the center of the world stage. But Amazonian pottery, as we might expect, is understood differently. From the beginning, making pottery is a story of relationships: in gathering clay from the Clay Mother of the riverbank, a specific tree-sap for glaze, stones and clays for paint – and no less in painting the designs themselves.

One way that power or strength is paradigmatically manifest is in works of beauty – as in songs, but also in the making of pottery painted with "abstract" geometrical designs. (Notably, the activity of the female potter has been argued to parallel that of the usually male *yachaj*.)[103] So far as I understand the matter, such designs as I have seen derive from a careful study of specific plants and animals. They are intended at once to display an intimate familiarity with patterns and hard-to-notice details in "nature", and to evoke and bring to articulation the movement, character, and resonances[104] of a particular being. But they are not exact copies or figurative replicas of plants or animals.

The liveliness of the designs, so far as I understand the matter, arises in their "abstractness". Patterns are repeated from "nature" in a way that is intended less to be literally precise than, it would seem, dynamically evocative, an "imprecision" which nevertheless captures all the more faithfully a sense of a particular movement and intensity. The process of apprehending and painting such patterns is not itself separate from the modes of "listening" described earlier; and if the patterns painted on traditional bowls are in a sense reminiscent of "psychedelic art", this cannot be surprising – since studying the forest under the influence of *ayahuasca* and *wanduj* is one part of what is involved in being an attentive listener. Particular elements of the imagery may be evocative of stories or evoke a particular encounter the potter may have had with the animal in question. And so to make and show one's pottery to others – which is an iconic activity of women and bound up with traditional gender roles – is to make manifest and bring together all the skills and sensitivities involved in containing and becoming-

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[103] Norm and Dorothea Whitten, <u>Puyo Runa</u>, 64-67.
[104] Including those given and remembered in the origin stories associated with particular beings.

yacharishka that I have described so far.[105] And it accordingly displays and renders as *camai* an artist's own attractiveness, sensitivity, attentiveness, thoughtfulness, and knowledge.

Tod Swanson has offered this description of the ethical importance and value of similar practices of sharing and experiencing beauty in different Indigenous traditions that is worth repeating in this context:

> Much of the native traditions' ability to expand the affections in response to the natural order comes from the close tie they retain between aesthetics and the moral life. Traditionally, Indian peoples have recognized beauty in the syncopated patterns of the natural world. Moral character is the ability hold those patterns in memory and respond to them appropriately. Since the patterns are beautiful, faithful response to them will be beautiful. Therefore, the moral character is a person with style. Beautiful and original dancing is the outward sign of an individual's ability to respond in time to the concert of species of which he or she is a part. By contrast, being a mediocre dancer is a sign that the performer envies the part of someone else, or that the performer is too slothful or fearful . . .[106]

The impact of Quichua pottery designs, in their abstractness, is also such as to invoke the viewer's own remembrances and familiarities with the beings in question – they point one back to the plants and animals in question in an invitation to *iyarina*. And so a beautiful piece of pottery is in a sense dialogic not only between the potter and the viewer, but between both of these and other, particular beings. And accordingly such force of beauty as the pottery has draws upon, evinces, and reinforces in its own way a shared culture of becoming-*yacharishka* and a kind of style appropriate to it – and there is a joy and flourishing, I think, in such sharing. As such, this artistry is precisely not understood as a form of individual "creativity", generated from out of the inventive power of the free artist (as atomistic, made in the image of God the Creator, etc.). Rather, Quichua pottery, and the joy and beauty it partakes in, is profoundly rooted in the relational soil of becoming-*yacharishka*.

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[105] Elsje Lagou has similarly noted that, for the Cashinahua, the idea of a painted design without its "support" or context does not make sense – i.e., always at play in the aesthetic experience of a design are questions about "who paints whom", about "what is painted and when painting takes place." See Lagrou, <u>Cashinahua Cosmovision: A Perspectival Approach to Identity and Alterity</u>. (1998) PhD Thesis. University of St. Andrews. Available at: <u>http://research-repository.st-andrews.ac.uk/handle/10023/1676</u>, 33.
[106] Swanson, "Weathered Character," 306.

As a kind of addendum on this point, I think it is also worth considering the way something like pottery-making can function pedagogically – a question that brings us more directly to the conditions under which I myself encountered it during fieldwork. In the abstract, I suppose one might expect ethnographic fieldwork to consist in the main of interviews and (largely verbal) conversations with human beings – which one could record in notes or audio/video files to take home and ponder and so on. In the course of my own interactions with Quichua elders, however, it became clear that much more was always going on, and being given space. Stories and anecdotes would always be *occasioned*, for example on walks through the forest, by the presence of particular plants or animals, the memories and songs these might invoke, and so on. But another way of saying this is that stories, anecdotes, songs, and so on, were always relayed in contexts where the nonhuman itself was able to participate and itself be an interlocutor in a more "direct" or "present", if not necessarily *verbal*, way.

To my mind, this was certainly not "accidental", and should be considered not only in terms of the immanent coherence of Quichua thought and practice generally, but also in terms of its relevance to a pedagogical process of teaching and learning that framed the common purpose we were all there together to engage in. Michael Uzendoski and Edith Calapucha-Tapuy have argued that by its very nature, Quichua storytelling and speech immerses us in a much broader communicative landscape, of relational "somatic poetry", in ways of "experiencing" and "seeing" the world that extend quite beyond what tends to come across in verbal transcriptions.[107] As students, we were being invited into this broader communicative landscape, and hence into conversations that were not necessarily verbal and that engaged the nonhuman in a range of ways.

That we as students were also introduced to the practice of Quichua pottery-making should not I think be separated from this broader pedagogical method. If my account of these practices in general is true, then in sharing their own pottery with fieldschool students like myself and guiding us in making our own, our teachers were also inviting us to learn something of a culture of becoming-*yacharishka*. They were

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[107] Michael Uzendoski and Edith Felicia Calapucha-Tapuy, The Ecology of the Spoken Word: Amazonian Storytelling and Shamanism among the Napo Runa (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 1-5, 17, 21.

sharing something of the beauty that they themselves had come to learn from the landscape, and directing us to ways of seeing and conversing, of thinking and "listening" and gathering beautiful intensities and patterns on our own, that reflected their sense of what cultivatedness means.

Let this suffice, then, for my brief discussion of Northwestern Amazonian thought and culture. It is my hope that it will have afforded a somewhat substantive glimpse into one possible variation of what it might mean to live and think as a relationally-constituted person in a world filled with other persons, human and non-human. In order to push even further this question of the differences that exist between Indigenous and Western ethical regimes concerning "nature", let us now turn to one final example of Indigenous traditions, on the North Pacific Coast of North America. For if the Western "monological" and "technological" way of seeing is crystallized *par excellence* in (neo)liberal property law, it is edifying to contrast this with forms of Indigenous ownership.

That I move to the North Pacific Coast here should not be interpreted as a claim that other Indigenous peoples (or even those I have already discussed) do not practice forms of something like "ownership" (or, indeed, other versions of land stewardship). I turn to North Pacific Coast examples here not only to broaden the referential sphere of my discussion, and to continue to show something of how American Indigenous peoples may share broad philosophical orientations while not being monolithic, but also for certain strategic comparative purposes. For at one level and on a certain number of points, the examples offered below would seem to (superficially) approach more closely the kinds of things *we* might associate with what it means to own things: for instance, more sedentary subsistence patterns, a more formalized codification of (exclusive) legal title and protocols surrounding issues of trespass, a relation perhaps more closely resembling dominion over territory and animals, and so on. But this apparent proximity, examined more closely, reveals beneath its surface tremendous differences. These also aid us in understanding how broad themes in Indigenous thinking can find expression even in more sedentary lifeways that are nevertheless very far from our own.

3.3   Ownership Without "Nature": Examples from the North Pacific Coast

Among the first things we stand to notice in turning our attentions to the Indigenous peoples of the North Pacific Coast is a more settled relationship to the land in comparison, for example, with the semi-nomadic patterns of traditional Algonquian life. Relationships to the non-human world and to particular places are interwoven with appreciably different, and seemingly more formalized structures than amongst Ojibwe and Amazonian societies – evinced most especially in elaborate systems of rank and hereditary privilege. At one level, these structures comprise and determine something like a system of inherited "property" which comprises claims of "ownership" relative to particular places. But then, to begin to see such practices in their proper and meaningful context requires that we try to see how these also involve a range of relationships that go well beyond what we might expect to be constitutive of property relations. This can hardly be surprising, however, insofar as the institutions in question express an ontology radically different from our own – an ontology which is in many fundamental respects similar, but also not identical, to those already explored.

At the northern end of the North Pacific Coast area, the Tlingit are a matrilineal society composed of a number of organizational levels or groupings which serve to determine in different ways the status, roles, privileges, and identities of persons within them.[108] For example, all Tlingit belong to one of two moieties: the Raven and the Eagle/Wolf, under which are grouped some seventy clans. Moieties are exogamous and matrilineal; their division from one another is important not only in determining marriage structures but also in structuring the kinds of roles and obligations that groups of relatives perform in the context of ceremonial gatherings and "potlatch" feasts or *ku.eex'*.[109] The

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[108] For a detailed identification and discussion of six significant elements of Tlingit society – namely nation, moiety, *Kwáan*, clan, house, and person – see Thornton, Being and Place Among the Tlingit, 42-61.
[109] Ibid, 44; see also Kan, "The 19th-century Tlingit Potlatch," generally. The Tlingit term here derives from *ya-.eex'* – "to call out", "to invite" (ibid, 197). I use the term *potlatch* here in quotation marks simply because it is not a Tlingit term and because its use in the singular and applied broadly throughout the cultural area has been apt to give rise to a number of confusions. An important point here is that there is no single "potlatch" ceremony; rather, the word has been used to refer to a number of diverse feasting ceremonies held on different occasions, each having a quite different character, content, and overall

clan, also exogamous and matrilineal, is another extremely important grouping (Thomas Thornton suggests that it is the "oldest and most basic unit of Tlingit social structure").[110] Together with sub-clan "houses" or *hít*, clans form the primary units through and within which ownership relations, relations and activities of "resource" procurement, and aristocratic orders of rank and prestige, are determined and distributed.

The Tlingit word for "owned things" is *at.óow*. But what is owned here includes names, crests and regalia, sacred stories, songs, and dances; as well as rights of access to ancestral territories and to specific "resources" within these, and other forms of both tangible and intangible property. But although *at.óow* is passed down and in a crucial sense belongs to the house or clan, it is also individuating. For the totality of *at.óow* that accrues to an individual will make him who he is by emplacing him in a particular position within a rich matrix of relations; and no one living person's *at.óow*, tied to and including individual names, will be quite identical to anyone else's.[111] Being so emplaced, he not only acquires a specific rank and status amongst living relatives, but also rekindles and lives-out ancestral relationships with the land. With *at.óow*, one inherits and gains the means to partake in *shagóon*, which Federica de Laguna has glossed as "the destiny of a people (or individual), established in the past by the ancestors and extending to the descendents. It is one way of expressing 'the way things are'."[112] In ways that I hope to make clearer, *at.óow* enfolds the individual within a rich sense of being from which one comes to understand and realize what it is to live well, and which moreover establishes profound, localized, and caring relationships with the land and the other-than-human beings who dwell there. Let us try to see something of how this is the case with reference to two (not unrelated) forms of *at.óow*: that is, names and crests.

Tlingit individuals traditionally have several names, including names given at birth, as well as "nicknames" accrued during their life. In familial contexts, kinship terms were typically used. But in addition to this, aristocratic individuals also possessed (often

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purpose. See Kan's article on this point; c.f. also Umeek, E. Richard Atleo, <u>Tsawalk: A Nuu-chah-nulth Worldview</u>, at 3, who traces the word "potlatch" to an Anglicization of the Nuu-chah-nulth verb *pachitle* (to give).

[110] Thornton, <u>Being and Place Among the Tlingit</u>, 46.

[111] Ibid, 38.

[112] Qtd. In ibid, 39.

several) "potlatch" names. These were hereditary within the house or clan; and upon the death of an individual, they were conferred on an heir or heirs and publicly validated as part of the process of the memorial potlatch.[113] It is significant here, Thomas Thornton suggests, that the Tlingit word for "name" (*saa* or *ya saa*) corresponds with the word for "breath"; for in passing on names and titles to living successors, these names were "recycled" and "reanimated through ritual."[114] But at the same time, there would seem to be a sense in which the names themselves carried with them a kind of "animating" force, in a manner perhaps not dissimilar to the status and operation of breath or *samai* in Amazonian thought – i.e., as a means of conferring power or capacity. Thornton quotes Frederica de Laguna on this point:

> It is through his name, and the meaning of his name, that a Tlingit knows himself. His name or names identifies the spirit or spirits, formerly animating a long line of forebears, that have come to live again in him, shaping his body or lending character to his personality[115].

But if names confer spirit, the spirits in question derive not only from the ancestors but from also from specific places. Names of individuals are sometimes taken from the names for places; and the names of most clans are taken from names belonging to the landscape those clans inhabit.[116] As commentators are wont to point out, it is significant that in this relationship, Tlingit almost never name places after people (as in the modern European-American tradition); rather it is *the other way around*.[117] This would seem to express something essential: not only of the non-anthropocentric character of Tlingit culture, but even further of the way cultures of the North Pacific Coast tend to understand themselves as profoundly rooted-in, nourished by, and constituted within the landscape, to have become who and what they are by virtue of longstanding interrelations, becomings, and exchanges with specific places.

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[113] Frederica de Laguna, "Tlingit ideas about the Individual," in <u>Southwestern Journal of Anthropology</u> 10:2 (Summer, 1954), 184-187. For an account of the memorial potlatch and the role of naming within it, see Kan, "The 19th-century Tlingit potlatch," esp. 198.

[114] Thornton, <u>Being and Place Among the Tlingit</u>, 56.

[115] Qtd. in ibid, at 56.

[116] Julie Cruikshank, "Getting the Words Right: Perspectives on Naming and Places in Athapaskan Oral History," in <u>Arctic Anthropology</u> 27:1 (1990), 59; Thornton, <u>Being and Place Among the Tlingit</u>, 47-54.

[117] E.g., Thornton, <u>Being and Place Among the Tlingit</u>, 103; Cruikshank, "Getting the Words Right," 59.

Moreover, even within the character and composition of place-names themselves, it is possible to discern something of the complexity and sensitivity manifest within Tlingit relationships to places. Place-names in Tlingit are frequently complex and compactly convey within them an extensive set of associations and inherited knowledges that together convey and pass on particular ways of seeing and being. They also tend not to be arbitrary, but to reflect a heritage of attentive "listening" to the places in question. For example, Tlingit place-names can descriptively reflect the character of a particular place or the relationships between elements that come together in it; this is accomplished succinctly by virtue of the Tlingit language's especial adeptness at conveying, e.g., relational and directional ideas by compounding often multiple verb-stems and prefixes together in the space of a single word.[118] But place-names can also do a good deal more than this. They can also convey information about particular or notable species that live there and give account of *their* interactions with the land (e.g., *Médzíh E'ol*, "Place-Where-Caribou-Swim-Across-In-Groups")[119]. Important events can also be recorded here which refer to the histories of the ancestors, or to events told in "myth" or sacred stories (*Yéil Áx'sh Wulgeigi Yé*, "Place-Where-Raven-Swung").[120]

To invoke or remember such place-names is to invite up a whole series of reflections and remembrances which in a sense actualize, strengthen, and carry forward *shagóon* (and which unfold in a manner not dissimilar, it seems, to the Quichua practice of *iyarina* described earlier). To remember a place in connection with the ancestors, for example, not only calls forth and affirms a sense of how one came to be here and live on this land and have title to it. It also calls forth a memory of relationships with the land which one inherits and which were opened up with/by the ancestors. These relationships might be recorded in stories which connect to and are mnemonically triggered by places

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[118] Thornton gives numerous examples which are helpful here; *Sít' Eeti Geeyí* for example means "Bay in Place of the Glacier", where the component *a eeti* is a relational and nominalised verb meaning "taking-the-place-of" – and hence conveys, with elegant succinctness, not only what a place is called, but also "what" the place "is" – i.e., a situation, a dynamic taking-place that has happened and is presumably still happening there. The name substantively describes what that taking-place is, in the form of a specific relational interaction unfolding between bay and glacier (84). Modification of verb-stems within names can in this way convey a tremendous amount of directional and relational information (for example, Thornton [82] notes that there are more than twenty ways to say "move" in Tlingit, variations of which specify a particular *kind* or *way* of moving). See also Cruikshank, "Getting the Words Right," at 64.

[119] Cruikshank, "Getting the Words Right," 63.

[120] Thornton, <u>Being and Place Among the Tlingit</u>, 106.

and their names. These accordingly enfold the individual within a landscape rich with meaning and a sense of living history which is not simply "past", but continues to be made present in ways which supply lessons on how to live. Keith Basso has described how, for the Western Apache, the act of speaking place-names works to call forth remembrances which "deepen and enlarge awareness of the present"; they "speak the past into being . . . [and] summon it with words and give it dramatic form . . . forging ancestral worlds in which others can participate and readily lose themselves."[121] Something similar would seem to occur amongst the Tlingit; stories continually supply necessary tools by which to think. Stories hand down knowledge and wisdom accrued from the experiences of ancestors and other beings, and are frequently recalled in the course of analyzing and evaluating present and ongoing events.[122]

Names and place-names in this sense at once unveil and preserve a storied richness integrally embedded in the landscape as dwelt-in by Tlingit peoples; to know a place, to be part of it and to live-out one's *shagóon* is to be enfolded within complex and longstanding interrelationships with a whole host of other beings, human and other-than-human. But it is also in a sense to hear the wisdom of the ancestors murmuring within the land itself, to understand places as reservoirs of teachings that can be set to work simply by speaking their names. We might speculate that if we are to speak of power in the landscape, one mode of this power being present lies in this capacity to impact individuals, to trigger insight and thoughtfulness by means of self-questioning through stories.[123]

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[121] Basso, <u>Wisdom Sits in Places</u>, 32.

[122] See Julie Cruikshank, in collaboration with Angela Sydney, Kitty Smith, and Annie Ned, <u>Life Lived Like a Story: Life Stories of Three Yukon Native Elders</u> (University of Nebraska Press, 1990), generally. Also highly illustrative of mnemonic and moral roles of place-names which seem remarkably similar to Tlingit usage is Keith H. Basso, <u>Wisdom Sits in Places.</u>

[123] A quote from Lola Machuse, one of Basso's Apache interlocutors, describing how an instance of "speaking with names" to others worked, seems apt here. Another woman, Louise, was in some distress over recent troubles with her relatives; place-names in this sense worked to give comfort, supply perspective, and give advice in an indirect way which allowed the conversation to be appropriately respectful: "We gave that woman [Louise] pictures to work on in her mind. . . We gave her clear pictures with place-names. So her mind went to those places, standing in front of them as our ancestors did long ago. That way she could see what happened there long ago. She could hear stories in her mind, perhaps hear our ancestors speaking. She could recall the knowledge of our ancestors. . . . Those place-names are strong!" See Basso, <u>Wisdom Sits in Places,</u> at 83.

If the above has permitted us to begin seeing something of the complexity of relationships to the land embedded in *at.óow,* another instructive example can be seen in hereditary crests. These are also richly "storied", as Thornton describes:

> Animals were taken as crests typically because of specific events that occurred at particular places involving them and members of the social group. In other cases geographic places, themselves animate, were adopted as crests. When a place was appropriated as a crest, its image served to link indelibly particular social groups to particular terrains.[124]

Notably, crests generally feature such animals or "geographic places" (an example being Mount Saint Elias) presented in the form of a face. The face here assumes much the same significance as we have seen within the context of Ojibwe and Amazonian thought: that is, it signals the more transparent showing-up of personhood.[125] In this sense, then, we might suggest that to inherit such a crest is precisely to inherit a profound, specific, and communicative relationship already opened by/with one's ancestors but which also requires continual and direct work to keep alive. In the context of ritual ceremonies, for example, Thornton suggests that crests and other *at.óow* are understood to have the power to "evoke and make present the spirits of those things they resemble and encapsulate."[126]

One important point here is that although relationships are inherited in connection with things like crests, what is involved is no mere static repetition of abstract, frozen forms. Rather, the pedagogical mode would seem to be one in which successive generations are invited to *discover* and "think with" traditionally inherited knowledges and stories precisely in and through direct and interactive engagement with the land itself. In this sense, the "traditional" must be understood to be something which is continually living, and infused with all the dynamism it must be within the context of an attentive and ongoing engagement with places and beings in their particularity. In this vein, a

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[124] Thornton, <u>Being and Place Among the Tlingit</u>, 32.

[125] For evidence on the presence of such themes within the Tlingit context, see Thornton, <u>Being and Place Among the Tlingit</u>, 74-79, 97; see also de Laguna, "Tlingit ideas about the Individual," 187-189; Edward Sapir offered consonant speculations about the affinities between crests and Algonquian "spirit helper" themes in "The Social Organization of the West Coast Tribes," in <u>Indians of the North Pacific Coast</u>, 46. Notably, however, Sapir's analysis here proposed that crests were a stabilizing "degeneration" of the personal spirit helper theme, which is not an assumption I share.

[126] Thornton, <u>Being and Place Among the Tlingit</u>, 39.

consonant note can also be heard further to the south, where the Wet'suwet'en understand hereditary crests to be "infused with spirit power".[127] Such power is a necessary condition for the Chiefs to perform the role of Chiefs; but though power comes through the crests, what is required is also "individual contact with the spirit realm which comes from dreams, [and] visionary experiences. . ."[128]

Further south still, Umeek (E. Richard Atleo) has suggested, from a Nuu-chah-nulth perspective, that "all aspects of formal life" including "proprietary" and "resource" rights, are "rooted in origin stories"; but that the insights and truths embedded in this heritage are constantly being "validated" and explored by successive generations. This occurs especially, he says, through the practice of *oosumich* – a term which might vaguely be translated as "vision quest", but which Umeek suggests is more aptly translated as a "'careful seeking' in the context of a 'fearsome environment.'" Interestingly, and in a manner that resonates with what has been said about the experience of encountering *supai* in Amazonian thought, Umeek translates *chih-shitl*, a word that refers to experience with the "spiritual" or "supernatural", as "fearful". "Have you had a fearful experience?" his aunt asks him as a child. Again, however, we must try to avoid importing here all the Christian metaphysical assumptions that terms like "supernatural" tend to invoke; but after all that has been said we will perhaps be in a position to more carefully decipher what is meant here.[129]

Sewn into Chilkat and button blankets, Tlingit crests also literally clothe the wearer in these kinds of relationships (and "clothing" here would seem to carry much the same connotations as with the Quichua or the Ojibwe, i.e., as a privileged image to describe the body and hence the constitution of self and perspective as such). This occurs in a way that manifests and shows up a person's identity and is legible to others as an indicator of rank, but also functions as a declaration of legal title, i.e., of longstanding "ownership" of particular places.[130] (This broad legibility, however, remains limited, a

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[127] Delgam Uukw and Gisday Wa, The Spirit in the Land, 34.
[128] Ibid, 34.
[129] Umeek, Tsawalk,72, 74, 96.
[130] In a sense, then, we might wonder whether ownership as delineated by crests might not be articulable as a (restrictedly) socially-recognized declaration of capacity which follows from and is relatively legible in one's particular bodily makeup.

kind of restricted disclosure: there is here, as among the Ojibwe, a certain ethic of secrecy at work that conceals – in often quite formalized ways – the intimate details of the relationships involved.[131]) As such, weighty adornments such as these blankets and other regalia form at once a "material" and "symbolic" expression of a Tlingit ideal: to be "heavy, stationary, and dry like a rock, as opposed to wispy, fleeting, and wet like a leaf . . . the ideal person is conceptualized as situated and emplaced, like a feature of the land itself, but also as 'heavy' in adornments and possessions, or *at.óow*."[132] And yet, it will hopefully be clear by now that *at.óow* is precisely an integral part of what it is to be emplaced in the fullest sense, that it of itself "is" but also "enacts" profound and sophisticated integrations of self into place and vice versa.

Following on what has been said, let us turn more directly to the question of the "control" and "ownership" of land and "resources". Tlingit society (like, in general, other Northwest Coast societies) has traditionally practiced forms of ownership that give exclusive use-rights over specific resource-areas to particular families. For example, one family might have rights to take fish from a particular stream, or gather berries from a particular berry-patch. It has nevertheless been argued that, despite the fact that such rights were "officially" exclusive (i.e., no others would have been able to legitimately claim the same resource-area), actual use patterns were much softer – e.g., if permission was sought from a stream's owner, this would typically be granted. Moreover, Thornton suggests that Northwest Coast ownership regimes in this connection provided a means by which to ensure that the land was cared for by those who used it; for even when others might seek permission to gather from one's land, such interactions provided occasions for

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[131] For an account of some of the contours of such "restricted disclosures" amongst the Wishram, much further south in the Northwest Pacific Coastal cultural area, see Dell Hymes, "Two Types of Linguistic Relativity,"131-156.

[132] Thornton, <u>Being and Place Among the Tlingit</u>, 60. On the function of button and Chilkat blankets, see also 107-108, 142, 175. As a point of comparison, it is worth noting what seems to be a point of difference here between Tlingit and, e.g., Algonquian semi-nomadic sensibilities: the image of "heaviness" seems strikingly dissonant with the kinds of sensibilities associable with more nomadic subsistence patterns – with the latter, it is generally important to be able to carry things with you as you move around. But accordingly, it becomes possible to see something of the ways that broadly similar philosophical outlooks, both of which endorse relations of care and stewardship of the land, are nevertheless able to do so in different ways and in relation to different patterns of subsistence.

conferring knowledge about the respectful and sustainable use of areas from those who knew them intimately.[133]

But it is crucial for us to see how radically different such proprietary relationships were and are from "modern" ones. Notably, but not surprisingly, the relationships to the land involved here have tended to be expressed in English in terms of stewardship, rather than in the more monological terms associated with liberal property regimes. But then even here, as Bradley Bryan has noted, our notions of "stewardship" would seem to implicitly reproduce a sense of separation between human stewards and the land that is clearly foreign to the Indigenous understandings under discussion here.[134] It is worth quoting Chief Delgam Uukw of the Gitksan on this point, for a sense of some of other metaphors that might be invoked:

> For us, the ownership of territory is a marriage of the Chief and the land. Each Chief has an ancestor who encountered and acknowledged the life of the land. From such encounters came power. The land, the plants, the animals and the people all have spirit – they all must be shown respect. That is the basis of our law. The Chief is responsible for ensuring that all the people in his House respect the spirit in the land and in all living things. When a Chief directs his House properly and the laws are followed, then that original power can be recreated . . . By following the law, the power flows from the land to the people through the Chief; by using the wealth of the territory, the House feasts its Chief so he can properly fulfill the law. This cycle has been repeated on my land for thousands of years.[135]

The differences between European and Indigenous understandings here, as we will now expect, have their roots in differing ontologies. Rather than understanding humans to be atomistic agents acting on passive nature, imbuing it with labour and meaning and so on, Tlingit and other North Pacific Coast thinking understands human agents to be profoundly and relationally embedded in place, which is itself an active participant in events. Reverential invocations of "all my relations"[136] by Indigenous speakers in this sense can refer at once to plants, animals, and "geographical" features like mountains or glaciers insofar as they are "out there" as agentive persons; but such

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[133]Ibid, 136-141.
[134] Bryan, "Property as Ontology," 23.
[135] Delgam Uukw and Gisday Wa, The Spirit in the Land, 7, 8.
[136] E.g., Umeek E. Richard Atleo, Tsawalk, 22, 88.

relations are at precisely the same time part of who and what one is, how one is constituted as a self, and of the "power" one has in navigating the challenges of life. Indigenous emphases on the continued presence of the ancestors (i.e., as part of one's shared and relational body in effect continuing to live within ongoing relationships) inculcate valuations and ethical stories oriented not around the autonomous freedom of individuals to make new beginnings and do whatever they like with "their" land, but around an understanding of present generations to be perpetuating longstanding relationships which are to be handed on to those born in the future. (The Algonquian notion that you should consider your actions relative to and in terms of their impact on seven generations going in either direction, forms a noteworthy parallel here.)

Moreover, Indigenous ownership practices on the North Pacific Coast tend to be predicated on the assumption that if one does not treat the land and other non-human persons with appropriate and well-established forms of respect, these may cease to provide for human beings.[137] In the Wet'suwet'en House system, for example, the authority of the Chief is bound up with the role of maintaining this delicate balance. Disharmony or crises in such contexts are not understood to be accidental, but to arise as a problem that it is the responsibility of the Chief to determine and resolve.[138]

A number of isolated comparative points – though these will perhaps be fairly obvious – should perhaps be drawn out here. First, in contrast to the Lockean view of "nature" as intrinsically valueless, lying in waste if not developed under the dominion of human hands, Indigenous understandings here hold that the land itself is *already generous*. The central problem human beings face accordingly is to take care not to diminish this generosity; hence the scope of human action is already in a sense much less brashly Promethean than careful and cautious about the impacts of human doings relative to the land.

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[137] This notion of respect is grounded, here as it seems quite broadly amongst Indigenous American peoples, in the understanding that the relationship between hunter and prey is not antagonistic but rather a deliberate act of generosity or friendship on the part of prey animals. One must accordingly guard against disrespecting an animal's body or any other action which would dissuade the animal or his relatives from returning. See, e.g., Delgam Uukw and Gisday Wa, The Spirit in the Land, 23. Similar themes can be found throughout the anthropological literature from a variety of contexts amongst Indigenous American peoples.
[138] Ibid, 33.

Secondly, this kind of caution would seem reinforced by the very way problems and disharmonies tend to be understood. Rupert Ross has described how, amongst the Cree, wrongs tend to be understood, investigated, and redressed relationally. That is, the question tends to be framed in terms of the relationships *between things* which helped to produce the disharmony manifest in some particular act or set of circumstances. Because relationships radiate out and connect disparate beings in any number of complex ways, the list of relevant items can extend much further than what an atomistic ontology might bring one to recognize. For an intricate balance of supportive interrelationships maintains the world and makes life possible; it is this balance which constitutes the law itself and finds expression in an ethic of respect for all things.[139] Similarly, the Nuu-chah-nulth saying, *heshook-ish tsawalk*, likewise expresses an understanding that "everything is one", i.e., one network of relationships. No being is "useless" or expendable within such an understanding; everything has its role within the dynamic balance that maintains the world and makes living possible. And it is pertinent to us as we consider what assessing and rectifying problems might mean here that the Nuu-chah-nulth sense of this oneness extends beyond the pale of what we recognize as belonging to material objectivity.[140] Rather, it encompasses and requires relationships that we might try to awkwardly gloss as "spiritual" ones – but which we might alternately attempt to describe instead in terms of profound, communicative and self-constitutive relationships with non-human persons. Maintaining balance in this sense must be something much more "involved" – in the sense that it also would seem to call for a listening and an engagement in a way which draws much more comprehensively upon the entirety of one's "selfhood".

Thirdly, although we might expect to find stewardship practices here that suggest comparison with Western "managerial" ones, it is plain that Indigenous stewardship amounts to a very different set of relationships. Certainly we see something very different from the technological framing of modern man relative to a calculable nature. If one is disposed to caution and understands everything as dynamically interconnected, then we

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[139] Rupert Ross, "Exploring Criminal Justice and the Aboriginal Healing Paradigm." Discussion paper for the Government of Ontario. Available at: http://www.lsuc.on.ca/media/third_colloquium_rupert_ross.pdf, 3-8.

[140] Atleo, Tsawalk, x-xi,114-118. Darnell and Vanek, we might note, describe similar understandings amongst the Cree. See "The Semantic Basis of the Animate/Inanimate Distinction in Cree," 177.

might well be inclined to question the Baconian experimentalist dictum that the isolation of causal variables through the controlled repetition of experience allows us to have a grasp of things sufficient to know and control what changing the world will bring about. The elevation of human beings to the position of managerial master of the world, and indeed the whole modernist project of wiping away and replacing "traditional" practices, is profoundly bound up with such a possibility for cognizance and a capacity for control. But neither the moral imperative nor the ontological preconditions for such a positioning seem present in the Indigenous traditions discussed here. And neither is it assumed that problems in our relation to the land are likely to be fixed by self-sovereign individuals in any piecemeal, isolated fashion – which is precisely the sort of solution *we* appear to anticipate when we articulate faith that "science" or "technology" can "fix" whatever discrete problems and impacts arise in light of modern doings.

Of course, one could well go on with such comparisons without gaining much as to what subsistence and proprietary relationships substantively mean and meant for North Pacific Coastal peoples. Indeed, even our best efforts here would seem capable only of affording minor and formally abstracted glimpses into the matter, and reminding us all the more firmly that we come to such things as outsiders. But then, perhaps enough has been said by now about the nature of *at.óow* and *shagóon* in the Tlingit context, and the constitution of the self within the context of these, that we can at least begin to imagine something of the richness which is involved and made to live within Indigenous ownership and use practices on the North Pacific Coast.

Not being anthropocentrically solipsistic, these draw together all that has been described in terms of what interagentive engagements with non-human persons amount to and require.[141] Further, ensuring and perpetuating successful and productive relationships with the land is precisely one of the functions of *shagóon*, i.e., the destining heritage one

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[141] As among the Ojibwe and the lowland Quichua, positive relationships with non-human others are necessary to live – not least in the course of obtaining food, in acquiring the kind of empathetic connections which skill in hunting and fishing is understood to require. Thornton suggests one gloss on this problem – that in order even to be a good fisher, one must have *made a study of the fish*, i.e., learned to see the world from their perspective. It is also interesting to note in this connection that tools like fish-hooks are also thought about as persons, as having a kind of animacy about them, being carved with decorations in order to effect and influence the fish, and so on. See Being and Place Among the Tlingit, 79, 148. C.f. Atleo, Tsawalk, 85-94, for a discussion of *oosumich* in connection with whaling practices.

is bequeathed by those who have dwelt on the land sustainably for innumerable generations. Subsistence activities, indeed, would seem to be an integral and inseparable part of a living actualization of *shagóon*. Many major traditional ceremonial events were integrated into the flow of seasons and the different activities appropriate to these. From early in life, furthermore, subsistence activities would have formed occasions for instruction from elders, for learning the stories of the place and fusing them together with one's own experience through ongoing reflection, for getting to know the other beings in the land through one's own direct experiences.[142] Living off the land repeated and reinvigorated the relationships of the ancestors – and in a sense continued to make those ancestors present; and in so living, a Tlingit self could in a sense *be* most properly what he was. The consumption of foods of itself further constitutes and reaffirms the individual in his or her belonging to locales, incorporating and being nourished by the land and specific relations thereon. Subsisting on the land – gathering, fishing, responding to its changing rhythms, taking care of it – in this sense performs and lives-out what it means to be a respectful relative in an extended community of human and non-human persons. And in this connection, it can hardly be surprising that subsistence practices are understood by Tlingit and other Northwest Coast peoples not in terms of meeting the bare minimum in a hierarchy of needs, but rather as "real being" itself, as an ongoing actualization of a full and rich existence.[143]

3.4   Conclusion

In this chapter, I have made a brief and partial survey of understandings operative within three separate Indigenous cultural traditions: most especially those of Ojibwe, Quichua, and Tlingit peoples. It will be noted that I have explored different, though related, questions through each of my ethnographic examples. Through Ojibwe/Algonquian examples, I tried to introduce a different way thinking about animacy, personhood, and power that could be shown to rest on relational premises.

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[142] C.f., ibid, 79. As should by now be expected, the sense of "knowing" here should be thought, I suspect, in proximity to the transformative "knowing" described in earlier sections.

[143] Thornton, <u>Being and Place Among the Tlingit</u>, 117,127-135,170. C.f. the way Delgam Uukw describes the significance of feasting and the gathering of wealth through the respectful use of the land as a "fulfilment" of Gitksan law in <u>The Spirit of the Land</u>, 7-8.

Through my focus on Quichua thought, I tried to broach more directly the question of what it might mean to live in a relational world of nonhuman persons – what knowing-becoming, maturity, skill, thoughtfulness, and so on might mean under such circumstances. Through Tlingit examples, I focused more on questions of ownership, land stewardship, and law.

There is a sense in which each example has sought to build successively and suggestively upon the last: each should prepare us to come more thoughtfully to the next by inviting us to rethink fundamental questions on relational terms. From a more basic and fundamental discussion delineating alternate meanings of animacy and personhood, we are then more ready to move to a discussion of inter-personal relations with the nonhuman, experiences of relational selfhood, and so on, in greater detail and specificity. Having done this, we are in a better position to think about questions of what something like socially recognized and codified forms of ownership, responsibilities of stewardship, and so on, might look like under relational terms.

In this, I certainly do not mean to suggest that Algonquian notions of animacy, for example, may be simply transplanted to Quichua or Tlingit contexts with the expectation that nothing will be different. To be sure there are differences: as one would fully expect given the differences in language, in stories, in landscapes and the kind of styles with which these might be inhabited, in subsistence patterns, and in everything else that comes to compose the specificities of discrete cultural traditions. For its part, the tropical jungle will invite very different kinds of conversations than, say, will northern prairie or muskeg. But we can move from Algonquian to Amazonian and then North Pacific Coastal contexts having at least come to trouble *our* usual assumptions about what animacy can mean, having hopefully broadened our own thinking on the point, and having begun to puzzle out at least one set of (to us) unaccustomed and more relational possibilities. We cannot take identity for granted, but we are further ahead to a better understanding than when we started, and we have hopefully learned at least how to ask better questions.

It will perhaps nevertheless be asked why I have not elected to focus on only *one* cultural tradition, and flesh it out more comprehensively by following it through all the thematic questions raised within this chapter. Why not, in short, describe one tradition more fully than three only partially? To a certain degree of course my selection of examples here has been the product of circumstance rather than design: inasmuch as they are necessarily particular examples that I have come across in one way or another and tried to engage in the course of my work. I have had to rely on the ethnographic work of others who have been thinking and writing about such things much longer and with greater expertise than I have; and at some level I have crafted my discussion here in order to be able to draw on the work of others where they seem to speak most strongly and directly to my overall purposes on particular points. That Algonquian languages, for example, contain animate and inanimate genders, and that important work has already been done on the meaning of animacy in this context, readily suggests Algonquian traditions as a point of reference in breaking in to these particular concepts.

Beyond this, however, I consider a broader base of comparison more desirable given my theoretical purposes here. My aim, once again, has not been to produce an ethnography focused on any one particular localized example – but to get some sense of what relational thinking might possibly mean and look like. In this regard, a broader engagement that suggests workable themes of "family resemblance" across a range of individual variations (and giving some sign as to what some of these variations might be) is I think more appropriate, not least because it frees us from overidentifying "relational thinking" or relational ontology with any one example to the exclusion of others. We hopefully gain a sense for possible points of generalizability without tying ourselves too inflexibly to some kind of pan-Indigenous ideal type, or an abstract discussion of some thing called "animism" or whatever else.

It is also I think a better way to be suggestive of and relevant to the broader political context to which this dissertation attempts to speak and within which it is situated and oriented. In other words, the point to which we are moving is not simply one where we come to think a little harder in the abstract about relational ontology and what this might mean in contrast to an atomistic one, but moreover to understand that this

disjuncture is one that is being played out broadly and in an ongoing way through the political processes of contemporary colonialism itself. That is, that magic line we are continually invited to draw in the constitution of our settler-state polities, property regimes and economies and so on, is precisely a line that also inscribes an atomistic ontology *in the place of a specific range of relational ones*. In this sense, giving space as much as possible to variations and differences between Indigenous American cultural traditions in the course of my discussion is also intended to invite reflection with greater nuance on the political conjunctures informing life today in the Americas. The aim is to have my attempt to "do theory" in light of political context have a somewhat broader, more complex, and more suggestive sphere of relevance than a focus only on one people would permit.

My attempt to balance my own more in-depth studies in the Amazon with examples from the North, in this sense, also has a certain strategic element to it. Most especially, I wanted to trouble as much as I could certain tendencies in what I take to be the Canadian settler imaginary, which seems much more comfortable with appreciating difference in the distant spaces of the global South than with confronting the idea that Canadians are actively dispossessing similarly rich traditions here at home.

Between the traditions I have surveyed, we can see numerous point-for-point contrasts with our dominant, Western philosophical heritage. These are oral rather than textual traditions; they are primarily relational, rather than atomistic, in ontology and in focus. As against the willful and sovereign self of modernity we find selves constituted through a relational and yet ideally contained "becoming"; an anthropocentric tendency for moral solipsism finds its counterpoint in worlds full of non-human persons. Time is not such as to be the linear flow of history which leaves the past behind; rather, the past is something which continues to live, continually present in one's shared body and called forth in one's relations with a storied and living landscape. Our quantitatively-oriented tradition encounters ones much more concerned with a knowing and perceptiveness of qualities. One could go on.

But moreover, we have seen something of how such understandings can unveil phenomena differently within the fabric of everyday life: in understandings of ownership and stewardship; in the use of medicines; in the learning of "skills" or capacities; in the experiences of being a relative, and navigating and understanding everyday emotions within that context. In this process, we have hopefully come to see not only that relations to "nature" here are different, but that the modern way of distinguishing nature and culture is not present here – nor, indeed, is it necessary or "natural" as such. We have also begun to explore and imagine what it might mean to think and live from out of different terms altogether, how listening to and engaging the world in other-than-modern ways might be possible, and what these might possibly look like.

Much of the value of this process, as I suggested at the outset of this chapter, lies in the way it helps us undermind the blackmail logic of the either/or: either our dominant sense of things, or its impossible negation. By learning to think alongside ethnographic examples such as those I have presented, we come to see how alternate coherences are possible . . . and *coherent* on immanent terms, thoughtful, giving space to a fullness and richness of life along different terms. The referential vantage-point from which we are able to ask ourselves the serious questions of life has perhaps begun to undergo a change.

Still, there is an unavoidable sense in which the preceding has been concerned to think about others – other traditions of thought as inhabited by other peoples. Let us now turn back and more explicitly ask questions of ourselves in light of the ground we have travelled. Beyond the mere apprehension of difference, how are we to theorize some of the ways Indigenous traditions might provoke *us* in *our thinking*, and bring us who are moderns to critically interrogate ourselves?

Chapter 4

4 On Dangers and Relations: Thinking Between Traditions

It is hoped that the more directly ethnographic work of the last chapter will have managed to offer a glimpse of the ways (certain) Indigenous traditions tend to understand the world and the horizons of ethical existence within it. But if we can see how Indigenous understandings contrast strikingly with those dominant in Western modernity, it will perhaps be worth exploring with a little more focus some of the ways the former might be brought to challenge us who are moderns – and who come to Indigenous thought from the outside – to reflect on ourselves *and the dangers we face* in a new light. To this end, it can be helpful to explore possible "bridges" – points of linkage, of rough analogy or proximity between traditions – in relation to which its provocations and divergences are able to stand out in sharper relief.

At some level, the work of engaging Indigenous traditions at all from an outside standpoint seems unavoidably tied to such a search for bridges; and it is certainly the case that this dissertation has already employed many of these in a heuristic capacity. In particular, it has been my sense that some of the better and more helpful bridges from within the Western canon hail from what we might call the Nietzschean tradition. In this chapter, I will attempt to explore some of these bridges – as found in the thought of Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger in particular – more directly and with more focus, and to bring these into a more explicit conversation with Indigenous thought.

What is important here is not only that Indigenous thought (at least, as I have been engaging it) arguably arrives from different directions at points similar to these Western thinkers (and I will try to show, in greater detail, that to an extent it does). Rather, it is important to first understand Nietzsche and Heidegger's thought in the context of the powerful critiques they offer of contemporary life and many of its defining aspirations. This brings us back to the worries foregrounded at the opening of this dissertation: for

both Nietzsche and Heidegger diagnose modern life as plagued by a sickness – and invite us to begin a cure. And the problem of our relationship to the world and to "nature" is itself central to their thinking and to the worries they invite us to share.

What is especially valuable for us here is the *way* they beckon us to this problem: precisely not as something susceptible to address in terms domestic to the dominant modern construal of nature and what we "do" with it – e.g., resolve to know it more fully in its "reality", to manage it more responsibly, even to protect it ontically as "wilderness". The matter rather is made much harder for us. For both Nietzsche and Heidegger, what is at issue is nothing less than the very fundaments of how we understand and experience reality and our place in it (and by way of which nature precisely *becomes nature*) – that is to say, the trajectory of our dominant metaphysics and its consequences. These consequences could be said to afflict much that has traditionally been assimilated into the domain of "culture" – in the sense of bearing upon the manner and quality of our sense of selfhood and self-cultivation (which should not be conflated with the sense of culture as distinct from nature, in its precise sense as an ontological pillar of modernity[1]). What is in effect an impoverished ontology gives rise to a poverty in lived relations; we encounter precisely the *doubled and intrinsically linked problem of the impoverishment of our (modern) relations to the world and worldly entities on the one hand, and a corresponding impoverishment of the self on the other*. This critique is, as Nietzsche saw[2], a potentially potent one to pursue in our age of solipsistic subjectivism because it addresses itself directly to (and undermines) the pride we moderns still cling to in one guise or another: that we alone represent the pinnacle of culture and civilization, that our reworking of the world and of our relations in it constitutes a universal history of life finally made better.

Now, the possible bridges I think we might explore between Indigenous and Nietzschean thought arise precisely through the latter's explorations of what a richer, more thoughtful, less impoverished way of thinking-and-being-otherwise might be. Both

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[1] It is worth noting the etymology of "culture" in this regard – as Freya Mathews points out, the word derives from "the Latin *cultura*, meaning a tending; *cultura* is in turn derived from *colere*, to till or cherish." (<u>Reinhabiting Reality</u>, 21.)

[2] Nietzsche, "Thus Spoke Zarathustra," 128-129.

Heidegger and Nietzsche, I will show, evince a turn in this capacity towards *more relational* ways of thinking. Thus it is precisely that which sets them apart from their (and our) own dominant tradition in this regard that makes these philosophers suitable as interpretive bridges and as interlocutors with Indigenous thought. And although Nietzsche and Heidegger begin from very different starting-points than those of the Indigenous thinkers, for example, that I have come to know, they nevertheless seem able to arrive at somewhat similar questions and inclinations in thought, though they do so by means of different paths and arguments.

But then, there remain important differences between Nietzschean and Indigenous thought, a number of which might be expressed in terms of the *extent* to which we can recognize that they are permeated by relational thinking. In the case of Indigenous thinking, relationality can be seen to be operative *at the level of ontology* and as *prior to any kind of "atomistic" or thingly fixity*. This kind of relationality achieves expression within the very terms of coherence of beings, in the scope and character of consequent ethical relations, etc. – in a way that neither Nietzsche nor Heidegger aspire to or attain. But this difference I think sets the stage for possibilities in reflexive and critical rethinking of ourselves and the world in ways that would not otherwise occur to us – that touch not only upon the question of how we understand our impoverishment or what is "lost" in modern life, but also upon the ways we might imagine and explore richer possibilities.

At issue in this chapter, then, is not simply the contrast between our dominant, modern ways of construing and dominating "nature" on the one hand, and Indigenous ways of thinking and relating to the land on the other. It is a question of also bringing the work of defamiliarization to bear upon what we might call our contrapuntal or critical lexicon, and the ways we conceive being-otherwise. In this way, I am attempting to pick up many of what I consider to be valuable challenges from Nietzsche and Heidegger, but moreover to do so with the insight that these thinkers wrote and offered critiques of the modern tradition within and relative to what was, in important respects, a different time and context from my own. Accordingly they were writing mindful of concerns and contexts that, while connected, are also not precisely the same as my own; neither did

they come to their questions through the spaces and conjunctures of settler colonialism in the same way as I do (they were both eminently *European* thinkers). Nor were they *able* to pursue their thinking in light of a serious engagement with Indigenous American traditions of thought. (Their own attempts to open spaces for thinking also made use of a defamiliarizing process – but here the conversation tended to be limited to engagements with the ancient Greeks.) My concerns here, however, are framed by present-day worries, and by a life lived within the complexes of Canadian settler colonialism; and the openings I wish to explore are not the same as those experienced by Nietzsche or Heidegger. Accordingly it can hardly be surprising that the latter did not come to precisely the same conclusions I do – nor need we insist that they *should* have. But by the same token, "doing theory" in a manner that is responsive to the present need not expect all its relevant tools to come from Nietzsche or Heidegger taken alone and by themselves.

This chapter attempts to explore in this way some of the unique provocations of thinking *between* traditions – and in this, attempting not only to step back from the terms of our own metaphysics but rather to think in light of tensions, divergences, and alternate pathways experienced *between ontologies* and the ways these unveil the world to us. And if the problem of "nature" stands to be posed in terms of the consequences of our metaphysics, we are afforded here an opportunity to ask whether and how, in the relief cast by (my) cross-cultural thinking, *even Nietzsche and Heidegger* remain implicated in (or less effectively able to problematize) manoeuvres and dicta that are precisely characteristic of our modern (monological and ruinous) scene.

This chapter unfolds in three parts. The *first section* establishes what I take to be bases for comparison or affinity between Nietzsche and Heidegger on the one hand, and Indigenous thought on the other – thus laying the ground for the discussion that follows. The *second section* turns to Heidegger, who brings the Nietzschean question of impoverishment to bear specifically and perhaps most pertinently upon a diagnosis of our relationship to "nature". I then try to show how something like the worries Heidegger raises for us – but also the sense of emplaced richness he invites us to experience – might be engaged, but also revaluated and explored differently in light of the thinking opened by Indigenous philosophical traditions. The *third section* turns to Nietzsche, whose

meditations upon the sickness of modern life traced its symptoms so eloquently through the convolutions of the modern self. In his explorations of what a "healthier" or richer self might be, Nietzsche uncovers a way and orientation of thinking/being that bears many suggestive affinities with Indigenous thinking.[3] I then reconsider Nietzsche's vision in light of the way Indigenous thought might lead us to reflect on these matters.

4.1   Entry Points: On Truth, "This-Worldliness", and the Self

On this point Nietzschean, Heideggerian, and Indigenous thinking tend to be in broad agreement: that the question of the self must be approached as something fundamentally embedded in the world, that it makes little sense to speak about the one in isolation from the other. In Indigenous thinking it seems to be a question of already finding ourselves, of only ever coming to be *as* selves, as situationally located within a complex web of relationships that are prior, that give rise to fixities and supply the conditions for further possible transformations of these fixities. With Nietzsche, we find something perhaps *similar* in the notion that all there ever "is" is a sea of forces in a relation of play and tension with one another, a "will to power" that is always becoming, which we also are ourselves and from which "we" emerge epiphenominally.[4] Heidegger, responding in his own (phenomenological) way, will pose anew the question of the self as *Dasein* or being-there, who always already encounters himself as "thrown" into the world. This thrown-ness supplies the basic condition of access to being and beings, relative to which it does not make sense for us to speak of an outside. In being-there, we also always already find ourselves situated and in-relation, dwelling in places and amongst others, gathered amongst things.[5]

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[3] By progressing from Heidegger to Nietzsche, we will also be able to progressively uncover many of the implicit presuppositions operative within the former. But we will arrive at Nietzsche in such a way that we already read him *in light of Heidegger*, and the worries he raises about the echoes of subjectivism in Nietzsche's story of will and value – worries that I think are worth keeping in mind if we are trying to read Nietzsche in light of the problem of nature.

[4] Nietzsche, The Will to Power, at 550.

[5] E.g., equipmental relations with things, relations of care and attunememt, relations with other Daseins, within relations constituted by the manner in which language reveals a world. See Heidegger, Being and Time, 88, 94-97, 102-105, 112-113, 126-7.

In this, it seems to me that both Indigenous and Nietzschean traditions of thinking express a certain affinity in inclination and sensibility with regard to this "this-ness" (call it being, existence, etc.[6]) that stands well at odds with the sensibility that has come to shape our dominant tradition. Following Nietzsche, we might broadly call what is at stake here a matter of "this-worldliness". Of central importance here is the way this problem plays itself out in the domain of our understandings about reality and truth on the one hand, and (relatedly) about the relation between thought and the body and sense on the other.

It will be recalled from Chapter Two how the Cartesian turn and its logic of the real, for all that it may have signified the "death of God" in the rise of modern Man, nevertheless remains beholden to the metaphysical architecture of Christian thought itself. Crucially, this architecture (in its dominant form) is ontologically equi-vocal, and uni-versal in its mathematical logic. That is, it presupposes on the one hand an ontological separation between worldly, finite, materialized Creation and a transcendent, infinite, spiritual Creator. On the other, and despite the gap between our finite understanding and God's, the *logos* that governs and constitutes the world remains singular: there is *one uni-verse,* one "Book of the World", that it belongs to us to aspire to read. This confluence sets the terms for subsequent epistemological and ethical problematics.

We can see some of the stakes here by asking: what is error and illusion for Descartes, who sets us on the path of our epistemological subjectivism? It is something that follows as a possibility from the way I, as an imperfect and finite being, am able to partake in nothingness due the ontological distance that separates me from God (and hence, is an iteration of my capacity to sin).[7] In this metaphysical tradition, as we already saw in Chapter Two, God is Spirit; and He is also perfect, infinite intellect with perfect knowledge, whose power is expressed in infinite will that rationally creates and sustains

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[6] In much of what follows, I have conceded to use the word "existence" for ease of reading; though I would not wish to retain its traditional sense (present in the medieval distinction between *essentia* and *existentia*) of *standing outside the thought of God*. "Being" might do just as well or better, if we accept the possibility of rethinking it through Heidegger's more Nietzschean and evental inflection of the word, though the overuse of the term often presents a barrier for readers that I have chosen to try to avoid here.

[7] Descartes, "Discourse on Method," 21; "Meditations on First Philosophy," 79, 82.

the universe. This configuration sets the stage for a particular relationship to sense: for the mixture in us of body and mind (itself nothing other than an analogue of soul or spirit) is also another way of describing our ontological imperfection *vis à vis* God. Because it belongs to mind, "and not this composite"[8], to discover the truth and to know, it is necessary to disentangle our judgments about reality from the input of the senses. This trouble arises within the context of an atomistic ontology, moreover, that sets up the problem of knowledge in terms of the correspondence between the ideas/representations of the subject ("in here") and the universally valid reality of subsisting objects ("out there").

The significance of illusion in this arrangement is that it is what we experience when we have allowed ourselves to be duped concerning what is "out there": whether by fanciful figments of our own (atomistically enclosed) faculties of imagination, or by our senses – by relying on their input to tell us about reality itself, rather than mere subjectively-experienced appearance. The way out of this problem is through what is highest in us (since the orienting idea of God itself assures us that He has left us a lifeline, a means to avoid deception): the rational mind. The whole problematic of epistemological doubt and the possibility of correctness gains its meaning and value here in a repetition of the Christian metaphysical aim to actualize our highest potential by retracing and thinking the thoughts of God after Him, elevating ourselves towards a "God's eye" viewpoint through rational knowledge of His Creation. We can dispel illusion by reflexively putting the body in its place and in effect recognizing the way it inclines us towards nothingness and imperfection (an aim that, in turn, translates into the privileging of primary qualities for articulating knowledge about reality).

What is interesting here is the way that both the Nietzschean tradition, as well as the Indigenous traditions I have been referring to, seem to effect similar manoeuvres in their visions of truth. Nietzsche will work to show how a particular moral feeling and evaluation of existence (i.e., a No and a rejection) underlies equivocal ontology from Plato to modernity. And accordingly, in his own movements towards a *different* (affirmative) valuation, a Yes-saying to the world and to becoming, he will attempt

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[8] Descartes, "Meditations on First Philosophy," 95-96.

precisely to think otherwise than with such oppositions. But how do we think truth outside of the opposition of appearance/reality on the one hand, and outside of a Christian, equivocal framework with its connected mind/body hierarchy?

In Nietzsche's thought, the whole problematic of appearance/reality stands to be supplanted on the one hand by an insistence on perspectival interpretation as the unavoidable condition of life and of any experience of truth. (And indeed, the thrust of his moral critique has precisely the effect of showing just how much interpretation and valuation underlies what have become commonly accepted truths about the world.) We might see in this a certain turn towards a more relational style of thinking: we have suddenly little interest in things-in-themselves, or facts-in-themselves, anchored in transcendent positioning of a singular, Godlike viewpoint – but rather everything of concern occurs at the level of the relationships in which we find ourselves perspectivally.[9] There is no escape from interpretation or "apparentness" (which, accordingly, can no longer have the sense of "appearance" properly speaking) – but there is the possibility of having a bad conscience about it (a point Heidegger would later reiterate in terms of the insight that the hermeneutic circle is not a vicious circle[10]).

On the other hand, there can be no question of feeling, sense, or the emotions being "less real"; indeed the whole question of *what thought is* stands to be interpreted anew. Nietzsche will say: thinking is nothing other than a relationship of phenomenal "drives" to one another, a plurality of sensations or feelings which is always inseparable from our embeddedness within the world. "Body am I entirely, and nothing else;" says Nietzsche's Zarathustra; "and soul is only a word for something about the body."[11] All the folds of thought and the heights of the spirit, for Nietzsche, are indistinguishable from a play of senses and sensuality, from the body and the relations that this body finds itself in and enters into.[12] But if the body is co-extensive with the self, the question would have to be raised anew as to what the body is; and Nietzsche, in thinking the self *qua* body, apprehends properly speaking not a singular "thing" (a logical "A") but always a teeming

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[9] Nietzsche, <u>The Will to Power</u>, 301-306.
[10] Nietzsche, <u>Beyond Good and Evil</u>, 65-66; Heidegger, <u>Being and Time</u>, 143.
[11] Nietzsche, "Thus Spake Zarathustra: First Part," 146.
[12] Nietzsche, <u>The Will to Power</u>, 347-348, 540.

multiplicity in flux.[13] (It is worth keeping in mind here what Deleuze saw in Nietzsche: that he uncovers a domain of transversal and relational becomings, "a free and unbound energy", which Deleuze will come to theorize precisely in terms of a "body without organs".[14])

It is worth noting here how Heidegger will go some way towards thinking an alternate and non-subjectivistic conception of truth that responds to Nietzsche. In his reclaiming of truth as *aletheia*, or the coming-to-disclosure of beings within the clearing of being, Heidegger offers a "fundamental" sense of being-true that *is* nothing other than the happening that we as Dasein or being-in-the-world essentially *are*.[15] Within the terms of *aletheia*, the kind of panic-reaction for the real that we see in Descartes ceases to make sense; the question of truth is reframed in a manner that becomes inclusive of the prior and relational positivity that being-in-the-world already is as such.[16] But this means that everything, such as it is encountered and engaged within the "clearing" of our being-there, already is, crucially, *in truth* as such – a condition from which all other questions

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[13] Ibid, 271, 281.

[14] Gilles Deleuze, The Logic of Sense, trans. by Mark Lester (New York: Columbia, 1990), 107; Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, e.g., 40: "the Earth . . . is a body without organs. This body without organs is permeated by unformed, unstable matters, by flows in all directions, by free intensities or nomadic singularities, by mad or transitory particles. . ." Of course, it should also be remembered here that Deleuze will also differentiate his own thought from Nietzsche's through his insistence upon the thought of the surface: that what is interesting is not a Dionysus of the depths opening onto an undifferentiated abyss into which the self dissolves (as we find in *The Birth of Tragedy*), but rather the nomadic play of becomings across the surface of the world.

[15] Logically speaking, Heidegger displaces the whole problem of the ground within the Cartesian logic through the ontological difference. In the Western tradition, he suggests, we have tended to think the being of beings as though it *were* a kind of being underlying and grounding phenomena – e.g., as substance, the absolute positedness of things such that I might know them (Kant), etc. Heidegger works to instead show that the being of beings is not itself a being, but is rather precisely the happening of that clearing (in) which we find ourselves, on the basis of which we encounter things as already understood and interpreted. One might accordingly suggest that, contra that old metaphysics that separates Being from the flow of time and becoming, here being precisely "is" time. See Martin Heidegger, The Basic Problems of Phenomenology, trans. by Albert Hofstadter (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1982), 315.

[16] We gain access to the character of this positivity of understanding through the everyday use of equipment: for a tool, when it is working, is not an object standing before us awaiting analysis so much as something that is already "understood" when it is simply being used, encountered as "to hand". That is, it is encountered as "to hand" relative to other things and the "in order to" towards which it is used, understood within a broader lived context of being-attuned towards others, projecting possibilities, etc. "Worldhood" for Heidegger signifies the relational totality of meaning within which we always-already are, and in which we are already moving when we use and understand things in this way (i.e., even without theoretically "thinking" about it we "know" what equipment is for because we already encounter it as understood in some way.) Heidegger, Being and Time, 65-67, 77. C.f. also Heidegger's remarks in Poetry, Language, Thought, 123: "affirmation, however, does not mean to turn a No into a Yes; it means to acknowledge the positive as what is already before us and present."

about knowledge must be understood to be *derivative*. This coming-to-disclosure exists necessarily *in relation* with Dasein, and indeed it would make no sense for us to imagine a being-true *outside* of this relation – in other words, there are no adequate grounds for a prior equivocal comparison that undermines the truth of our being-there from the outset. The worldhood of the world is that it *is that world*.

It is worth briefly emphasizing the way this movement evinces a turn to a relational habit of thinking, in contrast to the familiar Cartesian and Kantian habits of understanding things as self-subsisting substances – which stand over-against the subject in the form of objects of knowledge. Heidegger writes, in a way that by now will be somewhat reminiscent of Indigenous thinking:

> The thing does not relate to a cognitive faculty interior to the subject; instead, the cognitive faculty itself and with it this subject are structured intentionally in their ontological constitution. The cognitive faculty is not the terminal member of the relation between an external thing and the internal subject; rather, *its essence is the relating itself, and indeed in such a way that the intentional Dasein which thus relates itself as an existent is always already dwelling among things. For the Dasein there is no outside, for which reason it is also absurd to talk about an inside.*[17]

One consequence of this is that there is also no sense in Heidegger that "illusion" or hallucination can or should be reduced to a "nothingness" of the non-real: it is not a question of an erroneous representation but of a genuine happening within the intentional relationship, the equiprimordial togetherness, of our being-in-the-world. That happening is misconceived, and not allowed to be itself, if we begin from the prior isolation of the Cartesian subject and the question of its in/correct representations of what is "out there". Heidegger offers the intriguing example of coming across a tree and taking it to be a man; what is important and interesting here is to not nullify the sense of the event, which is precisely that "the man himself is given to me".[18] But we can note how this produces a change in style of thinking and in orientation, and in the sense of what something like piety in thinking means for Heidegger. For what is interesting is not restricting ourselves to the special rules for saying delimited by the Cartesian epistemological logic, but the

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[17]My emphasis. Heidegger, <u>The Basic Problems of Phenomenology</u>, 66.
[18] Heidegger, <u>The Basic Problems of Phenomenology</u>, 63.

possibility of listening more daringly to the poetic folds of our dwelling, in a questioning attunement that "lets beings be" in the abundance of their presencing.[19] (And in this we can recognize the echoes of the reorientation explored by Nietzsche: "How much truth can a spirit *endure*, how much truth does a spirit *dare*?"[20])

Nietzsche's turn towards the body might be said to have a rough correlate in Heidegger's thought in turning towards the constitutive relations we have with/in *places* – i.e., the "there" in which we always find ourselves dwelling as being-there.[21] It has been the habit of the modern epistemological tradition to understand *space* as prior (i.e., a universal mathematized frame of pure extension that has tended to be conceived as a kind of empty container filled with rearrangeable physical bodies). To instead take place as prior to mathematical "space" here is simply another expression of Heidegger's strategy of displacing the subjectivistic epistemological project through the problematic of being-in-the-world.

What sense does "place" have here, and in what way does it denote constitutive relations? Edward S. Casey, thinking this problem after and also through Heidegger, puts the matter aptly: on the one hand, it is a matter of seeing how places and bodies (and we are in places precisely by way of our embodiment) *belong* to and "interanimate each other", as we inhabit and navigate places in an ongoing and open-ended way. This co-belonging and co-constitution of dwelling in place can be expressed as a *gathering*; as a being-within a "configurative complex" that is also eventual. It is a bringing-and-holding-together of a relational arena in which we understand, project, and live out possibilities, in which we think and remember, in which we experience sense and mood. Dwelled-in places, accordingly, are rich with meaning because they hold-together, *with us in our being-there*, much that we atomistic moderns might want to gloss (and thereby misconstrue) as "ours" and merely "subjective" – e.g., the voices and intensities of memory and thought and emotion, interpenetrated as these are with innerworldly sense,

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[19] C.f., Heidegger, Poetry, Language, Thought, 112-113, 121-123, 134-135.
[20] Nietzsche, The Will to Power, 536.
[21] Heidegger, Poetry, Language, Thought, 153-154.

and so on.[22] (And we can see here, by turn, how the Nietzschean/Deleuzian question of transversal becoming might be posed at this point in a way that allows "place" to gain a character somewhat closer to the sense of Indigenous thinking, and attains to vistas Heidegger himself seemed not quite to experience.)

We can recognize much that is perhaps *similar* here in the inclinations of Indigenous thinking. We have seen examples of how Indigenous relational ontologies give rise to an experience of truth that is not oriented towards a universalistic, God's-eye view of things, but rather remains always rooted within a condition of perspectival relationality that begins from a position of situatedness within the world. (It should be remembered however that the sense of "perspective" here is quite different from that found in Nietzsche – arising as it does from a distinct ontology and thought-tradition.[23]) Basil Johnston puts the matter quite explicitly relative to Ojibwe contexts:

> "When an 'Anishinaubae' says that someone is telling the truth, he says 'w'daeb-awae.' But the expression is not just a mere confirmation of a speaker's veracity. It is at the same time a philosophical proposition that, in saying, a speaker casts his words and his voice only as far as his vocabulary and his perception will enable him. In so doing the tribe was denying that there was absolute truth; that the best a speaker could achieve and a listener expect was the highest [possible] degree of

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[22] Casey, "How to Get From Space to Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time," 23-26. It should be noted that Casey is also drawing heavily upon Merleau-Ponty here. Heidegger speaks of a gathering-together or "worlding" of things within places; all of which brings together, in specific ways, relationships between what Heidegger calls the "Fourfold" – i.e., earth and sky, divinities and mortals. I have turned to Casey here as a way of giving a gloss of what is at stake in Heideggerian questions of "place" that will be brief and yet hopefully adequate for our purposes, without having to attempt an exegesis of Heidegger's Fourfold – the sense of which is difficult to penetrate without a great deal of discussion that would take us too far afield here. Some of the relevant passages in Heidegger can be found in Poetry, Language, Thought, 149-159, 175-180. (My own sense is that much concerning the Fourfold gains its sense for Heidegger in the context of his meditations concerning the default of God and the Greek gods, and hence his concern to explore different possibilities of being human in relation to "divinity", and to think in a memorializing way across historical epochs in the metaphysical disclosure of being, in light of the specific kind of world disclosed in the poetry e.g., of Rilke and Hölderlin.)

[23] Indeed, Nietzsche remains in important respects tied to the Kantian critique and modern ontology (whence the problematic of will and value, the problematic of philosophy as a form of "tyrannical" world-creation that imposes order on a fundamentally chaotic and indifferent nature, etc.), and inhabits a specific tradition of grappling with and thinking in-relation-to the fallout of modern subjectivism. A helpful and more detailed contrasting of Western and Indigenous (Amazonian, in particular) senses of "perspective" is given by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, "Exchanging Perspectives," 471-475. See also Chapter Four of this work for a gloss of the contrasting sense of Indigenous "perspectivism".

accuracy. Somehow that one expression 'w'daeb-awae' set the limits of a single statement as well as setting limits on all speech."[24]

Moreover, it is possible to see in Indigenous thought a broadly similar inclination towards questions of truth *vis à vis* the question of illusion, which would seem to arise on the basis of ontologies that also does not recapitulate the hierarchical equivocity of Christian metaphysics. Elsje Lagrou offers a helpful gloss here of what she understands to be the Cashinahua manner of understanding and approaching the world and phenomena, which I suspect could be generalized more broadly within Indigenous contexts:

> Another consequence of perspectivism in art and perception generally is that the traditional [Western] opposition between appearance and essence, or between reality and illusion, no longer makes sense. Each perception has some degree of existence specific to itself. . . the distinction between different kinds of percepts is made within the frame of different states of being. I use "states of being" to substitute the more commonly used "states of consciousness" because in this way we avoid the pitfall of inadvertently opposing mind and body.[25]

Not an equivocally-derived logic of inclusion/exclusion that sets terms for an intellectualized correspondence with reality, but the assumption that all "experience" only ever occupies *different levels of being*. All perceptual experience belongs in a valid sense to this "this-ness", and its coherences must be approached on that basis – and within a world approached from the beginning on embedded, relational terms, relative to which there is no Archimedian point. To continue our comparison, Indigenous views about dream and vision would seem illustrative here. It is not a question of "hallucinating" something "not really there" – a nothing/absence mistaken for a something/presence – or of not being able to distinguish the conditions of dream/vision and waking/sober life. It is rather a matter of acknowledging that under certain conditions the world is opened and the self experienced in a different way – in and through different states of being – that

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[24] Basil Johnston, "One Generation From Extinction," in Canadian Literature 125-126 (Spring/Summer 1990), at 3.
[25] Lagrou, Cashinahua Cosmovision, 33.

also facilitates certain kinds of relationships, and always within a this-worldly context.[26] (Though the sense of what counts as "this-worldly" accordingly becomes something different, and more expansive.) Not a dissolution of all coherence, but a frame of coherence able to ask what might be remarkable and valuable about such experiences as a kind of truthful happening, and what might be learned from them. It is able to explore, with good conscience, how certain *kinds* of investigations (and certain kinds of beings), certain possibilities for listening and empathetic communication/transformation – the play and sounding-forth of qualitative zones of sensation, etc. – are heightened, enabled, made visible, and intensified, under such conditions.

In addition, I have already discussed at some length (in the last chapter) how knowing in the sense of (e.g.,) the Quichua becoming-*yacharishka*, is bound up with a notion of the body as delimiting perspective – but a body that is also susceptible to transformation through relational connections. Certain affinities can perhaps readily be found here between Indigenous thought and Nietzsche's turn to the body, his experience of thought as fundamentally embodied, and so on. But it is also the case that the Heideggerian/phenomenological turn to place would seem helpful in opening up a way of thinking and attunement that brings us closer to a point of conversation with Indigenous relationships to the land, understandings of the landscape as storied, as an active participant in daily life, and so on.[27] For place connotes specificity of there-ness, an immersion within a specific set of (bodily) relationships, in a way that resonates well with the sense of *situatedness* characteristic of Indigenous thinking – a point I will return to shortly.

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[26] It should be noted that the etymological meaning of "hallucination" carries this sense of "having illusions". Lagrou suggests that the closest thing to "illusion" in Cashinahua thought would by something like "lying" (*txaniki*) – i.e., the possibility of being misled by another person, often to nefarious ends. This can happen in the realm of the "visionary", but the person at fault is generally not the one who reports having seen something, but rather the (powerful) being who has produced the specific visions in question. <u>Cashinahua Cosmovision</u>, 34. Interestingly, the notions of lying (*llullana*) and, less seriously, exaggeration (*lalana*) amongst lowland Quichua peoples carry a sense of removing something from its proper context, of making overly abstract generalizations. (Swanson, <u>Napo Runa Shimi</u>,114) The concern with faithfulness to phenomena as direct, relationally-occurring "experience" and context here would also seem reminiscent with observations by made A.I. Hallowell amongst the Ojibwe.

[27] A suspicion that I am certainly not alone in entertaining; Keith Basso and Thomas Thornton in particular have made productive use of the Heideggerian notion of "place" in ethnographic context. C.f., Basso, <u>Wisdom Sits in Places</u>, at 74; Thornton, <u>Being and Place Among the Tlingit</u>, 17, 24-26.

For the moment, let this suffice as a preliminary elaboration of what I take to be some of the basic points of connection and affinity relevant to this discussion. What I have termed here a "this-worldly" orientation of course gives rise in Nietzsche and Heidegger to an apprehension and analysis of an impoverishment that constitutively haunts modern life. Let us now turn more directly *this* aspect of their thought, and to some of the ways we might begin to reflect upon this provocation in the vicinity of Indigenous understandings. In this, let us turn first to Heidegger's reading of modernity and its metaphysics under the sign of "technology".

4.2   Relationality, Listening, and the Poverty of the Fungible

What is impoverishing, for Heidegger, about existence experienced through the terms of "technology" – that modern constellation of seeing by which nature comes to stand as so many calculable resources before the human will?[28] At issue, on the one hand, is the way our manner of thinking the real "annihilates" things. This occurs because the way we pose the problem of reality covers over the immersive conditions of our being-there, the relational dimension of our dwelling in places.

Precisely *in* the way we thus "forget the question of being", we secure for ourselves the possibility for certainty concerning the (atomistic) identity of objects – in a way that the whole problematic of calculability presupposes.[29] The play of identity here has the effect of construing beings as fungible within the context of an overarching and universal mathematical framework – and thus, as exchangeable, identical, repeatable, replaceable. In this, identity has the effect of flattening rank and difference, of standardizing. At the same time, the disenchanting play of our metaphysical architecture ensures that the richness we experience as belonging to our dwelling is bracketed away into superfluous "cultural" or subjectivized side-structures, in effect covering over and

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[28] Technology, for Heidegger is only ever a mode of revealing – of which there are and have been many others. (The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays, 12; c.f., 34, 117.) That this is so – that technology is a mode of *aletheia* rather than the uncovering of the real as such – follows from the distinctive way Heidegger will undermine an equivocal and universal metaphysics by means of the ontological difference between being and beings.

[29] That is, through a particular construal of the metaphysical dictum that identity is a characteristic of being. See Heidegger, Identity and Difference, 26, 28, 33-40.

degrading the relational grounds through which experiences of meaning and worth can emerge.[30]

As beings recede into fungibility and value is subjectivized, the status of (likewise atomistic) human beings as willful positions us as the ascendant masters of the earth. And it is the interlocking logics of *both* sides of this constellation (i.e., as constituting the nature both of subjects and objects), as well as the universalistic and exclusive character of the framework *as a whole*, that comes to constitute the danger Heidegger sees. Not only the play of fungibility, but the monological comportment of willing and ordering, debars a more thoughtful engagement that lets resonate more fully the relational richness of what dwelling in places and amongst beings is.[31]

Now, *contra* a horizon of innumerable, fungible objects within space, Heidegger will speak of "things", gathering themselves in places; the latter term denotes beings insofar as we dwell amongst them – that is to say, it is a word for beings approached in a renewed way from *within the relational horizon of our being-there*. And in opening up the possibility of a more daring listening to "things" in their presencing, Heidegger will speak of our dwelling as a poetizing – which describes nothing other than the open event of truth *qua aletheia*, through which being comes to language.

Poetizing accordingly is a term for bringing-to-disclosure that connotes a greater richness and more expansive sense of the positivity of our being-there – which technological seeing never attains to. It would seem to comprise at once an understanding and interpretation that is at once necessarily embodied and yet always connected to the way we come to see something *as something* – in this sense a kind of immersive hermeneutics that is always gathered in-relation-to the sayable.[32] (It also seems, in the space of Heidegger's text, to be an experience of truth that opens the possibility of remembering and re-enlivening alternate ways of thinking and encountering beings, as

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[30] Heidegger, <u>Poetry, Language, Thought</u>, 112-114, 117, 168; <u>The Question Concerning Technology</u>, 12-23, 26-27, 118-123. 167-175

[31] Heidegger, <u>The Question Concerning Technology</u>, 27-29.

[32] See supra, note 17; c.f. Heidegger's account of the *logos* as originally a pure letting-be-seen, an apophantic saying. The expansive sense of language conveyed here is moreover evident in the way Heidegger will describe language as nothing other the "house of being" itself. <u>Basic Writings</u>, 77-79; <u>Poetry, Language, Thought</u>,129.

for example in the experience of Homeric religion. And running through Heidegger's engagement with the Greeks, in turn, is always a basic orientation to relationality: the Greeks – including Aristotle – are remarkable in their being opened out onto the world, even in their experience of reason, in a way that is closed off in the modern subject.[33]) To open oneself more fully to this kind of abundance, moreover, requires that we learn a different mode of comportment: it calls for a kind of unshieldedness to the event of being, a mindful and questioning non-willing in contrast to the self-assertive willing of technology.[34]

From the vantage point of late modernity, it strikes me that Heidegger's thought can be especially valuable as a way of opening space vis à vis our dominant way of thinking, in which to explore something of the richness that a relational way of thinking directs us to see and experience. His continual assertion that the character of our being – our emplaced stay amongst things and the relationships that are possible there – suffers a radical killing insofar as we reduce this to the terms of technology, and reduce all extant beings to resources, remains I think a crucial point of objection and call to reflection within our present conjuncture. And I take Heidegger's implicit suggestion to be a genuinely provocative one: that we might approach the question of modernity's sickness, and most particularly the devastations evident in our relationships to nature, by way of the contrast opened by a more relational way of thinking.

But in this, we might perhaps do well to ask after some of the ways Indigenous thought – in its profound relationality – might at once speak to some of the worries Heidegger raises here while also pushing us in some sense "farther", and bringing us to reflect on these matters from a different vantage point. For if Heidegger seeks to step away from the terms of the technological framework into a more poetic dwelling, he still does not conceive of this matter explicitly in terms of a divergence between our

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[33] Heidegger, The Question Concerning Technology, 131, 147.

[34] Heidegger, Poetry, Language, Thought, 129; Martin Heidegger, Discourse on Thinking: A Translation of Gelassenheit, trans. by John Anderson and E. Freund (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), esp. 58-70. It is notable that Heidegger thinks this non-willing letting-be in conversation with the meditations of the Christian mystic Meister Eckhart. For a relevant sense of the latter's thought, see Meister Eckhart, Breakthrough: Meister Eckhart's Creation Spirituality in New Translation Commentaries by Matthew Fox (New York: Doubleday, 1980), esp. 213-223.

dominant/equivocal/atomistic and relational, "this-worldly" *ontologies*. At some level, this cannot be surprising given the way Heidegger conceived his own project in terms of a "fundamental ontology" that was, *as fundamental and primordial*, precisely an attempt to think the transcendental structures of human being-there while stepping-away from metaphysics *as such*.

But in this, it seems to me that we can explore not only some of the limits of Heidegger's relational turn – and thus some of the ways in which he still seems to think within the space opened by a largely traditional Western, atomistic ontology. At the same time, we can perhaps begin a process of further rethinking concerning how we are to understand something like an impoverishment haunting modern life, as well as what it might mean to think and live otherwise.

4.2.1 Technology and Dwelling, Considered Between Divergent Ontologies

How might we reflect differently on these matters in light of Indigenous thought? Let us consider for example the issue of fungibility. At root here, we saw, is the logic of identity: A is identical (i.e., the same and equal) not only to itself, but to any other instance of A, since we are inclined to presume that what is true remains true always and everywhere.[35] To come to beings in this way, we have seen, involves an atomistic ontology and bent of thinking. Heidegger counters this in his own way – not by problematizing the question of how we conceive beings as such, so much as through the question of being (thus by showing that insofar as something is, it is as gathered within a world in relation to Dasein). Heidegger, I have suggested, opens onto a *more* relational way of thinking by this route, which experiences that things *as things* are "modest in number" and not fungible, directs us towards a renewed and poetic questioning of beings in their presencing, and so on. He opens a possibility for seeing, in this direction, *that* beings may show up altogether differently (worlded in a different way), and for

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[35] Heidegger, <u>Identity and Difference</u>, 24-26.

countering certain of the universalistic logics by which our dominant tradition has tended to be dismissive of such differences. And his implicit impulse would always seem to incline him towards *more* relational possibilities in his reorientation towards the world (as seen in his remembering the Greeks, and his recounting of things as always constituted through a relationship and a coming-together of the fourfold of "earth and sky, divinities and mortals", etc.). Nevertheless, he does not seem to attain to the kind of positive articulation of a relational ontology, such that beings themselves are able to assume a whatness and coherence that is itself relational, in the same manner that seems characteristic of Indigenous traditions.

This alternate kind of relational coherence is what seems to be at stake in the Indigenous notion that things become what they are on the basis of a prior network of relationships. We have seen already numerous examples of this playing out in different contexts; but let us borrow one more from Rupert Ross: a shell holding smouldering sweetgrass, passed around within a ceremonial context. Our own dominant philosophical habit would be to focus upon that atomistic, self-subsisting thing, to determine its properties, to investigate what it is in such a way that it might presumably tell us something about similar things in other contexts. It is striking, however, that Ross's Indigenous interlocutor says something different: this shell, used now in this context and assuming a name which reflects that context, will nevertheless be called something different in another context. This "thing" we are apt to isolate as an atomistic A is in this case notably *not* identical to itself; it *has become something else*. As Ross tells it, the shell in question

> could be a sacred vessel at one calling, a vessel bringing candy at another,
> or a vessel receiving cigarette butts at another; it depended on its
> relationship to the speaker and to the occasion. To call it, as European
> languages did, by one name for all occasions was seen as a 'poorer' way to
> speak of the world.[36]

Because such a "thing" as this shell is viewed relationally rather than atomistically, it is relational context – subject to change in this case from one instance to

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[36] Ross, "Exploring Criminal Justice and the Aboriginal Healing Paradigm," at 4.

another – that makes something what it is. This kind of relational ontology, we can see, is connected to an ontological understanding of beings as capable of transformation. (And we have explored this matter much more thoroughly already in connection with the questions of relational personhood and perspective.) But then, in this it should be noted that the question of *what beings are* is precisely not posed either in a substantive sense or as relative to a universal perspective – it is understood contextually and relative to the perspectival location of the speaker and with the understanding that this viewpoint can itself be subject to transformation.

We see this again in the way that, as noted in the previous chapter, the term for "human being" (in Quichua, *runa*) does not refer to a class of beings but to a position of relative communicative transparency, shared feeling and understanding and empathy relative to the speaker, that is held together by *yakichina*. But it is entirely possible for one to cease maintaining relations with one's community of relatives, to move away, to become angry with them, to cease feeling *yakichina* for them. In such a case, one drifts away from being a *runa* of the *allyu* (kinship network) to assume a viewpoint position of non-transparency outside of it (i.e., one becomes an *auca*, which is to say a potential enemy). Conversely, it is also possible for an outsider to become an insider, as for example through marriage. Eljse Lagrou describes a very similar way of thinking amongst the Cashinahua; she notes how the term *nawa* (equivalent here to the Quichua *auca*) can mean "outsider" relative to oneself in a variety of senses – strangers and enemies "like the white colonizers or mythical *inkas* (cannibal gods)", but also simply other neighbouring peoples, or even other moieties *within* one's own community. The meaning here is always strictly relational: *nawa* "will always mean someone other than oneself" and hence occupies a contrastive position at an opposite pole from *huni* (the Cashinahua term for "human beings", similar to the Quichua *runa*). This also serves to give another indication of the way relationality and the play of often reversible and shifting positions comes to inform Amazonian "classificatory" thought generally.[37]

In certain respects, Heidegger may be seen to *approach* such a way of thinking. Returning to the example of the shell, he might ask: how does the shell gather itself as

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[37] Lagrou, "Sorcery in Cashinahua Discourse," 245-6.

what it is, within the hermeneutical *and* emplaced, relational context of our dwelling? And he does seem to experience the way our thinking can undergo a change in trying to apprehend as sympathetically as possible that it may have come to disclosure differently (again, we can recall the impact of the Greeks here). And yet, it may be that throughout this he is limited in his thinking by the noun-centered linguistic and philosophical habits of European thought, as well as by the way his overall project is framed in terms of a stepping-away from metaphysics rather than as thinking in the space *between metaphysical/ontological traditions.*

For Heidegger can only ever name seemingly atomistic entities as examples of things, *whose underlying atomism itself is not explicitly put to question*: jug and bench, tree and pond, brook and hill.[38] It will be noted, by contrast, that the broadly-shared trait of Indigenous American languages (at least those engaged here) as being verb-centered and heavily relational through their use of directional, positional, etc. suffixes, opens up possibilities in naming and expressing that are markedly awkward in Western languages – while also taking us quite beyond the almost exclusively Indo-European-based milieu of Heidegger's thinking.[39]

Heidegger's project would also seem limited in this regard given the way the temporal axis of historical being *remains an underlying ontological structure* that itself is not problematized beyond its nonhierarchical division into epochal pulsations. His thinking of history in this sense would seem (despite its leveling gesture) to continue the habit, typical of late modern European philosophy, of conceiving the world in terms of the unfolding of such an *ultimately singular process* – which is why the present is always experienced inexorably and singularly as the present in such a way that one can only *await* a future change or *remember* something different.

The difference is an important one that has implications for the way we think about what is flattened over by a(n atomizing) logic of fungibility. Notable of course is that this logic works precisely to cover over and remove things *from the very context that would make them what they are and sustain them* – indeed as a condition of their

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[38] Heidegger, Poetry, Language, Thought, 180.
[39] See again my discussions in the last chapter, especially in connection with Tlingit place-names.

mobilization as fungible objects. But pushing this matter further is the way that Indigenous capacities to think in terms of relationships, in a non-entity-centric way, allow for a sense of *what is* to be articulated *in terms of* these radiating and linking relationships. Indigenous relational ontologies accordingly give rise to a sense of something like ontic interdependence: everything that is, is profoundly connected to everything else.

This kind of articulate interdependence gives rise to distinct normative possibilities of caring for the land, relations of stewardship, concerns for something like sustainability with regard to things, approached in terms of a law of respect for all and the preservation of balance and harmonious relations.[40] But in this sense, the violence of technology's "annihilations", as the condition of mobilizing objects in the way it does, also becomes something ontically "real" in a way that Heidegger's own grappling with the problem does not seem to be able to articulate. In the same way, it becomes possible to experience possibilities contrary to the technological in the form of an articulate and alternate disclosure of beings *as what they are*, in such a way as to enable precisely something like disagreement or contest concerning the given and consequent normative understandings.[41]

Such an alternate way of thinking the coherences of beings and happenings also, it should be noted, undermines the problematic of the atomistically separate human will in its own way. For a self that is understood as a relational focal-point of power, constituted through relationships of becoming, contagion, and so on, the manner of our being-there on the land and amongst others must also be understood and experienced as bound to

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[40] C.f., my discussion of stewardship in connection with North Pacific Coastal cultures in the last chapter. It should be noted of course that the problem of sustainability and of caring for that which is, cannot be assumed to be identical to the kinds of discourses on offer in Western ecologist circles. Indeed they are not. One of the crucial differences in this regard stems from the attribution of agency to the non-human, as well as the role of "animal masters" in human-animal relations, in ways that are certainly not found in Western biological thought. An important example seems to be variances in understanding what the extinction of species amounts to: is it the eradication of the last breeding pair, or is it the (potentially only temporary) withdrawal of species, corralled into distant safety by the animal masters, as a response to bad conditions, poisoned relations, offence by humans, etc.? (This is at any rate how the matter seems to be understood in traditional Quichua contexts.)

[41] Such as we see, precisely, in the character of political disputes between Indigenous peoples and European settler-states, and as I have already discussed in connection with thinkers like Jacques Rancière and Mario Blaser.

these in profound relations of interdependency. The technological self-positioning of ourselves as masters of the world accordingly makes little sense here, at the same time that the problematic of "listening" acquires a different kind of meaning. I will return to this point in a moment.

Following the question of relational ontology further, it strikes me that we hit on a second major point to consider here: that is, the way personhood *as such* is thought differently in these Indigenous traditions. Indeed, if we wish to ask how Indigenous traditions might invite reflections relevant to the sense of technology's impoverishments, then one formulation from the Amazonian context strikes me as especially important here. Namely: the lesson that if one blunders through the forest noisily and non-receptively, incapable of listening and of being transformed there, *if one cannot see persons in one's non-human environment,* then there is a sense in which one is not coming to things thoughtfully.[42] For is this not at some level an apt description of what we moderns tend to do – living our lives through such entrenched monological premises that we remain assured in our workaday life that no dialogue is necessary or valuable with the non-human, and indeed that it is absurd to even speak of dialogue here?

That the notion of personhood here is thought differently, and made inclusive of a great range of beings (including "places"), constitutes one of the most crucial ways in which, I think, Indigenous relational ontologies push us beyond the scope of Heideggerian thought while nevertheless being able to speak to concerns this raises. Heidegger, we saw, continually described "technology" as orbiting the story of the will and drawing out the latter's dangerous consequences. His engagement with this question always bore the traces of Nietzsche who, before him, repeatedly undermined the

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[42] This amounts, indeed, to such a wonderfully layered phrase, in view of the sense of personhood put forth here – such that the statement encompasses not only a dearth of perceptiveness, but also of empathy – which carries at once the sense of becomings and of caring (and which is in turn linked to the transformative power of "perceptiveness", though it is a relation and not a matter only up to "me") – and all the other ethical matters listed above. This phrase also implies something about the "one" who, as unthoughtful, must accordingly feel "alone" in the forest – precisely that the "I" itself is poorer, not only as being presumably isolated from the extended and profoundly emplaced community of *runa*, but also a sense that the self has not been grown and expanded through its travels and relations. Even the notion of what "thoughtfully" means here seems difficult for us to grasp, where it does not seem to be a question of what I do as an isolated self apart from forest, sky, waters (or one that is "intellectualizing" after the terms of the mind/body split in Descartes and beyond); rather the sense and content of "thinking" seems always inextricably tied to relations, becomings, embodied immersions and transformations with/in the land.

ontological truth of the will by insisting there is finally no doer "behind" the doing, that the supposition and unification of such a doer is bound up precisely with the soteriological heritage of our Christianized metaphysics. But then, Indigenous thought would seem to articulate precisely a kind of selfhood and agency that does not rest upon this same set of suppositions, such a projection of a doer (structured by the atomistic unity of the self, the free will as spontaneous organ of our authorship, whose activity precedes action in the form of intention, and so on). Moreover, what is so astonishing to see here is how our understanding of the whole world changes as a result, as does the composition of human beings' ethical horizons. Or rather, what is astonishing is that nonhuman persons become thinkable as actors or actants *vis à vis* ethics (but also in the constitution of thought and "world" as such).

In other words, if Indigenous senses of personhood are from the beginning profoundly relational, and if it is this relationality that also allows for an understanding e.g., of a stone as animate, as a person (as I have argued) – then part of what is so provocative here is the way this comes to give rise to a profoundly *different* sense of our ethical horizons. If it is a question of relating to "things" differently – this still, I think, is *one matter*; if it is a question of relating to *persons* – well, this is altogether another, and changes perceivably the way we are apt to approach and regard the problem.

To pursue the comparison with Heidegger, we may consider here the following question: why is it only the human being who is Dasein, for Heidegger? Curiously, it would seem in this that Heidegger in many respects repeats an altogether familiar differentiation of beings as appears elsewhere in the Western tradition. The animal is "poor in world" (and stones are "worldless") as against the richness of the way man is "world-forming", because only we have language – i.e., only we are able to see something as something.[43]

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[43] Heidegger, <u>The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude</u> trans. by William McNeil and Nicholas Walker (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 192; 196-198. It is interesting here that Heidegger actually offers a repetition of our old nature-culture settlement on this front: "[the stone's] having no access [i.e., no world] is precisely what makes possible its specific kind of being, i.e., the realm of being of physical and material nature and the laws governing it." (Ibid, 197.) Heidegger's argument about the animal being "poor in world" and so separated from man "by an abyss" is also repeated in a shorter form in "The Letter on Humanism," in <u>Basic Writings</u>, 226-230.

But in this, we would seem to find ourselves (and quite curiously) moving again and at bottom within a presumed atomistic ontology (i.e., we are the *beings* who "have" language – such that our prior status and boundedness *as beings* would seem unproblematically presumed). Or rather, is it perhaps that we encounter here the limit of Heidegger's own attempts to distance his thought from the way traditional metaphysics has conceived man as the *animale rationale* (the being whose characteristic property is to be capable of reason), without more directly exploring the possibility of thinking in the vicinity of alternative ontologies as such? Could it be so self-evident to Heidegger that "man" (*what*, finally, is this, as "a being"?) uniquely amongst *beings* "has" language, were he not already moving from the beginning *within* the space of traditional Western cultural and metaphysical construals of the given?

To begin to entertain possibilities of understanding ourselves and our ethical position within the world differently, moreover, is I think one of the most radical and important possibilities that a genuinely relational ontology would seem to present to us as moderns. For what we experience as the problem of "nature" is profoundly bound up with our sense of ourselves and of our unique ethical and agentive position within the world. Beyond simply cultivating a distrust in *our habitual sense* of these matters, might not the problem of *thinking agency and ethics altogether differently* not be a crucial task under present circumstances?

It can be worth drawing out this question of language here. While in Indigenous traditions it seems to be the case that, at least from a certain vantage point, only human beings[44] might be said to "speak" in a fully *transparent* (to us) sense, it is rather a matter of there being different kinds of "speaking" – which includes, for example, the thunder thundering. To describe thunder as speech, in other words, is not to indulge in metaphor, likening it figuratively to something else (human speech) that it in truth is not.[45] It is rather that language as such is distributed across the differential registers of perspectival being. In this sense the relational ontology of "perspectivism" and understanding of beings as capable of transformation sets out an altogether different topography through

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[44] Though properly speaking, this means the network of relatives and community in which one is situated – as in the case of the Quichua *allyu* or *runa*.
[45] C.f., Ingold, The Perception of the Environment, 76.

which the existence of language stands to be thought. And this precisely does not reaffirm our familiar self-conception as unique and privileged amongst beings[46], but instead sets the grounds for a whole alternate ethical complex, problematics of becoming and containment, and so on.

Accordingly, if Heidegger invites us to a non-willing mode of listening or "letting beings be" in contrast to the technological will, then it seems to me that Indigenous notions of personhood set the stage for something that is also rather like such a meditative listening, but one that stands in much greater contrast with monological willfulness by virtue of its alternate articulation of our ontological and ethical horizons. For in a relational world including non-human persons, a whole flood of additional questions and possibilities arise that also go quite beyond the dichotomy of willing/non-willing and venture into the realm of the properly *dialogical* (because *interpersonal*) with the non-human. For example: what is my relationship to *X* (a question that also thinks "me" in a way that extends back to the ancestors and *their* relationships that I might be inheriting/remembering)? How transparent is this relationship? How old is this person – and (connectedly) how much wisdom do they have? How powerful are they? Can they help me, and what might they teach me?[47]

The question of age amongst nonhuman persons is worth lingering over a bit further here: across the traditions I am engaging here, there is a sense in which ancient trees and mountains can be assumed to hold ancient wisdom, because their life cycles –

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[46] It is interesting to note here that one of the ways Heidegger counters our sense of mastery is through what seems like an intriguingly Christian moment – i.e., by a questioning of being structured by showing that we are not masters of "it", and the irreducibly mysterious manner in which being lends itself historically to thought and yet always withdraws in this process.

[47] Interestingly, it would also seem that the Indigenous extension of personhood into the domain of the non-human also lays the ground for seeing something like performative moments of gathering and rendering-actual capacities etc. as possible in contexts of interaction with the non-human. Another possible bridge to explore here might be the way this seems reminiscent, though in a much less anthropocentric way, of the kind of interactive and relational context that Hannah Arendt, for example, saw as central to the experience of the pre-philosophical *polis* in early Greece. Indeed, it is quite striking that much of what Arendt describes as connected to the interactive dimension of the *polis* (and which she also sees as fading from our experience under modern conditions) – in terms of a relational experience of power, of excellence and beauty, a context in which stories are immensely important not only as guides but also as a way of being oriented in living – i.e., one wants to live in such a way as to be like a story, worthy of remembrance, etc. – might be brought into conversation with certain features of Indigenous traditions. See Arendt, The Human Condition, esp. 181-207.

the time in which to grow wise (each, we would expect, in their own way) and to have relations – are longer than that of humans. More experience generates more wisdom. The kind of ethical/interactive consequences we might draw here are ones that tend to elude us given our usual thinking. As the logging industry makes clear, for example, forests are to be understood as a "renewable" resource – which is to say that there is no appreciable or essential difference between an old-growth forest and one planted to replace it. From the industry's point of view, all are rendered fungible and already pre-mobilized as timber. We can see how the Indigenous perspective here would foster a very different way of approaching, relating to, and appreciating/articulating not only what is striking about mountains, old-growth forests, and so on – but also the kind of knowledge that empathetic relations with these might give rise to. For Quichua and other Indigenous traditions, it is moreover important and a source of richness that the land and the persons in it knew your parents and other relatives, and that you remember and continually re-enliven those inherited relationships; such an orientation must seem quite strange to modern thinking.

The *ethical* problems of empathy, respect, and reciprocity – which seem to belong most fully to the domain of relationships between persons – obtain a pre-eminence in Indigenous relations to the non-human, the land, etc., in ways that are profoundly circumscribed if not outright precluded in our habitual lifeways. Within the space of these alternate ontologies, we also gain a more positive sense of how non-anthropocentric relations with the non-human might be possible, and what it might mean not only to profoundly (and non-subjectively) rethink the problem of "agency" but to understand non-human others as also *being agents*. Interestingly, this also occurs in ways that precisely cannot be dismissed as merely "anthropomorphizing" in the familiar (Western) sense.

(It is also worth emphasizing here that Indigenous, relational ontologies' non-anthropocentric character also implies the rethinking of the domain of the "anthropos". That is to say that places and people, human and nonhuman, become at some level utterly inseparable. In dwelling in places we are also already dwelling with people. most especially, with people who develop and deepen relations there. The joy we might

encounter in our relations with the beauty of the nonhuman world is also experienced and shared in our relations with people inasmuch as they are themselves dwell in place in a thoughtful and sensitive way. For a Quichua person, a great part of the *pathos* of moving through the land is being reminded of one's human relatives there. Thus people are embedded in the land as much as the land is embedded in people.)

The question of personhood raises the issue of something like the "freedom" of these persons – although, once again, what is involved here is not understood in terms of our familiar problematic of the free will.[48] Bound up with this notion of freedom however are a series of normative and ethical problematics that in their own way stand markedly opposed to the framework and the aspirations of mastering the world by calculation, subjecting nature to our monological ordering and planning, understanding beings as fungible, and so on.[49] It gives shape to specific ways and practices of "listening", of leaving space for others in a way that is also connected to the problem of language raised earlier. For it is a broadly shared sensibility across the Indigenous peoples I have engaged here that one should avoid impinging upon other persons and their freedom to act and interact in the manner they do. This includes nonhuman persons, and moreover means that it is necessary to let things speak for themselves and on their own terms as much as possible.

In the injunction to not impinge upon the freedom of others, it seems to me that we can also see something *like* a guarding or caring for "difference". For a free person's actions are not calculable (i.e., governed by impersonal and necessary laws), and the speaking of non-human beings is perhaps one way to think about much that recedes or is occluded by the conditions of rendering-fungible, by relationships of willing, by our

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[48] I.e., freedom is not construed in terms of the spontaneous action of the will that stands noumenally behind one's doing (framed temporally in terms of a gap in time between intention and act), and that constitutes the organ of causality proper to an atomistic self-in-itself. See again the discussion of the last chapter.

[49] Amongst lowland Quichua peoples, for example, it seems to be a kind of expression of piety to avoid making definite pronouncements about the future, and to insist that while repeating patterns may be observed in the world, these do not repeat *exactly*. The notion that regularities in the world can be approached in terms of the habitual action of persons, discussed earlier in connection with Ojibwe understandings, seems to me to be a way of being attentive to the world and understanding regularities within it that is precisely consistent with the notion that personhood is not the exclusive characteristic of human beings. A number of other ethnographers have made similar and connected observations here; c.f., Brown, Tsewa's Gift, 172; Lagrou, Cashinahua Cosmovision, 29-30.

persistent (and connected) drive for (in principle, monological) disambiguation within modern political and legal contexts, and so on. The problem of letting others speak would seem to be a more dialogically-conceived way for exploring something *like* what Heidegger approaches in terms of the poetic registers of embodied thought – but also for inflecting this problem in a quite different way.

Some examples may be helpful here; and indeed one of the advantages of reconsidering our own ontological commitments cross-culturally is that we are afforded the opportunity of seeing how the consequences of alternative presumptions can play out meaningfully and concretely in the context of ("our", but also "their") daily life, practice, idiom, and so on. (And to experience that these kinds of lived differences is part of what "ontological disagreement" and "relational thinking" means also, perhaps, encourages us to take such philosophical matters in a sense that is made all the more "concrete".)

I have already written at some length about practices of dreaming as modes of listening. But it can be helpful to invoke more "prosaic" examples as well. One such example of what this kind of listening and "leaving space" looks like, I think, is simply the way Amazonian Quichua-speaking peoples are generally reluctant to abstract or take things out of context – including the singing of songs or the telling of stories. (The sense of lying, *llullana*, and exaggerating, *lalana*, in lowland Quichua is tied precisely to this problem: to lie and exaggerate is what one does when one takes things carelessly out of context.) And indeed, particular songs and stories will become especially "appropriate" (or not) within such situations as coming across a particular plant in the forest, hearing a certain bird, coming across a stream where peccaries used to be found, or some other event. And so it is often easier to prompt and hear stories about forest-beings from an elder when out in the forest than, for example, when sitting around at home: because in this way non-human actors can participate. At some level, we might say that this has to do with the way memory in oral Indigenous cultures is often "triggered" by specific and direct encounters (seeing a particular tree, an animal, etc.). But I think we can understand all this better in light of the question of personhood, and the nature of remembrance or *iyarina* as a practice and form of engagement generally (of which the remembering of origin stories is a component).

As I have suggested, when encountering (for example) a tree, the practice of remembering origin stories lets one remember and make-present *in that tree* the withdrawn personhood that the story tells about, and lets one experience at the same time what personhood means in terms of the tree. Such a making-present is not one-sided, but is a *relational* and *interactive* happening; it is at once something one does and a kind of invitation to dialogue that *involves others*, that precisely gives space for them to speak for and show themselves, to be discovered as persons, for relations of empathy and contagion to begin or continue developing. This may be more or less successful depending on how things go. But to tell such a story in-context, i.e., in the presence of the tree, in this sense is important because doing so allows *iyarina* and the story to work as a practice and interaction. It is simultaneously a pathway to letting non-human personhood be seen, and a means of allowing the story to be told with the participation of non-human others, letting them speak in their own manner, for themselves on their own terms. (Songs concerning nonhuman persons can be seen to belong properly within specific contexts and situations for similar reasons, with the additional reason that songs are often sung *to* specific nonhuman others as part of techniques for interacting successfully with them.)

It is interesting to note that this kind of leaving-space for others also applies quite broadly in the context even of communication between human speakers. For example, offering moral advice by speaking indirectly in stories or even (and more sparsely) through place names invocative of stories, in the manner described by Keith Basso amongst the Apache, seems at one level to be a way of preserving the dignity of human interlocutors.[50] By giving advice indirectly through stories, rather than spelling things out, it is possible to at once offer direction while still preserving the freedom of others and the space for them to come to the appropriate realizations by their own paths. But the matter becomes even more complicated (and interesting, I think) *when we consider the way selfhood itself is understood as multiple and relational*; for in this sense letting stories go to work on others is also nothing other than leaving space through which that person's own dialogical and direct relationships with the land and the ancestors can be

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[50] Basso, <u>Wisdom Sits in Places</u>, 82-85. Basso's observations here do seem to me to have resonances much more broadly within Indigenous American thought, in ways that should be fairly evident given the material I have covered.

enlivened and allowed to transpire and give rise to insight.[51] In this sense the "freedom" being guarded from smothering here seems to be that of *all persons* involved, and not merely human ones.

This is I think a broadly-found pattern amongst Indigenous traditions, of which numerous examples could be adduced. The use of ideophones in Quichua, for example, would seem to involve similar principles: these are not literal *imitations* of sounds (e.g., the laughter of the *oropendula*, the sound of grass, the sound of minnows in a school, etc.) so much as invocations of them. This is precisely a way of inviting others to remember not only their own experiences with the phenomena in question, but also associated meanings and connotations, and so on. In this sense, one precisely leaves a space in conversation in which these phenomena are able to speak for themselves. I have also already discussed how Quichua pottery communicates in an analogous fashion.

It is also worth emphasizing here, I think, that this kind of "leaving space" might well appear to us negatively as "sparse speech" or leaving silence, is in another sense a full positivity of ongoing communication (and becomings, and so on) – although the nature of that communication is such that it would seem to best or properly transpire within such "silences". This again stands markedly in contrast to the predominant impulses of modernity, which seem continually bent on disambiguation and clarification – as indeed the political problematic of Hobbesian sovereignty, and the political and legal problematic of *spelling out and defining what things are* in a way that applies across contexts and allows for predictability and rationalization, exemplifies.[52]

In the foregoing, then, I have tried to explore some of the ways in which Indigenous thought might bring us to respond to Heidegger – and through him to our era more broadly. In this, my predominant suggestion has been that while much in Heidegger's turn towards the problem of dwelling offers a valuable bridge for conversation with Indigenous thought, the latter offers important challenges to particular lingering metaphysical presuppositions within his thought. In the form of articulate, alternate understandings and relations in the world consequent upon *relational*

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[51] C.f., Basso, Wisdom Sits in Places, 86, 90-91,106-7.
[52] I wish to thank Tod Swanson in particular for his insight on this point.

ontologies, and the kind of disagreement with modern thought this gives rise to, Indigenous traditions would seem to invite us to further critical self-reflection, to explorations of ourselves and the world along very different terms. And if our present crises under the sign of the devastation of nature do indeed draw the consequences of our metaphysical heritage, then perhaps such an invitation is of no small importance today.

But then, is there not a sense in which Heidegger also already thinks within and responds to reverberations of Nietzsche's critique and the latter's ontology of the will to power?[53] And if we turn then to Nietzsche, do we not see an ontology, sense of self and of beings (as multiplicities in flux), that differs significantly, with coherent articulateness, and in important ways from our dominant traditions? And does this not also push forward the question of relationality, in its own way? Let us turn now to consider these matters directly. For Nietzsche, I think, does indeed offer valuable provocations to our dominant tradition, that also might be seen to approach, from our vantage point, certain understandings characteristic of Indigenous traditions. My suggestion will nevertheless be that, in light of what is opened by Indigenous traditions, it can be valuable to reconsider certain elements of Nietzsche's thought and, accordingly, both his reading of our impoverishment in modernity and his efforts to think otherwise.

4.3   On Knowing-Becoming, and the Impoverishment of the Self

In countering the equivocal metaphysical impulse from Plato through to modernity, we have seen, Nietzsche explores a philosophy of perspectival, immanent becoming and embodied thought that challenges us to a more "expansive" sense of the world and of the self than is countenanced in our dominant philosophical and epistemological tradition. From that vantage-point, moreover, Nietzsche is able to offer an account of the impoverishment of modernity that turns upon its *banality*, and the emptiness of its sense of "culture". Perhaps the most striking (and haunting) image of this is found in Nietzsche's portrayal of the Last Men who have "invented happiness".

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[53] Consider, for example, the Nietzschean echoes and aesthetic sensibility that informs the essay "What Are Poets For?" in <u>Poetry, Language, Thought</u>, esp. 112-135.

But if the Last Men express something essential about who we moderns have become (and I think they do), then it seems to me that Indigenous thought also offers grounds through which we might understand something like this banality, as well as a contrasting vision of richness. One way we might explore this possibility is through the suggestion that the dominant *modus operandi* of modern life (and for all its epistemological pride) discourages and covers over anything like the cultivation of knowledge as *yachana* and becoming-*yacharishka*. But to say this is precisely to link a paucity of the self with an unthoughtful relationship with the land and nonhuman others: for in becoming-*yacharishka* with the land, we have seen that one grows/becomes in a sense not only a multiplicity of the self, but that at the same time one broadens the affections, opens onto new registers of feeling and affect, establishes communicative transparencies, and so on. In the vision of what a more cultivated selfhood and manner of being would be in Indigenous thought, it seems to me that we at once come provocatively close to Nietzsche in many respects, but that we also diverge significantly from him. These divergences (and the grounds for them), I think, constitute important provocations for us to think through today, especially if we are concerned to imagine how a more affirmative philosophy rooted in "this-worldliness" might also possibly be responsive (and reflexive) with regard to the problem of "nature" and the ongoing dynamics of ecological devastation that now threaten us so inexorably.

4.3.1 Nietzsche's Last Men

Nietzsche's image of the Last Men, recounted in the early pages of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, expresses the cultural fallout of many of the most fundamental aspirations of modern man and our stories of progress. These contemptible beings inhabit a world made comfortable, domesticated, and manageable; a world entertaining and yet empty, devoid of genuine worth and feeling. "'What is love? What is creation? What is longing?' . . . thus asks the last man, and he blinks."[54]

What is at stake here for Nietzsche is the diminution of human beings in and through the very ways we come to think and secure our freedom and our happiness, in

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[54] Nietzsche, "Thus Spoke Zarathustra," 129.

accordance with our manner of thinking "civilization" and justice and so on. "The leveling and diminution of European man is our greatest danger," Nietzsche writes in the *Genealogy of Morals*;

> "because the sight of him makes us despond . . . We no longer see anything these days that aspires to grow greater; instead, we have a suspicion that things will continue to go downhill, becoming ever thinner, more placid, smarter, cosier, more ordinary, more indifferent . . . This is Europe's true predicament: together with the fear of man we have also lost the love of man, reverence for man, confidence in man . . ."[55]

This process occurs by virtue of the moral gesture or "valuation" that lies at its root: fundamentally, a soteriological one that rejects the world in its ambivalence, its danger, its fullness. Here we can recognize again what I described above as the equivocal metaphysical gesture: for Nietzsche, the positing of a beyond that redeems our suffering, which begins by saying No and holding the world accountable to a standard that must find its orientation-point outside of it. But what is crucial here is the way this moral gesture establishes and remains present within a whole metaphysical trajectory and connected understanding of truth, and of ourselves and our position in the world.

But let us review Nietzsche's gloss a little more closely. With Christianity, we can see how this soteriological gesture becomes active in the world through the language of universalistic law on the one hand, and a connected logic of identity on the other. It is easiest to grasp what is at stake here interpersonally – in *The Genealogy of Morals*, we are invited to see how moral universalism takes revenge on the strong and on difference and rank: the leveling dictum "blessed are the meek" in this sense opposes every aristocratic (and pagan) sensibility.[56] But the law also and simultaneously requires the supposition (and production) of a doer, an atomistic, self-enduring free agent who can experience the guilt of her sins and be held accountable for them as their cause. (The free will, we recall, is nothing but the organ of this efficient causality.) An atomistic self-sameness in this sense covers over difference and multiplicity "within"/as ourselves, while universal law brings sameness to reign amongst and between human beings (at

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[55]Nietzsche, "The Genealogy of Morals," 177.
[56] See Nietzsche, "The Genealogy of Morals," first essay.

least, in the space of that law's domesticity). Man, in becoming "man", becomes something tamer, less dangerous and more predictable, in a way that serves a broader soteriological aim of making the world tamer, more comfortable, more agreeable, less difficult.

It may seem something of a detour, but a comparison of early Christian and Homeric senses of self can be helpfully illustrative of what is at stake here and of how we might take Nietzsche seriously as a reading of the Western tradition. The Homeric self was emphatically not self-sovereign. Happenings that were not unusual but nevertheless stood out from the ordinary and were accorded importance (the sudden swell of courage, the loss of one's wits, a sudden flash of insight, etc.) were understood in terms of relationships to forces beyond the self – i.e., as interventions by the gods or (expressed in a more general way) "some daemon". What seems expressed here is not least the insight that the kinds of "psychological" happenings described here do not seem to originate "from" us or to be at our disposal for control, but to come mysteriously of their own accord and on their own time. Moreover, theophantic happenings in Homer possess qualitative characters whose interplay constitutes precisely what the world is. This interplay shows up in moments of affinity, as in the enduring love affair of Ares and Aphrodite, but also in the way the gods are continually at odds with one another, pulling human beings this way and that, such that we cannot avoid slighting one or the other at various times. Early Greek justice was (accordingly) not concerned with intention but with the act only; and so even in the case of being guilty of some crime, there could be no gnaw of guilt in the same sense that we experience it as absolute authors of our doings – for both good and ill belonged to the play of the divine within the world.[57]

But if the pagan Greek could inhabit such a world with reverence (Nietzsche's "golden laughter") for the often treacherous, dangerous, and agonistic play of the gods who embroil human beings within their eternal drama, Christianity required something else altogether. Pagan attributions of feelings or actions to the influence or showing-up of divinities must appear precisely as a shirking of *responsibility*; the will must be sovereign

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[57] C.f., E.R. Dodds, The Greeks and the Irrational, 7-16; a good discussion is also given in Walter F. Otto, The Homeric Gods: The Spiritual Significance of Greek Religion trans. by Moses Hadas (London: Thames & Hudson, 1979), 169-181.

over the self as the condition of accepting the moral problematic of guilt and sin (and the possibility of salvation) in the Christian sense. We can also recognize the transmutation of the *daemonic* into the *demonic* in its ethically dualistic, Christian sense here. Even where the force of the demonic is acknowledged, the struggle is always to overcome one's susceptibility to such influences through the trumping sovereign power of God's grace, in concert with the higher faculties of the finite human self aspiring to a participatory repetition of that sovereignty.[58]

Returning to Nietzsche, we can see how, at the same time, he invites us to recognize this same soteriological logic within the metaphysical story of the real and the rendering-fungible and calculable of things. This can be seen not only in the specific manner in which, e.g., concepts of law and of causality can be understood to employ transferences from the moral/interpersonal realm to that of nature itself (the concept of causality being derived, Nietzsche asserts, from an interpretation of willing).[59] It is always moreover a question of what we are doing when we seek such causes and such laws *as* what is truly real. If Nietzsche sees in our moral and legal progress stories the effort to rework the world and take revenge for our suffering, the same impulse underlies our (Baconian and godlike) technoscientific mission: "the illusion that thought, guided by the thread of causation, might plumb the farthest abysses of being and even *correct* it."[60]

The result of our philosophical trajectory, which we experience in the modern world, is nothing other than the leveling equalization of human beings and a standardization of our relations to the world. (And we can see how Heidegger in turn inherits this problem.) At the same time, a universalistic and imperializing commitment to truth *qua* a subjectively-conceived (and equivocally structured) reality eats away at any larger sense of meaning by showing this to be a matter of "value" – and hence to have no

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[58] St. Augustine's memorable sense of guilt over even his *dreams* is indicative here. See Augustine of Hippo, <u>Confessions,</u> e.g., *X. xxx (41) – (42).*

[59] As noted in Chapter Two, one of Nietzsche's most provocative suggestions in this regard is to trace transferences between legal and moral thinking and the terms modern natural science presumes as the condition of its mode of investigating phenomena – as, e.g., are expressed in notions of causality, lawful necessity, the problematic of the real itself, and so on. That is, Nietzsche sees the spirit of revenge as motivating in the realms of our thinking both on nature and culture. See Nietzsche, "The Genealogy of Morals," 179, 191; <u>The Will to Power</u>, 337-9, 350, 352; <u>Beyond Good and Evil</u>, 49, 51, 53, 65.

[60] Nietzsche, "The Birth of Tragedy," 93.

basis in "fact". (Whence the whole trajectory of formally rationalizing values as matters of "belief", which accordingly withdraw from public conversation into the private sphere, as against a public space defined by commitments to a formal value-neutrality in law and to the purported value-neutrality of science.)

The Last Men arrive to inhabit the world this produces. On the one hand, they experience the illusion that the world has been rendered finally transparent to knowledge, dispelling the madness that had formerly engulfed human beings. On the other hand, they experience a life in which "everybody wants the same, everybody is the same: whoever feels different goes voluntarily into a madhouse."[61] Life sinks complacently into a superficially entertaining commodity fetishism, at the same time that all the hard questions fade from view and appear irrelevant to the demands of the real world. The sense of life becomes so impoverished and banal, so insulated from the questionable richness of the world and all that invites us to the difficult heights of the soul, that we settle into a spectatorial sterility incapable of any further or alternate "creation of values". Who still even asks why life is worth living, or what it means to have wisdom? The Last Men cannot even despise themselves because it requires too much exertion to do so, and indeed to see why they should be troubled – just as they no longer see how or why one could or should strive for anything beyond the comfortable nullity they imagine as the pinnacle of civilization.

For Nietzsche, the Last Men have forgotten the chaos within themselves – a forgetting that is nothing other than the playing out of our dominant metaphysical tradition. But it is precisely from the soil of chaos and tension that Nietzsche understands love, joy, creation, and the experience of genuine worth to be possible.[62] What is important for our purposes is that the experience of this chaos is precisely connected to the problem of "faithfulness to the earth", to becoming, *a rethinking and a more expansive and courageous exploration of the self in its relations in the world*. The whole problem of Nietzsche's resistance to what I have described as the Cartesian equivocal gesture is situated within this context. It is this sense of chaos that Nietzsche recovers in

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[61] Nietzsche, "Thus Spoke Zarathustra," 130.
[62] Ibid, 129.

his return to (and complication of) the body, in coming to see the self as a multiplicity of forces in struggle with one another, embedded in the transformative ontogenetic sea of becoming itself.*63*

But must not the self, experienced *as a self,* always be a kind of fixity or relative hypostatization, even within the context of this turbulent sea of force relations? One way Nietzsche expresses what a more affirmative form of fixity might be here is in terms of an agonistic relationship between principles in tension – which carry the names of Dionysus and Apollo. Apollo here signifies boundedness, stability, individuation, clarity; and he stands in contrast to the "intoxicated", transformative overflowing of Dionysus (the "passionate-painful overflowing into darker, fuller, more floating states; an ecstatic affirmation of the total character of life").[64] This passionate-painful overflowing is connected to a sense of multiplicity, difference, the strife and struggle amongst pluralities that give rise to thought and to the "I" as an epiphenomenon, of the self and thought as always profoundly bodily and nothing else. These suppositions diametrically oppose the thesis of the atomistic subject of the mind/body distinction and possessed of free will. In this sense an Apollonian experience of fixity, which *as Apollonian is already in relation to Dionysus*, must precisely be a different kind of self, in much the way that a self-sovereign atom can be differentiated from an always tragically ephemeral, epiphenomenal concrescence.

What is the central problem that a more affirmatively-experienced self finds itself engaged with? Not salvation, but the problem of health, of accumulating power, of feeling the self increase in strength, and venting its strength – that is, of partaking to the fullest in the joyous and terrible play of the world.[65] Nietzsche speaks of "the highest and

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[63] The Heraclitean overtones here are striking. Nietzsche himself adopts one of Heraclitus' key images here, of the bow bent back in tension against itself as the condition of taking aim and firing its arrows; but the bow might also be a *musical* one – with the lesson that a profound agonistic tension can nevertheless give birth beautiful melodies (a *palintonos armonia*). (C.f., "Thus Spoke Zarathustra," 129; G.S. Kirk and J.E. Raven, The Presocratic Philosophers: A Critical History with a Selection of Texts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 193-195. The bow (*biós*) in Heraclitus also puns with the word for life (*bíos*) itself ("The bow is called life, but its work is death.") Here we see as well the Heraclitean affinity between life and tension, and life and war or strife, "the father of all", which is also nothing other than the characteristic of becoming itself.)

[64] Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Birth of Tragedy," 32-36; The Will to Power, 539 (#1050).

[65] Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, 44; Nietzsche, The Will to Power, 355 (#674).

most illustrious human joys, in which existence celebrates its own transfiguration,"
experienced as "an overflowing wealth of the most multifarious forces" nevertheless
gathered together, in a sense "fixed" or concrescence as a kind of polity-in-tension within
"one man". In this same passage, the tension between Dionysian overflowing and
Apollonian ordering appears in terms of the co-dwelling of this multitudinous wealth and
the lordly power of commanding within one person.[66]

Gains in such a wealth of power occur relationally, arising in and through the
bodily immersion of the self within the worldly play of force relations, and on the basis
of the self's character as a processual (i.e., transformational) doing. This relational
principle is articulated on the one hand in terms of the idea that any displacement of
power at any point must necessarily affect any other within the whole system (i.e., in
terms of a version of interdependency). On the other it is expressed in the dictum that the
will to power can only manifest itself against resistances – whence the importance of
struggle and gaining in power through overcoming, which Nietzsche also describes with
metaphors of assimilation, absorption, nourishment, and so on.[67] Such quantitative gains
in power, moreover, are experienced in myriad qualitative becomings (since to speak of
different quanta of force is only another language for expressing difference in quality, in
sense and feeling).[68]

A thoughtful and rich life within the play of the world is not comfortable, but is
rather something frightening, opening onto strange and terrifying registers that strain us
to (and always potentially beyond) the limit of ourselves. Much of the problem of art and
artistic creation gains its sense for Nietzsche in this context. Great art evinces a greatness
of spirit, an appetite for the terrifying and the questionable, which it is a sign of strength
to be able to endure.[69] The power of a properly tragic aesthetic lies in its carrying-forward
into the (Apollonian) realm of form and boundedness, the resonances of such

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[66] Nietzsche, The Will to Power, 540 (#1051). The stress on *command* here, and its difference from the
containment, for example, of the Ojibwe spoon, constitutes a key point of contrast between Nietzschean
and Indigenous thought. I put off raising the issue until a little later for the sake of simplicity and ease of
argument.
[67] See ibid, 340, 346.
[68] The Will to Power, 304-5.
[69] Ibid, 450.

transformative registers, of Dionysian overflowing. It brings to presence a beauty that has force in being tinged with the fearful, and whispering of death; but for this reason it is a joy and delight in power and life, at once a tonic and a fixing of stabilities by which it becomes possible to live.[70]

4.3.2 The Self that Becomes and Travels Far: Between Nietzschean and Indigenous Thought

Certain affinities will perhaps be obvious at this juncture between Nietzsche's thought and Indigenous conceptions of the world and of knowing-becoming – as will their mutual contrast with our dominant forms of selfhood in modernity. We can begin to see how certain aspects of the paucity that confronts us in Nietzsche's Last Men might also be described in terms in terms of an impoverished relationship to the world, a dearth of knowing-becoming. Given what has been said, we can begin to understand what something like "listening to beings" might mean for Nietzsche, and also begin to sense how close this comes at times to the character of becoming-*yacharishka* with places and beings.

Let me suggest a few broad similarities here at the outset between Nietzschean and Indigenous senses of the world. We have not only a shared inclination with regard to matters of truth, embodiment, "this-worldliness", the groundlessness of any absolute distinction between inner and outer regarding the self (as I argued above), and so on, but also a shared basic sense of the self as being in a relational process of becoming, a kind of multiplicity-in-unity. We can see a roughly similar play here between something like fixity and ephemerality, as well as a roughly shared understanding of the self as constituted through a relational and this-worldly play through which the gaining of power is both possible and crucial to life itself and to experiences of joy. We can see how the search for power within a profoundly ambivalent world calls for something like an aristocratic sensibility on both fronts, not least in the requirement for courage in relations that can be marked by *contest* (recall the dangerous allure of the *wanduj* man, the danger

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[70] Nietzsche, <u>The Will to Power</u>, 452 (#853).

of being contained rather than containing – and we see again how a notion of contest and danger in relations with the nonhuman is grounded here in a different sense of agency/freedom).

Both Nietzschean and (at least) Amazonian thinking in this regard recurrently approach and concern themselves with something like limit-experience under conditions of becoming – that is, with the question of "how far" one is able to go ("How much truth do you dare?"; a shared attraction to the intensities of something like the "ecstatic", etc.). How much is one able to take on and yet return, *maintaining* oneself? On both fronts, it would seem to be in the (frightening, transformative, uncomfortable) vicinity of the limit that strength is gained, that enlivening is possible. (We can remember, again, the character of face-to-face encounters with the *supai*, the character of *ayahuasca* sessions as described above, the frightening character of the Nuu-chah-nulth *oosumich*, and so on.) As we saw in the last section, one can also perhaps draw connections between the Nietzschean/Heideggerian concern with difference and Indigenous sensibilities in thought and interaction.

At the same time, there are important divergences here, a few of which I would like to take note of here. Like Heidegger, Nietzsche is of course also a modern and Western thinker, in ways that also become troubling when considered in light of what being modern and Western tends to mean in terms of our contemporary relationship to the world and to nature. Indigenous thinking in this sense can invite us to consider whether inflecting certain matters differently might not permit us to think through something *like* Nietzsche's critique in a way that is more adequately reflexive and responsive to present-day worries – most especially, the need to reconsider ourselves in light of our relations to the land and waters, and to non-human beings. Together, I would suggest, these differences constitute important provocations for allowing us to think through and assess the impoverishment of the modern in a way that strives to be responsive to the problem of our anthropocentric and monological domination of the world.

A first and important point to make here is that Indigenous traditions can be seen to be much more explicitly concerned with and rooted in relations with the land through specific places, and with non-human beings gathered and experienced there as persons. In this, they are *relationally and directly situated* from the beginning; and this situation puts them in a position that on the one hand remembers relationships that precede the dramatic, monological reworking of the land and our relations to it under the terms of Western modernity.[71] On the other, this situatedness also inflects the problem of becoming in such a way that this also is consistent with practices and longstanding relations of stewardship and "taking care" of the land.

One way to express this situation would seem to be through the question of what it is to be a relative, which is precisely what a "human being" properly is (in the case of the Quichua *runa*, for example). A *runa*, with whom other *runa* share constitutive contagions and becomings (foods, dwelling-place, lifeways, etc.) and relations of transparency, is profoundly rooted through these becomings in longstanding, inherited, and continually re-enlivened relationships with the land and with *specific* dwelling places and the beings that live there.[72] It is worth emphasizing here that the relational *runa* (or Tlingit, or Ojibwe) self is not relational within the domain of the *present* only, but in a way that extends back to and recalls those ancestors who came before – it is constituted "across" time in a way that emplaces thought and selfhood in a context of successive

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[71] In this, it is worth noting that whereas various complex forms of plant cultivation, "management", and land use preceded the arrival of Europeans throughout the Americas, these nevertheless did not have the same kind of anthropocentric, domineering character and generally deleterious consequences associated with modern Euro-American forms thereof. The robustness of the land at the time of European arrival is perhaps even testified to by the very ease with which it could be seen as untrammelled "wilderness" *by* Europeans. For one set of examples of Indigenous cultivation and land "management" practices from the North Pacific Coast, see Nancy J. Turner, et al., "Plant Management Systems of British Columbia's First Peoples," in BC Studies 179 (Autumn 2013).

[72] Which is not to suggest that nothing "new" can be encountered or brought into the folds of Indigenous traditionalistic thinking. An excellent example here might be the way missionary efforts at "conversion" have played out in certain contexts. Neil Whitehead for example describes a whole form of shamanism in Guyana ("*alleluia* shamanism") that enfolds teachings and practices of Christian missionaries *within a shamanic ontology and manner of thinking*. (Neil Whitehead, Dark Shamans: Kanaimà and the Poetics of Violent Death, [Durham: Duke University Press, 2002], 5.) Indeed, the resilience of Indigenous ways of thinking and being in the face of the changes and violences wrought by modernity throughout the Americas is often nothing short of astonishing. But that this is so should also not be taken as a contradiction of the point I am trying to make here about emplacedness and situatedness in Indigenous traditional thinking. To conclude that this is so would seem to involve relying on the blackmail position that *either* Indigenous peoples must be modern, deterritorialized, etc., *or* they must remain in a kind of purity of isolation.

generations and relationships (with places, animals, etc.) that extend across them. To move away, to live too long amongst others, to cease remembering and feeling the stab of homesickness/*yakichina*, etc., is to become something different and not a *runa*[73] (it is also, relative to the point of view of *runa*, to be *quilla* and to forget one's relatives, no less than it is *quilla* to be seduced away into the forest by non-human *supai*).[74] The whole problematic of becoming here is accordingly understood in relation not just with an abstract principle of fixity, but with the rooted problematic and emplacedness *in situ* of being a *relative amongst relatives*.

In this sense it is also not (abstractly-conceived) *becoming* per se that seems to be valuable here, as for example when removed from the containing and orienting fixity of one's preceding network of relatives. It is rather a question, I have argued, of a disciplined and contained becoming, experienced in the tension between travelling far and taking on much on the one hand, and being a relative on the other. A connected point is to remember here that becoming-*yacharishka* always seems oriented or focused around *specific* (non/human) *persons*, and around specific properties shared by people and places.

That the persons of the forest also become *yacharishka* with you indicates not only a mutuality of relationship that develops and extends itself over time but also that one's being a relative *qua runa* has its character in being tied to and rooted in the land and its non-human beings as co-dwellers. And whereas becoming *yacharishka* with powerful persons, engagements with *supai*, etc., can amount to becomings that enliven the self and are sources of power, it is also therefore a matter of orienting and growing the affections, cultivating empathy, feeling and inducing *yakichina*. In this sense a life of wise or disciplined becoming is also nothing other than a life in which one comes to love one's dwelling-place and feel companionship there. (It is also the case that the entire life of the emotions seems thought *from the ground up* on relational terms amongst peoples like the lowland Quichua, in a way and with a sense of nuance that it is difficult to find

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[73] In the strict sense. Tod Swanson has noted that the term can also be extended outwards to encompass e.g., neighbouring peoples, and now also other Indigenous peoples throughout the Americas. Swanson, "Singing to Estranged Lovers," 62.

[74] C.f., Elsje Lagrou, <u>Cashinahua Cosmovision</u>, 35.

parallels for in the Western canon.) Again, the effect of being situated as a relative tends to be that this kind of caring is oriented in many respects towards what *we* might want to gloss as the "natural landscape" and its wellbeing, although the matter is clearly not understood in this way by Indigenous traditions themselves. It is becomings and interactions rooted in *this* forest, *these* rivers, *these* mountains, that grow the self, that open the self onto all the terrifying and wonderful registers of being, that enable one to feel richly (and also dangerously) alive. But no less is that same land something to respect and care for, and no less must the loss or devastation of that land bring tremendous sadness.

But this already changes a great deal that sets our thinking apart from Nietzsche's. The way Nietzsche sets up and approaches the question of becoming, and thus experiences the character of a tragic, richer, and Dionysian selfhood, would seem to be *as a universal principle*, as such. Approached and grasped as a principle reigning over all things, becoming of itself contains for Nietzsche something inherently "terrifying and uncanny", whose "strongest comparison is to the sensation whereby someone, in the middle of the ocean or during an earthquake, observes all things in motion."[75]

The challenge levied by Zarathustra is to say Yes to *this vision of becoming*, to the great ontogenetic sea *as such* – which is to say, Yes to *all possible* change and happenings, to all that is cast up in every moment, and even its eternal recurrence.[76] If a more tragic or Dionysian self, as described earlier, always constitutes a *healthier* vision of selfhood by comparison with us Last Men, then it is in the thought of the Eternal Return that Nietzsche finds a kind of test that shows us what a *highest health*, a greatest and self-deifying Yes-saying, would be – and how difficult this is. (For if there no rage,

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[75] Friedrich Nietzsche, The Pre-Platonic Philosophers trans. by Greg Whitlock (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 61. In this same early lecture, Nietzsche describes how this thought brings us to see how all things stand to be "devoured" as by a "wild storm" – and this would seem to have force *even for Nietzsche* in *undermining* what presumably must be a pre-given sense of stability. We might wonder whether, at this early stage in Nietzsche's thought, we detect one place where the traces of an atomistic ontology are felt. Still, it is the case that Nietzsche's later writings will strive to avoid this sense of becoming: "[the world] is not something that becomes, not something that passes away. Or rather: it becomes, it passes away, but it has never begun to become and never ceased from passing away – it maintains itself in both." (Will to Power, 548.)

[76] I.e., the thought of the Eternal Return, which confronts us with the notion that *everything* that can happen *has* happened, and will again do so eternally – and *this* is the orienting vision that Nietzsche challenges us, ultimately, to affirm. (Nietzsche, "Thus Spoke Zarathustra," 270.) C.f., The Will to Power, 544-550.

for Nietzsche, against what happens to us, against time in becoming, then there can be no "I should/should not", nor is there the same kind of necessarily-reactive genesis of a hypostasized I who remembers and promises.)

But this is a point of crucial importance, it seems to me, if we wish to consider the potential of Nietzschean provocations for allowing us to respond to the devastations we now confront in the "problem of nature" – as one pre-eminent sign of the devastations of modernity as such. Oriented in this way to becoming as a vision of the total world-process *as such*, is there perhaps a peculiar sense in which Nietzsche allows us to be *too* comfortable in our uprootedness, or with the ecological and cultural ruin now spreading in the face of capitalism and industry? For it would seem that his challenge here is finally to be up to all such changes and even this ruin, to *say Yes to it* (even again and again!).

Read in the vicinity of Indigenous thought, we might ask whether Nietzsche's approach to the problem of becoming does not bear too many easy affinities with the kind of scenario we find ourselves in *as moderns* – in our passion for mobility and mobilization, for the new, for deterritorialization, and in our ready conviction that life such as we can live it is already uprooted, such that we must learn to embrace precisely this rootlessness?[77] The crucial point of tension would seem to be this, thought relative to Quichua terms at least: if for Nietzsche, strength lies in saying Yes absolutely, in Quichua thought strength (being *sinzhi*) is always opposed to being *quilla*[78] (which in some sense says Yes too much and too easily). And so even if there is something in Nietzsche (and I think there is) that is contemptuous of our oblivious and atomistic solipsism, our complacent unthinking and non-listening character, I would venture to suggest that Indigenous thought challenges us more profoundly to connect our impoverishment of selfhood with the matter of our situated relations to the land and place and the general problem of our non-sustainable and domineering relations with these.

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[77] A conviction that has after all been a mainstay of the modern ontological constellation since the rejection of neo-Aristotelianism: final causes are not operative in the world, we are in this sense cut off from nature, *ergo* we must set our own definitions and ends, emerge into our freedom as human subjects, etc.

[78] An opposition that often invokes sexual connotations – if *quilla* is also a word for being promiscuous, easily seduced, etc., there is also a connected sense in which that the expenditure of sexual energy depletes one of power that could otherwise be marshalled to other purposes. See Swanson, "Singing to Estranged Lovers," 49-50, 54-55.

From the vantage point of Indigenous philosophies' rootedness in place and amongst non-human relations, it might perhaps be suggested that our own way of life is not only poor in emplaced knowledge (as knowing-becoming), but that we are also (somewhat paradoxically) impoverished in a certain sense as being *quilla*. That is, our condition of uprootedness *vis à vis* "nature" would seem to preclude us being good relatives in our dwelling-places – in a way that is at once celebrated in many of the aspirations of modern life, and that Nietzsche would seem at some level not to adequately counter.[79] In a connected way, Indigenous thought would seem to provide grounds for articulating why and how *becoming* per se is not necessarily interesting or wise as an absolute point of ethical orientation (i.e., in any and all contexts) – a point that various contemporary Western inclinations to identify becoming or difference with a force of necessary resistance to modernity (e.g., in the Marxian rhetoric of the multitude) seem reluctant to grasp.[80]

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[79] Zygmunt Bauman's descriptions of our present stage of "liquid modernity" may be worth invoking here – a stage in which "mobility, or rather the ability to keep on the move, is the very stuff of which a new hierarchy of power is built." But it is also interesting to note here how Bauman understands this form of society to impact thought (easily digestible ideas not needed reflection are privileged, novelty displaces substance, etc.) and understandings about life (which becomes an individualized obsession with self-invention, in search of ever greater horizons, irresponsible to local roots and indeed reluctant to ever set roots down). (Zygmunt Bauman, Society Under Siege (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), 162-3, 165, 171.) Something like this character of the way being *quilla*, in the sense proposed here, would seem to coexist with our unthinking, atomistic dearth of knowing-becoming in place has also, I think, been approximated under different terms in Marxian analyses that have traced the relationship between the peculiar mobilizing destruction of traditional countryside life wrought by capitalism and the lonely, isolating atomism characteristic of modern mass society. See, for example, Guy Debord, The Society of the Spectacle trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1994), 26, 120-122. Such a condition as described in these terms must of course be distinguished from the kind of mobility characteristic of non-modern nomadic and semi-nomadic peoples (or so I argue in light of my above engagements with Algonquian thinking).

[80] As seen for example in Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's classic text, Empire (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000). This is detrimental I think in a way that especially manifests itself in the domain of the politics of nature. As an extreme example, it would seem that it is difficult for a political ontology rooted in a principle of becoming (and approached from out of a modern position) to articulate why, for example, capitalism is harmful other than in unduly hampering becomings – even though it must also be acknowledged that to a certain extent capitalism opens the door to a greater fluidity in and through its deterritorializations. In which case, we find ourselves again in a position not unlike that of Marx: capitalism is itself a liberatory force, but must be surpassed. But in this, the whole problematic of rethinking our relations to nature – as well as the whole political terrain of multiple ontologies – remains stubbornly difficult to adequately raise. And if we are serious about extricating ourselves from soteriological thought, why must we assume that there cannot be bad becomings, bad multitudes? C.f., Hardt and Negri's location of resistance to the power of Empire always in a principle of creativity, flux, new mutations, etc. *against all* forms of discipline, seeing "nothing permanent" and reducing *all that exists* to rubble so as to open new paths through it, in Empire, 215-218.

But then, there would seem to be other (though not unrelated) ways in which Nietzsche reaffirms understandings that would seem all-too modern and of no small significance for our capacity to reflect upon the problem of "nature". A second major point of divergence, for instance, lies in the way power is conceived between Indigenous and Nietzschean thought. For Nietzsche, strength or power manifests itself in the phenomenon of *commanding* – i.e., power *over* others: at the level of relations between selves, but also *within* the self, whose multiplicity is envisioned as a *political body* ordered by the *rule of one part over others*.[81] (Similarly, philosophy, art, and the positing of values for Nietzsche constitutes an act of strength that is described as *tyrannical* as over against an intrinsically indifferent nature – a setup that seems eminently subjectivistic and all-too familiarly *modern* in its ontology, in ways that will by now be obvious.[82]) In other words, even if the self is made multiple and chaotic for Nietzsche, his way of interpreting becoming *qua* Heraclitean strife nevertheless preserves a good deal that would seem traceable to or at least consistent with the problematic of modern sovereignty and rule itself (and in this, intriguingly, to nothing other than the Christian theological tradition).[83] While Nietzsche might disagree on a great deal with a thinker like Thomas Hobbes, they would seem to share *this* assumption at least: that power, as power-over, shows up in relations of *dominance* rather than, for example, of *vulnerability* or *dependency*.[84] This notion of power as domination centered in the will, as I have shown, has been of no small consequence in modern relations with nature.

In the Indigenous traditions I have surveyed, power is precisely not thought in terms of "power over". Rather, it would seem visible in the way that what is is maintained in a balance or dynamic tension of forces, which have the character of being relations of complex and mutually sustaining interdependency – in which nothing,

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[81] E.g., "'I am free, "he" must obey' – this consciousness adheres to every will." (<u>Beyond Good and Evil</u>, 48.)

[82] See, as an example of this move in Nietzsche, his refutation of Stoicism in <u>Beyond Good and Evil</u>, 39.

[83] It is interesting to compare Hannah Arendt's observation here (who attempts to conceive both power and freedom in more relational and less hierarchical terms, with reference to the classical Greek *polis* – which she emphasizes was precisely *not* characterized by relations of *rule*): "In polytheist systems, for instance, even a god, no matter how powerful, cannot be sovereign; only under assumption of one god ('One is one and all alone and evermore shall be so') can sovereignty and freedom be the same." In <u>The Human Condition</u>, 234-5.

[84] Hobbes, <u>Leviathan</u>, 62, 65, 141.

moreover, is superfluous. This Indigenous understanding of the world, as comprised and sustained by power relations and in which striving to gain in power is understood to be important for living, is nevertheless consistent with an ability to derive from the world a law of respect for all things. Rupert Ross has intriguingly suggested that this is precisely a consequence of the Indigenous habit of thinking relationally, i.e., understanding *between-ness* to give rise to (at least temporary) fixities/"things" rather than assuming a world of atomistic things from the outset. If one looks at the forest and sees a sum of atomistic beings, it may well make sense to look *within* them for an innate principle of behaviour (self-preservation, self-expression, self-assertion over others, looking out only for itself) that necessarily sets animate beings against one another. Looking *between*, however, it is possible to observe that same forest and see rather relationships of interdependence and interwovenness, in which any one point is connected to any other.[85] And following Ross, we might wonder whether this is one sign of Indigenous thought being more profoundly relational than Nietzsche's.

The Indigenous traditions engaged here understand power to circulate through relationships and be shared.[86] Remarkably, the basic mode of comportment or condition associated with the growing of strength is precisely something like *vulnerability* – it is a question of seeking help from more powerful others, inducing them to care and to cooperate, of entering into/cultivating more transparent relations with them. For example, Ojibwe vision-fasters will seek to invoke the pity of the *ätisokának*.[87] The Quichua concept/problematic of *yakichina*, of causing others to "compassionate", to care and feel sadness for you, seems very similar. It is also worth quoting Umeek on this point, who describes the matter (in this instance) in connection with *human* community,

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[85] Ross, "Exploring Criminal Justice and the Aboriginal Healing Paradigm," 3-6.

[86] In the Ojibwe context, this is the case not only in that the *ätisokának* share power with human beings, but also in the way powerful persons seem able to share power with others. For example, "powerful men, in the Ojibwa sense, are also those who can make inanimate objects behave as if they were animate." (Hallowell, Contributions to Ojibwe Studies, 553.) It is also interesting to consider here that, if the problematic of commanding or ruling is linked to a monotheistic tradition in which *one* party stands above all others, hunter-gatherer Indigenous societies themselves tended not to experience any such centralization, even in the relatively rigid, hierarchical and aristocratic codifications of the North Pacific Coast. In this sense an affinity may also be drawn with the polytheistic Greek context. *Supra*, fn. 82.

[87] Hallowell, Contributions to Ojibwe Studies, 452.

though I would suggest that this community should be understood to extend well beyond the human:

> A specific Nuu-chah-nulth teaching associated with the idea of community is that if one doesn't ask for help when help is needed, then one is not friendly, one is not kind. One is not *aphey*. . . One of the strongest criticisms of another person's character is to say, 'that person is not *aphey*.' Consequently, a person in need is taught and encouraged to depend upon neighbours, and this interdependence is considered one of the strengths of a traditional Nuu-chah-nulth community.[88]

The contrast could not be clearer with the modern ideal of the self-sovereign individual, pulling himself up by his bootstraps and owing nothing to anyone. But it also stands in stark contrast to Nietzsche's sense of what power means and how he understands it to be manifest – as for example amongst the ferocious "birds of prey" of the *Genealogy of Morals*, with the strong dominating the weak. Umeek's passage also illustrates the way strength here is understood with reference to a community of relatives in a way that is not at all the kind of super-individual or atom that the modern state is, and indeed seems quite different throughout from Western/modern conceptions.

Power, in the Indigenous traditions I have discussed here, seems identifiable or felt not in one force or person being dominant over others, so much as in the way that one is able to belong to a *community* of relatives through which strength is gathered, through which it is possible to grow the self into a multiple of shared (and yet contained) modes of being.[89] (That this community of relations extends to land*,* place, nonhuman others, etc., will by now hardly need reiteration.) That *containment* (in the manner of the Ojibwe spoon) – rather than *commanding* – seems a more suitable image here is significant: it is not a question of a struggle between would-be rulers asserting/expending themselves, but rather of relational and shifting positions (of effecting and being-effected, etc.) that

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[88]Umeek, <u>Tsawalk</u>, 12.

[89] Although, to be sure, *certain* individuals may be known as especially powerful. But it is important, I think, not to read into this the kind of egoistic and individual quest for power as this would be understood in modern/Western contexts. For no matter how powerful such a person might become, this can never (so far as I understand it) be ontologically divorced from the community of relations to which they belong; and a whole complex series of limiting and other problematics must accordingly be understood to be at play here.

implies interrelationship and asymmetry of power without importing metaphors (or structures/institutions) of rule.

This containment can moreover occur within the space of a relationship in which the containing person remains less powerful than e.g., the plant or animal *supai* from whom they have contained something, with whom they become *yacharishka*. Indeed, this would seem to be the pervasive nature of experiences with *ätisokának*, *supai*, animal masters, of surviving the intensities and becomings of *wanduj* and *ayahuasca* and so on without losing oneself – whence in part the continual problematic of treating these others with respect, of maintaining relationships, etc. The difference involved here can also be expressed, I think, in terms of the difference between Nietzsche's problematic of artistic *creation* – even if his "creation" does not originate in a free self-grounding will, in contrast to the usual modern conception – and the kinds of relationships characteristic, for example, of Quichua artistic practice described in the previous chapter.

Furthermore, that containment rather than commanding seems the better metaphor for understanding power in turn changes the character of the kind of contest we find ourselves navigating in the world. For in the notion of commanding it seems that we will always find an underlying assertion of will, of self-assertiveness and self-expenditure in which we locate the agent of an instance of domination. An atom (even as one part of a multiplicity) actualizes (or attempts to actualize) what seems inevitably to be a kind of external, efficient causal impact on something else: in being commanded we are being marshalled to ends other than our own, and we recognize in the will of another the power that moves us there.[90] But containment can be brought about by different kinds of dynamics and structures. We see this in the case of *yakichina* acting as a kind of glue or bond of *attraction* that maintains the fixity of the shared body of the *allyu*. For as a *runa* travels, engages in a range of becoming-relationships, etc., we can recall that the experience of *yakichina* plays a role in instances of remembering oneself, not going too far, not being *quilla*: one feels homesickness, remembers one's family *as* one's family and feels empathy and care for them.

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[90] The connection between the problematic of the will, as comes to be clarified in connection with the Christian doctrine of Creation, and the notion of external causality that becomes dominant in modern thought and natural science, is also helpfully drawn out in Bradley Bryan, "Reason's Homelessness".

But this remembering *should itself*, I think, be understood to be an instance of the phenomenon or happening of containment. *Yakichina*'s showing up – as an emotional pull, a remembering, and so on, in this context would be precisely part of what allows containment to happen, and hence an instance of a "contest" being won (in the sense that one is not seduced away, does not become somebody else, is not pulled into death, etc.). The shared body of the *allyu*, and the strength this network imparts, prevails – and a mature, disciplined becoming is maintained. Whereas *yakichina* is a relational verb that expresses the way I might cause another to feel empathy, pity, or concern for me, it is important to see that it is not a question of finding a will here. For *yakichina* is cultivated through interactional relations *between* persons; it transpires *between* such as in the experience of being drawn and finding someone else attractive, cute, cuddly, and pitiable; in maintaining and cultivating shared planes of transparency, and so on. And if this involves processes of gathering powers of attraction and marshalling "technologies of sentiment", then the beauty and attractiveness one gathers up in this way itself is something attained relationally, and is not summoned without the cooperation and help of others (and where that cooperation and help is itself understood to transpire in the manner of a relational happening). Not a will or multiplicity of wills, in this sense, but *relations all the way down*; not rule, but a maintained network of relatives; not commanding, but a play between fixity and becoming constituted not least in the play between attractions and becomings relative to which problems of focus, rootedness, and memory attain a particular kind of meaning.

In these ways, then, Indigenous thought would seem to be able not only to speak to certain of the worries raised by Nietzsche concerning modern man. Engaging Indigenous thought, furthermore, can be helpful in bringing us to integrate these worries into a radical – and in certain respects more effective – problematization of our relationships to "nature". And if the image of the Last Men gives us an important and harrowing vision of ourselves and of the fallout of our dominant philosophical tradition – and I think that it does – then confronting the problem of nature in modernity would seem to demand that we be reflexive about the precise manner in which we understand their (and thus, our) impoverishment.

No less would it seem incumbent upon us to reflect upon the possibilities we delineate in the way we construe a contrasting vision of richness. Especially striking here is the way Indigenous thought seems so adept at what is so elusive for Western moderns: bringing together an immense richness that we seem best able to describe in terms of "Dionysian" registers, cultivating accordingly a tremendous breadth and courageousness of self, an openness and sensitivity to becomings; while simultaneously cultivating a profound caring and empathy, forms of balance and fixity that confound soteriological premises, entrenching a loving "rootedness"[91] and stewardship of place, living much more sustainably with "nature" – and this altogether *without nature in our sense of the term*.

4.4   Conclusion

In this chapter, I have tried to open up and explore one possible conversation between Western theory and Indigenous thought. I selected Nietzsche and Heidegger for this conversation not only because I think they offer valuable bridges for engaging Indigenous thinking, but because I am also convinced that they offer some of the most enduringly important available critiques of our present "cultural" moment (especially in our relationship to nature) from within the Western tradition. And yet, it may also perhaps be a matter of faithfulness to the spirit of their own thought to experience as sharply as possible the way that our habits of thinking, our language and its metaphors, our inherited ontological dicta, and so on, delimit and give shape to what we experience as possibilities for being and thinking in the world. If the wasteland we experience as unfolding in late modernity (*not only within ourselves, but across the earth itself*, in the form of what from one vantage point are ecological crises) traces the fallout of our own habitual philosophical heritage, then a reflexive engagement with Indigenous American

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[91] In a way that, interestingly, seems present in albeit different ways across very different Indigenous traditions – for example, "rootedness in place" for a Tlingit person would seem to connote a more sedentary heaviness that contrasts with the inclinations of an Ojibwe or Cree semi-nomad. But then, if by rootedness we mean a self-constitution that is profoundly rooted in communicative and transformative becoming-relations with the land and with co-dwelling non/human others in it, then Ojibwe and Cree traditions very much exhibit a rootedness in place that far exceeds our own. As I have already noted, we can also expect that the qualitative *kinds* of dialogical relations that are possible in places will also differ with the landscape itself.

traditions (such as have, indeed, dwelt upon this land since time immemorial) will perhaps be recognized as holding no small value. If our approach is to be a Nietzschean one – i.e., one diagnostic of a sickness latent in our culture and looking towards a greater health – then we should not, I think, exclude a diagnosis of our evidently ruinous relationship to "nature" from our motivations and concerns. And Indigenous traditions are, I think, some of the best available teachers concerning the possibility of having more dialogical relationships with the land, of growing the self through those relationships and paying heed to the ways in which this can happen. In this, they also precisely avoid anything like our accustomed Romanticism, and the ways this might lead us to try to overcome a rift with "nature" by seeking a "one-ness" with it, the ways we would understand what this would mean, and so on. I have accordingly attempted to explore some of the ways it might be possible at once to think with and against Nietzsche and Heidegger – to work through elements of their thought that are perhaps especially provocative (glossed here as their turn towards relationality), and yet to see some of these carried further into much more into altogether different horizons.

Of course, to reflect on Indigenous traditions of thought in this way is to construe, inflect, and respond to them in ways that are inevitably and significantly shaped by a very different tradition and trajectory. That a non-Indigenous response and engagement with Indigenous traditions (such as this one) is and must be its own distinct phenomenon, forming its own pathways, need not of itself be viewed as a weakness or a bad thing, I think, provided that it recognize itself for what it is. At some level, such a recognition would seem to be a necessary beginning-point for any authentic engagement in this regard.[92]

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[92] If non-Indigenous engagements such as these should be recognized as inevitably shaped by and emergent from its own specific context, this point should not be taken as an excuse to ignore the unmistakable dangers of confusing our own interpretations with the ways of thinking we are trying to understand. Otherwise we engage in no conversation at all – and it does seem to me that the protocols of honest and respectful dialogue demand of us that we not cease *trying to get it right*, and *trying to learn* – a process that is always difficult and, in the case of cross-cultural work, demands that we try to be faithful to the experiences of blocked understanding, opaqueness, and the ever-present risk of misinterpretation, with which fieldwork is apt to acquaint us. In this sense, the present chapter must only ever be understood as one tentative exploration of possibilities, a beginning and invitation to further conversation, and an attempt above all to encourage reflexivity from a non-Indigenous position.

Arranging this engagement *through* Nietzsche and Heidegger can in turn have its own distinct advantages for us. Among them is this: that they help us recognize, by analogy, something of what the challenge in engaging and learning from Indigenous thought, *of even being up to an honest conversation with it*, must be for us moderns. Not least amongst these difficulties would seem to be the problem of overcoming our own endemic *banality*, our own impoverished sense of experience, of the world and of ourselves. The thought of Nietzsche in particular may be taken as instructive here, as to what grappling with such banalized horizons must be: the challenge, in ways perhaps not so different from those he saw levied on us by the echoes of ancient Greece, is likely to be both harrowing and difficult. At stake is not only the possibility of altering the terrain of understandings through which the self may be experience and cultivated, but moreover of letting the face of the world show itself in altered (and, at a certain level, much more expansive and terrifying) guise.

At the same time, by engaging Nietzschean thought *through Indigenous relational thought*, it becomes possible to recuperate elements of Nietzschean critique reworked along more relational lines (and lines more profoundly dialogical, especially with the nonhuman). The challenge to explore more "aristocratic", affirmative, or daring modes of being and thinking can be dissociated from the lingering traces of a commanding ethos, and from the valorization of a "tyrannical" posture (including over meaningless nature) as the necessary outflow of "aristocratic" self-affirmation. Rather, we can come to see how something like a more affirmative existence in the Nietzschean sense might be taken to be perfectly consistent with a profound vulnerability and respectful listening to the nonhuman. An affirmation of this-worldliness becomes reconcilable with an emplaced situatedness quite different from the modern love of rootlessness and transience. By rethinking power and thus substituting *containment* for *commanding*, we can come to see how a call to strength and to the joys of becoming stronger can be perfectly consistent with an *ethos* oriented around cultivating rooted relations and being a good relative. We can also experience something like a call to a reverential dwelling in place that pushes well beyond the relatively traditional Western ontology of Heidegger. A slavishness and smallness or impoverishment of self, as well as that which is "annihilated" by technological seeing, can also be reinterpreted along lines that do not lock us back in our

more accustomed ontology and all the associated concepts the modern "problem of nature" might lead us to try to avoid.

But then, it should also be noted that many of the provocations of Indigenous thought, and the possibility of experiencing these, would seem inevitably to lie quiet – or perhaps only ever be prepared-for – within the space of a written theoretical discussion such as this one. "An Indigenous way is not an abstract system," Tod Swanson writes; and there is something essential, I think, worth heeding here.[93] Such Indigenous ways as I have been fortunate to engage firsthand have been profoundly interwoven with (and responsive to) the fabric of specific places and specific networks of relatives and inheritances, situated relations of empathetic becoming, with the speech and movement of the non-human and with the seasonal rhythms of life and sustenance upon land and waters. The sense of becomings and knowledges spoken of in Indigenous thought is always bound up, at least in the contexts I have observed, with direct practices and emplaced "askeses" – with the work of walking thoughtfully in the forest, in *this land*, with the work of dreaming, sustenance practices and the consumption of foods, the meditative taking of medicines all indissociably linked to dwelling-place. These specificities are sensuous and directly dialogical, as experienced for example in the passage of qualitative *samai* (breath) from plant persons into the thoughtful taker of medicinal steam-baths or through smoke as part of the process of becoming *yacharishka* with them: these are becomings that are inextricable from the somatic and relational play of smells, tastes, and sounds, as well as other senses.

The question of how we who come to such things from the outside might authentically experience and explore, at this level, something of what lives in these traditions is itself a complicated one that cannot be entered into here. But my suspicion is such explorations must be honest about the space and position from which we begin. The question of what it might mean to co-dwell thoughtfully and in a decolonialized way upon Indigenous lands would seem to be a crucial place to start.

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[93] Swanson, "Weathered Character," 305-6.

As Swanson himself argues, we can moreover recognize that something in the nature of Indigenous ways and these practices retains an essential relation to those whose Indigenous traditions they are and precludes direct adoption in the way an individual theorist might simply espouse a new set of ideas. For the very reasons that a *runa* (for example) is not the same thing as a human being in the sense of the universalistic, Western category, we who *are not runa* must acknowledge that though we can in some sense appreciate the possibility and richness of experiencing place in a *runa* way, the specificities of that way are also not ours. Indigenous traditions are not merely abstract ideas but emplaced knowledges and practices, rooted and situated within specific networks of relations that extend back innumerable generations. And we who are colonial settlers in Indigenous lands have no adequate rejoinder to a challenge once levied by a Tlingit man: "which grandfather gave you that place that you can claim it?"[94]

But it seems to me that one way we might at least begin to proceed here is to see how taking Indigenous thought about "nature" seriously also seems to require that we reflect upon our own manner of relation with those peoples whose traditions we are attempting to engage. Those of us who are settlers here would do well, I think, not to abstract such a philosophical conversation as this one from the political conditions that bring us into encounter with Indigenous traditions in the first place, and which moreover implicate us in longstanding and continued colonial dynamics aimed at the disqualification and dispossession of Indigenous peoples, the eradication of Indigenous lifeways and the assimilation of its peoples. To begin to authentically take Indigenous thought seriously, in other words, demands in its own terms that we confront the challenge of healing and establishing better relationships *with those peoples in question*. Might a starting point not be to learn, in other words, *to be better relations* to Indigenous peoples ourselves? It is I think only through such a course that we can properly set out on the problem of what thoughtfully and authentically paying heed to Indigenous thought, and letting it go to work on us, might mean.

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[94] The man in question is named in the text as the father of Herman Kitka; qtd. in Thornton, <u>Being and Place Among the Tlingit</u>, 195. The question itself strikes me as an important one that follows quite logically from the premises of North Pacific Coast traditions.

But with this, we find ourselves turning back to the question of politics with which I began this dissertation. That we find ourselves here is perhaps only a further indication of the value of engaging Indigenous thought *and the kinds of coherences and hence disagreements it presents us with*. For if we wish to ask what a meaningful counterpoint to modernity's dominant logics is, then perhaps no better indication can be found than in precisely those traditions that still comprise some of the most verdant political and cultural challenges to the unrestrained industrialization and exploitation of "nature" under modern conditions. And if the bridges proposed in this chapter hold, we can also take a further lesson here: that the question as to whether a more "daring" and "listening" relationship to the world, whether a less impoverished and more relational way of living is possible and viable today, *is one that precisely remains alive within the terms of our colonial politics and relationships*. Such questions are accordingly not only ones that we ask alone and of ourselves; they are questions that force us to grapple with the political terrain in which we are continually and structurally embedded.

From wherever we find ourselves in this scenario, however, it seems to me that we can always begin to play the relational game against the atomistic one, in ways that kick the solidities of our dominant atomistic stories out from under themselves, and that open thought and experience to alternate possibilities. This game can begin at the level of the self: as with the atomism of the state, the atomism of the subject requires that we draw a line somewhere that bounds us: *here* is where I begin in my independence, *here* is the locus in which I locate my freedom, the (human) origins of beauty and art and will and whatever else. Accordingly, we can ask: how do my understandings of what is real and of what matters in life reflect a way of thinking that turns against and passes over the relational?

A relational turn will always open this self out again, will disrupt the neat partition between inside and outside, self and relatives, self and dwelling-place. Accordingly the self becomes expansive. And this expansion lets us ask in turn: what relations predominate in gathering me as I am, which are strongest and continually reinforced by the work of memory, narrative, and so on? How am I embedded and implicated in *bad, impoverished, or resentful relationships*, and the bad relationships of

my relatives? And – conversely – how might I cultivate better relations, letting certain connections wither and developing/strengthening others, gathering certain qualities to displace others, and so on? Such a way of thinking is not too distant, I think, from the way one might think about healing in a relational way. In such recuperated terms, perhaps, we might begin to take up Nietzsche's invitation to cultural self-diagnosis and cure – as unavoidably at once an ethical and political problem. It is a problem that is lived out in, and concerns, at once our relations to the human and nonhuman, and to the land on which we dwell.

Conclusion(?)

5 Growing Alternate Relations in Dark Times

How we think about ourselves and/in the world shapes in no small measure how we are able to live, and to experience and cultivate our existence amongst others. If we are able to think only in our accustomed terms – our atomistic ontology, our self-separation as willful, free individuals over and against a mute natural backdrop of passive matter and lower life-forms – it becomes all-too easy to remain confirmed in our self-image of privilege within Creation, to experience our relations to "nature" and the nonhuman monologically, to view anything else as obviously nonsensical. The aesthetic and affective element here can be connected to a capacity for empathy: where our accustomed terms reign alone, we come to feel the serious demands of "real life" marginalize and disavow any more attentive "listening" to the nonhuman, or any more meaningful ethics of respect. We experience instead an underdevelopment of anything like what Amazonian Quichua peoples might call becoming-*yacharishka* – and with this, I think, also a dearth of *yakichina*.

I have tried to show how a defamiliarizing process of engaging, of learning to "think through" more relational ontologies and ways of thinking, might be capable of meaningfully shifting the terrain of acknowledgeable possibilities, opening up unforeseen alternatives and insights. Under relational terms, the inhabited world discloses itself differently: more dialogically, dynamically and perspectivally, more vibrantly interconnected, speaking and resonating in ways that continually teach, that grow and even strain the self to liminal intensities of transformation even while comprising the nurturing folds of who and what we ourselves are at any time. Contrapuntal thinkers within the Western tradition, such as Nietzsche and Heidegger, have in their own way shown us something of what a more relational way of thinking can lead to, and the critically rich possibilities this can open. But in the preceding pages, I have tried to indicate how much further Indigenous thought can take us in this direction, and how valuable a cross-cultural conversation can be on this point.

From the relational perspectives explored here, there is much in our dominant lifeways that looks decidedly *bad*, crass, and even oblivious and foolish – even while our usual thinking (and the complex of social relations that expresses this) seems almost engineered not to see it. Nietzsche's construal of the danger in our tradition – in terms of the fallout of a particular moral trajectory – is I think an incisive articulation of much that is at stake here, as is his sense of what a meaningful counter-evaluation might be: a contrasting play[1] for "this-worldliness", a more relational ontology, and so on. Reconsidered cross-culturally, however, it also becomes possible to rethink and deepen our sense of what relational thinking can mean, while bringing this to bear more fundamentally upon the problem of nature itself and our habituated assumptions in this regard.

That the problem of nature as we experience it proves at once so pressing and seemingly intractable for modern thinkers (including even Nietzsche and Heidegger), should make evident our need for different conceptual tools; and I have tried to indicate something of the learning Western thinkers might do in conversation with Indigenous thought in this regard. If Nietzsche exhorts us to a more affirmative, courageous, and less contemptible mode of living, I have tried to show that, thought in more rigorously relational terms, this exhortation can also be consistent with an ethic of empathetic listening and respect, and of a more caring rootedness (which can even be nomadic) and stewardship, relative to the land and the nonhuman. And Nietzsche's general invitation is also consistent, in this light, with a call for greater respect for Indigenous traditions and peoples themselves. We can see, accordingly, how this problem of nature and of grappling with our own endemic slavishness is never far from that of grappling with our colonialism, with the way this continues to live within us in our sense of who we are and how it makes sense to live. And neither is it far from the question of how we might better understand some of the reasons that colonialism and colonial efforts at assimilation continue to be resisted by Indigenous peoples.

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[1] Which may be taken, perhaps, in the sense of the Heraclitean *palintonos armonia* – and as telling us something about how the situated metaphor of philosophy as medicine might be thought here. C.f., my discussion in the last chapter.

The reflections made here, the *askeses* and pathways I have tried to explore philosophically, are of course inevitably made *in situ*, embroiled within broader dynamics, structures of entrenched power *in the Western sense*, that we can neither stand altogether outside of nor individually control. And it is clear, as we return back to ourselves from the path of our thinking, that those who – like me – live as settlers and moderns today (in one way or another) especially find ourselves intimately and structurally bound up the worrying trajectories detailed in this essay. Effectively grappling with these trajectories and dynamics requires engagements that go beyond what can be discussed here, even if it may be hoped that the theoretical efforts of this dissertation may contribute, in a preparatory way, to them**.** On this front, it may be hoped, not least, that the present work may contribute to a more adequate understanding of the political situation in which we currently live – as involving the struggle and disagreement of multiple ontologies. It will hopefully be better and more substantively understood *what this means*, and what this *might* mean in terms of potential openings, dialogues, and solidarities to be explored politically.

The value thought can have here is perhaps (and paradoxically) signalled by the very degree to which our dominant political and quotidian culture seems to do its utmost to foreclose on such openings. For if our dominant culture encourages a certain underdevelopment of aesthetic and dialogic sensitivities relative to the nonhuman, numerous contemporary theorists have also described in other ways a narrowing and ossification of modern horizons, even relative to what a fuller life might mean under a more classic humanism. Here we might reference all the important work of the Frankfurt School, of Hannah Arendt, and so on: their accounts of our increasing de-politicization and alienating atomization, of the supplanting of critical thought with stereotyped edutainment and fascism, of the reduction of daily life and valued activities to the routinized economistic roles of job-holders and consumers, and of an accompanying atrophying of thought within the narrow confines of our technological rationality.[2] Under an increasingly transactional model of existence, it appears that thought (and also self-

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[2] C.f., perhaps most notably, Arendt, <u>The Human Condition</u>; Marcuse, <u>One-Dimensional Man</u>; Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, <u>The Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments</u> trans. by Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), especially 94-136. Weber in his own way could be included here, among many others.

work) comes to be valued only insofar as it furthers the rationality of that model. And if we recognize in ourselves here the slavish banality of Nietzsche's last ones, we can also recognize how readily this is guarded by the resentment and revenge-taking highlighted in *The Genealogy of Morals*, ready to rage at all that stands in our way to unilateral, if ultimately empty and recklessly devastating, mastery of the earth. In just this way, the "conservative" *ethos* now coming to prominence in the public life of Western societies seems only and most especially to appeal to everything that is worst in us.

There can perhaps be no greater defence of a reinvigorated valorization of thought and critical thinking – and the meaningful difference these can make – than watching our own nihilism play itself out to its repugnant conclusions in this way. For such cannot be permitted to hold the day, to determine the terms for what life and thought can be: for the life they offer is not worthy of what life is. If not a few Western theorists have seen this, it is also the case that many of their critiques (and many that continue to form the available and accustomed critical arsenal) tend to be waged in a way that does not yet permit us to grapple adequately with the problem of nature, and to see how this problem is integrally of concern here. This occurs, not least, where we resort to a story of anthropocentric, willful freedom as the ontological grounds necessary for breaking open contemporary life for disputation and rethinking at all. I hope that the present study may be taken as a modest contribution towards exploring less anthropocentric and monological ways of grappling with this problem and thinking about alternatives.

However, we do find ourselves struggling here within an overarching, globalizing context, as it were a great machinery long ago set in motion, from which it is difficult to know if "we", or indeed if anyone, will emerge. Rubbed raw against his iron cage of disenchantment a hundred years ago, and attempting to evaluate what life could then hold for us under the dominant and seemingly immovable terms of our modernizing rationality, Max Weber once prophesied that "not summer's bloom lies ahead of us, but rather a polar night of icy darkness and hardness."[3] Weber understood by his words an impoverishment of our worldly existence, the loss of a certain freedom and beauty and plenitude possible for human life, though he did not yet fathom the full consequences of

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[3] Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," 128.

this process for the fate of all life on our planet, as such. But coming after Weber, if we project forth our futures as merely the further playing-out of our dominant logics, of the relations we seem bound and determined collectively to enact, it seems no exaggeration that this winter promises to be long and dark indeed. Can we even, in full honesty to ourselves, imagine that a spring will come before the end? Is there not a sense, as one thinker has put it, that it is easier for us today to imagine the end of all life on earth than even a much smaller, meaningful change in our rampant technological capitalism and associated lifeways?[4]

As ever, however, a clear sight of the future is not open to us – and as a Quichua thinker might remind us, we perhaps do better to refrain from pronouncing on such matters with certainty. If there is hope, or even at least a more open-ended field of possibility, we can perhaps glimpse this in the simple truth that Weber's horizons do not hold the field exclusively or universally, or unchallenged – that there remains *more going on*, that the finality and inevitability of the "reason" he knew remains contestable and never rests on merely neutral grounds, and certainly not on "reason alone".

As a beginning and at a minimum, one possibility that still lies open to us is to *refuse the blackmails* that even Weber thus played into – and which we ourselves continually experience in everyday hailings of interpellation, *and the demand that these be seen to straightforwardly capture things as what they (and we) are, to settle matters*. Where we allow our ethical horizons and our terms for interpreting the world to be sewn up neatly in the claim that *we all are and must be moderns now*, we also too readily convince ourselves that we have no option but to go all-in on all the wagers of modernity wherever the question comes up – as it does in all manner of everyday contexts. Matters become accordingly at once simpler, more easily legible, and less open – as a wealth of contestations, alternate possibilities, and more complex considerations are continually passed over and effaced. But there is room here yet for disagreement, and aliveness to a persistent agonism within our present; for practices of defamiliarization; for cultivating and nurturing alternate relationships; for refusing the simple resolution, the closure from disruption, of onto-political and ethical terrains – which means nothing less than the

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[4] I am referring of course to the well-known quip by Slavoj Žižek.

terrain of reality itself and of our concrete relations. There is moreover room for the work (at once personal and collective/interactive) of decolonization and for fostering better relationships with Indigenous peoples, for doing better rather than worse under the circumstances, and for attempting to learn something from Indigenous normative and philosophical traditions, and to respond and carry forward what we learn in our own way as authentically and courageously as we can. There is room to help preserve and strengthen alternative positivities and coherences that exist and to let ourselves be shaped by them: alternate disciplines, alternate games of truth. It is Hobbes who tells us that where there is not the order of modernity, there is chaos and uninhabitable nothingness. The better counter is not simply to opt for the chaos that is the mere negation Hobbes' order, but to see and to show from the beginning that this construal of the alternatives, and of the terrain we must navigate, is false.

This is so even if we concede that simply disengaging the state altogether, and all the structures through which we remain embroiled in it and the rest of our dominant heritage, may seem at once idiosyncratic and self-delusional, and to abandon ground that remains valuable in concrete struggles. (Indeed my writing of this dissertation, in conversation with a public university, presupposes at some level a different strategy.) But to resist the closure, the containments, and the disavowals our dominant logics would have us accept, to foreground and remain faithful to a context of onto-political disagreement and the alternate possibilities this leaves us with – that in itself, thought through and carried forward in concrete instances in daily and collective life, may already open up great deal, and to entail no shortage of political work in colonial contexts. And if, as Nietzsche has it, the wasteland grows – then woe indeed to them that harbour wastelands within, *who are able to be nothing else, because they also experience and are up to nothing else*.

Even so, the Weberian in us will ask: will Western society at large, and the globalized world along with it, continue undeterred (and despite all efforts at resistance) down its present and colonially violent path to ecological ruin, ever convinced that there are no meaningful alternatives, that any actually different lifeways are only the anachronistic echoes of "humanity's" primitive past? Or will different futures be

possible, shaped by different practices and more sustainable relations? Jacques Rancière's writing on politics suggests that politically effective interventions on the sayable and thinkable, litigations against the exclusion of worlds, may bring about an experience of rupture – and with this, a reconfiguration of the terms of the dominant order.[5] Will such reconfigurations indeed be possible, in an adequately meaningful way, for our society?

Such questions reach beyond our sight. Practically, to give up on such a possibility altogether would seem to lead us only to a quietism or resignation that is I think intolerable, coming from us. Even so, present experience would seem to promise no small sadness for any who are bonded in empathy with the land and non-human others, who have intimated the most sublime heights and terrors of the soul in the beautiful and beckoning intensities of the forest, who have grown and stretched even themselves sufficiently to feel something of their own death in the death and silencing of the land. (And we can also recognize how difficult it is to share this sadness with those not already attuned to it; for feeling *yakichina* entails work that it is fully possible to ignore. We accordingly find ourselves fumbling for words in the face of callous insensitivity, of impoverishment that thinks itself as wealth. And to this it is difficult to have any adequate rejoinder, other than to simply admit that this too is part of our situation and the sadness of it.)

We might draw a cautionary lesson here from the longstanding love-affair that modern Western imaginary and its blackmails have had with a certain kind of temporal reasoning. In this reasoning, the future is projected to follow inevitably from out of modern logics, which in turn justifies in a renewed way contentious assumptions about the present – namely, *that it is modern*, or that now is a time only for becoming modern, that those who live today can have no time for anything else. Under that temporal framing, we have tended for a long time to see Indigenous peoples and traditions as unavoidably destined for extinction. Now, in a reversal of "civilizing" universal history into universal decline, it seems that most life on our planet must also go. We should not assume that there are not real dangers and pressures in this regard; but once again we

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[5] See, e.g., the introduction to Rancière, <u>The Politics of Aesthetics</u>, at 3.

should resist taking such matters too readily as foregone conclusions. They have been wrong, too quick, and most certainly harmful in the past. And we might well harbour worries about the kinds of projects and "solutions" such a logic might lead us to in years to come, as our ecological situation worsens.

One lesson that relational thinking might broadly invite us to here – as a thinking of emplaced situatedness, of attentive listening wary of abstraction – is to not blind ourselves to what remains (Heidegger might say, what is *nearest*) before us – to those relationships we *yet do have and can have* as real positivities. Hearing a different kind of story, or a way of thinking that allows the world to cohere in alternate ways, *can be powerful and go to work on us in such relationships,* and can and do bear fruits, when approached the right way and with sufficient effort. There remain possibilities for a more expansive vision of existence to which we might strive to do justice, and from which it is possible to gain nourishment and strength. And neither need we reduce what can be involved here to actuality of presence: what we might call the work of "memory" and memorializing, but which is really only another form of relation, constitutes a crucial force in this connection. Might the cultivation of such relations be a beginning, a source of disruption that pries open alternate futures? We might hope so and work toward such a possibility. But whatever scenario awaits us in the years to come, keeping alive such alternate modes of relating and cultivating ourselves would seem at a minimum to be a vital possibility for even our own enrichment and enlivening. It would seem vital for our own sense of beauty and interconnectedness, for remembering why one must fight at all, for keeping all this alive for others, for keeping open doors that the worst aspects of the modern tradition would see closed forever.

Tod Swanson recounts in one article how a highland Quichua woman he has interviewed understands changes she has experienced in recent years to the Andean landscape she knows and cultivates. The increasing poverty of the soil there is interpreted through Catholicized imagery as the "aging and tiring of God" – though in speaking of God here she identifies Him, in a more traditional highland Quichua fashion, with the earth and the weather, and signifies her reverence for these. For her, the inattentiveness of people to the dynamics of the land and its changing rhythms, their (*quilla*-like) envy for

the lives and situations of others (we might say the mobilizing ethic of modernity), contributes to this accelerated aging of God. This Quichua woman's response, as Swanson tells it, has been to strive to better attune her own life to the rhythms of the land she knows, to its storylines, "so as to slow down God's aging."[6] Maintaining and deepening relationships with the land, in this sense, appears as a kind of counterforce, an effort of mindfulness that preserves a richness of positivity as a potential disruption of fate, as a way to enliven and actualize alternate futures, if always within a kind of tragic context of looming death**.**

So as to slow down God's aging – to slow the tiring of the earth, and the decay of relationships – which means also the decay of ourselves. Such a phrase makes little sense within our dominant frameworks; but holding off such initial closures, there is perhaps much that can yet be nurtured with the aid of such an ethic. Perhaps even those of us who are non-Indigenous might take a lesson here – an invitation to explore, strengthen, and keep alive more intimate and dialogic relations with the land; to be "faithful to the earth", we might say, so as to also let the earth in turn be as generous as possible; to care for the richness of our dwelling-places and help this remain audible and esteemed a little longer. To explore meaningful alternatives for understanding and living a good life, to carry these forward lest the night fall even before its time. It might perhaps be hoped that such an ethic could make no mean contribution to the unfolding fate of our times, and to our own worthiness in meeting it.

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[6] Swanson, "Weathered Character," 288.

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