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MORAL IMAGINATION, ECOLOGICAL CRISIS, AND THE RECALCITRANCE OF THE OTHER

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COLIN BENJAMIN WEAVER

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For Megan Leigh

I think the hardest thing for anyone is accepting that other people are as real as you are. That's it. Not using them as tools, not using them as examples or things to make yourself feel better, or things to get over or under. Just accepting that they are absolutely as real as you are and have all the same expectations and demands. And it's so difficult that basically the only person that ever did it was Christ. The rest of us are very, very far behind.

Zadie Smith, *On Fighting the Algorithm*

What makes a subject difficult to understand—if it is significant, important—is not that some special instruction about abstruse things is necessary to understand it. Rather it is the contrast between the understanding of the subject and what most people what to see. Because of this the very things that are most obvious can become the most difficult to understand. What has to be overcome is not a difficulty of the intellect, but of the will.

Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophy*

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Abstract

This dissertation critically examines the imaginative habits of a strand of Anglophone environmentalism that is characterized by its preoccupation with transforming the worldviews of other people. I argue that these would-be worldview changers, or eco-conversionists, are animated by a certain anxiety over the existence of their ethical and political opponents, whom they consistently cast as mere barriers to solving ecological problems. Employing a deflationary methodology inherited from ordinary language philosophers, the project seeks to augment the imaginations of such environmentalists, freeing them from a narrow focus on worldview change and supporting them to imagine a future on a damaged planet where other people do not disappear through conversion but require encounter and negotiation.

The argument unfolds in three stages. The first stage (Chapters 1 and 2) is diagnostic and critical. I argue that a particular picture of environmentalism's other as such, a figure I call the ecological other, constrains the imaginations of eco-conversionists to the relational modality of worldview change. In this picture, the ecological other is figured as transparent despite their heterogeneity and insignificant on moral matters concerning the nonhuman: a familiar and inconsequential stranger. I also argue that multiple strategic and moral problems attend this preoccupation with worldview change, ranging from the alienation of potential political allies to allotting the other a merely impedimental role in one's thought and action.

To expand the eco-conversionist imagination beyond its focus on worldview change, I describe another conception of the other that illuminates additional relational modes. Stage two (Chapters 3 and 4) develops that alternative picture by considering how others' perspectives can be opaque to an onlooker and how the others of environmentalism can prove strategically, epistemically, and ethically significant on nonhuman matters. Those examinations suggest the image of the other as a genuinely strange stranger, who may bear gifts.

Stage three describes additional modalities of other-relation that come into view when we contemplate this alternative conception of the ecological other. In Chapter 5, I suggest that this alternative invites the idea of trying to dissolve another's opacity, a kind of labor I call apprenticeship. That relational mode, in turn, leads me to consider the ways in which such efforts can go wrong, including that others can refuse to take us on as apprentices. I illustrate this possibility by considering Indigenous American refusals to collaborate with settler individuals and institutions, including environmentalists. That efforts to dissolve another's opacity can fail in these ways suggests a further relational possibility, namely, that one can accept and learn to live with another's opacity.

In Chapter 6, I argue that the picture of the other as genuinely other also suggests the relational modality of revisiting our preconceptions of others, a possibility I call re-reading. I illustrate this possibility vis-à-vis the figure of one of Western environmentalism's repugnant others: the conservative Christian anti-environmentalist. I re-read this other by examining a collection of hunting and fishing devotionals authored by American Evangelicals and marketed to a sympathetic audience. I argue that these objects parochialize the image of this opponent as narrowly unconcerned with the nonhuman and that re-reading practices are morally and politically valuable.

Introduction: Alterity and Ethical Therapeutics on an Ecologically Damaged Planet

§1 Are you deep green?

On a damp Wednesday in London, the eleventh of May, 2016, two environmental activists, Patrick Curry and Joe Gray, met in the Rising Sun pub to finalize their plans to launch an open-access, peer-reviewed environmental journal, which would be called *The Ecological Citizen*.[1] Taking its name from Aldo Leopold's suggestion that humans reconceive their relationship to the biosphere, "from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it" (1949, 204), the journal would aspire to be "a catalyst for radical, egalitarian, compassionate, unifying change…lead[ing] to a truly wild Earth, with secure homes for everyone in the biotic community" (Whyte et al. 2022). The idea for such a forum was hatched earlier that year when members of the defunct journal *Wild Earth* and the Ecocentric Alliance, a self-styled "global advocacy network for ecocentrism and deep green ethics" (Ecocentric Alliance, n.d.), held a series of teleconferences on whether to revive the former or reincarnate it with a new name and financial structure. Under the leadership of EarthFirst! co-founder David Foreman, *Wild Earth* ran from 1991-2004 after splintering off from the *EarthFirst! Journal*, the discursive hub for the radical environmentalist movement.[2] The consensus reached during the teleconferences was that a new journal should be founded, one with global scope and a focus on concrete paths to an ecologically viable planetary future. *Wild Earth* was financially dependent on external donations to pay its staff, which eventually it could not sustain; the new journal would be a volunteer model, signaling, among other things, its staff's commitment to the cause. Curry would become Editor in Chief, Gray an Associate Editor.

Since publishing its first issue in July 2017, *The Ecological Citizen* has been organized around a few themes, but most consistent and prominent among these is its mission to spark a widespread

1. References to the history of *The Ecological Citizen* rely on Whyte et al. (2022) and Taylor (2018).
2. EarthFirst!ers self-style as radical environmentalists (see EarthFirst!, n.d.).

shift toward an ecocentric worldview. This commitment comes out not only in the articles the editors select for publication, but also in its editorials, online tools, mission statement, and its ecocentric manifesto, "Statement of Commitment to Ecocentrism." In an exemplary editorial, Gray, Curry, and Associate Editor Ian Whyte, describe the ecocentric worldview like this: "Ecocentrism sees the ecosphere–comprising all Earth's ecosystems, atmosphere, water and land–as the matrix which birthed all life and as life's sole source of sustenance. It is a worldview that recognizes intrinsic value in ecosystems and the biological and physical elements that they comprise, as well as in the ecological processes that spatially and temporally connect them" (2018, 130). The authors set this perspective in diametric opposition to anthropocentrism, which, they explain, ascribes greater value to humans and human interests than the well-being of other entities. Part of the authors' interest in ecocentrism, besides is obvious veracity in their view, resides in how it casts ecological crises as keenly urgent and obliges individuals to not only scrutinize their own negative impacts, but to activism aimed at largescale social and economic change. Along with this explanation of the significance of ecocentrism, the editors include a device—a series of multiple choice questions—for readers to sort out whether they are genuinely ecocentric or not, headlined by the question, "Are you deep green?" (ibid., 131). The palpable implication is that those who do not so conform may have some reflection to do; the authors accordingly provide suggestions for further reading.

In a similar fashion, *The Citizen*'s "Statement of Commitment to Ecocentrism" opens with the declaration "We, the undersigned, hold and advocate an ecocentric worldview that finds intrinsic (inherent) value in all of nature and the ecosphere" (Washington et al., n.d.). Ecocentrism, the authors explain, encourages humans to view all of life as their kin and therefore it cannot abide mass extinction, environmental degradation, nor anthropogenic climate change; it compels individuals and groups to respond to ecological crises for moral reasons. The statement concludes by articulating the signatories' commitment to promulgate this perspective:

> We maintain that a transformation towards an ecocentric worldview is a necessary path for the flourishing of life on Earth, including that of our own species.
>
> We, the undersigned, are convinced that the future of our living planet is dependent upon the recognition of the intrinsic value of nature, and strong support for ecocentrism as a worldview. We all have a duty to communicate this whenever possible and to undertake, promote and endeavor to inspire action in accordance with this worldview. (ibid.)

At its latest update on April 24, 2024, the statement is underwritten by 1351 ecocentrists, including individuals who further identify themselves in a range of ways, from holistic therapists, poets, organic gardeners, and Earth protectors to clinical chemists, philosophers, and epidemiologists. The selected list of reputable signatories includes environmental philosophers Philip Cafaro, J. Baird Callicott, Freya Mathews, and Holmes Rolston III; philosopher Kathleen Dean Moore; biologists Jane Goodall, Anne Ehrlich, and Paul Ehrlich; philosopher and ecologist Ricardo Rozzi; climatologist Will Steffen; self-styling deep ecologists Tom Butler and Joanna Macy; and environmental sociologists Eileen Crist and David Naguib Pellow. In what follows, we will witness a number of these individuals keeping faith with this manifesto as they engage in various individual or collective efforts to promulgate an ecocentric worldview.

This list of signatories and the journal's ties to groups like the Ecocentric Alliance and EarthFirst! begin to reveal how *The Ecological Citizen* is not only a minor center for ecocentric discussion and coordination, but also one node in a web of environmental activity seeking to articulate and cultivate a shift toward particular environmental worldviews. In his influential work *The Politics of the Earth,* John S. Dryzek calls the sort of advocacy expressed here "green consciousness" environmentalism (2005, 185). This strand of activism seeks to change the world in large part by changing people and the way people think. "A stress on green consciousness," Dryzek explains, "means that the way people experience and regard the world in which they live, and each other, is the key to green change. Once consciousness has changed in an appropriate direction, then policies, social structures, institutions, and economic systems are expected to fall into place" (ibid.). Dryzek suggests that this interest in consciousness change is widespread in environmentalism,

found, for instance, "among deep ecologists, bioregionalists, ecofeminists, ecotheologists, and lifestyle greens, among others" (ibid.). The editorial and manifesto above substantiate Dryzek's suggestion that environmental advocates for worldview change often ground their efforts in how such transformations promise to motivate responses to ecological crises. Such crises are reliably described as symptoms of deeper problems with how people understand themselves and the world. This diagnosis and the urgency and scale of eco-problematics therefore require, in these environmentalists' views, sweeping changes to how people conceptualize themselves and reality.

Many readers will recognize this variety of worldview-change environmentalism; it is not unrelated the popular image of environmentalists as utopian and moralistic.[3] Likewise, the ecological crises that inspire environmental advocates for worldview change will be all too familiar, and they are indeed urgent. Central concerns here include land degradation and biodiversity loss; the latter tends to imply species extinction and the homogenization of bioregions.[4] The stakes of these crises include the disappearance of entire kinds of beings and networks of beings (e.g., species, relatively wild places) and the death, destruction, or mutilation of particular beings and systems. Inextricable from such problematics, anthropogenic climate change ranks as a consistent issue among the environmentalists in question—indeed as a sort of umbrella concern, especially for its impact on nonhuman systems and individuals.[5] The sorts of environmentalists that interest me often cast,

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3. On this image, see Nicole Seymour's discussion of the affective and cultural status quo in mainstream environmentalism (2018, 17-19).
4. The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) reports that, "The global rate of species extinction is already at least tens to hundreds of times higher than the average rate over the past 10 million years and is accelerating…Human actions have already driven at least 680 vertebrate species to extinction since 1500" (2019, 24); roughly one million more plant and animal species face extinction within decades (2019, 12). Biological homogenization and species extinction are primarily caused by land use and degradation by humans around the world, especially from industrial agriculture, infrastructure development, and mineral extraction—all of which directly displace or destroy native species, structurally disrupt ecosystemic dynamics, and chemically erode and toxify the land while eutrophicating fresh water (IPBES 2018, 19).
5. On this inextricability, see IPBES (2019) and IPCC (2023). "Human activities, principally through emissions of greenhouse gases," reports the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), "have unequivocally caused global warming, with global surface temperature reaching 1.1°C above 1850-1900 in 2011-2020" (2023, 4). Levels of global atmospheric CO2 concentration are now judged to be "higher than at any time in at least 2 million years" and methane and nitrous oxide levels "higher than at any time in at least 800,000 years" (IPCC 2023, 4). The effects of these

rightly I think, undue anthropogenic ecosystem disruption as such as a kind of moral disaster; climate change is then taken as a global case. By undue disruption, they often mean any impact on ecological systems beyond what is necessary for a maximally acceptable population of humans to live decent lives; by maximally acceptable population, they tend to mean the greatest number of human individuals that can exist while avoiding certain ecological perils, such as runaway climate change, or achieving certain ends, such as allowing vast swaths of Earth's biosystems to run wild or, more moderately, allowing these systems to maintain a minimal degree of independent stability.[6]

Following Earth-systems scientists such as Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer environmental writers regularly refer to the foregoing crises as part and parcel of what they see as Earth's new geological epoch, the Anthropocene. This moment is differentiated from the interglacial Holocene epoch of the past eleven thousand years—during which human civilization thrived—precisely by the extensive infiltration of planetary systems by human activity and, especially, by the geological scale of human impact on those systems (Crutzen and Stoermer 2000).[7] Besides the foregoing, signs of such influence include the fact the less than twenty-five percent of Earth's land surface shows only moderate or minimal impact from humans, a total predicted to shrink to less than ten percent in the next quarter century; most of that remainder is expected to consist of deserts, mountains, and icy tundras (IPBES 2018, 18-19). Similarly, as of 2014, less than three percent of the world's ocean area appears "free from human pressure;" industrial fishing affects over fifty-five percent (IPBES 2019, 24). Further indicators include the detection of nuclear isotopes

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changes—such as rising sea levels, the increased frequency and severity of extreme weather events, and the land and species crises mentioned above—are already being felt "in every region across the globe" and will continue to be felt and intensify into the next century (2023, 5-7).

6. See Crist (2019, 224) and Callicott (2013, 97) respectively. See also (Crist et al. 2021).

7. I will occasionally use the term Anthropocene in what follows, but only because it is the widely used and allows me, following Elaine Gan et al., to "join the conversation" on those phenomena to which it refers (2017, G3). I do not endorse the worst uses of this term, such as those that obfuscate that this so-called age of the human dawns because of the behavior of *certain* humans or uses that uncritically allow the term to center and even celebrate human power and dominance. For excellent critiques of this term and its tempting pitfalls, as well as examples of problematic uses of it, see Crist (2013) and Haraway (2016c, 44-57).

around the world from atmospheric nuclear bomb testing (Dean et al. 2014), a global rate of anthropogenic rock and sediment movement that surpasses that of natural systems by an order of magnitude (Wilkinson 2005), and the circulation of plastics throughout Earth's bioregions and organisms—from the 1.7 million tons that enter the oceans annually to the micro- and nanoplastics increasingly found in breast milk and human and nonhuman animal blood and tissue (see Dong et al. 2023, Leslie et al. 2022, Richie 2023, Sripada et al. 2022).[8]

Yet besides the crises of the Anthropocene, another problem energizes these worldview-oriented environmentalists, namely, the reality of other people, in particular people who seem to have worldviews opposed to or imperfectly consistent with their preferred perspectives.[9] Ecological crises may spur these environmentalists to action, but the form that action takes is equally indexed to their keenly felt sense that other people exist, people who are not moved quite as these environmentalists think most everyone ought to be. It is the existence of such people that makes the idea of changing worldviews legible to begin with. These would-be worldview changers, then, are defined in part by their appreciation of a two-fold problematic: manifold ecological crises and a version of what is sometimes called the problem of the other or others. This twin concern motivates worldview transformation and distinguishes it from other tactics, such as blowing up pipelines or building diverse political coalitions to achieve environmental policy goals, which are likewise

8. Increasingly, these environmentalists include human-conscious justice concerns in their articulations of the climate and other crises, such as how the effects of climate change already and will continue to disproportionately impact marginalized peoples, such as poor, Black, and Brown communities in the Global North, and those nations who have historically contributed least to it, such as peoples in the Global South. However, these concerns are often, sometimes explicitly, subordinated to broader ecological concerns, in part because these environmentalists are extremely wary, and with warrant, of how human concerns can indefinitely defer nonhuman concerns (see, e.g., Crist 2019, 245-46; Gray 2018, 123; Mosquin and Rowe 2004, 6-7; Washington et al. 2017, 38-40).
9. So-called anthropocentrism would be an example of the former; biocentrism or Christian environmental stewardship models might illustrate the latter.

correlated to the first problematic, ecological crises, but differentiated in other respects, including how other people factor in.[10]

This dissertation ruminates on this distinctive possibility for how one individual or group might relate to another, expressed above in *The Ecological Citizen*'s publications and described by Dryzek, namely, the relational modality of trying to drastically change how other people understand themselves and reality.[11] This modality, as I take it up here, has ethical and affective dimensions: it cites moral reasons for changing the other and seeks to change the other's conceptions of the good and true; it is also plainly activated by various anxieties and often, as we will see, impatience and revulsion with others while seeking to restructure how they feel about certain matters, such as the plights of the nonhuman. As we have already glimpsed, the conceptual-ethical-affective reorganizations achieved by such transformation, it is hoped, will not only correct erroneous conceptions of nature but lead people to respond to ecological problems. In addition to considering this modality of transformation, the present project contemplates the conceptions of other people that tacitly license an individual's or group's fixation on this ethico-affective possibility of other-relation, conceptions in which, I will propose, others are cast as mere and obvious barriers to or trivialities with regards to pre-given ethical and political projects.

I am particularly interested, of course, in how this transformational mode and the pictures of others that ground it partially organize, indeed constrain, the ethico-political imaginations of some Anglophone environmentalists as they react to ecological crises. Taking a cue from some of these environmentalists' descriptions of worldview change as a kind of *conversion*, I will often refer to the

10. Of course, a given environmentalist might attend to all or some combination of such tactics and others beyond; the distinction here is a conceptual one. More below.
11. By "ruminate" I wish to connote that my practice here is one of slow thought, both slow reading and contemplation. I want that term to call to mind the Preface to *On the Genealogy of Morals* where Nietzsche writes, "To be sure, one thing is necessary above all if one is to practice reading as an *art* in this way, something has been unlearned most thoroughly nowadays—and therefore it will be some time before my writings are 'readable'—something for which one has almost to be a cow and in any case *not* a 'modern man': *rumination*" (1967, 23). Nietzsche is not the only slow thinker; my practice draws on another tradition.

sorts of sweeping transformations in self and world understanding they seek as *eco-conversion*, and I will usually refer to those who seek such changes as *eco-conversionists*. In what follows, I will claim that a number of environmentalists are in the grip of this possibility of eco-conversion, which they see as an essential response to the dual problematics of ecological crisis and human multiplicity. I will marshal support for this claim throughout the project by citing a range of examples, such as *The Ecological Citizen* and its supporters. I will refer to such environmentalists' preoccupation with eco-conversion *qua* preoccupation and default-modality of other-relation as *eco-conversionism*; those whom eco-conversionists wish to transform I call *ecological others*. I discuss these terms further below.

Over the course of the following chapters, I will seek to understand this interest in transforming others among some environmentalists (how it is rendered commonsensical to conversionists, whom they wish to transform, why this route of action, etc.) by attending carefully to how some of them write and talk about it. I will problematize this raptness on strategic, moral, and conceptual grounds before ultimately seeking to expand eco-conversionists' capacities for imagining—and imagining how they might interact with—their others. My methodological sensibilities, which I discuss below, are primarily indebted to the later writings of Ludwig Wittgenstein and therapeutic ordinary language philosophers inspired by him, such as Stanley Cavell and Cora Diamond. One challenge that Wittgenstein often comments on is that of going as slowly as one should in philosophy, of noticing all that one takes for granted in moving from one stage of thought to another (see, e.g., 1967, §382; 1980, 34e, 68e).[12] Diamond sometimes describes this slowing down in terms of exposing how we tacitly or explicitly lay down "philosophical requirements" for what must be the case in some region of life as we undertake various projects (see, e.g., 1991e, 19-23). In a similar spirit, this study seeks to slow eco-conversionists down as they reflect on what to do about both ecological crises and the reality of other people, to patiently reveal

12. Citations to Wittgenstein's works that consist of numbered sections refer to specific sections rather than pages.

how they take for granted certain pictures of their others—tacitly laying down requirements for what others must be like—in their schemes and projects to transform them; the results of such excavations will then provide starting points for newly imagining and engaging such others.

Given the sense of urgency that tends to characterize environmentalist discourses in the West, the temporal sensibility of this project may seem mismatched to many environmentalists' concerns; given the very real urgency of ecological crises, my interest in slowing (some) environmentalists down may seem to signify a failure to appreciate those realities. Despite these appearances, I will argue that conversion-inclined environmentalists cannot afford to *not* slow down, to avoid rethinking their others and how they might relate to them. I will suggest that in their haste to respond to ecological problems through transforming other people, eco-conversionists risk making those same problems worse and uncritically create new ones. Chapter 2 enumerates such pitfalls. At the same time, in their urgent concentration on transforming worldviews, I will claim that eco-conversionists miss the opportunity to develop the sort of subtle and expansive imaginations that our ecologically damaged and variegated world requires.

The next section provides an overview of my entire argument at a glance. After that, in section 3, I will introduce important terms for my discussion, before considering some further examples in section 4 of environmentalists advocating for or pursuing worldview transformation. Section 5 considers how other analysts have responded to such interest in worldview change. The chapter concludes with a discussion of my methodological commitments.

§2 Overview of the Argument

In Chapter 1, I examine eco-conversionists' interest in worldview change in detail by parsing the governing assumptions and animating concerns of works by four prominent environmental writers: philosopher J. Baird Callicott, sociologist Eileen Crist, political theorist Jane Bennett, and religious studies scholar Whitney Bauman. Different in numerous respects, these thinkers are united

by their interest in transforming how others understand themselves and the world as an important and often necessary part of responding well to ecological crises. My examination of their works will not only reinforce the suggestion that a certain interest in worldview change preoccupies some environmental advocates, but also reveal a tripartite pattern of assumptions and motivations that renders this preoccupation commonsensical to conversionists and legible to others, a pattern I will call the *etiological structure of eco-conversionism*. The first element in this structure I have already mentioned, namely, these authors are motivated, I will claim, in their efforts at or calls for eco-conversion not only by concern for the nonhuman, but also by a certain anxiety over the existence of other people, of ecological others. The second element at work in these conversionist texts is a tacitly-accepted picture of the other as such, a figure I call *the ecological other*, which is particularly salient in rendering worldview-transformation an obvious response to ecological crises. This picture itself has two components: first, the other's conceptually-constituted life with the nonhuman is construed as obviously understood by anyone, including non-inhabitants of that life, or *transparent* to just anybody. This component is expressed by conversionists' consistent and reasonable moves to differentiate and distance themselves from their would-be converts, positioning themselves outside of the perspectives in question. Secondly, the other's understandings, say, of the nonhuman, are cast as ethically insignificant according to the criteria of the conversionists in question. This aspect of the picture in question is implied by the move to conversion itself which seeks to displace or otherwise radically alter the perspective of the candidate for conversion. The third element in the etiological structure is a shared sense of who is ecologically other-to these environmentalists' preferred perspectives, other to, say, ecocentrism. In particular, I suggest that Indigenous peoples and

religiously and politically conservative U.S. citizens are recurrently figured as ecologically other by these and other eco-conversionists.[13]

My examination will reveal the important role of the picture of the other as transparently or obviously trivial as eco-conversionists make sense of their projects in worldview transformation. As eco-conversionists respond to ecological crises, I will suggest, advocates who take for granted this picture see the possibility of changing other people to respond likewise to those crises as eminently reasonable if not desirable or even compulsory. And as specific subject positions recur as plausible candidates for such transformation, those who are repeatedly thought of as other-to the ecological point of view (e.g., various religious anthropocentrisms, etc.) variously instantiate this general other—as species of a genus or variations on a theme. Ultimately, I will claim that the elements of the organizing and motivating conversionist structure, especially the picture of the other it posits, constrains conversionists' imaginations to the relational-modality of worldview transformation, crowding out alternative forms of other-relation.

The elements of the structure isolated in Chapter 1 guide my critical and constructive work in the rest of the dissertation. Eventually, I will be interested in expanding the eco-conversionist imagination beyond a focus on worldview transformation, refiguring the modality of trying to change the other from its default, necessary status to being one option within a range. However, because I think eco-conversionists are trenchantly in the grips of the possibility of worldview change and the structure that licenses it, I dedicate Chapter 2 to enumerating four ethical and strategic limitations of fixating on this modality. The work of that chapter arises from my fear that merely documenting and analyzing that fixation in Chapter 1 may not lead eco-conversionists to rethink

13. As we will see, in the literature in question Indigenous peoples are only sometimes cast as ecologically problematic, other times, laudable or ambiguous. Nevertheless, they are consistently differentiated from the perspectives advocated for and then evaluated on its terms. Following one line of orthographical practices, I capitalize "Indigenous," and also "Black," in order to articulate the referents of these signs as discrete and particular groups of "political and historical communities" (Weeber 2020), simultaneously resisting those peoples' historical and ongoing political and ethnic trivialization and obliteration. See also Laws (2020).

their focus on worldview change. My hope in Chapter 2 is to earn a hearing for the imaginary-expansion enterprise I undertake in subsequent chapters by further problematizing that focus. The first problem corresponds to the first specific ecological other discussed in Chapter 1, namely, the Indigenous other. I argue that eco-conversionist rhetoric and efforts risk conflict with Indigenous cultural resurgence and decolonial efforts, aligning eco-conversionists with settler colonialism, a moral problem, and unnecessarily alienating potential political allies, a strategic problem. Foregrounding such liberatory efforts as exemplified by Indigenous American movements, I will suggest that decolonial cultural resurgence consistently and reasonably sets itself against forces that strive to subordinate Indigenous perspectives to others. Beyond expressing a certain obtuseness to these concerns, eco-conversionism often resembles the forces those resurgent projects resist.

The second problem with eco-conversionism concerns the conservative other. I argue that eco-conversion talk uncritically confirms anti-environmental narratives proliferated on the political and religious right that precisely construe environmentalism as a secular missionary movement that seeks to displace traditional forms of living. Drawing on empirical studies of political fracturing in the United States, I will suggest that such narratives are woven into the background of rationales that underwrite many American conservatives' opposition to environmental goals. Eco-conversionists may therefore ironically inspire opposition to the worldviews they seek to disseminate precisely through their transformation rhetoric and projects.

Thirdly, I suggest that there are empirical and moral reasons to question the desirability of the sort of widespread conceptual-ethico-affective conformity conversionists aim at. Drawing on the discourse of biocultural conservation, I suggest that many analysts see human cultural diversity as inextricable from such ecological goods as biodiversity and therefore advocate for the conservation of each form of plurality. From an ethical perspective, I suggest that there may be a certain goodness in such multiplicity as well, which eco-conversionist aims forfeit.

Finally, I argue that allowing the transformation modality of other-relation a default status in our imaginations expresses an absence of moral relationship to our others altogether. Drawing on Cavell's writings, I will claim that eco-conversionism figures the other as a mere barrier to pre-given ends—something to be managed, gotten over or under (cf. Smith 2019), and that such a construal amounts to a refusal to engage others as subjects to whom fuller engagement is owed. Taken together, these four limitations suggest that an imagination constrained to the possibility of changing the other not only rings of a certain immorality but mismatches the realities of living on a damaged planet inhabited by a multiplicity of human perspectives, making such an imagination a liability. To better meet these realities, and cultivate an imaginative relationship to others that better preserves their moral status, conversionists should seek to expand their repertoire of other-relation.

But how exactly to achieve this expansion? A number of options present themselves, and in section 5 I will discuss some alternative routes taken by other scholars likewise concerned with some environmentalists' focus on worldview change. My own approach derives from my commitment to the methodologies of therapeutic ordinary language philosophy, which I will describe in section 6. This approach has two elements. First, by examining eco-conversion and the structure that fixes it in the imagination of conversionists, I hope to start loosening the hold of that possibility and the assumptions that make it commonsensical—denaturalizing it by making it an explicit object of thought. Secondly, I suggest that we can start augmenting the eco-conversionist imagination by carefully considering aspects of our lives with other people that the etiological structure, and especially the picture of the other as trivial and transparent, hide from view. That picture, I will suggest, relaxes on true, familiar, and banal facts about our lives with other people, namely, that sometimes we understand and think little of their perspectives despite not fully understanding them ourselves. Yet eco-conversionists, by defaulting to eco-conversion, do not treat these facts as mere possibilities, but rather as consistent, necessary characteristics of others, treating the possibility that

others might be transparent and trivial on moral matters as a paradigm for others' perspectives. The picture of the other as transparent and trivial is a kind of generalization of these mere possibilities, one that hides alternative ordinary features of our lives with others from view. Examining and reflecting on some of those overlooked features, I propose, can not only loosen the hold of the transparent and trivial picture of the ecological on the conversionist imagination, but also illumine corresponding alternative modalities of relation. In particular, I set out to examine two ordinary facts that are logically indeterminate variations on the assumptions made by eco-conversionists, namely, that others can be *opaque* to a subject and can have ethically *nontrivial* or *significant* forms of understanding and living.

In Chapter 3, "The Ecological Other's Potential Opacity," I dwell on the first of these possibilities, that of a conceptual other's potential opacity to a self. I illustrate this possibility by considering examples of writers reflecting on the different ways people can understand and not understand each other, can be opaque to each other. These examples amount to a gathering of quotidian examples designed to remind eco-conversionists of ways in which others can and might be opaque to them. With the aid of these cases, I differentiate between the possibility of knowing and not knowing *that*, *how*, and *why* someone lives with a particular set of concepts. I then suggest that our others might be opaque to us in what they are up to with their concepts in any of these senses: we might not know *that* they use some concepts, *how* to use them, or *why* one would use them. That discussion forces upon me the question of how we can tell whether we understand another in any of these senses. Drawing on a reading of Wittgenstein's discussion of rule following in *Philosophical Investigations* (2009a), I respond by suggesting that there are no abstract criteria, or shortcuts, that guarantee whether or not we understand other people, only all the quotidian techniques we trade on every day and none of those secure for us that understanding has finally and immutably been

reached. We are, to use a Cavellian idiom, perpetually exposed to having whatever we think we understand of the other's conceptual life overturned—when it turns out we're wrong.

If Chapter 3 starts to illustrate some of the ways in which others can be opaque to us in their talk and other behavior, preliminarily generating the image of the other as opaque, as a shifting nimbus or strange stranger, then Chapter 4, "The Ecological Other's Potential Nontriviality," illustrates how the conceptual other might be variously significant or morally nontrivial to eco-conversionist concerns. Chapter 4 thereby aims to charge the image of the other as opaque with potential significance—transforming the picture of the other as a hazy mist into a thunderhead: full of unpredictable potential to matter. Drawing on literature, ethnography, Diamond's moral thought, and again the discourse of bio-cultural conservation, I describe five forms of such value. To help associate these modalities of value with the image of the ecological other, I attach a figure to each: (1) conceptual others in their mere existence can support ecological goals, say, by protecting biodiversity through the perpetuation of their distinct religious and cultural traditions (the other as *Device*), (2) others can be epistemically valuable in offering important information about nonhuman entities (the *Informant*) or (3) effecting paradigm shifts in how such information is collected (the *Epistemic Revolutionary*), and (4) that others can be morally valuable in the distinct senses of qualitatively enhancing one's value-saturated understanding of nonhuman entities (the *Quickener*) or (5) in expanding one's repertoire for morally understanding and acting in relation to the nonhuman (the *Metamorphic*). Chapter 4 concludes with a discussion of the fact that what it is to value has no general form and, accordingly, I suggest that there is no limit to how the other might be significant in a subject's life; the foregoing merely illustrate an open-ended possible range.

The final chapters of the project articulate some of the distinct relation-modalities that come into focus with the help of the picture of the other as opaque and potentially nontrivial. In Chapter 5, I observe that the image of the other as opaque suggests the possibility of trying to dissolve that

opacity, to understand the other, and the fact that the other might be nontrivial generates a reason to seek such dissolution. I describe the possibility of such labor to understand as *apprenticeship* and illustrate some of the shapes it can take by reviewing some anthropological writings. The initial mode of apprenticeship, in turn, suggests further relational possibilities. First, I observe that numerous limitations can undermine one's attempts to understand the other, including that one might refuse to become a student or be refused by a would-be mentor. The growing discourse on Indigenous refusal—say, to collaborate with settlers—serves as a major tributary to my discussion of such limitations. Finally, I propose that the possibility of these limitations suggests a further important fashion of relating to conceptual others, namely, of *accepting their opacity*, of proceeding in one's dealings with them or other people in a kind of *knowing ignorance* of their conceptual life.

Chapter 6 describes a final relational mode, which I call *re-reading* the other. If other's can be opaque and nontrival to us, I suggest, and if nothing finally secures for us when we understand them, then the possibility comes into view of thinking against our conceptions of them. I am particularly interested in re-reading conceptions of consistently demonized others, and take the figure of the repugnant U.S. conservative Christian anti-environmentalist as exemplary. I spend most of that chapter sharing the conclusions of my own experiment in re-reading this figure, which I undertook by examining a collection of devotionals written by Evangelical hunters and anglers and marketed to a sympathetic audience. I suggest that these texts parochialize the commonplace construal of this repugnant other as morally unconcerned with the nonhuman, and, further, that such re-reading can be morally and politically invaluable.

§3 Terminology and Audience

Before proceeding, I should specify some of the terms upon which my discussion already relies. First and foremost, I said above that my focus is on the rhetoric and thought of some Anglophone *environmentalists*, a thoroughly ambiguous term. For my purposes, by environmentalist I

will mean, capaciously, anyone concerned with improving the situations of non-human entities and systems in the present and future, including individuals and groups who do not necessarily give that concern preeminence over other concerns like the ecocentrists mentioned above. I will apply this term to scholars and non-scholars, familiar and nontraditional activists, and myself.[14] However, within this broad group, I focus my attention even more specifically on settler environmentalists, largely white, in the United States while also touching on individuals and groups in Australia, Canada, Norway, and, as with *The Ecological Citizen* founders, the United Kingdom. By settler environmentalists I mean ecologically-concerned individuals who are solely citizens of settler states such as the United States, Australia, and Canada, and not also members of Indigenous nations. The salience of this distinction will be especially relevant when I consider the interface of eco-conversionism, settler colonialism, and Indigenous decolonial activity below; it will recede in other contexts, such as when I discuss U.S. conservative opposition to environmentalism, which is often a dispute among citizens of that/my settler state. Occasionally, I will refer to the environmentalists who interest me as *Western* environmentalists because despite my focus on Anglophone examples I suspect the patterns I consider here can be found in other contexts, especially other contexts that share many conceptual and ethico-affective features as my foci, thanks to shared social and economic histories and geo-political hegemony, a collection of contexts sometimes called the West.

My focus on white, Anglophone, settler environmentalists takes in stride, and indeed implies, the plausible existence of a variety of sensibilities that one might reasonably call environmentalist, or to use a fashionable idiom, though in my view potentially misleading, a variety of environmentalism*s*.[15] This is an important point because for efficiency I will occasionally contrast

14. Since this project scrutinizes some environmental thought, perhaps this point should be reiterated: in my own thought, everyday life, and political activity I set myself against human chauvinism in all its forms (that is merely a conceptual point about the concept human chauvinism and amounts to little more than saying I live with it).
15. In a single gesture, "environmentalisms" aspires to inclusive pluralism while tacitly subordinating that multiplicity to a historically and culturally specific conceptual framework. Within this framework, it makes sense to talk and think about such things as "environments," a possibility attended by all sorts of other contingencies, such as the objects from which

environmentalism with other groups and movements, such as American conservatives and Indigenous American sovereignty projects. To take such contrasts to suggest I do not think these other groups have "environmentalisms" or nonhuman concern would misrepresent my views and conflict what I in fact argue throughout. One of my interests is precisely in understanding and challenging members of a group often called "environmentalism" who strive to make the particular shape of their nonhuman concern dominant.

Again, I focus not on Western environmentalism as a whole but on a particular sect within it, namely, eco-conversionists or environmentalists who often react to ecological crises by seeking to transform the worldviews of their cultural, political, and religious fellows as well as cultural, political, and religious groups to which they do not belong. It should be plain from what I have said so far that I do not think all settler environmentalists are eco-conversionists. However, the specific notion I have in mind when I refer to this sect implicates more environmentalists than the exemplary group I will analyze here and may be more dynamic than meets the eye. I do not conceive of "conversionist" as a static nor exhaustive predication of a soul—as if conversionism were the permanent constitution of a subject, a sect one could never leave. Rather, I think of conversionism as one possible—if, as we will see, sometimes consuming—preoccupation of a multifarious soul, most clearly expressed by exemplars, idealized expressions, such as those I consider here.

This point cuts in multiple directions. It entails, firstly, that those whom I call eco-conversionists should not be reduced to that status. I have already and will continue to consider exemplars of eco-conversionism, but to call my exemplars of this tendency eco-conversionists is, to speak with J. Z. Smith, "a disciplined exaggeration in the direction of knowledge," one that is

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such things as environments are differentiated, say, "humans" or "cultures." The present project itself relies on a related distinction, namely, between the human and nonhuman, insofar as it is parasitic on a discourse regulated by it. One downstream effect of this work should be to deflate the status of that distinction, though developing that effect is not among my central foci.

hopefully enlightening (1996, 403). Those whom I construe as eco-conversionists are not only and always approaching ecological problems via worldview change, but rather, in the very quotidian sense of the word, these individuals and groups seem preoccupied with this possibility, sometimes to the point of fixating on it or risking fixation. But my arguments throughout depend on the fact that eco-conversionists might have more to them, more available to them than this relational modality—that they are not fated to the conversionist chapter of environmentalism.

That conversionism is not a static nor exhaustive disposition of a subject also suggests the possibility that the proclivity toward conversion should not be thought of as a possibility limited to some subjectivities versus others. An important premise of this project is that all sorts of people might find themselves in the grip of trying to change others in response to this crisis or that—that a conversionist might live in many of us. I hinted at this above when I said that I am ruminating on a preoccupation with a particular relational-modality (as such) as it is orders the imaginations of some environmentalists. I cannot overstate the importance of this point for understanding the present work, for it helps specify my audience. This text is addressed almost exclusively to those Western environmentalists, like myself, who find themselves potentially pulled toward conversionism, including but not limited to those who explicitly call for worldview change. To achieve that address, it undertakes an encounter with exemplary expressions of this preoccupation.

This work, then, speaks not to all environmentalisms, all of Western environmentalism, nor solely to obvious eco-conversionists, but to the potential conversionist within any of us Western environmentalists, including myself. That is my audience and the entire dissertation should be seen as a kind of internal critique of a shifting group to which various people including myself sometimes belong. Some of what I consider here may be relevant to other discursive spheres, and eavesdroppers to this inward discourse are welcome, invited. But readers do well to bear in mind that my orientation to a very specific audience orders this entire project, including the terms and

techniques I employ. I am incited to engagement *here* in response to a very specific set of interlocutors and *what I say* and *why* within that engagement is thoroughly shaped by, more, parasitic upon, those interlocutors; in other words, what I write here and why is no reliable indicator of what I may think about adjacent problematics, what I might be inspired to write when beginning from the elicitations of different interlocutors.[16]

Other terms: my use of first-person pronouns merits remark and relates to the point about audience. It is unfashionable these days to employ the first-person plural in scholarship, especially in the humanities. This trend has moral and political grounds which largely persuade me, such as how authors can misleadingly and perilously use these words to cast themselves as speaking for others, which might be problematic intrinsically or because the authors in question misrepresent those for whom they claim to speak (cf. Moi 2017, 18). However, there is no *a priori* limit to how any sign might be significantly used, and to deprive writers of the terms *we* and *us* on the grounds that they necessarily entail that authors are trying to represent people they do not represent is to reductively transform a possible use of language (misleading representation) into a necessary one (as if every time one wrote *we* the use was to misleading represent), and *that* is itself a misleading distortion that robs writers and speakers of all sorts of tools. Most notably, it robs us of an invitational use of such signs, which is how I will regularly use *we* and *us*. I practice this usage in the spirit of therapeutic ordinary language philosophers and critics such as Wittgenstein, Cavell, Diamond, and Toril Moi. For such writers, the invitational use of *we* and *us* is not a description of what is the case for some group of people (an empirical claim), nor of what some group should do, say, or think (an order or normative claim); nor is it the royal usage. Rather, *we* and *us* are used to invite the reader into a position on a matter alongside the author or speaker. As Moi explains it, such usage is "an *invitation* to the reader to test something out for herself, to see if she can see what I see. If she can't, we can

16. These features of my writing are tied to my philosophical and methodological commitments discussed below.

try to figure out why. The claims of ordinary language philosophy are invitations to a conversation, invitations to do philosophy together" (2017, 18). Likewise, Cavell describes ordinary language philosophy's appeal to "what *we* say" as an attempt to discover community, to discover who else sees the sense, or reason, in what one says (see Cavell 1979, 20; see also Cavell 1976b, 239-240). In this spirit, I will regularly use first person plural pronouns to invite my imagined audience, and other readers, into various perspectives on different matters, inviting them to see what I see—not insisting that they do nor assuming that they already do. Oriented toward the potential conversionist in the hearts of many environmentalists, I will shift between referring to eco-conversionists in the third person (e.g., "eco-conversionists think such and such") and first (e.g., "Shouldn't we [conversionists] be worried about such and such?"), and in both cases I will imagine eco-conversionists as a group to which my ideal audience and I potentially belong.

The term *conversion* is plainly important for my discussion; I shall mean by it the transformation of one worldview into another. *Worldview*, in turn, will refer to the affectively and evaluatively charged, semiotically constituted, practically- and socially-sustained, embodied, and ecologically-entangled understandings belonging to human individuals and groups. This definition encapsulates conceptual repertoires, beliefs, values, affects, norms, expectations, and imaginations of groups of people. This definition is not my own, but rather emerges from and aims to reflect the literature in question; it belongs, for my purposes, to eco-conversionism.

I promised to say more about my selection of the term *conversion* to describe the modality of other-relation that interests me. I use this term for a number of reasons, here are five: First, as I mentioned and as we will see, some of the environmentalists in question use this language to refer to the changes they seek; there is, then, a certain fidelity to them in using this term. Secondly, I think this term frankly conveys the thoroughgoing nature of the imagined and sought after changes. Thirdly, I find the verbiage of conversion, eco-conversionist, etc. to be more economical and less

clumsy than alternatives such as worldview change, worldview changer or transformer, etc. Fourthly, I will eventually be interested in undoing eco-conversionists' fixation on worldview change and I think the term conversion tends to have negative associations in many environmentalist circles and adjacent or overlapping social and political networks. By selecting a somewhat negatively-valenced term that I think nonetheless accurately describes the ends sought, I hope to already start loosening the hold of conversion on these environmentalists, to start making it less desirable.

Fifthly, and perhaps helping to explain those negative associations, the term conversion suggests potential similarities between the imaginative proclivities of the environmentalists in question and other groups of people, most obviously evangelizing Christians, say, conquest-era Spanish and French Catholics in the Americas or contemporary Southern Baptist rhetoric around the Great Commission.[17] I do not think these potential similarities are accidental. Religion scholar Evan Berry suggests that historically, "theologically rooted notions of salvation, redemption, and spiritual progress provided a context for Americans enthusiastic about the outdoors and established the horizons of possibility for the national environmental imagination" (2015, 5). Berry sees multiple ways in which those notions "remain vitally constitutive of our environmental inheritance," including in the conception of nature as "morally salient, both as an object of intrinsic value and as a means of advancing human moral goods" as well as in the related "logic of salvation" that structures public discussions of ecological problems in the twentieth and twenty-first century (5, 184). In this salvation scheme, "environmental degradation" is framed as "a result of human sinfulness, our alienation from a natural order that operates according to principles written into the fabric of nature itself" (184). This diagnosis, Berry suggests, enables and constrains a corresponding range of responses that seek to redeem people and nature by "transcend[ing] human depravity" (186). I

17. On the former, see the chapter "Conquest and Conversion in the New World" in *The American Catholic Experience* by Jay P. Dolan (1992); on the latter, see the SBC's website (SBC 2000).

suspect that for the environmentalists I consider here, their interest in worldview change is inextricable from such historically Christian patterns of salvific thought. Indeed, one figure I will discuss, the environmental philosopher J. Baird Callicott, explicitly models his account of worldview change on the Apostle Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus (2013, 32); another, on Christian (and other) missionary movements (Assadourian 2016, 255). However, by describing eco-conversionists' focus on worldview change as a fixation on conversion, my interest is less in suggesting a causal relationship between Christian theologies of redemption and contemporary patterns of environmentalist thought, what Berry calls a "historically demonstrable genealogical affinity" (2015, 2), than in simply calling to mind this formal similarity between these environmentalists and these other various salvationist traditions. The upshots of sounding this resonance are manifold, including to bolster my fourth rationale for those environmentalists who do not wish to be associated with such traditions. Another I will emphasize in the final chapter is how my use of this term illuminates similarities in the practical efforts of some environmentalists and some of their foremost opponents, namely, conservative American Christians.

Another set of important terms for my discussion are *moral* or *ethical* and *political imagination*, which I will sometimes refer to together as *ethico-political imagination*.[18] This group of terms refers to how people imagine parts of their human and more-than-human worlds and also imagine interacting with those parts. In particular, ethical and political imaginations, as I use those terms, include individuals' or groups' particular conceptions of parts of the world and the range of practical possibilities that make sense in light of those conceptions. A practical possibility is simply something someone could do. Here I am particularly interested in the idea of characteristically relational

18. It is of no use to me here to differentiate the moral and ethical. Such distinctions are only ever pragmatic—what Wittgenstein calls a "reform" of language "for practical purposes" (2009a, §132)—and my purposes are not particularly served by such a reform. I allow a distinction between the ethico-moral and political because it will sometimes be useful for me to emphasize practical possibilities for other-relation that are more concerned with matters of collective self-organization—culminating in characteristically political expressions, such as institutionalization or legislation—in contrast to other indelibly ethical matters.

practical possibilities, what I have called relational-modalities: potential forms of interaction with someone or something else. Eating is an example of such a relational possibility; it is a potential form of interacting with (or trying to interact with) an object (whether edible or not). Conversion as I've defined it is another such example: a potential modality of interacting with another person. Such possibilities, I will suggest, often rely on particular corresponding conceptions of their objects of relation, with which they coinhabit a person's or people's imagination. In the study that follows, the analogy between eating and worldview-transformation will prove apt.

Environmental scholars should be relatively familiar with what I'm up to in my use of *moral imagination* and *practical possibility*. Foundational figures in Anglophone environmental thought have been interested in the ways we imagine things, such as more-than-human nature, and how those imaginings encourage or compel some ways of feeling, acting, and further imaginings over alternatives. For example, Carolyn Merchant's *The Death of Nature* (1980) focuses on how shifts in certain conceptions of the concept of nature (and women)—from an organismic to a mechanistic picture—enabled and rationalized certain (destructive) behaviors (such as vivisection and unmitigated mineral extraction) while crowding out alternatives (see, e.g., Merchant 1980, 29-41). In my terms, Merchant's book traces a change in the moral imagination (*viz.* how we picture nature and women), which in turn entailed a change in the practical possibilities that seemed not only reasonable but desirable or even compulsory.[19] One thing that differentiates my project from Merchant's and others' is that I am not focused on how environmentalists picture and concomitantly relate to the nonhuman. I am instead focused on how we picture and imagine reasonably interacting with other people, and how different conceptions of others invite correspondingly distinct routes of interaction as commonsensical.

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19. When introducing her premises and methods, Merchant cites Stanley Cavell and Charles Taylor (Merchant 1980, 5ft2). Additional influential environmental texts on imagination and practice include Buell (1995), Cronon (1996), Morton (2009), and Nash ([1967] 2001).

Finally, following Sarah Jaquette Ray (2013), I define *ecological others* as those classes of people who are tacitly or explicitly cast as other-to environmentalism by ecological writers, especially eco-conversionists.[20] I am particularly interested in peoples who are construed as ecological others because they supposedly live with understandings of the nonhuman that diverge from the preferred understandings or worldviews of eco-conversionists. That is, I am interested in ecological others who are *conceptual others*, who live with concepts with which the eco-conversionist self does not live, who are conceptually *deviant*. In the writings of eco-conversionists, such conceptually-different ecological others are figured as potential converts, the objects correlated to the relational modality of eco-conversion. Throughout my discussion, I will differentiate between *particular ecological others*, on the one hand—such as members of the so-called Abrahamic traditions, various Indian Hindus, different Indigenous peoples, and secular anthropocentrists—and the general figure of *the ecological other*, on the other. The latter figure is the center of my critical and constructive engagement, though I will consider material pertaining to particular ecological others throughout. When I argue that eco-conversionists are in the grip of a particular picture of their others, it is this general figure to which I refer, in which the other is cast as transparently insignificant on nonhuman matters, an obvious and mere barrier to responding to ecological problematics. The particular subject positions that eco-conversionists cast as ecologically other, I will suggest, are mere instantiations, concretizations, or varieties of this general picture. Thus, as we will see, different eco-conversionists regularly advocate for the conversion of transparent and trivial ecological others who, in some sense, happen to be a Southern Baptists, for instance, or Yamuna devotees.[21]

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20. My ecological others are human. But I am interested in how both environmentalists and such others relate to—in thought and practice—another category of existents that are also intelligibly called ecological others, namely, nonhuman entities (see, e.g., Alexander 2013, Cassidy 2012, Desai and Smith 2018, Haraway 2016b).

21. By "in some sense," I mean to obviate a misreading: that I am saying the particularities of these others are accidental to their candidacy as converts. That would be false. Rather, the specifics of these other subject positions are contingent in the sense that whatever particular characteristics they have, these positions are always cast as understood and trivialized, thus always index the presence of the general conception of the other that interests me.

Specifying the ecological other(s) that interests me with the term *conceptual* allows me to refer, less clumsily than, say, *worldview other* would, to the fact that the salient differences between eco-conversionists and their ecological others are differences in embodied, ethically and affectively saturated, socially sustained, and culturally situated *understandings*.[22] The term *conceptual other* signals that those understandings are conceptually constituted—made up of systems of distinction and various general forms of sense-making that organize individuals' and groups' perspectives. The differences here emerge in how individuals and groups render intelligible their worlds and live in light of/through that sense. The central concern of conversionists is how their others conceptualize more-than-human reality, including how they ascribe value to it (or don't) and relate affectively to it. Such practices of ascription and affective relation are often tacit but sometimes explicit processes of conceptualization, of rendering-intelligible. Such tacit and explicit conceptualization occurs in both the quotidian and special practices that make up a person's or people's life.

In general, following Wittgenstein, I will think of concepts as particular uses of signs, including but not limited to words and collections of words, such as sentences (see, e.g., 2009a §§43, 67, 70-71, 105-7, 383). To have a given concept, then, say, "Creation," "is," "addition," "nature," "or," "not," or "of," shall be to live with some range of intelligible uses of these words. Indeed, by and large, I will mean by *concepts* ordinary words as they are used by the people who use them.[23] By sign, I shall mean that which is perceived of a concept, such as the words just listed, or the sentences in which those words might be used, but also gestures, actions, events, or otherwise intelligible phenomena (cf. 2001, §3.32).[24] Borrowing a term from Wittgenstein, I will sometimes use *grammar* to

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22. My perspective on concepts draws from the mutually resonant accounts of Wittgenstein (e.g., 2009a), Wilfrid Sellars (1997), and John McDowell (1994, 1998a-c).
23. This does not entail that all that is understood, and so conceptualized, can be articulated in words. Only that any concepts that will be *discussed* will be discussed *in language* and represented using the signs of a language.
24. Thus, to borrow an example that repeats in Wittgenstein's writings, the sign "is," as used for instance in the proposition "GREEN is green" is that which is perceived of any of a number of concepts (Wittgenstein 2001, §3.323). That range includes but is not limited to, following Wittgenstein and James Conant (1998, 237), the concept with the function of predication (the application of a concept to an object; *is* as *copula*) and the concept with the function of

refer to the open-ended but not random ways in which concepts/signs are intelligibly used in our or others' lives, such as the grammar of the concept *nature* (signified just now with the sign *nature*) (2009a, §§84, 122). I will take for granted that concepts can be given "rigid boundaries" or definitions—we can, say, use the word "number" as "a rigidly bounded concept" within a particular practice—but that they need not be so bound. For we can, and everyday *do*, use our concepts without rigid boundaries, such as when we say without mishap, to take one of Wittgenstein's examples, "Stay roughly here" (§71).

I will also take as given a feature of our lives with concepts, and language, to which Wittgenstein repeatedly draws attention, namely, what Alice Crary calls the logical priority of (linguistic) pragmatics (use or what is *done*) to semantics (sense or meaning) (see, e.g., 2009a, §§7, 23, 43, 432, 654-56). As Crary notes in her commentary on Wittgenstein, "we necessarily draw on pragmatic sensitivities in making sense of what a person is saying in a manner that is relevant to, among other things, determining whether her words invite evaluation in terms of truth or falsity, or whether they invite evaluation primarily in terms of some other standard" (2016, 69). By "pragmatic sensitivities" she means capacities to perceive what someone is doing with their words on some occasion, which presupposes a sense of what they might be doing in a range of cases: joking at work, tattling on a sibling, describing a dream, etc. That which is to be understood in each case, Wittgenstein and Crary invite us to see, is misapprehended, and so *not* understood or even perceived, if *what* is *done* with the words in question is missed.[25] To use a concept, then, is a *doing*, and understanding one involves grasping *what* is done.

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equation. Say that these uses are two concepts or that the same concept has two uses; either assertion may have utility in particular circumstances.

25. If you take my joke as a report, tattle, or recital of a dream, then you miss what I have *done*, and miss, then, *what* I have said, the *meaning* of my saying. And to take my joke as a joke, you will need to know a good deal, including what a joke is, that people tell them, how they are told, what it can be like to tell one well or poorly, that some people tell them only in special circumstances, others are playfully impertinent, when I have told one, and more.

I refrain from further specifying the terms *concept* and *sign*. I do not think I need further specification to legibly proceed nor that there is a final definition to offer; what more exactly concepts and signs *are* is something that can only be discovered *a posteriori* and never finally, that is, by studying them in the wild of ordinary life (cf. Wittgenstein 2009a, §66).[26] I take this cue from Wittgenstein, who continually draws attention to the open-ended variety of roles concepts have in our lives (think of all the ways we use "is," and now "nature"—all the ways that concept works for us, might be in play tacitly or explicitly in a practice). In the pages to come, we will see some range of what concepts and signs can do, and so be.

Insofar as the conceptual differences that concern the present work often express themselves linguistically (i.e., through natural languages) or semiotically (i.e., linguistic and non-linguistic significations in gestures, actions, and other behavior), say, with different groups using different lexicons, it is tempting to call them *linguistic* or *semiotic*. Yet, one of the benefits of my terminology is that it allows us to discuss differences even among people who appear to live with the name natural language or collection of signs. Still, it would be accurate to call the differences in question semiotic or linguistic if we appreciate that two or more individuals can speak the same natural language or in some sense use the same signs—insofar as they use literally the same words—and yet do such different things with those signs/languages that in an equally persuasive sense they can be said to speak different languages or to use different concepts while using the same signs.[27]

My terminology also allows me to take in stride that eco-conversionists often slip between talking about worldviews, religions, cultures, belief systems, and societies. Eco-conversionists often

26. For my purposes, then, the signs "concepts" and "signs" are merely a way to talk about the constituents of understanding, sense, or meaning; they are the constitutive instruments of understanding and at least tacitly in play anytime something is understood or intelligible, including a perceptual experience, discrete practice, or other behavior. If a phenomenon is understood, is even very basically intelligible, I shall take for granted that it is conceptualized or understood in terms of some set of concepts, semiotically instantiated.
27. Think of the wide range of intelligible uses English speaking Americans have for the sign *create* and its affiliates—ranging from the halls of MoMA to those of Petersburg, Kentucky's Creation Museum.

account for this slippage by talking in terms of worldviews, since either that term or my preferred terminology avoid the confusions that might arise when we appreciate various differences, say, within religious traditions or cultures, to say nothing of the vagueness of these terms themselves. Throughout, I will be discussing various "religions" and "cultures" and by in large allow my foils to define these terms, since I am largely working critically and constructively within their frameworks. However, my use of the language of *conceptual* otherness and difference will enable a more precise analysis over the course of my discussion, and should signal my appreciation of the numerous conceptual and political difficulties surrounding the terms "religion," "culture," and "belief."[28]

§4 Further Illustrations of Eco-conversionism

4.1 Preliminary Survey of Eco-conversionism

Chapter 1 provides my close analysis of eco-conversionism. At present, I wish to continue bolstering my claim that some environmentalists are preoccupied with the relational-possibility of worldview change while also filling out the general eco-conversionist profile, illustrating some of the forms this enmeshment can take. Consider first the claims of Erik Assadourian, environmental advocate and long-time researcher for the now defunct Worldwatch Institute, who argues that we need to turn environmentalism into a "religious missionary force" (2016, 247). "Considering the massive scale of change necessary," Assadourian explains, "I see one strategy as superior to others: the creation of environmentalism as a missionary philosophical movement" (254). The environmental movement, he suggests, needs to learn from the successes of Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and other religions. Like these traditions, environmentalism "needs to espouse a comprehensive philosophy and use its core energy to spread that philosophy first and foremost" (255). By "comprehensive philosophy," Assadourian means, "an ethics, cosmology, theodicy, rituals,

28. On difficulties surrounding these notions, see Asad (1993), Masuzawa (1998, 2005), Smith (1998).

even stories of redemption that could deeply affect people and change the way they live" (255). Transforming into a religious missionary force doesn't entail the abandonment of short-term political engagement, "only that those immediate campaigns are subordinated to longer-term missionary movement building" (ibid.).

Assadourian's call exemplifies the sort of attachment to worldview transformation that interests me. Later in the same paper, he even seeks to intensify one of Dryzek's examples of green-consciousness environmentalism, namely, the deep-ecology movement, initiated by the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess. Naess famously differentiates between a shallow and a deep ecology movement. The former seeks resource conservation and pollution mitigation for the sake of human well-being; the latter, which Naess vigorously commends, is oriented toward mutual human-nonhuman flourishing; it is a "philosophy of ecological harmony or equilibrium" that seeks to correct society with its metaphysics and "value-priority system" (Naess 1973, 95, 97-99). Assadourian cites Naess as offering a working model for the missionization of environmentalism, if also one to be improved upon (Assadourian 2016, 255). One of his complaints is that Naess allows too much room for individuals to develop their own distinctive deep-ecological outlooks (ibid., 256). How can we coordinate an appropriately-scaled "missionary philosophical movement," Assadourian reasons, if everyone gets to pick their own philosophy? In other words, Assadourian seeks to enhance the stringency Naess's worldview-transformation work, recommending that environmentalists seek to promulgate a more restrictive or singular ecological perspective.

Scholars of religion and ecology and environmental philosophy will be particularly familiar with some environmentalists' desire for worldview conversion. As Roger S. Gottlieb observes, the "heart of the study of religion and ecology" is formed by two questions: "What have the world's faiths believed about the human relation to nature? And how must beliefs (and actions) *change* as we face the environment?" (2009, 4; my emphasis). We can probably chalk up the centrality of these

questions to the influence of Lynn White, Jr.'s 1967 essay "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis." For it was White who told us that "[w]hat people do about their ecology depends on what they think about themselves in relation to things around them. Human ecology is deeply conditioned by beliefs about our nature and destiny—that is, by religion" (1967, 1205). Accordingly, if we want to change what people are doing "about their ecology," we need to change their deeply held beliefs and values (ibid., 1207). As many have argued, White's paper set the trajectory for scholarly engagement on religion and ecological problematics (see, e.g., Jenkins 2009; LeVasseur and Peterson 2017). Given White's influence, one need not look far to find scholars of religion writing about the ways in which worldviews, religions, and cultures are changing and still need to change to address our ecological problems (see, e.g., Anthony and Pavel 2016; Eaton 2016; Kollar 2019; Swimme and Tucker 2011; Tucker 2015, 2019).[29]

Even those religion scholars who are critical of how the field took up White's challenge often find themselves working within the parameters it set. Bron Taylor, for instance, helped found the *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature, and Culture* in large part to create a more inclusive forum within which to critique the conceptual foundations of the religion and ecology area, including what he saw as scholars' obsession with studying religious beliefs and persistent theistic assumptions (Taylor 2007, 7-9; see also 2010, 220; 2015, 133-34). Taylor has taken particular issue with how many religion and ecology scholars insist and celebrate that the world's religions are, to use my term, undergoing eco-conversions, a proposition he calls "the greening of religion hypothesis" (2016). Together with collaborators Gretel Van Wieren and Bernard Zaleha, Taylor has tested this

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29. I expect that some part of the work in religion and ecology on integral ecology, and the integral ecology project itself, is driven by a shared concern with getting worldviews right in order to promulgate them. See, e.g., Mickey (2014, 2016). The integral ecology project, best represented by Sean Esbjörn-Hargens and Michael E. Zimmerman's enormous *Integral Ecology: Uniting Multiple Perspectives on the Natural World* (2009), seeks, briefly, to systematically integrate analytics from the humanities, social, and physical sciences into a super analytic while taking all forms of human difference extremely seriously (see, e.g., 65). But the very desire for such unity amidst diversity vis-à-vis the nonhuman suggests to me, in the very least, the operation of an anxiety over multiplicity similar to that which inspires eco-conversionism (see, e.g., 488).

hypothesis through an extensive review of existing literature on the relationship between religions and environmental understanding and practices. They find that, in fact, "the majority of religious individuals and groups remain mostly indifferent to environmental concerns" (2016, 348). Taylor, Van Wieren, and Zaleha do not take issue with scholars' interest in worldview change, but rather criticize the lack of progress in achieving such changes. They conclude their study thusly,

> Much remains to be learned, however, about the role of traditional religions and other religion-resembling social phenomena in nature-human relationships. With regard to the world's predominant religions, important questions include, for example: How malleable are these traditions or subsets of them, and what makes them so? How durable will they or subsets of them be as adherents incorporate evolutionary and ecological understandings into what they care about and know? Put differently, what are the possibilities and limits to hybridizing traditional religious beliefs and values with scientific understandings and the sustainability-oriented values derived from them? With regard to the various types of (non-indigenous) nature spiritualities, significant questions are: How rapidly and extensively are they growing? To what extent are they or some of them exercising cultural and political influence? What are their continuities, discontinuities, and relationships with indigenous peoples and perceptions about their spiritualities and ethics? (Taylor, Van Wieren, and Zaleha 2016, 354)

Paired with the authors' emphasis throughout their paper on how the worlds' religions seem ecologically unconcerned, it is difficult to imagine the stakes of these questions to be otherwise than how they might lead us to achieve the so-called greening of religion.[30] Such critics of religion and ecology, then, dispute not that eco-conversion should be a priority, that White set a worthy agenda for the study of religion and nature, but rather critique how well that project is going, and they call for further work to help it along.

Philosopher J. Baird Callicott claims that White's paper also "set the agenda" for environmental philosophy (1999b, 41; see also Minteer and Manning 2005). "First," Callicott explains, "we identify and criticize our inherited beliefs about the nature of nature, human nature, and the relationship between the two…Second, we try to articulate a new natural philosophy and

30. This reading is bolstered by the fact that Taylor is not only a signatory of *The Citizen's* "Statement of Commitment to Ecocentrism," but one of its architects (see Washington et al., n.d.). He has also expressed consonant views elsewhere (see, e.g., 2010, 222; Taylor et al. 2020).

moral philosophy distilled from contemporary science. We try, in other words, to articulate an evolutionary-ecological worldview and an associated environmental ethic" (ibid.). The second step, however, is not limited to articulation, but includes dissemination, or as Callicott recently explains, "To expose and *promulgate* that [post-Modern] worldview and from it to derive its axiological and normative implications is, I argue, the true creative work of environmental philosophy. And, because what we do depends on what we think, to *change* what we do in and to the natural environment depends on this changing of our *thinking* about it" (2017, 41; initial emphasis mine). Critique, articulation, promulgation—according to Callicott, these are tasks that White's essay set for environmental philosophy, tasks that he and many of his colleagues have pursued for decades.

As Callicott suggests, this focus on changing worldviews often requires the critique and even exclusion of certain undesirable perspectives. Or as Todd LeVasseur, another scholar of religion and ecology, puts it,

> Cultural stories and cultural views of consciousness and our bodies that abstract us out of biophysical reality should be *constantly policed and challenged,* including where these occur in the academy. This is especially true if they contribute to maladaptive ways of behaving that can and do lead to species die off, loss of biodiversity, and human and nonhuman suffering, as for example with most current varieties of conservative and fundamentalist evangelical Christianity in the United States. (2021, 21-22; my emphasis)

According to LeVasseur, then, the project of cultivating the right "stories and cultural views" requires environmentalists to not only disseminate their preferred worldviews, but also be ever ready to oppose those worldviews that, by their lights, contribute to ecological problems.

Beyond religion and ecology and environmental philosophy, I suspect that a similar concern with worldview change spurs the proliferation of empirical metrics such as the New Ecological Paradigm scale (NEP). First developed by sociologists Riley E. Dunlap and Kent Van Liere in 1978 and then revised in 2000 by Dunlap, Van Liere, and their colleagues Angela G. Mertig and Robert E. Jones, NEP employs a fifteen question rubric to measure populations' "endorsement of an ecological worldview" (Dunlap et al. 2000, 438). "Increasingly," Dunlap explains, this scale is

"treated as a measure of environmental beliefs, which I believe is the most accurate interpretation, although *ecological worldview* is my personal preference for a descriptor because I believe the NEP Scale measures the degree to which respondents view the world ecologically" (2008, 10). The questions used in the metric, with which respondents are to agree or disagree, range from "Humans have the right to modify the natural environment to suit their needs" to "The earth is like a spaceship with very limited room and resources" (ibid., 433). Writing in 2008, Dunlap reports that NEP "has become the most widely used measure of environmental concern in the world and been employed in hundreds of studies in dozens of nations" (3; see also Anderson 2012, 261).

The authors of the 2000 paper envisioned that NEP might measure global civilizations' progress toward an ecological worldview and more sustainable societies, progress they projected to proceed more or less inevitably in response to ever mounting information on ecological crises (Dunlap et al. 2000, 439). Eight years later, Dunlap concedes that such projections were overly optimistic and that the dissemination of this worldview now faces staunch resistance from political conservatives in particular (2008, 13-14). He writes,

> At this point, the question becomes how to spread this rapidly growing ecological worldview from scientific and academic communities to society at large. The necessity of doing so stems from Pirages and Ehrlich's (1974) earlier noted and highly prescient warning that a "society is threatened when its [dominant social paradigm] no longer offers valid guidance for survival" (p. 47). Despite the current institutionalization of an antienvironmental perspective that would have been unimaginable in the early 1970s, I believe that environmental education—both formal and informal from the elementary to university levels—has continued to help infuse an ecological worldview among younger generations. In fact, evidence suggests that even short educational programs may stimulate an increase in NEP scores among children (Manoli et al., 2007) and college students (Rideout, 2005). Also, many adults who came of age in the 1960s and 1970s retain an environmental sensibility. Still, it is clear that environmental skepticism has become widespread, as significant sectors of the public have absorbed the antienvironmental message of conservative elites and, for example, question the reality and significance of global warming (Dunlap & McCright 2008). (Dunlap 2008, 15)

Dunlap connects an interest with the measurements of NEP with the need to "spread this rapidly growing ecological worldview" to "society at large." The scale, he explains, tells us what techniques

might be effective in achieving this change. I suspect that an interest in seeing the worldview in question disseminated partially underwrote Dunlap and his colleagues' initial interest in measuring that dissemination, but this passage suggests that connection more strongly insofar as it positions the metric as not only measuring changes in worldviews but the success of particular efforts to effect such changes. The tool is here cast as a means of refining and advancing efforts at worldview change. "We are in the midst of a paradigm war," Dunlap explains, "with two sides attempting to give highly divergent interpretations of ecological realities. Investigating and tracking changes in worldviews seems particularly important" (ibid.).

4.2 Further Signs of Significant Attachments

The rhetoric, sweeping vision, and multiplicity of cases seen so far already suggest that the idea of worldview change is something of a preoccupation for some environmentalists. That this possibility has a certain grip on these advocates also comes out strikingly in the fact that many of them pursue multiple eco-conversion enterprises. Consider, for instance, that the website of the Ecocentric Alliance, which like *The Ecological Citizen* seeks to promulgate ecocentrism, is currently maintained by *Citizen* editor Joe Gray, and that its membership includes *Citizen* editors Crist and Curry (Ecocentric Alliance, n.d.).[31] These individuals have additional conversion ventures as well; in Chapter 1, I will consider some of Crist's relevant scholarship.

The significance of some environmentalists' commitment to eco-conversion is also revealed in how they sometimes respond to criticisms of their and allies' efforts. Consider the reactions to the recent work of ethics and religion scholar Lisa Sideris. Over the past decade, Sideris has criticized a body of loosely affiliated projects that she initially called the New Genesis movement, but now

31. Among its resources, the Alliance's website hosts a sister manifesto to *The Citizen*'s "Statement of Commitment to Ecocentrism," titled "A Manifesto for Earth." The authors of the latter, ecologists Ted Mosquin and Stan Rowe, insist that a conceptual, ethical, and especially affective revolution, among "all people," is necessary to meaningfully responding to ecological crises; their eleven "core" and "action principles" culminate in the imperative to "Spread the Message" (2004, 8).

refers to as the New Cosmology movement (see, e.g., Sideris 2015a, 364-70; 2015b, 137; 2017, 1).[32] This movement, as Sideris describes it, consists of a network of scholars in the natural sciences and humanities that aim to develop and disseminate comprehensive, scientifically-based narratives that describe the origin, nature, and destiny of the universe and life on Earth (2015b, 137; 2017, 1). Such narratives aspire to function as the sacred myths of a science-based spirituality (2015a, 364; 2015b, 137ft2). Illustrating again how attachments to ethico-conceptual transformation can spur the deployment of multiple conversion projects, Sideris's analysis ranges widely across New Cosmologists' multi-media enterprises, including but not limited to academic texts, trade books, university-curricular overhauls, interviews, a documentary film (along with screenings and public discussions of the film), self-help webinars on "evolutionizing" your life, YouTube videos, podcasts, and websites (see, e.g., 2015a, 365; 2015b 138-139).[33]

New Cosmologists' desire to develop and promulgate comprehensive, sacralized, evolutionary or cosmological narratives, Sideris finds, is driven in large part by their concern with environmental problems; it is precisely to re-enchant nature, to imbue it with "wonder, meaning, and value," that New Cosmologists recommend their cosmic and evolutionary narratives (137). However, for many of the New Cosmologists, global humanity faces not only ongoing and future environmental crises, but also finds itself drowning in a proliferation of particular, religious, and

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32. Her principal examples include the works of science writers Connie Barlow and Eric Chaisson, cultural historian Thomas Berry, "Big Historian" David Christian, author and Christian pastor Michael Dowd, biologist Ursula Goodenough, mathematical cosmologist Brian Swimme, and religion scholars Mary Evelyn Tucker, John Grim, and Loyal Rue (2015b, 138; 2017, 3-4). The cosmologies that these figures develop and promote are variously referred to as the Evolutionary Epic, The Universe Story, Big History, The New Story, or the Great Story (Sideris 2017, 4).
33. In responses to Sideris's arguments, multiple New Cosmologists object to being classified as parties to the movement (See, e.g., Goodenough 2015, 176; Tucker 2015, 206; 2019, 410; see also Callicott 2015, 155; 2018, 328; Deane-Drummond 2015, 171.). However, Sideris's analysis persuasively suggests that this group is unified by the desire to design and disseminate singular "metamyths" that claim to be thoroughly consistent with contemporary scientific cosmological and evolutionary knowledge and that can and should *encompass* and/or *displace* all other purportedly competing (i.e., religious and non-scientific) myths. Sideris has also collected numerous examples of these scholars referencing each other's work and discussing their work together (say, in interviews) and occasionally referring to themselves as a movement (see, e.g., Sideris 2015c, 224; 2017, 109, 126, 147).

environmentally-problematic myths.[34] What humanity requires therefore is not only pro-environmental narratives, but rather a singular, scientific, and environmentally-enlightened myth that can unify the world's peoples, reorient them to these matters, and motivate action (2015b, 137-40).[35]

Sideris's primary criticism of the New Cosmology movement is that despite the intentions of its architects, it may in fact undermine nonanthropocentric environmental concern by displacing primary experiences with nature. Sideris's secondary concerns include narrative and cultural homogenization (see, e.g., 2017, 128, 145). My own interest in this movement lies with this second problematic, for Sideris's examination documents a widespread and robust captivation among some environmentalists with the modality of worldview change paired with persistent concern over human conceptual difference.

Responses to Sideris's research, especially among those implicated in her criticisms, have been reliably spirited, signaling the investment of New Cosmologists and their allies in these worldview ventures. Sideris first introduced her ideas about the New Cosmologists in the paper, "Science as Sacred Myth? Ecospirituality in the Anthropocene Age." Eventually published in the volume *Linking Ecology and Ethics for a Changing World* (Rozzi et al. 2013, 147-162), the piece was nearly pulled due to complaints from some of those whom Sideris scrutinized (Callicott 2015, 154). Also in 2013, Sideris delivered a lecture as part of a series on the *Journey of the Universe* project, one of the New Cosmology enterprises she studies (see Swimme and Tucker 2011). Sideris's talk, which raised "pointed questions about this new cosmology and its agenda" was (and remains) the only lecture excluded from the online archive (Sideris 2015a, 367, 367ft19).[36] After learning of the near suppression of "Sacred Science?", Bron Taylor republished the essay in *JSRNC* alongside nine

34. "It's all a question of story," Thomas Berry famously wrote, "We are in trouble just now because we do not have a good story. We are in-between stories" (Berry 1987, 187).
35. That the new cosmologies are already functioning in a fashion we might call "sacred" or "religious" has been preliminarily explored by Sarah E. Fredericks (2019).
36. As of March 25, 2024 Sideris's lecture remains unposted. (Yale Religion and Ecology 2024).

responses (Taylor 2015, 134). The general mood of the replies was heated, and multiple scholars, again especially those Sideris takes to task, reacted with venom, accusing her, for instance, of attacking science and knowledge as such (Zaleha 2015, 218) and grossly oversimplifying differences within her so-called movement (Deane-Drummond 2015, 171; Goodenough 2015, 176).[37]

These energetic responses, attempts to suppress Sideris's research, and the decision by *JSRNC* (and later *Zygon*) to host symposiums on her work cumulatively suggest that Sideris struck a nerve. That that nerve was an attachment to the enterprise of widely disseminating a singular unifying scientific narrative, or set thereof, which would necessarily subordinate or displace other perspectives, comes out in how critics often chose to focus their criticisms. Consider a particularly illuminating reply to Sideris's 2013 paper from the *JSRNC* symposium authored by philosopher Holmes Rolston III. After briefly addressing Sideris's interest in how the new cosmologies might cheapen first-order encounters with nature (2015, 200), a claim he doubts, Rolston dedicates his paper to attacking Sideris's concern that New Cosmologists may be intolerant of religious and cultural diversity and, in fact, defending the displacement of worldviews inconsistent with contemporary scientific views—again, an implication of the new cosmologies and a secondary concern for Sideris, but not the heart of her analysis.

Rolston concedes that different traditions may be "green on their own terms," but asserts that ultimately the modern sciences give the definitive accounts of natural phenomena, to which other-than-strictly-scientific perspectives will inevitably have to succumb (ibid.). Rolston gives four examples of, by his lights, other-than-strictly-scientific understandings of natural objects to show how the scientific understandings are simply "better" (201-3). His cases include Hindu

37. In 2017, Sideris published a book-length study of the New Cosmology movement entitled *Consecrating Science: Wonder, Knowledge, and the Nature World*, and in 2019 *Zygon* published the papers from another symposium featuring scholarly replies to the monograph (see Peterson 2019). That symposium was less lively, though many vehement dissenters remained (see, e.g., Tucker 2019).

understandings of the Yamuna river, Indigenous Hawaiian conceptions of the Kilauea volcano, Paiute (Indigenous American) conceptions of the Grand Canyon, and Aṉangu (Aboriginal Australian) self-conceptions in relationship to "Uluru," a mountain in the Northern Territory of Australia (called by settlers "Ayer's Rock"). Here is what he writes of Yamuna and her devotees:[38]

> I was at the Yamuna River in India recently, a major river that flows from the forested Himalayas through Delhi and into the Ganges and Bay of Bengal. Pristine at its origins, the river becomes dangerously polluted downstream from erosion due to forest cutting, from industrial pollution, and from human wastes. By Hindu accounts the river has (or is) a mother goddess. Krishna is said to have delighted in the river. Some conservationists there claimed that accentuating local beliefs that the pollutants were making the mother goddess sick and fearing her anger was a more effective strategy than teaching them any science. Keep their myths! Well, okay, perhaps provisionally, perhaps pragmatically such a tactic makes sense. But neither Sideris nor I believe that mythology. Eventually that account will have to be 'deconstructed' into a more scientific explanation, even if it can be simultaneously 'reconstructed' into some more generic account of rivers and forests as sacred gifts on a wonderland planet. (201)

Rolston gives parallel analyses of his other three examples (201-2). In his view, all such other-than-strictly scientific conceptions of the more-than-human world eventually need to give way to scientific accounts; they "have only antiquarian interest" for science gives "the definitive interpretation" (201). "Any contemporary culture," Rolston writes, "in its encompassing vision must 'incorporate' science—slip in vast amounts of it, in fact. No story is worth listening to that cannot do this. I do believe that evolutionary natural history is, in a quite positive sense, the one true story for everybody on the planet" (203). I will return to Rolston's impatience with the existence of these other perspectives in Chapter 1 and cite his general view often in the following pages. For now, I am interested in the surprising amount of time he spends, given Sideris's foci, defending the promulgation of a scientifically-grounded worldview over and against various other cultural and religious perspectives. We will see this focus repeated in the next chapter when I discuss Callicott's

38. Yamuna denotes a Hindu goddess of love and life, immanently manifested as the great river of Northern India that flows from the Yamunotri Glacier in the Himalayas through Delhi before joining the Ganges at Allahabad. One of the holiest river goddesses in India, she is worshipped by many Hindus and is the central object of devotion for numerous practices, hymns, theological texts, artworks, and temples (see Haberman 2006, 95-140).

reply to Sideris's work. This interest in defending worldview change is striking because, again, Sideris's principal concern with the New Cosmologists is how they may undercut the value of primary experiences with nature. Especially in the initial essay (the target of these replies), Sideris's discussion of the erasure of cultural and religious difference is relatively marginal and undeveloped (see, e.g., 2015b, 142, 145-48). This focus combined with the heated responses to Sideris's work may index eco-conversionists' sensitivity to criticisms of and therefore also their significant investment in the promulgation environmental worldviews.

§5 Adjacent Labors and this Work

5.1 Fellow Critics of Worldview Transformation

As Sideris's work indicates, I am not the first to notice and critically engage some environmentalists' engrossment with worldview change. Historically, environmental pragmatists and eco-socialists have been prominent among the critics of the worldview-change approach to environmental crises.[39] Though hardly mutually exclusive, these camps tend to differ in various ways while both giving analytical and practical priority to what people *do* rather than what they say or think about themselves and the world. This emphasis on practice and action leads pragmatists to eschew many environmentalists' fixation on axiology and worldview change, which they see as polarizing and imprudent, in order to focus on pluralistic decision-making in concrete cases (see, e.g., Minteer 1998; Minteer and Manning 1999; Norton 1991, 1992, 2005). Eco-socialists, by contrast, contest that worldviews are somehow the root cause of ecological crises, giving priority rather to the political-economic system that causes them, namely, industrial capitalism. Ecological crises, for these critics, reveal some of the contradictions of capitalism, such as how an imperative of

39. There are, of course, other important critics of settler environmentalism as such and eco-conversionism in particular, most notably Global South environmental justice movements. However, such critics as often as not call into question the preeminence and conceptualization of the conversionists' ecological problematics as such; the pragmatists and eco-socialists I am thinking of share much of this problematic with eco-conversionists while differing on what to do about it.

unfettered capital accumulation encounters devastating and ultimately self-consuming limitations on a damageable planet with finite resources. If we wish to mitigate further ecological crises and runaway climate change, the argument goes, transformations are needed in the register of material relations (Burkett 2006, 320; Dryzek 2005, 212; Fraser 2022; Peterson 2006).

I agree with the pragmatists that axiology talk and especially worldview promulgation can undermine, and as we will see *are* undermining, practical action on numerous ecological problematics. I also agree with eco-socialists that many environmentalists, especially eco-conversionists, give too much credit to different peoples' ways of talking and thinking and, historically, too little to the historical-material systems that unavoidably ruin local, regional, and global ecosystems, to say nothing of fundamentally conditioning groups' conceptual capacities.

I also have questions for these groups, such as how the former's preoccupation with consensus building obfuscates other important antagonisms, a matter I turn to in Chapter 6, and how the rhetoric of the latter fuels opposition to the very political-economic changes called for, especially in the absence of institutions that make those calls hearable, a matter I touch on again in Chapter 2 and the Postscript. But at present, I am interested in the possibility that these groups' complaints and analyses may not be persuasive to eco-conversionists, a possibility given merit by the latter's continued fixation with worldview change despite such challenges. That persistence is evidenced by recent examples, including those who have been repeatedly criticized by pragmatists in particular, such as Callicott (2013) and Rolston (2012; see also Samuelsson 2022).

The difference between my approach to eco-conversionism and those of pragmatists and eco-socialists hinges on the place I give to eco-conversionists' anxiety over the existence of ecological others. I suspect that because these other critics do not take this anxiety seriously, their arguments fall not on unsympathetic ears, but rather ears ringing with an alarming awareness of others' apparent and marked *lack* of care for the nonhuman, the roar of alterity. Failing to take this

anxiety seriously, these critics mistake the very nature of eco-conversionism, fail to address its animating concerns and conceptions. By contrast, the present work focuses precisely on those last matters, taking especially seriously the anxieties and conceptions of others that organize eco-conversionism. The hope here is to offer a salve to at least some conversionist anxieties, where previously they were merely told their ideas were wrong or impractical. To speak with G. E. M. Anscombe, remarking on the effect of Wittgenstein's thought on her during her own fixation with phenomenalism, the aim here is to try to *extract the nerve* that keeps conversionism "alive and [raging] achingly" (1981, viii). I will develop the contrast between the present work and these practice-oriented methods further in Chapter 1, focusing on the case of environmental pragmatism.

5.2 Ethics in the Muck and Mire

In addition to sharing many of the concerns of eco-socialists and environmental pragmatists, this project joins the swelling ranks of scholars interested in scrutinizing environmentalism itself and thinking slowly about ethics, politics, and multispecies attunements and attachments in the context of widespread ecological problematics, social injustices, and political discontent. Such patience is expressed in this literature by a refusal to succumb to tempting simplifications of environmental and social problematics, such as alarmist rhetoric, moralism or nihilism, and undue optimism or pessimism. Donna Haraway calls this kind of thought "staying with the trouble" (2016c, 1), Anna Tsing and her collaborators, "arts of noticing" (Tsing 2015, 255) or "arts of living on a damaged planet," that is, practices of attending to the material and semiotic gatherings of the dead and living in particular places that might help us "see livability anew" (Gan et al. 2017, G5-6; see also Tsing et al. 2020). We can conceive of this kind of thinking as a variation of non-ideal moral and political thought, a variety simultaneously somber and enthusiastic, patient and mournful, imaginative and self-scrutinizing. Insofar as such thought does not allow itself to get bogged down in tempting, obvious, and simplistic moralism but rather pursues that which such moralism overlooks, it might

also be called, to echo a notion from Cora Diamond (1997, 222-23), *non-moralistic ethics*.[40] Or speaking with Alexis Shotwell, we might call this practice of thought *ethics without purity*, or moral and political thought that starts from assuming that many of us are unavoidably implicated and complicit in situations that "we (at least in some way) repudiate" (2016, 5). "Under conditions of oppression and exploitation," Shotwell asks, "how might we enact practices of freedom that can shape worlds we currently cannot imagine?" (18). The present project should be seen as such an exercise of freedom, one contribution to the impure project of better facing, and shaping better futures on, an ecologically damaged and infinitely diverse planet.[41]

I include some environmental pragmatists within this tide of non-ideal ecological thought,[42] but also see it in quarters of Indigenous and Black studies scholarship, literature that is anything but naively optimistic about the forms of human and nonhuman justice that can be accomplished in the short term.[43] For instance, philosopher Kyle Powys Whyte argues for the cultivation of genuine relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous societies despite the fact that such labor will not preclude runaway climate change and because such work will be necessary to mitigate further social injustices on a changed planet (2019, 5); indelibly tied to the current absence of such relational repair, he also argues for the unavailability of Indigenous ecological knowledge to settlers (White, Caldwell, and Schaefer 2018, 174-5). In another vein, Axelle Karera attacks the idiom of eco-social relationally that regulates so much ecological thought for how it conceals racial antagonisms and anti-blackness and thereby uncritically repeats the conditions for the latter (2019, 47-51). Against the

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40. I will return to this notion in the final section of Chapter 6.
41. In climate change ethics, the sort of attitude that interests me is expressed by Stephen Gardiner's attention to the tragic complexity climate change and his interest in articulating not only an ideal theory of climate ethics but also ethics for the non-ideal present and immediate future, including a discussion of the sort of virtues required to mitigate the tempting evasions and moral corruption that accompany climate change. See especially Chapters 1 and 9 of *A Perfect Moral Storm* (Gardiner 2011).
42. Consider, for instance, Willis Jenkins's interest in sustaining the possibility of ethics and future generations' grounds for grace in the face of ongoing and overwhelming eco-social problems (2013, 310-7).
43. Near one end of this spectrum of doubt is Black nihilism. See, e.g., Warren (2015).

obfuscations effected by calls for solutions to our ecological crises, which so often depend on this idea of relationality, Karera defers the very task of thinking of solutions. She explains that she is "reluctant to leave prematurely the ongoing critical project of unravelling the scenes of violence that characterize the underbelly of normative projects" (49). Keeping with that stance, she calls for "'speculative experimentations' whereby one can experiment with ethically counterintuitive terms like the 'non-relational' in the attempt to renew the central tenets of our critical endeavors" (50).[44] Works such as these advocate Indigenous and Black resistance to white settler responses to ecological crises and social injustices, premised on both the ongoingness and relative unavoidability of future ecological crises and the relentless permutations of racism and settler colonialism, a recalcitrance that follows from the structural role of blackness and indigeneity in the operation of the state and flows of capital, to say nothing of dominant ideologies (ibid.). Such critics compel us to reckon with the unavoidability of both ecological crises and human multiplicity, the latter instantiated as racial and colonialist antagonisms; indeed, they warn against not only schemes that aspire to make our various problematics easier than they are, but also the desires that spur such plans (see Karera 2019, 44). A repeated target of their criticisms is how the rhetoric of urgency and catastrophe in climate change and Anthropocene discourses often relies on and strives to sustain the attachments and futures of white settlers and their forms of living while obfuscating contemporary instantiations of and resistance to racism and colonialism, foreclosing adequate political analysis (33-34, 39, 44; see also Whyte 2017, 100). I will engage such arguments below, but cite them now for expressing, among other things, a non-ideal ethico-political attitude resonant with my own.

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44. For arguments resembling Karera's, see Diana Leong's "The Mattering of Black Lives" (2016). It is not lost on me that Karera's and Whyte's criticisms may implicate some of the other authors I commend here. For instance, in a paper presented to a session of the Religion and Ecology Unit at the 2022 American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, Emily Theus persuasively extended Karera's and Leong's criticisms to Haraway and Tsing (Theus 2022). Nevertheless, my interest is in the non-moralistic attitude that cuts across these cases.

The sort of non-moralistic, non-ideal thinking this project practices is also at work in the ethnography of religion scholars like Robin Veldman (2019), who take religious U.S. conservative anti-environmentalism seriously enough to try to understand it on its own terms without defaulting to easy and convenient rhetorics of demonization. In a different register but same key, I find a fellow traveler in political theorist Amanda Machin's work on the ironies of pursuing consensus on climate change, namely, that it inspires undemocratic forms of dissent, and corresponding advocacy for radical democratic approaches to ecological crises (see Machin 2013).

This dissertation also shares some of Nicole Seymour's sensibility in *Bad Environmentalism* (2018), which explores how queer, Black, and Indigenous practices productively unsettle the hegemonic affective and moral imperatives of traditional environmentalism. In Seymour's examples, individuals respond to ecological crises and environmentalism with "absurdity and irony, as well as related affects and sensibilities such as irreverence, ambivalence, camp, frivolity, indecorum, awkwardness, sardonicism, perversity, playfulness, and glee" (4). In addition to challenging the heteronormativity and whiteness of environmentalism, such practices, Seymour argues, manifestly criticize the affective norms of mainstream environmentalism, the "gloom and doom,… guilt, shame, didacticism, prescriptiveness, sentimentality, reverence, seriousness, sincerity, earnestness, sanctimony, self-righteousness, and wonder" and the desire to "flip the switch" in our relations to nonhuman beings (5). Such disruptions, Seymour suggests, are valuable for responding well to the eco-social present. "They remind us," she writes, "of the unlimited imaginative possibilities of an era facing some of the most troubling limits we have ever known" (38).

Another work that resonates with the present project is Sarah Jaquette Ray's *The Ecological Other: Environmental Exclusion in American Culture* (2013), which I mentioned above. Ray takes up the analytics of critical race and feminist theory to examine "how the environmental movement deploys cultural disgust against various communities it sees as threats to nature" (1), that is, how disgust

operates in the history of U.S. environmental discourse to differentiate "good ecological subjects and impure, dirty, unnatural 'ecological others'" (2). By critiquing such "othering," Ray reveals how environmentalism "enforces social hierarchies even as it seeks to dismantle other forms of hegemony;" she thereby sharpens environmentalism's critical edge and helps make it more liberative (1). Against the potential charge that she undermines environmentalism through criticism, Ray insists, in a spirit reminiscent of Whyte's, that examining the connections between environmental and social injustice is necessary to meaningfully achieving environmental goals. One connection that she foregrounds is how "fear of eco-apocalypse can easily lead to discourses that make the exclusion and exploitation of those deemed other the cost of protecting the environment" (184). The present project is likewise interested in thinking critically about the connections between environmentalism's imagined others, values, and political goals, and with Ray argues that such critical thought is essential to responding well to the ecologically and politically tenuous present and future.

The sensibility of the present work should be read alongside the sort of non-moralistic, often mucky and insolent ethical and political thought that partially characterizes the works of the authors above. As a work of ethics, it is premised on the notion that one task of normative thinking is to help us face intractable problematics better, simultaneously more capaciously and more realistically,[45] than we might otherwise be inclined. This form of thought corresponds to the ethico-political quandaries of over-simplification, reduction, imaginative narrowness, and fantasy in circumstances of moral judgment and action. My interest, which resonates with this work's non-moralistic cousins, is not in laying out what environmentalists should do in specific cases, but rather in expanding the range of plausible courses of action that might be available to us in an open-ended range of cases. This means I am not particularly interested in ruling the modality of conversion out of court, so much as positioning it, in the eco-conversionist imagination, as one ordinary modality of relation

45. In the sense of, say, literary realism. More on this below.

alongside others. The modality of conversion may be rendered irredeemably unattractive over the course of the project, but that is not my explicit aim.

5.3 Religion, Ethics, Ecology, and the Present Work

This work offers its contributions to non-ideal ethical and political environmental thought from a tangled nexus of multiple subfields, including the academic study of religion and ethics and the area of religion and ecology. As I mentioned, these disciplinary origins shape my practice in many ways, such as disinclining me to uncritically delimit such concepts as religion and culture.[46] They also lead me to attend to how other writers in environmental studies conceptualize "religion" and similar notions. As we have glimpsed, the ecological other that orders and animates eco-conversionism is often conceived by conversionists as, among other things, a religious other, where "religion" is associated with assent to certain suspect propositions, the use of questionable concepts, and pernicious values. While the sort of eco-conversionism I study here is doubtlessly found among those whom we might intelligibly call "religious,"[47] it is noteworthy that most of the eco-conversionists I study in detail would almost certainly think of themselves as secular moderns. It may then be more precise to say that the ecological other of eco-conversionism as I study it is sometimes thought of as *the* religious other, the constitutive, antiquated, and backwards other of modern secularism (cf. Harding 1991; 2000, 270-72). Since one of my aims is to invite eco-conversionists to expand their imaginations by denaturalizing their image of the ecological other and proposing a competitor, and insofar as that other is often thought of as religious, one consequence of my arguments will be to complicate how eco-conversionism conceives and values religion.[48]

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46. Again, my engagement with these terms will be parasitic and therapeutic vis-à-vis my interlocutors' uses.
47. Think of Pope Francis's talk in *Laudato Si'* (2015) of paradigm change, conversion, and other far reaching, conceptual-ethico-affective transformations (e.g., 106, 123, 216-17, 224-26).
48. This consequence resonates, in my view, with Tyler Roberts's interest in approaching religion as a site of disciplined encounter and responsiveness, within which the particularity of the religious other is attended to in detail and with an eye to how they make claims on the self (2013,16-17), as well as Richard Miller's account of the study of religion as, among other things, a critical and reflexive experiment in imaginative edification (2021, 245-48).

Within the study of religion, ethics, and ecology and also the broader study of non-ideal environmental thought, this project is differentiated by its methodology and philosophical sensibility. To throw these characteristics into relief, the next section outlines my methodological commitments. The differences in question have to do with how Wittgenstein and his most reliable readers are taken up in these fields. Wittgenstein's ideas have been engaged in the study of religion and ethics to great effect, from the field's early days to the present (see, e.g., Little and Twiss 1978, 9-10; Miller 2016, 19-28).[49] This work builds on those engagements by drawing inspiration from Wittgenstein's distinctive deflationary methodology and those it has spawned. By contrast, in religion and ecology and the parts of the environmental humanities with which I am familiar, Wittgenstein's influence is scarce, indirect, and hardly ever focuses on his methods.[50] This project will show how productive such an encounter can be.

§6 Excursus on Methodology

6.1 *Snapshot of the Philosophical Backdrop*

My methodology takes inspiration from the blurry-bordered tradition of therapeutic ordinary language philosophy as initiated most importantly by Wittgenstein, especially in his late period (2009a, 2009b, 1969),[51] and developed by scholars such as Cavell (1976c, 1979) and Diamond (1988,

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49. Of course, Wittgenstein and his readers have had an enormous influence on philosophy of religion and philosophical theology, though, again, not always with respect to their methods. See, e.g., Alston (1991), Hector (2011), Phillips (2004), Roberts (2013, 205-29), and Tran (2021). For an excellent selection of divergent approaches to Wittgenstein and religion, see Ruhr and Phillips (2005).
50. Merchant's *The Death of Nature*, for instance, might be seen as indirectly influenced by Wittgenstein's methods (see my discussion of that book above). Bron Taylor, in turn, indirectly inherits Wittgenstein's term *family resemblance* (Taylor 2010, 1-2), but does not engage his deflationary methods. Anthropologist Eduardo Kohn, in another case, draws from both Diamond and Cavell in *How Forests Think*, but does not seem, nor purport, to take up their methods (2013, 17-18, 104, 117). Likewise, many Anglophone environmental philosophers cite Wittgenstein, but do not treat of his methodological commitments and techniques. See, e.g. Callicott (2013, 107-8).
51. Wittgenstein's work may be divided into early, middle, and late periods. There is, however, disagreement on the principles for making these divisions. One way of characterizing this disagreement is to say that while scholars agrees that he transitioned from a more metaphysical approach to philosophy in his early period, exemplified by the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (first published in English in 1922) to a non- or anti-metaphysical approach exemplified by the *Philosophical Investigations* (first published in 1953), the sense in which his early work was metaphysical and his later work non-metaphysical is hotly disputed. For many therapeutic readers, especially those whom hold the so-called resolute or

1991h, 2008, 2018, 2020, 2021).[52] The methodologies of these writers are difficult to appreciate in the abstract. In Chapter 3, I will offer a close reading of parts of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (2009a) and in the other chapters closely consider some of Cavell's and especially Diamond's works. Still, a brief introduction to this cluster of thought may help orient the reader to the present text while providing me with a constellation of references and tools as I perform my own therapeutic experiment.

Consider first some of what Wittgenstein says about traditional philosophy and his own aims and methods in his most important later work, the *Investigations*:

> All *explanation* must disappear, and description alone must take its place. And this description gets its light—that is to say, its purpose—from the philosophical problems. These are, of course, not empirical problems; but they are solved through an insight into the workings of our language, and that in such a way that these workings are recognized – *despite* an urge to misunderstand them. The problems are solved, not by coming up with new discoveries, but by assembling what we have long been familiar with. Philosophy is a struggle against the bewitchment of our understanding by the resources of our language. (§109)

> When philosophers use a word – 'knowledge', 'being', 'object', 'I', 'proposition/sentence', 'name'—and try to grasp the *essence* of the thing, one must always ask oneself: is the word ever actually used in this way in the language in which it is at home?—
>
> What *we* do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use. (§116)

> The work of the philosopher consists in marshalling recollections for a particular purpose. (§127)

> If someone were to advance *theses* in philosophy, it would never be possible to debate them, because everyone would agree to them. (§128)

> The real discovery is the one that enables me to break off philosophizing when I want to.— The one that gives philosophy peace, so that it is no longer tormented by questions which bring *itself* in question. (§133)

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austere reading of his early work, his various periods are unified around the goal of liberating us from metaphysical confusions and differentiated by the effectiveness of the techniques employed (Read and Hutchinson 2014, 151). On the continuity and discontinuity of Wittgenstein's corpus, see Diamond's *The Realistic Spirit* (1991h), especially Introduction II and Chapter 6. For an overview of the dispute on the continuities and discontinuities in Wittgenstein's work, see Bronzo (2012, especially 54-55, 59-61).

52. Read as deflationists, J. L. Austin (1975) and Gilbert Ryle (2009) likewise initiate this "school." John McDowell's work on Wittgenstein and ethics, which is resolutely therapeutic while less dependent to the peculiar methods of ordinary language philosophy, is also a major influence on my approach (e.g., 1994, 1998a-b).

> There is not a single philosophical method, though there are indeed methods, different therapies, as it were. (§133d)

There are two philosophers in these remarks. One is the metaphysician who seeks to "grasp the *essence*" of "knowledge" or "proposition" or whatever, who tries to *explain* the phenomenon in question. The other is the philosopher who merely describes, who assembles "recollections," "what we have long been familiar with," for a particular purpose, namely, to bring peace to the first. Both can live in one mind.[53] The first does not know her way about (see §123).[54] The second reminds the first of possible options forward. The first advances theses about such things as "being," "object," or "meaning," while the second marshals obvious facts, familiar descriptions of our use of these words every day, occasions in which no such theses are called for. This marshalling and describing is a returning of words from their seemingly impressive metaphysical use to their ordinary, familiar use. Wittgenstein's expectation, and personal experience, is that the recollections of the second philosopher might be therapeutic for the first. The second philosopher aims to liberate the first from the torments of philosophy, "to show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle" (§309). There is no one way to effect this liberation, but rather various techniques or "therapies" that may do the job.

As these excerpts indicate, the later Wittgenstein's aim is not to develop philosophical explanations nor sophisticated theories of phenomena, say, of language (cf. §130). It is rather to bring peace to confused minds that find themselves in the potential cul-de-sacs of such explanations and theories.[55] We have here, then, a very specific aim corresponding to an equally special problematic. The recurring concern for Wittgenstein and therapeutic writers who follow him is how individuals can find themselves preoccupied by abstract and intractable problems, such as how a

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53. Both lived in Wittgenstein.
54. As Diamond puts it, "The philosopher is regarded by Wittgenstein as someone who does not know his way about with his old norms, who can talk nonsense through a kind of disorientation" (2018, 213-14).
55. He thus draws an analogy between his methods and those of the psychotherapist. That is, he draws parallels to psychotherapy as a *method* not a doctrine of mind (see Wittgenstein 1966, 41-52; Read and Hutchinson 2014, 151).

"word" connects to a "meaning," one of Wittgenstein's examples (2009a, §5), or how we tell real perceptions from mere appearances, one of Diamond's (1991g, 48-49). Such foci, these writers find, *qua* gripping problematics, often relax upon particular pictures or paradigms of some aspect of reality, which lend those preoccupations their apparent sense and urgency. For instance, a given philosopher of language might depart from the everyday fact that names are part of language—that we say things like, "mine is 'Colin,'" or, "Actually, Jo, we call *that* 'dog,'" etc.—and move to taking names and particular ways of using them as paradigmatic for what all of language is like and how it works (think of, say, nominalism; cf. Wittgenstein 2009a, §§129-32, 383). Such a reductive move simultaneously invites all sorts of intractable philosophical problems—such as, What exactly is the object to which a name refers, how do the two get connected, and how do we learn all the names that make up language?—while also hiding from view everything else we do with language, all its other parts besides names and naming and, indeed, all the further ways we might use names besides those pictured in the paradigm (see §§11-12, 23, 129, 383). Writing of the philosophical fixations at play in his earlier work, Wittgenstein famously characterizes this obsessive and obfuscating problematic like this: "A *picture* held us captive. And we couldn't get outside it, for it lay in our language, and language seemed only to repeat it to us inexorably" (§115). As this characterization suggests, the problems in question are crucially *imaginative*, problems of a limited and forgetful *capacity to picture*, to envision different possibilities because one option holds our attention. The philosophical fixations that interest Wittgenstein and his best readers derive from this sort of imaginative captivity, from moments in which we find ourselves in the grips of particular pictures of language or other parts of life, pictures that give our engrossment, say, with theorizing how names and meanings connect, an apparent sense (see Wittgenstein 2009a, §216).

Corresponding to this problematic, Wittgenstein and his followers seek to understand which pictures grip different individuals' imaginations, how they come to achieve such paradigmatic status,

and then ultimately to deflate the status of those pictures by showing them to be mere possibilities of what a part of life can be like—to transform *is's* (projections of necessity, of what something *must* be like) into *can's* (models of possibility, of what something can be like). This last, deflationary phase often includes taking the paradigms in question extremely seriously until it becomes clear that they cannot account for all they are supposed to—such as imagining that an entire language consisted only of names used to refer to objects (see, e.g., 2009a, §§1-10; Cavell 1976b 260; Diamond 1991a, 292)—as well as through the multiplication of counter-examples to the paradigm in question, such as when Wittgenstein deflates a paradigm of language as essentially consisting of descriptive propositions by inviting us to remember all that we do with language besides describing and, moreover, all the different practices we count as *describing* (2009a, §24). This second deflationary phase corresponds to Wittgenstein's suggestion that "a main cause of philosophical disease" is "a one-sided diet: one nourishes one's thinking with only one kind of example" (§593).

Both deflationary phases, taking a paradigm seriously and multiplying counter-cases, indicate the importance of examples in this therapeutic practice with its constrained-imaginative problematic. Accordingly, a central technique Wittgenstein employs is the strategic description of cases, or the development of what he calls *surveyable representations*.[56] He writes,

> A main source of our failure to understand is that we don't have *an overview* of the use of our words.—Our grammar is deficient in surveyability. A surveyable representation produces precisely that kind of understanding which consists in 'seeing connections'. Hence the importance of finding and inventing *intermediate links*.
>
> The concept of a perspicuous representation is of fundamental significance for us. It earmarks the form of account we give, the way we look at things. (2009a, §122)

A surveyable representation illustrates, shows, through the deployment of found and invented "links," such as cases,[57] those aspects of some part of our lives that are obscured and forgotten when

56. What G. E. M. Anscombe translated as a "perspicuous representation" (Wittgenstein 1958, §122).
57. In their revised fourth edition of the *Investigations*, upon which I rely throughout, Hacker and Schulte translate as "intermediate links" what Anscombe translated as "intermediate cases," namely the term namely, "Zwischengliedern" (cf. Wittgenstein 2009a, §122 and Wittgenstein 1958, §122). The former may be truer to the German and leaves open

we are in the grips of particular pictures. Again, such illustrations can simultaneously deflate those paradigms by, say, showing them to be thin caricatures, and also recollect alternatives to them. Such representations are designed to function as objects of comparison, "yardsticks" of a peculiar sort, rather than "preconceptions to which reality *must* correspond" (§131). Through comparison with the examples that can grip us, such representations are designed to unsettle and parochialize, to render ordinary and contingent rather than extraordinary and necessary, the paradigms in question. Notably, there are no *a priori* parameters around the resources one might use in developing such descriptions; this relates to the point above that, "there is not a single philosophical method," but multiple "different therapies" (§133d). Wittgenstein's surveyable representations are often clear and simple, *ex nihilo* illustrations of how a word is used or what some part of life is like, like learning to repeat a number series. Diamond, by contrast, engages artwork, journalism, literature, and poetry to summon therapeutic illustrations. Cavell draws on Shakespeare and film as troves for his sketches.

I have touched on a crucial distinction for therapeutic Wittgensteinians and this project, namely, between (a) the ordinary, everyday, and non-metaphysical and (b) the metaphysical or theoretical. Terms connected to "the ordinary" refer what our lives are like when we are not trying to explain or theorize the essence of some part of them, such as what our lives with language involve when we are not trying to provide a theory of language. Metaphysical or theoretical approaches to our lives refer to attempts by philosophers and other theorists to provide such explanations. Wittgenstein and many of his readers are particularly interested in metaphysical versus ordinary approaches to language. Metaphysical theories, they find, indelibly involve removing words that we otherwise know how to use from our familiar practices of using them.[58] The result of such

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that techniques besides using cases might be included in the category of links. However, specific invented and found cases are central to that category for Wittgenstein and appreciating that fact may make appreciating his methods more manageable, which is a virtue of Anscombe's translation.

58. A common misconception is that the idea of familiar or ordinary uses of language goes together with the idea that those ordinary uses never face problems, say, in understanding, or that appealing to them necessarily involves a kind social conservatism. Jacques Derrida provides one of the most influential articulations of the first complaint in his critical

extraction, this move to essentialize or play metaphysics, by Wittgenstein's lights, is for philosophers to speak or write a special kind of literal nonsense, to literally *say nothing* while appearing to say something profound; this kind of speaking and writing is special precisely because it does not appear to the philosopher to be nonsense (§§464, 524). Such talk and writing depends on our ordinary uses of words—for it is *made up of* our ordinary words—and yet seems to forget those usages as it asks impressive questions about them (e.g., What is a *name* really? What is it *to know* really?) and asserts bold theories in response (A *name* is ultimately a sign correlated to an object, namely, its meaning; to really *know* is to think that something is the case and be right) (see Cavell 1976b, 250). The therapeutic philosopher's task is to show that such questions and answers are language idling (i.e., not *doing* anything, not doing what it normally *can* do) and to remind us of what we know, of what our words mean, of what *we* can mean by them, such as what we ordinarily mean by "know" or "name"—how we use these signs without question or (grand) problems in nearly every context except when trying to grasp their essences (see Wittgenstein 2009a, §§132, 216, 271, 291, 507).[59]

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reading of Austin (1982b); the charge of conservatism has been levelled by many notable critics, including Herbert Marcuse (1964, 173). Neither concern holds water, however, vis-à-vis the most rigorous readings of Wittgenstein nor against those who develop his philosophical practice. In the approach to ordinary language developed by these thinkers, understanding and misunderstanding are of an everyday sort, not some fantastical encounter, or missed encounter, with the absolute presence of some strange entity called "meaning." (Mis)understanding looks like everything it can look like—when, say, no questions arise after an utterance or act, or they do. The charge of conservatism, in turn, imagines that the appeal to the ordinary is an attempt to police what can and cannot be done, as if semiotic doings were only intelligible in their traditional contexts and forms. That view would rule out attempts to criticize and innovate with respect to our usual language practices and other social doings; it also implies an impressively substantive theory of meaning entirely at odds with Wittgenstein's thought. He and his reliable readers do not draw limits on what we can and cannot say or do but rather seek to liberate us when we seem to think things must go one way or another. Another way to put this point, following Alice Crary, is to say that Wittgenstein does not try to limit what parts of life we can criticize, but tries to show how our capacities to intelligibly criticize are delimited by the boundaries of sense, which can remind us, among other things, that there is such a thing as empty abuse masquerading as genuine criticism (Crary 2000b, 139-40). For more on the ordinary reply to such criticisms, see Cavell (1995) and Moi (2017, 64-87).

59. The parallels and conflicts with Platonic *anamnesis* here merit remark but fall beyond the scope of my immediate concerns. Preliminarily, see Plato's *Meno* (2002) and Socrates's suggestion therein that the acquisition of true knowledge involves recollecting what one once knew and forgot (86b). Wittgenstein likewise is interested in how we forget what we know when we do philosophy (e.g., what our words mean, how to tell the real from unreal, etc.). And by reminding us of what we know, he pushes us to a more open-eyed relationship to ourselves. Various commentors have also noted parallels with especially Pyrrhonistic efforts to achieve *ataraxia*, a kind of tranquil state of suspended judgment, through the embarrassment of philosophical conceits. For an extensive discussion of these resonances, especially in Wittgenstein's *On Certainty*, see Eichorn (2012). For an extensive discussion of how Wittgenstein's later thought involves a robust appreciation for without condoning skepticism, see Cavell (1979).

Such techniques aim to release us from the compulsion to try to grasp the essence of some feature of our lives (e.g., our knowledge, language, perceptions, etc.) as if from a vantage outside of them.

As this brief overview suggests, Wittgenstein and his reliable readers offer not a theory, but a certain sensibility for thinking through and some techniques for engaging certain problems. Diamond, whose construal of Wittgenstein's disposition and methods decisively shapes how I read him, suggests that what Wittgenstein offers us is not so much a new philosophical school nor a set of doctrines but rather a spirit with which to approach certain problems, what she calls the realistic spirit.[60] This realistic spirit strives to be faithful to our lives are like—in all their complex, rich, and sometimes disappointing ordinariness—in order to speak to our needs. Here is one of Wittgenstein's remarks at the heart of Diamond elucidation:

> If I am inclined to suppose that a mouse has come into being by spontaneous generation out of grey rags and dust, I shall do well to examine those rags very closely to see how a mouse may have hidden in them, how it may have got there and so on. But if I am convinced that a mouse cannot come into being from these things, then this investigation will perhaps be superfluous.
>
> But first we must learn to understand what it is that opposes such an examination of details in philosophy. (2009a, §52)

Diamond writes of this remark, "The realistic spirit does not then know so well that you cannot get a mouse from rags that it will not *look at* the rags" (1991g, 47). Wittgenstein looks at the rags—at the details of the situation we ask questions about—and shows that philosophers miss these details because for some reason they think such elements cannot help with what they want to know, "because something has led them to think that no mouse *can* come out of *that*" (ibid.). Asking, for instance, how we tell "real things from chimeras," a philosophical "mouse," the metaphysician might introduce all sorts of seemingly essential ideas, such as the idea of the absolutely real and what it is

60. There is a delicious impertinence in Diamond's selection of this term, for few words invite metaphysical speculation more than "spirit" and, in addition, the association of this term, and its tempting connection to subjective internality, with Wittgenstein flies in the face of the logical behavioristic misreading of him as denying the existence of internal life. Diamond of course uses the word in the perfectly ordinary sense that many of us recognize when we are not geared to play metaphysics. One of the upshots of ordinary language philosophy is precisely to release writers and speakers to use even those words that traditionally strike philosophers as troublesome.

like to know *that*, while overlooking the actual myriad ways in which we, in the course of ordinary life and, say, research, tell the real from the unreal—Wittgenstein's rags.[61] But if we are genuinely concerned with the question of how we differentiate the real and unreal, we will fail to address that need by flying to abstract reflection and turning from the quotidian, and sometimes disappointing—precisely in their frailty and raggedness—ways we have in hand to mark this difference.

Fidelity to what our lives are like when we pull our noses from philosophy books, say, what our practices of noting and resolving problems of knowledge or perception are like—in all their ordinary and variously banal or rich and irreducibly complex particularity—*that* is what being "realistic" amounts to in Wittgenstein's philosophy. He wants us to look at the rags when we have questions about the emergence of mice. Wittgenstein thinks that by showing our philosophical ideas to be useless for what they purport to do and looking "from close to" at our lives with language we will recognize philosophical fantasy for what it is and be in a better position to answer whatever questions first led us to philosophy (2009a, §51). Realism in Wittgenstein's sense, then, is "open-eyedly giving up the quest for [philosophical] elucidation," appreciating that quest "as dependent on fantasy," and also recognizing the many things we might mean by our words and the many routes we have in-hand for addressing the questions that drive us to philosophy (Diamond 1991g, 69).

6.2 Ethics in the Realistic Spirit

This project strives to inhabit the realistic spirit as described by Diamond and variously inhabited by both Wittgenstein and Diamond in their writings. It does so by recasting Wittgenstein's problematics and therapeutics in explicitly ethical terms, following the leads of Cavell and especially Diamond.[62] I am particularly interested in how the problems that inspire their various therapeutic

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61. This is Diamond's example, which she derives from her reading of Berkeley's *Three Dialogues* (1999).
62. Wittgenstein's efforts to be realistic are persuasively described as distinctive ethical projects in their own right. Here ethics would be concerned with fidelity to honest if sometimes disappointing or frustrating quotidian reality. The potential problems of distortion and fantasy could be cast as corresponding evils.

techniques arise in more traditionally-conceived ethical situations, namely, our dealings with other people, nonhuman entities, and social and natural systems.[63] The position occupied by the metaphysically-inclined philosopher I shall fill with the conversion-inclined environmentalists. The peculiar theoretical preoccupations of the metaphysician, in turn, corresponds to the project among eco-conversionists to try to change other people. The metaphysician's forgetfulness of what her words can mean, of what she can do with, say, "know" and "meaning" without question when not doing philosophy, is refigured as the eco-conversionists' forgetfulness of how their others might be opaque and significant as well as all the ways in which others might be engaged.

In both cases the forgetfulness in question depends on another move that enables it. For the metaphysical philosopher, say, of language, her projects often depart from granting absolute or paradigmatic status to an ordinary part of life with language. In a similar way, the eco-conversionist's efforts tacitly begin by granting paradigmatic status to ordinary parts of life with others, namely, that they can be transparent to us in their behavior or speech while also being quite different from us in numerous respects—such as speaking a different language or the same language but within a different social location, or living with a different worldview—and it may also be the case that we find their speech and behavior inconsequential on various matters of moral and political concern. The "can's" in this description are not accidental but rather indexed to the non-metaphysical status of those assertions. These descriptions are of the order that Wittgenstein mentions when he says that "description alone" should take the place of explanation (2009a, §109) or that the only "theses" to advance in philosophy are beyond debate because agreed upon by all (§128). Eco-conversionists, however, do not treat these assertions as mere quotidian possibilities, but in their concentration on eco-conversion, and other practices of imagining their others, morph these mere possibilities into a

63. Another way to "ethically recast" this methodology is to treat of metaphysical fantasy in moral philosophy (see, e.g., Diamond 1988, 1991h, 2018, 2020, 2021).

paradigm, a “model for all cases” (Diamond 2010, 72ft51; cf. Wittgenstein 2009a, §131). This move helps make sense of conversionists’ pre-occupation with worldview transformation, for the picture of the other as transparent and trivial on ethico-political matters is an image of someone who can only benefit from conversion, whose conversion will only benefit the world. This picture of the other suggests as obvious the path of worldview transformation, and our ordinary lives with others inexorably repeat this picture to (some of) us.

By the same token, this picture occludes other ordinary possibilities for what life with others can be like and how we might encounter them besides trying to transform them. Most of this dissertation is dedicated to multiplying such ordinary but easily overlooked possibilities, including that others can be opaque to us, even if familiar in numerous ways, and may be significant on ethico-political matters that concern eco-conversionists, in, say, their perspectives or practices. Reflecting on these possibilities about others will give way then to further descriptions of how we might interact with others, what might seem reasonable to do in relation to them in light of their possible opacity and nontriviality. Again, these descriptions are of the ordinary order: familiar, simple, indisputable (for logically indeterminate) descriptions. They can be listed in a breath: others can be opaque to us (discussed in Chapter 3); others can be nontrivial for us (Chapter 4); we can try to understand others, fail or feel uncertain in those efforts, and try to live without understanding (Chapter 5); and we can try to think critically about our prejudices about others by giving their lives another look (Chapter 6). These indeterminate propositions should be banal, garden-variety; writing or uttering them in the abstract should seem pointless. But I do not offer them in the abstract, but in a particular context of forgetfulness. Which is to say, these quotidian descriptions “get [their] light—that is to say,…purpose” from the problems in question. These problems are solved, if they are, “not by coming up with new discoveries, but by assembling what we have long been familiar with” (Wittgenstein 2009a, §109). The possibilities I describe of what others can be like and how we can

interact with them are marshalled "recollections for a particular purpose" (§127), namely, to loosen the grip of the picture of the other as transparent and trivial on the eco-conversionist's imagination and expand the repertoire of modalities of other-relation available to that imagination (cf. Cavell 1976b, 240). The pages that follow, all the sentences besides these otherwise pointless and quotidian observations, should be read as a kind of mere, if extended, exegesis of them.

Following Wittgenstein, my methods will largely involve the curation of various illustrative possibilities of how our others might factor into our lives (how we can understand, misunderstand, and variously value them) and how we might relate to them. These cases will help specify the sense of the banal descriptions just listed, recollecting for us contexts in which we might intelligibly utter or write such descriptions. Examples, then, examined in detail, shall be crucial to my practice, but my examination of them will be misunderstood if the broader problematics of fixation and forgetfulness are overlooked. I seek, in Wittgenstein's spirit, "to establish an order" of what our lives with others can be, "an order for a particular purpose, one out of many possible orders, not *the* order" (2009a, §132). To help me describe this possible order, I will draw from journalism, literature, ethnography, and philosophy. My only principles for selection are ordinary fidelity—Wittgensteinian realism, fidelity to what some part of life *can* be like—and utility to my therapeutic ends (see ibid.).

6.3 Of Exposure, Deflection, and Acceptance

In her remarkable paper "The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy" (2008), Diamond collects examples of what she calls *difficult realities*, phenomena which some of us find "resistant to our thinking [them], or possibly to be painful in [their] inexplicability, difficult in a way, or perhaps awesome and astonishing in [their] inexplicability. *We take things so*. And the things we take so may simply not, to others, present the kind of difficulty, of being hard or impossible or agonizing to get one's mind round" (45-46). The encounter with such a reality is "the experience of the mind's not being able to encompass something which it encounters. It is capable of making one

go mad to try, to bring together in thought what cannot be thought" (44). The difficulty of such realities can reside in "the apparent resistance by reality to one's ordinary mode of life, including one's ordinary modes of thinking: to appreciate the difficulty is to feel oneself being shouldered out of how one thinks, how one is apparently supposed to think, or to have a sense of the inability of thought to encompass what it is attempting to reach." (58). Such realities can "unseat our reason" and part of their difficulty lies in how others may not find them difficult at all (74).

Drawing from Cavell, Diamond offers us the term *exposure* to describe our condition when we experience difficult realities, if we are among those who do, of feeling our thinking come unhinged (72-73). There are multiple ways to receive such exposure. Diamond describes two general reactions, again riffing on Cavell: We can deflect from the realities that unseat us and our exposure to them or we can appreciate and accept these things. Deflection is "what happens when we are moved from the appreciation, or attempt at appreciation, of a difficulty of reality to a philosophical or moral problem apparently in the vicinity" (57; see Cavell 1976b, 248). If deflection is turning away from difficulty realities, then acceptance refuses to turn away, which "involves acceptance of not being in what I may take to be the ideal position, what I want or take myself to want" (Diamond 2008, 72). A final thought in Diamond's paper is that such acceptance does not entail moral quietism but can take various moral shapes, including the form of responsibility expressed in the idea of "our own making the best of it," of resisting the desire to "double-deal," of "finding something we can live with," which "may at best be a kind of bitter-tasting compromise" (ibid.).

In what follows, I invite the reader to see ecological crises as among the difficult realities that unseat the reason of many environmentalists, shouldering us out from our familiar ways of living, disturbing, wounding, haunting our souls. Many of us feel thus exposed. Part of this exposure, I suspect, consists in the fact that other people do not feel equally disturbed, do not experience as unsettling the decimation of ecosystems, say, or mass animal deaths. As Willis Jenkins observes,

environmental writing more often than not opens with a "catalogue of woe," enumerating difficult ecological realities (2013, 6).[64] The present work opens not with such a catalogue, but rather with how some environmentalists inhabit their exposure to those realities, a condition to which such cataloguing may be tied. But again, there are innumerable ways to react amidst our exposure and to the fact that others do not feel so exposed. What marks eco-conversionists off from other environmentalists is precisely that they respond by trying to change other people, to make others feel, understand, and act as they do. This move, as I noted, suggests the weight of other people in the eco-conversionist imagination. I therefore suggest that eco-conversionists feel exposed to both ecological crises and the existence of other people and respond to these difficulties by trying to negate the second, thereby simplifying the crisis scene and making the first easier to manage. I will suggest in Chapters 1, 3, and 4 that this enthrallment with negation, or conversion, depends on another simplification, namely, a particular, impoverished conception of other people as such.

I submit that this attempted simplification is a kind of deflection from difficult ecological and human realities. Eco-conversionists seem to want, to speak with Diamond and Cavell, to find themselves in the "ideal position" of achieving a kind of consensus around non-human ethical and political matters and from there to work toward the co-flourishing of human and nonhuman individuals and systems (Diamond 2008, 72; Cavell 1979, 432-33). In Diamond's terms, they want to be *given* moral community with both nonhuman entities and humans (vis-à-vis the nonhuman). This is a kind of deflection because that ideal position is not forthcoming given what our lives with the nonhuman and other people are like. Besides the fact that multiple ecological crises are ongoing and many future crises are unavoidable—suggesting that at best conversionists might hope for a population with a shared ecological worldview that would indefinitely adapt to such crises—the reality of human affective, ethico-conceptual difference, of alterity then, is recalcitrant. As I will

64. Thanks to Kristi Del Vecchio for this reference.

argue at some length in Chapter 2, the very effort to achieve a unified worldview seems to drive opposition to it. That is a historico-empirical or contingent dimension of this recalcitrance.

Conceptually, the effort to establish a widely shared network of embodied understandings also mistakes what life with conceptually-constituted understandings is like. The desire for a broadly shared worldview expresses a wish for the kind of control one might imagine having over, say, a LEGO set, but in place of hard plastic pieces designed to snap together into a relatively sturdy structure, one plays with a host of semiotically-embodied concepts, such as *words*, with their squishy, vague, multivalent, contextually-dependent, ever-shifting possibilities for significance.[65] Whatever power we have over the significance of our concepts, it does not amount to the LEGO-style. Think, for instance, of the productive repurposing of slurs. Or think of how two groups of concept users can share a set of concepts and yet draw radically divergent implications from them. For instance, many environmentalists, animal rights advocates, and pharmaceutical researchers, companies, and regulators all appreciate, indeed insist on, the biological or evolutionary-ecological kinship of human and nonhuman entities. But many environmentalists and animal advocates think that kinship entails serious constraints on precisely the sort of experimentation and largescale botanical and mineral extractions that the latter group sees as permissible, even sensible. It will be said that the people involved with pharmaceuticals do not in fact fully appreciate the significance of the kinship in question. That, however, is precisely the present point. There is incredible overlap here, and yet marked differences remain, differences even in what the notion of human-nonhuman biological kinship entails. Setting aside the empirical question of the plausibility of overcoming these differences, say, by indoctrination, I am proposing that it belongs to our lives with language that such differences will recur, that agreement *here*, say, over the empirical basis of our kinship with

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65. Various philosophies of language might support this view. I am myself thinking of the writings of Derrida (1978, 1982a, 1982b), Gadamer (2004, 315-16, 401-7), Wittgenstein (2009, e.g., §68), and their readers (e.g., Diamond 1988).

other beings, and even over some of what that kinship might require of us, *entails*—in the strict sense of that term—nothing about agreement over *there*, say, whether we ought to stop harvesting rare minerals and botanicals for medical consumption. These issues will return.

Insofar as widespread worldview change will not finally resolve ecological crises nor find realization in light of contingent challenges and the nature of our lives with language, the time spent by environmentalists articulating ideal worldviews, promulgating them, and calling others to promulgate them strikes me as a deflection from the difficult realities of ecological crises and other people—a diversion to projects supposedly in the same neighborhood. I do not doubt that the sorts of worldview-change practices eco-conversionists call for may have desirable effects and some role to play in how we cope with our exposure to these realities. But besides the fact that such tactics also have drawbacks, I am interested in supporting conversion-inclined environmentalists to face up to these difficulties more fully. Insofar as these problematics are not imminently receding, a narrow moral imagination as we engage them will prove a liability. Moreover, there are goods to be won through approaches to others beyond trying to change them, such as how they might quicken our own understandings or how our political strategies might be enhanced.

Chapter 1: The Etiology of Eco-conversionism

Without an ecocentric perspective that anchors values and purposes in a greater reality than our own species, the resolution of political, economic, and religious conflicts will be impossible. Until the narrow focus on human communities is broadened to include Earth's ecosystems—the local and regional places wherein we dwell—programs for healthy sustainable ways of living will fail.
Ted Mosquin and Stan Rowe, *A Manifesto for Earth*

Our problem is not that we lack adequate methods for acquiring knowledge of nature, but that we are unable to prevent our best ideas—including our ideas about our knowledge of nature—from becoming ideologized.
Stanley Cavell, *The Availability of Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy*

§1 Introduction

The examples from the Introduction start to reveal a certain interest among some environmentalists with the possibility of transforming other peoples' worldviews. Ecological problems such as anthropogenic mass extinction, the argument goes, are mere symptoms of deeper problems with how we understand ourselves and nature. If we are to have any hope of really addressing such problems, people need to fundamentally change their concepts, values, and feelings. I am calling this way of relating to other people, in the sphere of environmental concern, *eco-conversion* and the preoccupation with this modality *eco-conversionism.*

I now want to examine this captivation with eco-conversion in greater detail. The present chapter will develop three claims. First, I will continue to bolster my proposition from the Introduction that a number of environmentalists are preoccupied with the possibility of transforming worldviews that are, by their lights, at odds with or overly divergent from the worldviews they condone. I will do so in the next four sections by examining four examples of ecologically-concerned scholars from different disciplines advocating for eco-conversion: environmental philosopher J. Baird Callicott (§2), ecofeminist and environmental sociologist Eileen Crist (§3), political theorist Jane Bennett (§4), and religious studies scholar Whitney Bauman (§5). All of these writers are concerned with improving the state of affairs of nonhuman (and often human)

entities. All are influential in their own and occasionally in each other's fields. All also call for a radical change in the worldview of groups of people to which they do not themselves belong, though each gives this call a distinctive twist.

Secondly, I argue that a three-part pattern of assumptions and motivations recurs across my examples and helps us make sense of their enmeshment with conversion. I refer to this three-part pattern as the *etiological structure of eco-conversionism*. Element 1: the conversionists in question seem anxious not only about ecological crises, but also the existence of conceptual others. Element 2 is a specific, tacitly-accepted picture of environmentalism's conceptually deviant other, a figure I call the *ecological other*. In this picture, the ecological other's conceptually-constituted life with the nonhuman is transparent to outsiders to that life and, moreover, trivial from the perspective of trying to live well with the nonhuman. Accordingly, I refer to this image as the *transparent and trivial picture*. We will see this picture implicitly at work below as each author casts themselves as outsiders to the perspectives they recommend converting. Element 3 is a shared sense of who counts as other-to environmentalism and often requiring conversion. In particular, Indigenous peoples and religiously and politically conservative U.S. citizens recur as ecologically-other and so relevant to the question of conversion. I call these repeated candidates for conversion *ecological others* and see them as instantiations of the general picture of the other as transparent and trivial. I amplify the parts of this structure in the discussions of sections 2 through 5 and synthesize its elements in section 6, an approach that amounts to tracing aspects of the eco-conversionist imagination.

Drawing together these first two suggestions, my third claim in this chapter is that the etiological structure of eco-conversionism constrains the imaginations of eco-conversionists, delimiting the range of conceivable possibilities for interacting with the ecological other. The simultaneous proliferation of the desire for conversion and this structure suggest this constraint. My examination will show the role of the image of the transparent and trivial other in particular in

narrowing eco-conversionists' imaginative horizons, lending conversion its default status in our schemes. For those who feel compelled to pursue conversion, I submit, this picture and the absorption with conversion it inspires crowd out alternative possibilities for encountering others.

The eco-conversionists that I study in the next four sections are mere illustrations. They exemplify a pattern, and although I raise questions for each author, I am not interested in faulting them for exemplifying the conversionist pattern. Rather, I select them because they support my claim that this pattern exists and help us understand it. As I mentioned in the Introduction, the desire for eco-conversion surely exceeds these cases. I suspect an eco-conversionist lives in the hearts of many of us advocates for the nonhuman, alongside other dimensions of ourselves and whether or not we call for the missionization of environmentalism like Assadourian and others. I for one certainly feel the desire to get my conceptual others to see, feel, and act as I wish vis-à-vis the nonhuman. My examinations are accordingly addressed to any environmentalist who finds herself in the grips of seeking to convert conceptual others.

§2 J. Baird Callicott and the Post-Modern Evolutionary-Ecological Worldview

J. Baird Callicott's work offers an exemplary illustration of the desire for eco-conversion and will serve as a useful reference when I consider my other examples.[1] For decades, Callicott has explicitly called for worldview transformation as a necessary part of responding to environmental crises. He has regularly argued that members of the "Abrahamic traditions" are particularly in need of conversion. However, he ultimately desires the evaluation and transformation of all the world's

1. Callicott has made invaluable contributions to many of the major disputes in environmental philosophy over the past forty years. He was a central figure in the debates in the 1980s and early 1990s around intrinsic value, animal liberation versus bio- and ecocentrism, anthropocentrism versus non-anthropocentrism, intra-personal moral monism versus pluralism, and environmentalism and multiculturalism (see, e.g., Callicott 1989, 1990, 1992, 1994, 1999a, 1999c, 2002a, 2005). He has influenced many other philosophers and a number of scholars working on religion and the environment (See, e.g., Ouderkirk and Hill 2002). His views are regularly cited as articulating a paradigmatically ecocentric system. In 2016, he was awarded the International Society for the Study of Religion, Nature, and Culture's inaugural Lifetime Achievement Award (see Callicott 2016, ISSRNC 2016).

cultures and religions to be consistent with his preferred worldview and ethical principles.[2] Callicott's writings readily disclose the organizing and motivating pattern I aim to isolate: a two-fold anxiety over environmental crises and the existence of conceptual others; the assumptions that conceptual difference does not entail difficulties in understanding (i.e., that our conceptual others are transparent to us) and that the disappearance of our conceptual others' ways of understanding the world is unproblematic from an environmental point of view (i.e., that our others are morally trivial); and reiterated tropes about who is other-to environmentalism and therefore relevant to considerations of conversion, notably but not exclusively in this case Abrahamic religious traditions (particularly in their conservative forms) and various Indigenous peoples.

Before isolating these elements, however, we should examine the perspective that Callicott avows and how he understands it. Callicott interchangeably refers to his preferred worldview as the "evolutionary-ecological worldview" and the "post-Modern scientific worldview." He has long advocated for and undertaken the articulation and dissemination of this worldview and its "associated environmental ethic" (see, e.g., 1994, 10, 186-91; 1999b, 40-41; 2002b, 167; 2011, 526-527; 2013). Indeed, he has recently described himself as "a proponent of the religionization of science" (2015, 155; 2016).

Callicott's "evolutionary-ecological" or "post-Modern scientific" worldview is a framework constituted by the concepts, theories, and information of contemporary ecology, evolution, and physics. Such a worldview is "post-Modern" insofar as it jettisons the Modern desire for absolutely objective knowledge by embracing the epistemological entanglement of knower and known from quantum to global-ecological scales (Callicott 1992, 141-42; 1994, 185; 2002b, 165; 2013, 93). Within

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2. Callicott is not alone in environmental philosophy in advocating and undertaking the task of transforming worldviews. A small sampling of his fellow travelers might include Arne Naess (1973), Arran Gare (1995, 2017), Freya Mathews (2003), Holmes Rolston III (1994, 26), and Paul W. Taylor (see, e.g., 1986, 99-168, 310-13). As I mentioned in the Introduction, we might also enumerate the many critics of the worldview transformation preoccupation within and beyond environmental philosophy.

the evolutionary-ecological worldview, *ecology* establishes the existence of biotic communities and *evolutionary biology* establishes humans as members and citizens of those communities (2013, 24-27, 80-81). The evolutionary-ecological worldview can provide a naturalistic spirituality consisting in "*a sense of kinship* with fellow creatures; a *wish* to live and let live; *a sense of wonder* over the magnitude and duration of the biotic enterprise" (2013, 29, italics original). In this alternative, humans perceive themselves, the land, and its more-than-human constituents and systems as members—kin—belonging to an ecological-evolutionary community (Callicott 2013, 53-55).

This new worldview entails the expansion of moral community to the land on the basis of the fact that humans and their communities are evolutionary and ecological kin (Callicott 2013, 38, 53-55, 299-300; see also Leopold 1949, 203-4). This axiological extension furnishes the original land ethic maxim, first articulated by Aldo Leopold: "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise" (Leopold 1949, 224-25).[3] In Callicott's preferred idiom, this ethic is metaphysically and morally nonanthropocentric insofar as it refuses to grant a special metaphysical status to humans and ascribes intrinsic value to entities other than human beings. Indeed, Callicott's preferred ethic is ecocentric because it attributes value and moral consideration not only to all animals or living things but to all nonhuman entities and systems (living or otherwise). Wary of eco-fascist accusations (i.e., that the land ethic always prioritizes ecosystemic over human goods), Callicott emphasizes that the extension of moral consideration to land is an addition to our anthropocentric commitments (our traditional human-to-human ethics) and does not override the latter (2013, 65-66).[4]

3. The land ethic maxim is "furnished" insofar as it is a normative articulation of the axiological shifts implied the evolutionary-ecological worldview. The latter is logically prior to the former, which is articulated as a device of practical reason within the horizon of the worldview in question.
4. For a compelling discussion of second-order principles in Callicott's system, which can resolve conflicts between duties to humans versus biota and biotic systems, see Callicott 2013, 66-67. Whether an ethic can be part of a *revolutionary* worldview and also *extensionist* remains unresolved in Callicott's writing.

As we saw in the Introduction, Callicott claims that Lynn White, Jr. set the agenda for environmental philosophy, and he consistently situates his own project of worldview transformation in relationship to White's legacy. However, Callicott's particular philosophical enterprise centers on Leopold's writings, especially *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There* (1949). Leopold, Callicott suggests, anticipated White's critique of the Abrahamic worldview and the project of worldview transformation by nearly two decades (2013, 22; 2017, 39-40). However, while White promoted a worldview that reflected the metaphysically democratic theology of St. Francis of Assisi, Leopold advocated for an ecological worldview. Of *A Sand County,* Callicott writes,

> There is one underlying, persistent thematic thread that Leopold weaves through the fabric of his masterpiece from the first pages to the last: the exposition and promulgation of an evolutionary-ecological worldview and its axiological (ethical and aesthetical) and normative (practical moral) implications. Leopold's bold project in *A Sand County Almanac* is nothing short of worldview remediation. (2013, 21)

This unifying, remedial theme is "radical and revolutionary" insofar as it involves displacement of the "Abrahamic concept of land" (Leopold 1949, viii), which Callicott suggests synecdochally refers to "our inherited biblical worldview" (2013, 21; 2018, 341). The idea is that we in the West mistreat the land because we conceive of it as our property, as a commodity, the value of which depends on its appeal to or utility for human desire. This conception, Callicott claims, derives from the Judeo-Christian understanding of land and nature *qua* given to humans by God for their use (Callicott 2013, 21-22). The "biblical worldview," in Callicott's preferred turn of phrase, is morally and metaphysically anthropocentric. It is morally anthropocentric insofar as human beings are construed as the sole "set of entities to be ethically regarded;" it is metaphysically anthropocentric insofar as in this scheme "humans occupy a privileged place in the order of being" (9). According to Callicott and Leopold, these characteristics are fundamentally incompatible with an ecologically and evolutionarily informed perspective (21-22). Leopold's corresponding mission is to supplant this dominant perspective with "a more coherent and comprehensive alternative," (22).

Callicott has spent years refining, defending, and promoting Leopold's project. His most recent and formidable articulation of Leopold's worldview-transformation project and land ethic is found in *Thinking Like a Planet: The Land Ethic and the Earth Ethic* (2013). In the first half of this text, Callicott sets out to adapt the ecological-evolutionary worldview and land ethic advanced by Leopold to the latest developments in ecology, evolution, and evolutionary moral psychology. In the second half of the book, Callicott supplements the land ethic with another moral system, an "Earth ethic," which he again derives in part from Leopold's writings. *Thinking Like a Planet* lays out "a single system of moral philosophy," constituting "a new comprehensive environmental philosophy for the twenty-first century" (2013, 12-13). This comprehensive philosophy, including its worldview, constitutive concepts, and two moral systems, are Callicott's attempt to press forward with White's call for the reexamination of fundamental concepts and values with what he sees as a Leopoldian version of answering this call. Callicott glosses this project as "the business of worldview transformation; indeed, worldview revolution" (2011, 511).

2.1 A Global Desire

As the discussion so far suggests, Callicott, following Leopold, often frames his evolutionary-ecological worldview as an alternative to a Western worldview informed by the Abrahamic traditions. As we shall continue to see, he consistently figures Christianity, Islam, and occasionally Judaism as tributaries to the Western worldview and, therefore, as problematic and in need of conversion from the evolutionary-ecological perspective. Another significant tributary to the Western worldview as Callicott understands it is Enlightenment-era European philosophy, and especially the mechanistic, Newtonian metaphysics of Modern philosophers such as Hobbes, Locke, and Smith; this metaphysical tradition "accelerates our aggressive and manipulative tendencies," since it morally and metaphysically exalts the human—emulating its religious forebears; it too should therefore be displaced (Callicott 2017, 43).

Although Leopold's views develop in specific relation to these Western legacies, as often as not Callicott globalizes the project of worldview transformation. He has regularly argued that a post-Modern scientific worldview and its land ethic can be employed as a measure for evaluating and recommending the remediation and transformation of not only the worldview(s) of the West, but of any worldview: it is "*the* blueprint for redirecting our genetically baked-in transformative instincts toward solutions to the problems of human living and flourishing that are as good for Nature as they are for us" (2017, 43-44; my emphasis). Examining this global turn will help us appreciate the pattern I am isolating: that eco-conversionism is motivated in part by anxiety over the existence of conceptual others in the face of ecological crises, that certain kinds of conceptual others circulate in the environmental imagination as relevant to questions of conversion, as ecological others, and that these others live transparent and trivial lives. A revealing starting point is Callicott's 1994 study of the environmental potential of the world's cultures and religions entitled *Earth's Insights*.[5]

Callicott's stated goal in this text is to "recognize and celebrate cultural diversity and intellectual pluralism," and he explicitly addresses familiar critiques of totalizing, homogenizing visions (1994, 185-86). Nevertheless, his desire to take cultural and religious difference seriously is repeatedly undermined by the authority he affords his preferred worldview and ethic and by his stated disavowal of "untempered pluralism" (186-87). The majority of the text is dedicated to isolating and evaluating the "intellectual potential for environmental ethics" of the various cultures and religions he examines according to their plausible coherence with the post-Modern scientific worldview and the land ethic. Callicott explains, the land ethic, is not only "a sister" of the other ethical systems considered in the text. It is, more importantly, "a universal environmental ethic, with

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5. This text has been subject to extensive commentary and criticism. See, e.g., Taylor (1997) and Ouderkirk and Hill (2002). Callicott has dutifully replied to many of his critics and often affirmed the basic position of the original text, while acknowledging his own scholarly limitations in undertaking such a large-scale project of cross-cultural comparison (see Callicott 1997, 2002a; see also 2002b, 2015, 2017). Moreover, various aspects of *Earth's Insights* are still cited approvingly by influential environmental humanists (see, e.g. Rozzi 2018b, 28).

globally acceptable credentials, underwriting and reinforcing each of the others. Further, it is also intended to serve as a standard for evaluating the others" (188). Likewise, of his preferred worldview he writes, "throughout this book an evolutionary and ecological worldview has implicitly served as a standard for evaluating the environmental attitudes and values associated with traditional cultural worldviews" (ibid.). He then explains that he is justified in this evaluative move by the tenability of his scientific worldview (189-91). I return to the point about tenability below.

In *Earth's Insights*, then, Callicott employs the evolutionary-ecological worldview and land ethic as a two-part sieve through which he filters the concepts, myths, and values of the world's traditions. Using this device, Callicott isolates the elements of these traditions that can be adapted to cohere with his preferred perspective and those that cannot. For example, Callicott approves of the multispecies kinship notions he finds in various Indigenous cultures because evolutionary understandings of species validate that humans and nonhuman entities are, in fact, biological kin (109-11).[6] Therefore, Indigenous notions of kinship can function as the foundations for a properly environmental ethic (i.e., an ethical system that coheres with the evolutionary-ecological worldview) (119-21). In this way, Callicott's understandings of the conceptual and moral inheritances of the traditions considered in the text are validated (or not) insofar as they conform to the post-Modern scientific worldview. If the concepts and values in question pass muster, they can be folded into Callicott's global vision; if not, they are to be discarded.

Callicott describes his evaluation and validation process in *Earth's Insights* as one of "reviving" the world's traditions in a way that affirms and dignifies them. But he also aims to disseminate contemporary scientific concepts and knowledge and help express such concepts and

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6. This slippage between biological kinship and first-person, say, phenomenological or anthropological understandings of kinship (of the sort anthropologists study, including between humans and nonhumans) runs without explanation throughout Callicott's body of work (see, e.g., 1994 109-121; 2013, 53, 68-69). The uncritical violation of this distinction has difficult implications for his project, which I lack space to develop here. For an example of a scholar who maintains the distinction between biological and phenomenological/anthropological senses of kinship, see Donna Haraway's work (e.g., 2016c; see also Desai and Smith 2018).

knowledge in "the traditional sacred and philosophical literature of the world's diverse cultures" (12; see also 1997, 178). He explains his goal like this: "A unity and harmony in multiplicity *must* be achieved, *if our common environmental crisis is to be cooperatively—and successfully—addressed.* What is needed is a Rosetta stone of environmental philosophy to translate one indigenous environmental ethic into another, if we are to avoid balkanizing environmental philosophy" (186; my emphasis).[7] Callicott thus wants to retain a multiplicity of cultures, but the worldviews of this multiplicity *must* cohere with the evolutionary-ecological worldview; they merely get to employ their characteristic symbols, myths, etc. within the parameters of the latter, which also functions as a device for translating across them—a Rosetta stone (see also, 187). Accordingly, "Indigenous worldviews," in this vision, "can contribute a fund of symbols, images, metaphors, similes, analogies, stories, and myths to advance the process of articulating the new postmodern scientific worldview" (191).[8] These traditions might in this way become "cocreators of a new master narrative" (ibid.).[9]

Despite his wish to respect and celebrate human cultural and religious diversity, Callicott's project in *Earth's Insights* is more conversionist and homogenizing than he acknowledges. His requirement that acceptable worldviews cohere with his evolutionary-ecological worldview and his relegation of the world's cultures to "funds of symbols" for richly fleshing out this worldview make conceptual transformation to his preferred perspective the cost of admission to his pluralist, ecologically-sound, global society.[10] Note the urgency of conversion in his prose above: our

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7. Here "indigenous" means "native," "emic," or "particular" to a tradition.
8. "Indigenous" here refers to Indigenous peoples around the world.
9. Callicott later clarifies his use of "master narrative" thusly: "By 'master environmental ethic' and 'master narrative' I must hasten to add that I do not mean 'master' in any trope of 'master' in relation to a slave, but `master' as in 'master key'… That's what we want, a master-key environmental ethic grounded in a master-key narrative, an environmental ethic that provides a template for and unlocks the door to each cultural worldview's particular environmental ethic. I find this master-key narrative in the evolutionary- ecological world view - the cosmic-organic evolutionary epic, about which Barlow writes - and the evolutionary-ecological 'land ethic' found in the writings of Aldo Leopold" (1997, 177). I do not think this qualification avoids the domineering implications of positioning Callicott's preferred ethics and narratives authoritatively vis-à-vis other traditions.
10. I am not alone in reading Callicott in this fashion. See, e.g., Taylor (1997) and Hester et al. (2002). Callicott defends nearly the same position described here in "Myth and Environmental Philosophy" (2002b, see, e.g., 171-172).

environmental crises *need* the unity provided by his worldview, we *must* find such unity.[11] Notice also that from Callicott's perspective the costs of forfeiting myriad particular perspectives on the nonhuman are low to the point of going unaddressed; there are only gains to be had here, not noteworthy losses. Callicott does not agonize over the homogenization of truly and radically different forms of conceiving and relating to the nonhuman; rather, he winces at the idea of a pluralism "untempered" by his preferred framework. These qualities indicate his anxiety over the existence of multiplicity as well as his trivialization of his others' perspectives on the nonhuman.

2.2 The Transparency and Triviality of Callicott's Others

As the discussion so far intimates, Callicott positions himself as an outsider to, as conceptually other to the perspectives he thinks should change, whether they are the Western Abrahamic perspectives or traditions, cultures, and worldviews from around the world, such as various Indigenous perspectives. Indeed, it is hard to imagine him being an insider to even a portion of the perspectives in *Earth's Insights*, which offers a global sampling of cultures. Nevertheless, Callicott's outsider status appears to in no way impede his capacity to evaluate and recommend the conversion of those perspectives, suggesting that he tacitly conceives of the worldviews of his conceptual others as transparent to him. Allow me to further flesh out this aspect of his position by considering two sets of examples: (1) Callicott's discussion of the tenability of worldviews and (2) explicit and implicit expressions of his exteriority to the views he wishes to displace.

The first example comes from Callicott's justification for the global turn in his eco-conversionism. He offers two reasons for this turn: Firstly, the phenomenon of globalization has rendered the vocabulary of Western post-Modern science actually or potentially legible around the world. "Whether we like it or not," he argues, we are part of a "global village" and the stage is

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11. The necessity Callicott attaches to conversion as a means to addressing ecological crises helps indicate the fixed place of conversion in his view.

therefore set for a global environmental ethic and worldview (1994, 161, 189; see also, 2015, 160-61; 2017, 43-44). Eileen Crist, discussed below, makes a similar claim.

Secondly, Callicott justifies his global turn by claiming that his preferred worldview and associated ethic have universal authority. This authority derives from his "tenability" criteria for evaluating worldviews and seems to necessitate the transformation of other-than-strictly-scientific worldviews (as Callicott understands "scientific"). Callicott endorses a Kantian transcendental epistemology, which robs humans of knowledge of objective reality in and of itself. He argues that it is impossible to evaluate worldviews according to their fidelity to the objectively real. "We have no unfiltered access," he explains, "to any such objective reality" (2011, 516; see also 2002b, 164; 1994, 189-90). Indeed, part of the problem with many religious traditions in his view, and especially Abrahamic traditions, is precisely that they violate these limitations on what human minds can know by claiming to possess infallible truths (2002b, 167). Trapped as we are in our different cognitive cages, all we can do is "determine the *tenability* of a worldview by two basic epistemological criteria" (ibid.). These criteria state that "a tenable worldview must be at a minimum (1) self-consistent and (2) consistent with and comprehensive of all phenomenal experience" (2011, 516).[12] With these criteria in hand, we can evaluate different worldviews. When we do so, we'll find that the post-Modern scientific worldview is the most tenable, since "science deliberately tests its hypotheses for self-consistency first and—through data collection and/or experimentation—deliberately seeks to expand phenomenal experience in an effort to falsify or confirm those hypotheses that pass the self-consistency test" (516; see also Callicott 2015, 160). Other "pre-scientific worldviews," such as those that emerge in religions or Indigenous cultures, "may also be tenable, but only to the extent that they are compatible with the ever-evolving and self-correcting worldview of science" (2011, 516). Since the scientific worldview is the most tenable, it can thus also function as a metric according to which

12. Callicott notes that Leopold might add the criterion of being "aesthetically and spiritually satisfying" (2011, 516).

we evaluate other worldviews. Crucially, one need not inhabit the worldviews in question in order to judge (a) that the scientific worldview is the most tenable nor (b) whether other worldviews are tenable at all or consistent with the post-Modern scientific worldview. The implication that one need not inhabit a worldview in order to evaluate it suggests that the significance of worldviews (say, the concepts, patterns of inference, and values that constitute them) is transparent to outsiders—at least Callicott and his imagined readers, but perhaps anyone.

To thicken this sense of transparency, consider also how Callicott consistently casts himself as an outsider to the particular perspectives that he recommends converting. For instance, in "Environmental Philosophy is Environmental Activism" (1999b) he writes,

> We live today in a culture undergoing a profound paradigm shift. Like the anthropologist confronting the strange cognitive orientation of people in another, very foreign culture, we are also keenly aware that our compatriots have a worldview whether they know it or not because the waxing new set of ideas uncomfortably coexists with the waning old set. Students of another culture are also keenly aware how intimately linked to a more general conceptual framework are its norms, values, ethics, and morality. (36)

Callicott compares the inhabitant of the post-Modern scientific worldview to the ethnographer in the field. The "field" is the multi-cultural context of the contemporary West, in which Callicott perceives a change in the "paradigm" or worldview that conceptually, axiologically, and normatively organizes social life. Callicott in this passage differentiates the new post-Modern scientific worldview from another, one with waning ideas, ideas that make mutual coexistence uncomfortable. The foreign culture and worldview of Callicott's compatriots are those of Western Modernity, including its outdated mechanistic conception of nature and its "biblical" view of land. There is familiarity between the parties here: The old view is held by compatriots in a culture to which Callicott seems to belong. There is also distance: He compares this other perspective to the "strange" and "very foreign culture" studied by the anthropologist. Callicott positions the holder of the post-Modern scientific worldview as a student of and outsider to the other, old worldview and culture. If the

student in this excerpt is a conceptual other even here in the West, surely this is all the more true vis-à-vis truly foreign cultures such as many of those discussed in *Earth's Insights*.

Further examples continue to illustrate this transparency while also amplifying the triviality, in Callicott's view, of the perspectives he wishes to convert. For instance, he commonly expresses disgust with the practices and ideas of various other-than-post-Modern-scientific peoples. He writes of Christianity, "How a religion centered on human sacrifice and a ritual of symbolic cannibalism and one condemning unbelievers and unrepentant sinners to eternal damnation in hell, turned out to be the most popular on Earth is a mystery to me—and not the kind of mystery that evokes awe and wonder" (2018, 340). Among other things, this representation exchanges the generally repulsive practice (for Callicott's imagined audience) of cannibalism with a central ritual of most forms of Christianity, indexing Callicott's own distance from that tradition.

Similarly, and usually in relation to justifying eco-conversion, Callicott regularly connects religions and what he seems to think of as relatively primitive cultures with various forms of violence. His examples include such things as Christianity's "long and dismal history of crusades; inquisitions; actual witch hunts; patriarchy; misogyny; persecution of sexual minorities; genocide and the ethnic cleansing of North America, justified by 'Manifest Destiny'; cruelty to animals; and divinely ordained environmental exploitation" (2018, 341; see also 2013, 143). In lockstep, Callicott writes the following in his reply to Lisa Sideris's concerns with conceptual homogenization, implied, in her view, by the goals of the New Cosmologists:

> [Sideris] seems to think that it is argument enough to point out that proponents of the new mythology think that the old religious myths are closed and dogmatic, intractable to evidence and argument alike. Well, aren't they? Maybe not in the halls of the University of Chicago Divinity School, but they certainly are in the pulpits of the Southern Baptist Church and the *madrassas* of the hoped-for Caliphate. Exposed to almost daily videos of beheadings in the name of Islam and settlement-building in the name of God-given Judea and Samaria, who can doubt that those good old-time religions are divisive and fuel violent conflict? The world we live in, thanks ultimately to science, is unified by transportation and communication technologies for better or worse— and the enterprise of science is international. The astrophysics advanced at Tokyo Tech is the same astrophysics advanced at MIT. But the

> theology cogitated in Ryadh is by no means the same as that cogitated in Rome. What in the world (as it has become) could be wrong with a myth that everyone can share and share both equally and freely? (2015, 160)

Here Callicott suggests that a significant part of the world's religions are (1) *dogmatic* (i.e., epistemically closed), (2) *delusional* (corrupted by false descriptions of reality), (3) *multiple* and *competing*, and (4) often *violent and dangerous*. A perspective grounded in science, on the other hand, eclipses religion on each issue: it is epistemically self-correcting and honest, it offers the truest image of reality available, that image of reality is universal, cutting across cultural boundaries, and science's universal truth allows us to avoid violent faction and environmental degradation. Such repulsive descriptions and examples rhetorically garner permission for Callicott's project of converting other-than-post-Modern-scientific peoples to his preferred worldview. Note how Callicott invokes stereotypically repugnant images of his others, inviting his readers to share his repulsion and to perceive the reasonableness of his conclusion (see also Callicott 2018, 340-1).

Besides garnering support for eco-conversion, Callicott's expressions of repulsion reiterate his sense of exteriority to the traditions and cultures in question. Callicott casts himself as an exile from one group (Western anthropocentrists), which he seeks to convert along with others around the world. These cases also show that having outsider status vis-à-vis the traditions Callicott wishes to convert, living with different concepts than them, does not seem to preclude the possibility of evaluating and judging that they should be converted. Callicott's tenability criteria for evaluating worldviews empower him to examine numerous traditions from around the planet according to their self-consistency and coherence with the post-Modern worldview. And Callicott repeatedly figures himself as an other to the conceptual perspectives that he describes above as dogmatically religious while yet possessing a sufficient understanding of those perspectives to license his recommendation of an overarching scientific myth (and concomitant worldview). Despite his outsider status, then, Callicott's conceptual others are relatively transparent to him; and from the perspective of living well

with the nonhuman and responding to environmental crises, the drawbacks of forfeiting these other perspectives through conversion are so few that they hardly merit remark.

§3 Crist: The Worldview of Abundance, and Global Ecological Civilization

Eileen Crist is an influential sociologist and ecofeminist critic working in science and technology studies.[13] She has long championed far-reaching, non-anthropocentric responses to the global biodiversity crisis, by which she tends to mean largescale biological homogenization and the global mass extinction event.[14] *Abundant Earth: Toward an Ecological Civilization* (2019) is one of Crist's most recent and comprehensive analyses of ongoing ecological crises, their causes, and her corresponding recommendations. This work contains a clear and extended version of Crist's argument that the ultimate cause of our environmental crises is a globally dominant worldview and that, therefore, radical and far-reaching worldview transformation is required. One differentiating feature of Crist's vision is that the recommended transformation is less a matter of exchanging one

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13. Crist's work on human population, global food production, biodiversity, and species extinction is widely read (see, e.g., 2004; 2007; 2013; 2019; Crist et al. 2021; Crist, Mora, and Engelman 2017). Her papers and books are cited by researchers working in fields as diverse as the agricultural sciences, conservation biology, economics, environmental sociology, geography, legal studies, literary studies, philosophy, postcolonial studies, religious studies, and science and technology studies. She is associate editor and regular contributor to *The Ecological Citizen* and the associated blog "Earth Tongues," which regularly publishes posts on ecocentrism and popular issues.

14. In numerous writings she resolutely sets herself against the activists, scholars, and policy-makers who habitually cast environmental problems as *human* problems. Such tendencies, Crist points out, perilously neglect the fact that human civilization has biologically homogenized massive expanses of Earth's oceans and lands and that we are currently in the midst of the sixth mass extinction event to occur in the 3.5 to 4.2 billion-year history of life on Earth, an event caused by the activities of our species. As Crist notes, "The rate of extinction today is estimated to be one thousand times greater than the rate of background or natural extinction (the rate of extinction absent the human factor)" (2019, 17). Echoing Rolston, she rightly calls anthropogenic extinction "a kind of superkilling" (2019, 19Ft25). The quote comes from Rolston (1985, 723). Similarly, she has regularly criticized approving interpretations of our current geological epoch as the "Age of Humans" and techno-managerial responses to environmental crises that promote a business-as-usual attitude toward industrial, globalized humanity's continued colonization of Earth's ecosystems (see, e.g., 2007, 33-36; 2013; 2019, 73-77, 94-96). In *Abundant Earth*, Crist, following Kieran Suckling, approves of "Homogenocene" as a moniker for our epoch insofar as the infiltration of *Anthropos* throughout the biosphere will entail biological homogenization (2019, 41). As part of her project to defend Earth's biodiversity, Crist often advocates for a radical down-scaling of industrial agriculture and the humane scaling-back of global human population to around 2 billion people (see, e.g., 2019, 180-83, 188-200).

conceptual scheme with another, as we saw with Callicott, than of *peeling-back* the dominant one to allow for the actualization of a more primordial set of human/nonhuman relationships.[15]

Nevertheless, Crist's account shares a number of features with Callicott's and those considered below. Crist's preoccupation with worldview transformation indicates a serious concern over the extant multiplicity of worldviews in the face of ecological catastrophe. Likewise, she consistently positions herself as an outsider to the numerous historically, linguistically, and culturally distinct perspectives that she addresses. Nevertheless, she is not concerned that her might impede her capacity to categorize and evaluate this multiplicity, suggesting that the perspectives in question are transparent to her; that she advocates for the absorption of many of them into her preferred worldview implies their triviality from the perspective of her interest in cultivating fruitful relationships with the nonhuman. Finally, certain figures reappear in Crist's discussion as other-to environmentalism, notably stereotypically anthropocentric Western religious traditions, especially their conservative iterations, and Indigenous peoples, often those of Turtle Island. Before examining the operation of this three-part pattern in Crist's thought, however, we should consider the contours of her analysis of the causes of our biodiversity crises and her corresponding solutions. This overview will reveal not only Crist's desired vision and conception of conversion; her analysis also explicates how conversionists sometimes connect worldview change to environmentalist goals.

Crist argues in *Abundant Earth* that there are multiple "levels of causation" that explain the biological homogenization of Earth's ecosystems and crises such as the ongoing mass extinction event: immediate, driving, and ultimate.[16] The *immediate causes* are those that directly cause biodiversity and species destruction: "habitat destruction and fragmentation, killing, pollution,

15. Freya Mathews makes comparable moves in developing her ecologically-oriented panpsychism. See, e.g., the first and third chapters in *Reinhabiting Reality: Towards a Recovery of Culture* (Mathews 2005).
16. Crist refers to these levels as the direct, ultimate, and even "deeper" layers; my demarcation avoids the ambiguity of the notion of a cause more ultimate than ultimate.

nonnative species, climate change, and the synergies between them" (Crist 2019, 21). Of these, habitat destruction and fragmentation are the leading immediate causes of biodiversity loss. The *driving causes*, meanwhile, are those forces that necessitate the immediate causes: "human population size and growth, overconsumption, and technological power" (ibid.). Finally, the *ultimate cause*, which licenses and normalizes the driving and immediate causes, is what Crist calls "the human-supremacist worldview;" this worldview is "the deepest causal layer of the biosphere's plight, for it makes humanity's expansionism appear acceptable and inevitable" (47).

Crist claims that if we want to avoid biodiversity collapse, we need to radically mitigate the causes of biodiversity destruction at the immediate level, and that means drastic shifts at the driving and ultimate levels. Techno-fixes (e.g., shifting to renewables, geo-engineering technologies, advanced recycling industries) that solely address the immediate level are mere "piecemeal, bandage solutions" that misalign with the scale of the crisis (2, 17, 187). Crist concedes that social and economic inertia partially explain why human expansion into the biosphere proceeds despite our knowledge of ecological crises. However, she insists that this inertia remains unchecked because the worldview that first inspired humanity's colonization of Earth retains dominance around the world (44). Any adequate response to the biodiversity plight, must, therefore, intervene in the dimension of worldviews. Without changes at the ultimate level (worldviews), changes at the driving level (population, etc.) are unlikely, and without changes at the latter level the loss of Earth's diverse biomes and biota is, according to Crist, all but ensured.

"Anthropocentrism," in Crist's judgment, is "too vague and apolitical;" she, therefore, calls the worldview she hopes to displace "human supremacist" (ibid.). What interests her is anthropocentrism seen as "a *human superiority complex* that represents and treats the more-than-human

realm as inferior, usable, and expendable;" the term "human supremacy" keeps this "complex" in the foreground (ibid.; my emphasis).[17] Crist writes,

> In simple terms, human supremacy can be defined *as the pervasive belief that the human life-form is superior to all others and entitled to use them and their habitats*. The core idea of the human-supremacist worldview is *superiority*, while *entitlement* describes how that idea is operationalized. This worldview is sometimes openly invoked to glorify the human race and sanction its modus operandi, but far more typically it works as an *unconscious lens*—and thus all the more profound an obstacle—that debilitates human beings from being appalled at humanity's bloated presence and impact. Human supremacy is not formally or explicitly taught. It is *indoctrinated* into humans from a tender age, without time-out, hammered into the human mind by innumerable conditioning feats of *the dominant anthropocentric culture*: a culture that does not simply include dimensions of domination over the natural world, but is entirely built upon and constituted through domination. (45, my emphases)

The human-supremacist worldview, then, is a pervasive conceptual, axiological, and belief system that understands humans as superior to nonhuman entities and systems and therefore entitled to relate to the latter as desired. In Callicott's terms, this worldview is both metaphysically and morally anthropocentric insofar as it gives humans a privileged metaphysical position and excludes nonhumans from the sphere of moral concern. This worldview is an "unconscious lens" that usually operates indirectly and is acquired by individuals through enculturation and social conditioning, or "indoctrination" (see also 45-46). This worldview not only encourages and justifies humanity's colonization of the biosphere; it also blinkers us to the beauty and goodness, and correlative losses, of rich biomes, indeed concealing the intrinsic violence of our relations (59).[18]

Crist argues that human supremacy is a worldview because it comprehensively defines the "human relationship with Earth's beings and places and with Earth as a whole" (46). What makes it so powerful is how it remains tacit. As Crist notes, "people rarely if ever explicitly entertain the propositions 'we are superior to all other life-forms' and 'we are entitled to use them.' Instead,

17. Crist regularly pathologizes the human-supremacist worldview in an ableist fashion, describing humanity's insensitivity to environmental destruction as indicating that we are "disabled" or, echoing Thomas Berry, that we suffer from a "collective autism" (44, 50, 65, 73). I lack the space to address the problems with this characterization. For a superb discussion of how disability and ableism historically constitute the Western environmental imagination, see Sarah Jaquette Ray's remarkable *The Ecological Other* (2013), especially Chapter 1.
18. I attend to Crist's consistent use of the generic terms "humanity" and "humans" below.

human behavior complies with those statements—which is what makes them assumptions" (ibid.). Since the human-supremacy worldview operates in this indirect fashion, the many ways humans impose on nonhuman reality appear as isolated, compartmentalized problems. Thus, Crist explains,

> [I]ndustrial fishing, sows in gestation crates, burning rain forests for soybean plantations, building roads and laying pipelines wherever, mining the seabed, locking up wild animals in zoos and aquariums, escalating industrial aquaculture operations, damming rivers, calling wild animals "game" or "trophies" and domestic animals "livestock," and so on, all such practical and conceptual ventures appear disjointed—as though (more or less) unrelated to one another. (47)

Despite appearances, however, Crist asserts that all of these and similar practices are unified by "the shared belief that humans are above everything and can rightfully use it all" (ibid.).[19] Seeing how these activities are premised on the belief in human supremacy amounts to seeing them as "so many offshoots of the human-supremacist worldview" (47-48). By making this worldview and its effects explicit, she thinks we can start to shed the perspective as a whole (48).

To redress the current trends of mass extinction and biodiversity loss, Crist recommends the wholesale transformation of the human supremacist worldview into the "worldview of abundance" alongside some specific, large-scale courses of action. Only such a profound set of shifts can "match the catastrophe's magnitude" (2). She writes,

> Unmasking the worldview of human supremacy as a conditioning regime gives space to the imagination to see ourselves anew as children and inhabitants of a biosphere abounding in the closest thing to pure magic that we know. Life! Thought freed from the strictures of human distinction and special prerogative turns toward another worldview to live by: one in which human beings—whether ultimately they choose to preserve a diversity of cultures or to embrace a melting pot of diverse individualities made from collages of diverse cultures—thrive within the biosphere's living plenum, with Earth freed to create exquisite compositions of being. (79)

Within this worldview of abundance humans no longer conceive of themselves as superior to but rather as "children and inhabitants of" life on Earth. When we inhabit the worldview of abundance,

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19. I return to the fact that Crist merely asserts this unity below and suggest that it indexes her anxiety over conceptual difference.

Crist suggests, we appreciate the self-sustaining, mysterious, and overwhelmingly abundant complexity, richness, and diversity of life on Earth. Consequently, humans thrive in such a way that Earth's biota and systems are simultaneously free to thrive, whether we "preserve a diversity of cultures" or allow diverse cultures to melt together into "diverse individualities" (see also 224).

One characteristic that makes accounts such as Crist's distinctive is that the envisioned worldview transformation is not a matter of replacing one worldview with another, but rather of peeling away the dominant worldview. Crist writes, "Humanity *does not need to invent a new worldview* to live by, for life's worldview of abundance created who we are and continues to envelop us. That worldview is deep within us, though 'it remains buried'" (223, my emphasis). The worldview of abundance, then, is already within us; the human-supremacist worldview has suppressed the former and warped our perception of reality. Crist writes, "This is indeed how sweeping frameworks trick the mind: they present themselves as windows onto the world, when in actuality they are portraits that cover up or distort reality" (55). But when we inhabit the worldview of abundance, we remove the distorting lenses of the human-supremacist worldview and come to see "the world as it is"—and ourselves as well (111). When we shed the human-supremacist worldview, Crist explains,

> [T]he entire world (and existence) will appear in a completely new light. The world will appear in a light truer to what is, because it will no longer need to be filtered through the lens of human specialness in order to conform to that perspective. The world will open up to as yet barely charted possibilities of perception and experience and will blaze in a light that self-illumines it more closely to what it is. A mystery. (ibid.).

It thus turns out that the human-supremacist worldview and the worldview of abundance are rather different objects: one a distorting lens, the other a primal organ of connection with the real.[20] With this great shedding, we start to recall "the original ontology of Earth," recover intimacy with the Earth, and simultaneously rediscover our own truest natures (186; see also 58-59). To start

20. Crist never provides criteria for differentiating illusory "sweeping frameworks" from genuine worldviews. It is therefore difficult to ascertain why we should accept her worldview as genuine and others as mere trickery.

inhabiting the worldview of abundance, we need only peel-away the human-supremacist worldview, open to Earth's reality, and rediscover our primordial relationship to nature (111). When we set aside the human-supremacist worldview, we start to see the reality of the world and ourselves anew. Humanity's turn from human supremacy will herald "the new adventure of the human in the biosphere and the emergence of another human identity…a revolution in being" (ibid.).

In addition to recommending the rediscovery of the worldview of abundance, Crist lays out a large-scale, action-oriented program. Crist categorizes these practical recommendations under the rubrics of *scaling down* and *pulling back*. Scaling down entails practical measures that drastically reduce anthropogenic consumption and waste. Among other things, scaling down requires "abolishing industrial agriculture" and humanely decreasing the global human population (183). Such efforts set the stage for pulling back, which more or less amounts to large-scale projects to re-wild tracts of land and the cultivation of a global ecological civilization that coheres with the worldview of abundance (186). Crist describes three general stages in this program: (1) the protection of 25 to 75 percent of Earth's terrestrial and marine biomes from human manipulation (besides efforts to support the recovery of these systems), (2) the reimagination of human communities as "islands" integrated "within the vastness of free nature", and (3) the long term goal of constructing "human inhabitation on bioregional principles, which, like indigenous ways of life, invite the creation of distinct but interconnected human cultural-economic identities fashioned in reciprocity with geographical place and grounded in love for all its beings" (225; see also 226-230).

The third stage of Crist's protocol is modelled on the bioregionalist vision. Bioregionalism is an "integral" form of human living in which human and nonhuman systems mesh in such a way that both flourish (231-32). A bioregion, Crist explains, "is a geographical location characterized by a topography, animal and plant communities, soil types, bodies of water, weather patterns and microclimates, humidity and aridity gradients, animal migrations, human histories, and other unique

features" (231). Bioregionalism, in turn, "is the name given to the political, economic, and cultural design of communities endowed with the advanced consciousness of inhabiting Earth's abundance" (ibid.). In bioregional societies, human "political, economic, and cultural" systems are integrated with their local and regional bioregions. Such a design, she notes, is modelled on Indigenous ways of life and culminates in a federal, bioregional civilization (230-231).

In Crist's global vision, humans around the world live in bioregional settlements as islands in an ocean of wild nature. Each settlement has its own "bioregional identity," "its own cultural 'feel'" (235). In each bioregion, humans are "native to [their particular] place, intimate with its ecologies, beings, history, and other unique features" (236). However, each will also reflect a conglomeration of various cultural ideas (235). These bioregions will not be "provincial and xenophobic," but rather foster "the cosmopolitan aspiration of open communication and solidarity between peoples" (ibid.). To help achieve and sustain this vision, Crist imagines "a global ecological civilization," a "federation of bioregions" that "must transcend every stripe of nationalistic delusion, religious fundamentalism, and cultural or ethnic zealotry" (235-236). To avoid slipping back into the vices of human supremacy, bioregional communities will have to "grapple with reinventing human life at deep levels," including taking care to "purge language of the human-supremacist constructs that, in their endless repetition, hold present day humanity captive to that worldview" (240). Crist recognizes that her vision of a bioregional, ecological civilization may sound utopian. Nevertheless, she argues, there is a place for utopian visions in orienting and motivating social change, and social change is necessary if we are to avoid worst-case scenarios of environmental degradation (231, 245).

3.1 Anxiety, Recurrent Others, and Transparency and Triviality in Abundant Earth

Crist consistently positions herself as both outside of the range of human perspectives that emerge in her text and nevertheless capable of adjudicating between them and recommending the conversion of some over others. In other words, despite seemingly significant differences in

historically, linguistically, and culturally situated outlooks, Crist's conceptual others are sufficiently transparent to her and many of their perspectives are trivial in the relevant sense.[21] Two examples illustrate these points; they also show the recurrence of Indigenous peoples and Abrahamic traditions as ecologically other within her account.

The first example is Crist's representation of Indigenous peoples. Throughout *Abundant Earth* Crist positions Indigenous peoples as already inhabiting the worldview of abundance or something close to it. For example, she writes, "A clear, panoramic view of the pre-Columbian North America, of its full house of diverse living beings, reveals the continent's cocreation by all its inhabitants, nonhuman and human" (125). When Crist describes the pre-Columbian North American ecosystems as a "full house of diverse living beings," she uses her characteristic idiom for evoking the abundance of Earth's biosphere, which the worldview of abundance sees clearly and which the pre-Columbian inhabitants of the continent preserved. Next Crist writes,

> North America was prodigious in wild beings and ecologies, coinhabited by native people, for a combination of reasons: the comparatively low numbers of human inhabitants, the nonexistence of a Native American 'livestock industry,' and, *most importantly, the animist cosmologies of Native Americans, which brimmed with respect for the natural world*… Animist vision does not only see spirit pervading both animate and inanimate creation, but also recognizes 'that the world is full of persons, only some of whom are human.' (125; my emphasis)

Animistic worldviews, then, go a long way in explaining why Indigenous people in North America "co-created" the continent in a fashion that supported its biological "full house." Similarly, when explaining the concept of "wilderness," Crist writes, "'wilderness' refers to the reality and conception of places in the natural world that remain free from exploitation, conversion, and exterminations by civilized humans. (*Indigenous people, on the other hand, who have lived in reciprocal integration with the natural world have been, and can continue to be, integral members of the wilderness*)" (113-14;

21. Recall that I it is not my present concern to fault my authors for presuming transparency and triviality. I am at present merely showing the circulation of assumptions about transparency and triviality. I shall, in some sense, fault them for fueling the problems described in Chapter 2; but that is a different locus of critique.

my emphasis). As we saw, this "integral inhabitation" inspires the bioregional social structure that the worldview of abundance underwrites. In Crist's account, then, Indigenous peoples appear to *already* inhabit a worldview that approximates the worldview of abundance.[22] This explains why Crist's calls for a shedding of the human-supremacy worldview and a reinhabitation of the worldview of abundance consistently exclude Indigenous peoples from needing such changes.

Note, however, that Crist does not position herself *as Indigenous*. Hers is not a call for human supremacists to become Indigenous *like her*. Rather, she calls for human-supremacists to convert to the worldview of abundance and suggests that many Indigenous peoples already inhabit that perspective. That is, she casts herself as exterior to Indigenous traditions and yet capable of judging that they conform to her preferred worldview; her exteriority appears to create no barrier to this evaluation; rather, her evaluation paired with her exteriority implies the transparency of their perspectives. Indigenous perspectives, as a relatively homogenous whole, are laid out before her alongside less commendable alternatives. Thanks to this transparency, Crist judges Indigenous perspectives nontrivial, indeed *exemplary*, insofar as they conform to her worldview. Crist does not mention the ways Indigenous perspectives might diverge from her worldview of abundance; in their *differences from* her worldview, these perspectives are trivialized through obfuscation.

Consider, secondly, Crist's representation of what she sees as paradigmatically human-supremacist perspectives. Crist consistently positions herself as an outsider to such points of view. For example, she explicitly excludes "religious fundamentalism" from her envisioned ecological civilization, alongside "every stripe of nationalistic delusion" and "cultural or ethnic zealotry" (235-236). She also distances herself from Western philosophy and "Judeo-Christian theology," which she claims are largely responsible for the idea of human supremacy (70-72). Crist locates the murky origins of the human-supremacist worldview in the Neolithic agricultural revolution and the birth of

22. For more evidence supporting this reading, see Crist (2019, 15, 93, 97, 113-14, 126-27, 225, 230, 233, 237).

civilization in the Levant and Mediterranean basin some 8 to 10,000 years ago, events that initiated humanity's alienation from nature (53). Subsequent cultural beliefs and myths that disparaged nonhuman reality and Indigenous people, such as those we find in ancient Greek plays and the Bible, solidified this alienation (53-54). Crist rejects those beliefs and myths. Her attempt to locate their origins is a project of making the human-supremacist worldview explicit to potential converts. The stakes of displacing traditionally Western perspectives are relatively clear: we—and the species of the world—can only gain; the losses accrued from this displacement are trivial. Meanwhile, that Crist can evaluate these troublesome and remarkably diverse (historically and culturally) perspectives from her third-person stance implies their transparency.

Crist's exterior evaluations of Indigenous peoples and paradigmatic human-supremacists imply the transparency of these perspective to her, and her desire to displace the latter suggests their triviality by her lights. However, the full extent to which Crist's others are transparent and trivial to her comes into view with her move to classify all non-Indigenous peoples and civilizations as human-supremacist. In *Abundant Earth*, the human-supremacist worldview transcends the familiar boundaries of the modern West. As my account so far reflects, Crist almost exclusively refers to "humans," "humanity," and (global) "civilization" as the relevant unit of analysis in studying environmental crises. She writes, "*We* are the inheritors of this worldview's long historical march. *We* are, more starkly stated, the products of that history. *Humanity's* way of relating and impact on the natural world is rooted far more deeply in the historical legacy of anthropocentrism, than in either fiendish flaws or superlative attributes of human nature" (59; emphasis mine). Likewise, it is a relatively unspecified "civilization"—"civilization, as we know it"—that stands in need of dismantling (243). Accordingly, it is a *global* ecological civilization that "we" need to move toward. All of the world's civilizations are implicated in this call with the apparent exception of Indigenous peoples (see, e.g., 113-14). Indeed, these general, aggregate conceptions of "humanity" and

"civilization" are consistently differentiated in the text from wild nature and Indigenous peoples (54, 60, 90). These distinctions between humanity, Indigenous people, and nature organize the conceptual universe of *Abundant Earth*. That is, throughout the text, Indigenous people and wild nature merit differentiation from humanity and civilization, while the differences internal to the concepts "humanity" and "civilization" do not. Crist's argument depends on this set of distinctions and the homogenization achieved by placing the world's non-Indigenous people under such general signs; her *global* call for worldview transformation relies upon a problematic of the corresponding scale. I am suggesting that (1) it is necessary for Crist to posit that the various peoples classed under humanity are conceptually transparent to her if she is to judge that they are all human supremacists and that (2) her lack of concern with dissolving this diversity of perspectives into the worldview of abundance trivializes those perspectives on extra-human ethico-political questions.

Crist tries to justify her aggregation of non-Indigenous civilizations by appealing to globalization and the global scale of our biodiversity crises. She and Callicott overlap on this point. I do not think this justification succeeds, for reasons I will offer shortly, but examining Crist's argument here helps us appreciate the operation of another aspect of the etiological structure of conversionism, namely, a certain anxiety over conceptual multiplicity. Vis-à-vis ecological crises, Crist's desire for global worldview conversion, I submit, indicates a perception of and anxiety over the extant multiplicity of worldviews.

Crist notes that while anthropocentrism "is not strictly a Western civilization phenomenon," her text focuses on "Western culture" (46). She justifies this selection on two grounds: "one, the West has arguably developed the most robust and historically sustained expression of human supremacy; and two, the West has today become the dominant socioeconomic civilization, infecting the entire globe with its particular strand of anthropocentrism" (46; see also 78). Western culture thus presents a paradigmatic case of a society ordered by the human-supremacist worldview. And its

global dominance has transformed other cultures into variations of itself. This global infiltration grounds Crist's shift from claiming to focus on Western culture to referring to *humanity* throughout *Abundant Earth*, again predominantly differentiated from Indigenous peoples and wild nature.

Moreover, the fact that our biodiversity crises, which Crist records in painstaking detail, are global in scale may seem to require a corresponding global cause, Crist's ultimate level of causation: a singular worldview. Between the facts of globalization and global biodiversity crises, which together homogenize the real multiplicity of human cultures and bio-cultural ensembles, the idea of a singular, causal worldview might seem forced on us and seems explanatory to Crist.

Yet, the *invocation* of globalization and a detailed record of global biodiversity crises are not support for the claim that *the world's non-Indigenous people share a worldview*.[23] Of course, global interconnection and the proliferation of largely unregulated capitalism and various forms of technology have profoundly homogenized human and nonhuman forms of living (see, e.g., Rozzi et al. 2018a; Young 2015, 117-33). Nevertheless, cultural, linguistic, religious, economic, aesthetic, affective, moral, ideological, broadly experiential, and other forms of human difference remain—if now in post-globalization forms (see, e.g., Govindrajan 2018, 12-13; Haberman 2020, 45-50, 226). Human difference has a certain recalcitrance. To show that these differences *do not matter*, that in fact all of these societies share one general conceptual and axiological framework *requires showing*, demands *analysis*. Such analysis would need to demonstrate that these sorts of differences are ultimately *illusory*, *superficial*. Crist offers no such demonstration.[24]

To the contrary, throughout her text she implies numerous differences within humanity and global civilization. These differences chafe against the use of such general terms and invite questions

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23. If they *did* share a worldview, globalization might be an *explanation* of why that is so and biodiversity crises might be symptoms of that fact. But *citing* globalization and documenting biodiversity loss does not amount to a demonstration that the world's non-Indigenous peoples are all human supremacists.
24. As I note in ft39 above, she merely asserts that disparate human activities involving nonhuman entities, of which she disproves, are unified by an underlying worldview.

about the reliability of her slippage from Western culture to an undifferentiated humanity and civilization. For example, she acknowledges profound religious and cultural differences *within* these concepts when she notes gender disparities in access to education across cultures as a barrier to decreasing global population (210). Likewise, she hints that humanity and global civilization are more internally diverse than meets the eye in her account when, as I've said, she excludes nationalism, religious fundamentalism, and other forms of zealotry from her ecological federation.

In the absence of a demonstration of the operation of a singular worldview and the presence of Crist's tacit acknowledgment of diversity within "humanity" and "civilization," it is difficult to avoid the impression that she is not in fact calling for the conversion of *a* general, singular problematic worldview to a laudable alternative; instead, hers reads as a call for the *multiple* extant non-Indigenous cultures and worldviews to undergo a worldview revolution—a great, global-civilization-wide peeling-back—leading all to her preferred worldview of abundance. From this perspective, and again in the absence of a demonstration that all non-Indigenous peoples are human supremacists in her sense, Crist's appeal to globalization functions argumentatively as an *exculpation* from addressing the world's actual diversity—one that allows her to bolster the case for worldwide conversion with a gesture that both elides the actual diversity of non-Indigenous human civilization (to say nothing of Indigenous diversity) and conjures the idea of singular problematic worldview. This move expresses what Wittgenstein in a more narrowly philosophical context calls a "craving for generality" (1965, 17-18), a generality that makes reality rather more manageable for us and our projects, because simpler. The value of such generality to Crist is plain, for to speak of a singular, global worldview is a convenient simplification that licenses talk of global worldview revolution. The desire for such exculpation, for permission to shift to talking at a global scale about worldview change, is in some sense a desire keenly aware of and concerned over the existence of a multiplicity of worldviews—hence the wish for exculpation, the flight to the general; a desire for simplicity

makes sense in a context of complexity. I suggest, therefore, that we see Crist's aggregation of non-Indigenous societies under "humanity" and "civilization" and appeal to globalization to ground it as indexed to her recognition of and anxiety over a real field of conceptual multiplicity.

In sum, whatever diversity exists within global and historical humanity as Crist understands it, this multiplicity is not radical enough to impede her judgment that *humanity* as such needs to convert to the worldview of abundance. Nor does Crist appear to perceive any drawbacks with displacing such difference. Crist conceives of herself as something of an outsider to both the worldview of human supremacy and Indigenous worldviews, while nonetheless inhabiting some version of the worldview of abundance. Her evocative descriptions of the worldview of abundance—in which, "the entire world (and existence) … appear in a completely new light" —suggest that she inhabits it (111). Yet despite suggesting that Indigenous peoples likewise inhabit this perspective, Crist consistently differentiates herself from them. From her particular point of view within the worldview of abundance, she is able to describe and evaluate both Indigenous versions of that worldview and the various perspectives she aggregates under the human-supremacist rubric. That is, her externality to these views presents minimal difficulty to understanding and evaluating them; those perspectives are, in my terms, transparent to her. The upshot of her evaluation is that the drawbacks of displacing the perspectives grouped under the human-supremacist worldview are few; these perspectives are trivial. Likewise, any true divergences between Indigenous perspectives and the worldview of abundance are invisible and trivialized.

§4 Jane Bennett's Vibrant Materialism

Jane Bennett is a prominent political theorist and philosopher, and a well-known defender of *new materialism*, a philosophical school interested in retrieving and improving classical monistic materialism. Her principal contribution to that literature is *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2010), which is cited with impressive frequency by scholars across the disciplinary spectrum from

media studies to education, psychology to marketing.[25] Within my discussion, Bennett's account is distinctive for at least three reasons. First, while she positions her preferred worldview, what she calls vibrant materialism, within the sphere of concern for the nonhuman, she also develops it in critical opposition to more familiar forms of environmentalism. Thus, the concepts "ecosystem" and "environment" as commonly understood by ecology and the environmental movement figure into her account only peripherally (as with ecology) or not at all (as with environment).[26] Secondly, Bennett draws on a distinctive theoretical body, post-structural and post-humanist thought, in comparison to Callicott and Crist.[27] These first two features suggest that the desire for conversion within the sphere of ecological concern extends beyond any one way of conceiving of the constitutive objects of the sphere itself (e.g., ecosystems, environments) and any one theoretical toolkit. Thirdly, Bennett does not explicitly call for the conversion of her conceptual others, at least not as directly as Callicott and Crist do. Rather, she persistently and indirectly *expresses a wish* for conversion to her preferred perspective and simultaneously expresses the wish for the disappearance of what are in her view less defensible worldviews. I believe this nest of desires motivates a significant amount of work among post-humanists in the sphere of environmental concern;[28] Bennett offers us a paradigmatic case of this tendency, which emerges also in the perspectives of her fellow travelers such as Karen Barad (2007) and Timothy Morton (e.g., 2007, 2019). Part of my interest in Bauman, discussed in section 5, is that he makes his desire for widespread conversion to a

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25. According to a brief search on the Web of Science, as of August 16, 2022, *Vibrant Matter* has been cited upwards of 4,000 times. By comparison, one of Crist's most frequently cited single-author essays, "On the Poverty of our Nomenclature" (2013) has been cited north of 162 times, with some co-authored pieces surpassing 500.
26. Bennett develops her own conceptual network, which I discuss below.
27. Tributaries to Bennett's account include such authors as Deleuze, Derrida, Foucault, Guattarri, Latour, and Spinoza. By contrast, Callicott largely draws from figures such as Darwin, Hume, Leopold, sociobiologists, ecologists, and Earth-system scientists while engaging recognizable environmental philosophers such as Bryan Norton and Dale Jamieson. In terms of theoretical influences, Crist occupies a middle-ground between Bennett and Callicott.
28. For my purposes, *post-humanism* refers to a movement of philosophical and literary projects interested in decentering the human (in, e.g., ontology, epistemology, ethics, and politics) and shaped by mid- and late-twentieth century continental philosophy.

broadly post-humanist perspective more explicit. These qualities make *Vibrant Matter* a distinctive conversionist text. Despite these differences, Bennett's text again manifests the conversionist pattern that interests me. She is plainly anxious over the existence of competing ways to conceptualize the world, she consistently casts these competing perspectives as transparent and trivial from her point of view, and again we will see the reiteration of familiar perspectives that are other-to her own.

4.1 A Philosophical and Ethico-Political Project

Bennett has two interrelated projects in *Vibrant Matter*: one metaphysical, the other ethical and political.[29] The metaphysical project is to rethink the idea of matter as passive, inert, or raw brute stuff, devoid of agency (vii). This task has negative and positive phases. The negative element attempts to criticize and "dissipate" distinctions that are fundamental to how many of us, especially but not exclusively in the modern West, understand ourselves and the world: the "onto-theological binaries of life/matter, human/animal, will/determination, and organic/inorganic" (x). Such distinctions, in Bennett's view, obscure as much as they disclose and imperil goods as much as they protect them (see, e.g., 12-13, 84). Nevertheless, Bennett argues, mere criticism is only necessary and not sufficient for achieving a better future. We also need positive, "even utopian" conceptualizations, alternatives that can themselves be critiqued in due course (xv). In addition to "estranging" us from our "habit of parsing the world into dull matter (it, things) and vibrant life (us, beings)"—indeed in the space created by that estrangement, Bennett articulates a positive "ontology of vibrant matter" (vii, x). Bennett's vibrant materialism, like Bruna Latour's Gaia (2017, 87), neither de-animates matter in the fashion of the modern Euro-American mechanistic paradigm nor over-

29. Bennett describes her two projects as philosophical and political. I include the term "ethical" to describe the second project because, as Bennett signals throughout, her interests in the practical consequences of her new materialism exceed a narrow definition of the political. As I discuss, she is equally interested in the perceptual, aesthetic, emotional, and axiological consequences of the new materialist ontology.

animates it as the raw material of an active soul (human or otherwise), in the form of so many pre-modern and contemporary-religious animisms, instead charting a path between the two (2010, xiii).

Bennett develops a nuanced network of concepts to help articulate her particular brand of animism, including *actant*, *thing-power*, *affective body*, and *assemblage*, as well as particular conceptions of vitality and agency. *All existents*, humans included, are re-described with the concepts of this system. To appreciate the particularity of vibrant materialism, we should examine some elements in this network. The *vitality* of Bennett's animate matter refers to "the capacity of things—edibles, commodities, storms, metals—not only to impede or block the will and designs of humans but also *to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own*" (viii; my emphasis). What we typically think of as inanimate things are recast in Bennett's system as entities that are not merely *acted upon* but in some sense *act on* other things themselves. To help express this sense of vitality, Bennett borrows Latour's notion of an *actant*. Actants, in Latour's and Bennett's accounts, are neither mere objects nor pure subjects. They are *sources* of action, sources of effects. Actants are entities that are coherent enough to be isolated as the producer of effects, as capable of *interfering in the doings of other things* (viii-ix). An actant is any existent that alters other existents in an encounter and can be recognized and denoted precisely in how it so alters other entities.[30] Actants can be human, nonhuman, material, and/or immaterial (e.g., semiotic). Ideas, fantasies, metal objects, electrons, structures of desire, economic systems, individual human intention and action – all such things can be actants in the relevant sense; all such things can be interferers, alterers of other things.[31]

30. For Latour on actants, see (2004, 75, 77, 80, 237). He develops his conception of Gaia on the basis of this notion (see Latour 2017, 75-110).
31. The category actant, then, is expansive, perhaps comprehensive, and would seem to exclude only entities that do not interfere with other things, and it is difficult to imagine anything that would *never* interfere with other things. These conditionals are plainly in play: if something effects other things, it is an actant, and if something is an actant it is *real*. However, I suspect that last proposition is in fact the first element of a bioconditional whose second element is submerged: If something is real, it is an actant. That is, all indications suggest actants are metaphysically basic in this system.

Two more essential notions in Bennett's vital materialism are *affective body* and *assemblage*. The notion affective body derives from Spinoza's philosophy. It describes the fact that all bodies are affective insofar as "each is, by its very nature as a body, continuously affecting and being affected by other bodies" (21). The key lesson Bennett takes from the notion "affective body" is that entities enhance or forfeit their power to affect other bodies as they mesh with other bodies to form ensembles. Bennett borrows Deleuze and Guattari's notion of assemblage to describe these ensembles of affective bodies.[32]

Assemblages, Bennett explains, are "ad hoc groupings of diverse elements, of vibrant materials of all sorts. Assemblages are living, throbbing confederations that are able to function despite the persistent presence of energies that confound them from within" (23). Assemblages are decentralized, finite collections of materially heterogenous affective bodies, bodies that shiftingly collaborate and conflict and, through their contingent gathering, generate effects and properties that are irreducible to the capacities of the individual constituent bodies nor the strict sum of those bodies. Such effects, rather, belong to the group as a whole (23-24, 42).[33] Bennett uses a range of examples to illustrate the sense of the assemblage notion and the emergent capacities of assemblages. She describes, for example, the effects on her of encountering an assemblage in a street gutter—a pile of debris made up of a glove, pollen, a dead rat, a plastic cap, and a stick, all shimmering and churning in the sun (4-6). Facing these items, she was *struck* (by them). These things oscillated for her between being things to ignore (mere tokens of human activity) and "stuff that commanded attention in its own right," exceeding human meanings and aims (4). In that second phase of encounter, these things "provoked affects" in Bennett: the rat repels, the litter dismays; at the same time, she was pressed upon by the singularity of *that* rat, *that* pollen formation, etc.

32. Conceptually, affective bodies and assemblages belong to the genus actant.
33. Humans can be understood as both assemblages and actants within assemblages.

The new materialist notion of assemblage entails distinctive concepts of agency and responsibility. Agency is distributed horizontally across assemblages rather than vertically to the intention of a doer beneath or above each deed. Assemblages are agential insofar as they causally effect other things and have a directionality in their churning, unstable existence, development, and interaction with other existents (see 31-32). In place of the idea of a doer behind each deed, the notion of assemblage thus brings with it the idea of a federation of actants, churning together in a nonlinear causal process that generates effects, which, in turn, display directionality in the federation and may or may not align with the intentions of particular actants. For example, Bennett describes an electrical grid as an assemblage consisting of such actants as "coal, sweat, electromagnetic fields, computer programs, electron streams, profit motives, heat, lifestyles, nuclear fuel, plastic, fantasies of mastery, static, legislation, water, economic theory, wire, and wood" (25); this assemblage has such capacities as *effecting a widespread blackout*. This capacity is not reducible to the capacities nor intentions of any of the individual actants within the electrical-grid assemblage and yet it implies a trajectory for the assemblage itself and indeed renders the assemblage isolatable as such.

In light of this distributed notion of agency, Bennett's new materialism unsettles the idea that responsibility for an act can be easily ascribed to an individual agent. She writes, "In emphasizing the ensemble nature of action and the interconnections between persons and things, a theory of vibrant matter presents individuals as simply incapable of bearing *full* responsibility for their effects" (37). In the perspective of the vibrant materialist, agents simply aren't fully responsible for the effects of their actions because they are never only *themselves* (since we are assemblages of actants as much as members in assemblages) and because agents' actions are never solely achieved by themselves but in collaboration with other actants (such as the blackout or Bennett's affective response to the debris pile). This doesn't mean we stop holding individuals to account if they are sources of harm. Rather, the distributed nature of agency entails that we take a wider view on the

sources that contribute to harmful effects, including as in the example of a blackout "unstable electron flows" (ibid.). This redistribution of agency recasts individual responsibility as a question of which assemblages to enter and which to abandon (38).[34]

The ethico-political project of *Vibrant Matter* is, Bennett writes, "to put it most ambitiously, to encourage more intelligent and sustainable engagements with vibrant matter and lively things" (viii). We can sort this practical project into three parts. I have touched on the first already: part of Bennett's practical project is to describe the core ethical and political concepts of vibrant-materialism, such as agency and responsibility, as well as the axiological implications of the system itself, namely, the distribution of value to "bodies as such" (13).[35] The second part of the ethico-political project is an exploration of what political analysis looks like from the perspective vibrant materialism. Bennett analyzes, for example, the North American blackout mentioned above with the tools of vibrant materialism (25-38).

The third part of the ethico-political project of *Vibrant Matter* is to advocate for and work to effect a conceptual, affective, and axiological shift in how we in the West imagine, perceive, affectively relate to, value, and practically interact with matter. That is, the goal is to cultivate vibrant materialism as an embodied, value-saturated view on the world. The articulation of vibrant materialism, the philosophical task itself, is part of the cultivation process. However, Bennett employs other techniques as well, such as offering tips for cultivating the perceptual powers of new materialism through, say, practicing intentional anthropomorphism (i.e., the hypothetical and imaginative ascription of creativity and agency to entities traditionally conceptualized as inert or passive) (95-99, 119-20).[36] Another technique she employs is the telling of "onto-stories," which are

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34. Thus it is not only the humans involved in the blackout or in shaping and placing the debris pile who are responsible for the effects of the assemblages in question.
35. Bennett's notion of *body* is capacious—she remains a materialist, if a vibrant one, and seems here to mean all (vitally) material existents.
36. Bennett takes Darwin's work on worms as exemplary of this practice (see Bennett 2010, 95-97).

narrative redescriptions of various states of affairs in the new materialist idiom. For instance, a pile of debris is redescribed as a quivering, furry, active assemblage (4-5), and *the real* as such is narratively redescribed as an open field of more and less active forces and flows (117). Such tales aim to shift how we perceive these and other states of affairs (see 6, 116-18). She writes, "The ethical task at hand here is to cultivate the ability to discern nonhuman vitality, to become perceptually open to it" (14). One consequence of this perceptual cultivation is to help effect the axiological shift mentioned above, in which we "distribute value more generously, to bodies as such" (13). While this redistribution doesn't solve problems of human oppression and environmental destruction, "it can," Bennett suggests, "inspire a greater sense of the extent to which all bodies are kin in the sense of inextricably enmeshed in a dense network of relations" (13).[37]

Ethical concern drives *Vibrant Matter* as a whole.[38] The purpose of articulating and advocating for the "vitality of matter," Bennett explains, is that a picture of matter as *dead* "feeds human hubris and our earth-destroying fantasies of conquest and consumption" (ix). This image of dead matter prevents us "from detecting (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling) a fuller range of the nonhuman powers circulating around and within human bodies" (ibid.). Our captivation by this image of matter as inanimate yields negative human and ecological consequences. Bennett writes,

> The figure of an intrinsically inanimate matter may be one of the impediments to the emergence of more ecological and more materially sustainable modes of production and consumption. My claims here are motivated by a self-interested or conative concern for *human* survival and happiness: I want to promote greener forms of human culture and more attentive encounters between people-materialities and thing-materialities. (ix-x)

Thus, the philosophical and practical projects of *Vibrant Matter* are unified by a concern with how humans are living with the nonhuman and in the goal of improving those relations. The

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37. Note Bennett's more phenomenological rather than narrowly biological use of "kin." Cf. Callicott's use above.
38. Bennett acknowledges that *Vibrant Matter* overlooks some of the ethical implications of vibrant materialism, such as what ethicists call normative and practical moral questions (see, e.g., 120-121). She limits her focus to general ethical-conceptual analysis and axiology.

philosophical project replaces the figure of matter as inanimate with one of matter as intrinsically vital; the practical project seeks, among other things, to get us to live with that figure, to experience ourselves and the world around us as made up of a vibrant materiality.

The new materialist conceptual system is designed to function as "vocabulary and syntax" that can describe and improve our discernment of the agency of things as I discussed above (ix). I've examined the core elements of this conceptual system in order to impress upon the reader its particularity and how it involves conceptualizing the world some ways and not others. This system of concepts articulates an embodied perspective on ourselves and the world that Bennett hopes to cultivate. She concludes *Vibrant Matter* with a vibrant materialist creed that encapsulates the metaphysical and ethical elements of her system:

> I believe in one matter-energy, the maker of things seen and unseen. I believe that this pluriverse is traversed by heterogeneities that are continually *doing things*. I believe it is wrong to deny vitality to nonhuman bodies, forces, and forms, and that a careful course of anthropomorphization can help reveal that vitality, even though it resists full translation and exceeds my comprehensive grasp. I believe that encounters with lively matter can chasten my fantasies of human mastery, highlight the common materiality of all that is, expose a wider distribution of agency, and reshape the self and its interests. (122)

As we saw above, Bennett thinks the perspective of new materialism as articulated in this creed and inculcated through various self-forming techniques will help curb the anthropocentric exploitation of nonhuman reality as well as refine our analysis of natural and cultural phenomena.

4.2 Other Animisms and Environmentalism

In addition to jettisoning a vision of matter as inanimate, Bennett develops her vital materialism in critical opposition to traditional environmentalism as well as a politically and religiously conservative American movement, which she calls the "culture of life." The latter arose as a powerful voice in the debate among Americans over the distinction between life and matter in the

early 21st century (83).[39] Representatives of the movement, such as President George Bush, Jr., maintain that there exists a vital force inside the biological human organism that is irreducible to matter because it is a free and undetermined agency. This vital force is a divine spirit that animates even the matter of the human embryo and entails a prohibition against harming the latter (83). Like vitalists who preceded them, defenders of the culture of life believe there to be something profoundly inadequate about mechanistic metaphysics (ibid.). They ascribe instead, Bennett explains, to the following system of "theological beliefs": "Life is radically different from matter," "human life is qualitatively different from all other life," "human uniqueness expresses a divine intention," and "The world is a divinely created order and that order has the shape of a fixed hierarchy. Humans are not only organic, unique, and ensouled but they also occupy the top of the ontological hierarchy, in a position superior to everything else on earth" (86-87). Needless to say, Bennett finds this system deeply questionable. It is, by her lights, uncritical, anthropocentric, and hierarchical compared with vibrant materialism, lending itself to hierarchized violence and comparisons with the vitalism of some Nazis (88-89). She signals her distance and disapproval of the cultural of life by marking its members' beliefs as "theological," an adjective she reserves for just such occasions.

In critical dialogue with the culture of life, Bennett observes, "not all vitalisms are alike" (83). For some vitalists, what Bennett calls "traditional" animists (2010, xiii), problematically over-animate or spiritualize matter and do so on the basis of objectionable distinctions and beliefs. While the

39. As Bennett notes, this is a recurrent theme of debate in the American public (82). However, it is an open question whether these debates, especially in the Bush Jr. era, consistently have much to do with the degree of matter's vitality. Bennett takes the culture of life's positions at face value in order to assimilate their utterances to the language-game of "honestly describing," in this case, "the vitality of matter," conjuring a foil position to her own. Thus, she casts their stance on embryonic stem cell research as more or less a consequence of their "theological beliefs" (likewise with their stance on the second invasion of Iraq). But it is not clear that that is the language-game that, say, representatives of the Bush administration were playing when they spoke of stem cells. Why not suppose they were, for instance, consolidating their political base by articulating a view on human nature more or else coincident with a vision of *the good*, an articulation that in the same gesture conjured a ruthless, secular foe of those visions? Bennett is playing politics in her ontology as well, but she is also debating the essential vitality of (material) reality. I am suggesting that it is not clear that *that* is the relevant question vis-à-vis the cultural of life and that mistaking it as the essential question may distort Bennett's conservative others' actual relationship to materiality (by taking what they say while politicking at face value).

"culture of life" movement is merely Bennett's main example of such "soul vitalism," it is not clear that she would approve of alternatives, say, from other religions or metaphysical systems. Rather, in Bennett's account the "culture of life" movement, and politically and theologically conservative Christians in general, exemplifies the tendency among various religious peoples to over-animate matter, the "temptation to spiritualize the vital agent" (81). Bennett regularly figures her account in opposition to theistic perspectives that might posit a deity or soul behind or dwelling within materiality; repeatedly, she dismisses such perspectives out of hand, signaling their triviality in her view (see, e.g., ix, xiii, 36, 69, 81, 118, 120). Her careful critique of prior attempts to adequately reanimate matter by figures such as Henri Bergson and Hans Driesch would also seem to rule out more radically animistic accounts of material reality, such as we find in many Hinduisms and Indigenous traditions (see 2010, Chapter 5).[40] Likewise, she distances herself from forms of deep ecology that posit "a diversity unified by a common spirit" (xi). As Kath Weston has pointed out, this tendency by Bennett and other new materialists to both seek to reanimate matter over and against the notion of inanimate matter while also rejecting the overanimation of matter in fact puts rather narrow parameters on what is ontologically permissible (Weston 2017, 26-28).[41] As her criticisms and dismissal of the culture of life and the over-animation of matter indicate, Bennett conceives of herself as an outsider to soul vitalism. Likewise, her criticisms and dismissals imply that her outsider status does not impede her rejection of non-vital-materialist animisms. Moreover, this easy dismissal implies that those perspectives have a relatively trivial take on things.

Her relationship to vital materialism versus Modern inert materialism, on the other hand, is more complicated; this complex dynamic is another distinctive feature of Bennett's account. Bennett

40. Which is not to assimilate these traditions under a monolithic account of *animism*. I merely mean to point out that Bennett's metaphysics excludes all attempts to vitalize matter beyond her own.
41. As a consequence, the Amerindian perspectives brought into the view of the West by anthropologists such as Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, for one example, would be excluded as appropriately animistic (see, e.g., 2014, 2015).

presents herself as a vital materialist in training, offering guidance to potential vital materialists as well as recounting stories of shifting between experiences of vibrant and inert materialism (see, e.g., 5). In personal experiences, matter's vibrancy strikes her and then fades and she works to retrieve it (4-5). Having authors such as Thoreau, Spinoza, and Merleau-Ponty in her head helps open her to such experiences, but doesn't quite secure her occupation of the vibrant material perspective (5). At one point, she even offers a kind of confession about her resistant passive materialism. She recounts learning that researchers are uncertain whether embryonic stem cells in fact exist *as such* prior to and outside of the laboratory context (unlike adult human stem cells which do so exist) (91). She explains that this news surprised and even alarmed her. She writes, "My reaction revealed the extent to which I also had been thinking of my body as a physiological mechanism with fixed and determinate parts, including stem cells. I had absorbed the machine model of nature, and if I was not careful it would, as a default, limit my ability to perceive the vitality of things" (92). Bennett is thus an aspiring and partial inhabitant of vibrant materialism and devoted critic of the passive materialism that occasionally, perhaps often, she cannot help but occupy.

Bennett also differentiates her vibrant materialism from "environmentalism." She asks, "Would a discursive shift from environmentalism to vital materialism enhance the prospects for a more sustainability-oriented public?" Environmentalism, in Bennett's view, customarily defines the environment as "the substrate of human culture," whereas the materiality of her system "applies more evenly to humans and non-humans," it "horizontalize[s] the relations between humans, biota, and abiota" (112). Vibrant materialism is thus less hierarchical than environmentalism: "It draws human attention sideways, away from an ontologically ranked Great Chain of Being and toward a greater appreciation of the complex entanglements of humans and nonhumans" (ibid.). Additionally, vibrant materialism disrupts both "the machine image of nature" imagined by anti-environmentalists and the "teleological organicism" of some environmentalists. When we see the world for the vibrant

materiality it is, "we see that biochemical and biochemical-social systems can sometimes unexpectedly bifurcate or choose developmental paths that could not have been foreseen, for they are governed by an emergent rather than a linear or deterministic causality" (112). Lastly, environmentalism, insofar as it retains the idea of an environment distinct from the human, makes it hard to keep a hold on the fact that humans are not exclusively human (but made up of nonhumans). Bennett thinks this fact "and the cultivated talent for remembering it, forms a key part of the newish self that needs to emerge, the self of a new self-interest" (113). Her system, on the other hand, can help us keep this fact in focus.

Bennett's work thus shows how the possibility of conversion preoccupies not only more traditionally conceived environmentalists, but in fact a range of thinkers in the sphere of environmental concern who draw from disparate sources in articulating their accounts. Even without an explicit call for widespread conversion to vibrant materialism, her wish for such transformation is implied by her dismissal of competing animisms and the strict parameters she establishes for tolerable conceptions of matter. Similar tendencies characterize related work in the environmental humanities by authors who are equally skeptical of traditional environmentalism and often theoretically indebted to post-structural and post-humanist thought, such as that of Barad (e.g., 2007) and Morton (e.g., 2007, 2019).

§5 The Planetary Perspective: Whitney Bauman

Callicott, Crist, and Bennett are only willing to tolerate conceptual difference to a degree, namely, insofar as the differences in question remain within the contours of their general frameworks. For Callicott, that framework is the evolutionary-ecological worldview, for Crist the worldview of abundance and the federation of global ecological civilization, for Bennett vibrant materialism—which excludes both under- and over-animated materialisms. These constraints are

part and parcel of these scholars' desire for transformations away from certain ways of thinking and feeling about the nonhuman and toward others.

Our next author, Whitney Bauman, has a more complicated relationship to conceptual difference and conversion.[42] He is a determined critic of homogenization and defender of human difference. Not only does Bauman criticize conceptual and cultural homogenization, but also any practice of imposing sameness upon some part of the world: from biological homogenization to the homogenization of identity categories and cosmologies that people use to make sense of themselves and the world. For example, in his most in-depth single-authored work *Religion and Ecology: Developing a Planetary Ethic* (2014), Bauman repeatedly criticizes the manifold forms of homogenization that globalization, colonization, and Western science and religion have imposed on the world (10, 14, 60). Each of these forces, in its particular fashion, imposes particular concepts and values on the human/nonhuman confederations it encounters. Bauman calls such impositions "conceptual violence," a term that refers to the exclusion of alternative ways of conceiving and being in the world and the literal harms enacted and entailed by such exclusion (2). One of his examples is the imposition of the Western human/nature distinction upon societies in which "landscape and culture are inextricably intertwined" (3). Such encounters result in the recreation of the latter societies as mirror images of the West—what he calls cultural homogenization through "cultural death"—and often resource extraction and biodiversity loss (ibid.).

Against such homogenizing trends, Bauman wants to "maintain the difference necessary for multiplicity without reifying difference into conceptual isolations" (1). *Religion and Ecology*, he

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42. Bauman's work has been instrumental in bringing the insights of queer and post-humanist theory to bear on the study of religion, ethics, and ecology, especially the writings of Karen Barad, Jane Bennett, Judith Butler, Donna Haraway, and Timothy Morton. Bauman, with collaborators such as Kevin O'Brien, has also been an insightful internal critic of environmentalism (see, e.g., Bauman and O'Brien 2019). He has not only joined a growing chorus of scholars such as Crist who criticize business-as-usual, techno-managerial environmentalism (e.g., 2015, 744, 752; 2017, 18; Bauman and O'Brien 2019, 59). He has also keenly critiqued the widespread moral absolutism of the environmental movement in general—from scholars to activists and public figures—on epistemic and practical grounds (2014, 131, 145-146; Bauman and O'Brien 2019, 121).

explains, "hopes to offer sites of planetary resistance against the powerful forces imposing conceptual violence upon identities and relationships between earth others" (15). This project of defending cultural, religious, biological, and other forms of difference without falling into "conceptual isolations" (or crude and hermetic cultural and bioregional relativism) involves the articulation of what Bauman calls a "planetary perspective." Bauman differentiates the planetary perspective from the global perspective (113-18). The global perspective aspires to an Archimedean standpoint on human and nonhuman life, preferring to gloss over differences in, say, Earthly terrain and human culture in favor of emphasizing sameness across such boundaries (113). The forces of homogenization mentioned above (Western science, globalization, etc.) inhabit this perspective. By contrast, the planetary perspective that Bauman recommends strives to create room for human and nonhuman differences and to orient human life toward supporting the flourishing of "multiple earth others" (116). In the planetary perspective, we are both aware of our entanglement with human and nonhuman entities around the world (i.e., of what we share) and conscious of and committed to preserving the many differences (cultural, biological, etc.) that make up the world.

Bauman's interest in homogenization and difference, especially religious, cultural, and broadly conceptual difference, resonates with my own interest in eco-conversionism. Indeed, *Environmental Ethics and Uncertainty* (2019), co-authored with Kevin O'Brien, explicitly takes aim at those environmentalists who seek a singular environmental vision or global environmental unification (e.g., 17, 55, 58, 80, 111, 121).[43] Despite these resonances, however, Bauman (including in the book with O'Brien) ultimately slips into the very totalizing practices that he critiques and disavows.[44] For to mitigate the harms of globalization, colonization, etc. and for imagining better futures on a pluralistic, ecologically-damaged planet, Bauman recommends that we humans shift our

43. I discuss my own concerns with homogenization and eco-conversionism in Chapters 2 and 4.
44. For Bauman disavowing the totalizing aims of his own project, see, e.g., Bauman (2014, 2, 4; 2018, 103, 115). These disclaimers repeatedly conflict with his insistence that "humans" conceptualize ourselves and the world with his schema.

manifold understandings of ourselves, each other, and the world to the particular conceptualizations he develops.[45] As much as he is concerned to take difference seriously, he is equally concerned to prescribe how we humans, *all* of us, should conceptualize ourselves and the world around us. We thus find here another call for eco-conversion, one that will again manifest the three-fold structure that interests me and yet made distinctive by its disavowal of what I am calling conversion.

5.1 A Particular Perspective for All of Humanity

Here is how Bauman describes his aims in *Religion and Ecology*: "Throughout I have argued for *a shift in our understandings of nature, religion, and identity* toward an evolving, planetary context" (2014, 164). Indeed, throughout the text Bauman frames his constructive philosophy as what *we humans need* if we are to start moving toward "viable future becomings" (4). He writes, "What *we* need is to rethink our own selves as part of the ongoing planetary process of creative destruction" (155). "What *we* need," he argues, "is a new way to think about our species as a nomadic organism moving toward an open future" (151). "[A]s *human beings*, we must begin to think about what types of futures we want to help cocreate," and this involves reconceiving humanity, science, nature, religion, the self, ethics, agency, integrity, and love (3; see also 4-5, 14-15, 24, 165-72). As these passages imply, the "we" in question refers not, say, to scholars of religion, but to humans as such.[46] Why do we need to so transform? For the sake of the flourishing of human and nonhuman beings. Perhaps, Bauman hopes, if we can recognize that we are nomadic organisms, becoming and entangled with the rest of nature, we might enter a phase of history in which the "generative capacities of earth" are no longer outstripped (152; all emphases in this paragraph are mine).

45. Bauman and O'Brien prescribe a particular conceptual framework in the broader context of trying to make environmentalism less dogmatic. See, e.g., Chapter 1 of their *Environmental Ethics and Uncertainty* (2019).
46. See also Bauman 2016, 3-4, 10. The subtitle to this book, viz. *Developing a Planetary Ethic*, refers not, say, to scholarly ethics; the ethic in question is one for the people of the planet (in opposition to the norms of the global perspective).

We need not consider each element of Bauman's planetary perspective to appreciate its particularity and how it excludes various alternatives. A brief excursus on his understanding of religion drives the point home. Religion in Bauman's hands is correlated to the philosophical anthropology of his schema: humans by nature are, among other things, meaning-making creatures (107-8). Religion is one way that humans make meaning. But often religions hold their ideas and values too firmly, thinking they are absolutely true, and this drives them to impose their views on others. Therefore, Bauman argues, we need to "reground" religion by "[thinking] of our meaning-making practices (including religions) as imaginative lines of flight" (64). He writes,

> In order to begin to jar us out of [metaphysical] ways of thinking about meaning and to begin to understand humans as the dominant meaning-making creatures on the planet, though not the only meaningful creatures, it is necessary to shift our thinking about meaning from that of foundations in some sort of nature, God/Revelation or essential, original identity, and toward that of understanding meaning as techne. In other words, meaning, God, values, purpose, nature, and language are more about technologies of imagination than ontology or metaphysics. (109)

How do we achieve this "shift in our thinking" from conceiving of such things as nature and God as foundational (to how we understand ourselves and the world) to "technologies of imagination"? Bauman recommends two initial steps: "First of all," he writes, "we have to begin to understand ourselves as natural-cultural, biohistorical, embodied thinking creatures" (109). This transformation in how we understand ourselves leads into the second step: "We have to understand ourselves as part of a becoming process…We are not outside the becoming process of planetary evolution, nor are we outside the 13.7 billion year process of cosmic expansion. As such, we are both part of and actors in an ongoing process" (ibid.). If we can start to see ourselves as "natural-cultural" participants in the planetary becoming of Earth, then our understanding of such concepts as "God, self, other, nature" shifts from one of holding these as "ontological categories" to holding them as "permeable, ethical categories that shape the world around us" (108). That is, the practices,

concepts, beliefs, and values of religion are recast as *sources* for making meaning in our lives as we participate in the ever shifting and developing history of the planet (139).

This is a particular conception of religion, one that not only figures Bauman as outside-of the religions and other practices he is theorizing as "meaning-making practices." It also suggests that (a) his outsider status in no way impedes he recommendations about how religions need to change and (b) the stakes of achieving that change, of conforming their particular expressions to his framework, are predominantly (or solely) positive. From this outsider point of view, Bauman suggests that we not think of religions as about, say, *God*, but rather *meaningful human lives*. This rethinking also requires new self-understandings. We should shift from whatever we already think about ourselves to a "biohistorical" understanding that emplots us in the "becoming process" of "cosmic expansion." This distinctive anthropology is part and parcel of Bauman's planetary vision.

Besides the very particular picture of the human Bauman recommends, readers familiar with James Gustafson's work will recognize that Bauman's reconceptualization of religion is quintessentially anthropocentric (see, e.g., Gustafson 1981, Chapter 1). Religion in Bauman's system is about *humans* making meaning as part of the history of planetary becoming. Bauman leaves little room to doubt this reading, since he repeatedly situates religion as one of multiple *sources* for human meaning making (see, e.g., 2014, 17, 40, 64, 67, 139). Needless to say, theocentric traditions, or those traditions that insist that what they do and believe is *not* about them but in fact about a deity, dharma, ultimate reality, and so forth may take issue with this recasting. We can draw out the contrast: imagine asking a practitioner of some religion what they are doing when they are, say, *listening for the word of God* during a scripture reading in worship. In the ordinary course of things, a perfectly rational, intelligible, and adequate explanation from such an individual would be: "Why, I

am *worshipping God*" or "listening for God's word."[47] I think we would be surprised if instead we received an explicit or tacit form of "I'm making meaning, making a meaningful life," as *listening for the word of God* were a mere means to such meaning and not *the practice* in question itself, with its correlated telos of *hearing the word.* Bauman wants us and the world's traditions to start thinking and speaking along the lines of the latter reply.[48] That is a very specific conception of religion, one that demands a potentially drastic transformation of how various peoples presently understand themselves, their practices, and the universe.[49]

Despite the particularity of the concepts that make up Bauman's planetary framework and his insistence that there are multiple valid ways to conceptualize the world, he regularly frames his distinctive framework *as describing the way things are*. When he discusses how we should think about religion he is talking about *all* of us and seemingly *all* religions. The same applies to the other elements of his system. For example, when discussing the ways in which human concepts and materiality together co-constitute human subjectivity and reality as such, Bauman writes, "We are *literally* iterating and being iterated by the becoming truth regimes of this way of organizing the boundaries of various becoming phenomena" (158; my emphasis). Similarly, in their discussion of identity in *Environmental Ethics and Uncertainty*, Bauman and O'Brien write,

> "[Judith Butler] reminds us that human selfhood is performative, contextual, and shifting rather than established. Identity is *always* performed with and through multiple others, both present and past. These performative identities co-create habitual norms, and norms *always* lead to the 'abjection' of someone and something, the leaving out of something that is determined to be not a part of the identity. *There is no identity without abjection*, and so *all* human selves are co-constructed through interactions with what they are not. In other words, we are defined in and through our differences" (2019, 19; my emphasis)

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47. The adequacy of this explanation depends upon the particularities of the questioner and the specific case. Doubtless, if the questioner were Hume or A. J. Ayer such a response would be perfectly inadequate.
48. Recall, "we" (i.e., humans) are to reconceive such signs as *God* more as "technologies of imagination than ontology or metaphysics" (109).
49. We could say that Bauman would have a first order discourse displaced with a second order discourse, or a first person understanding of religious concepts replaced by the third person. On the irreducibility of first person understanding to third, see McDowell (1998a-c).

This hardly sounds like one conceptualization of identity and selfhood among others. This is not to say that I disagree with Bauman (and O'Brien or Butler). Rather, these passages indicate that Bauman (and O'Brien in this case) is committed to and seeking to disseminate a particular conceptual system in response to the environmental and social crises that motivate his (and their) project. We humans need to rethink such things as religion, identity, nature, science, etc., he argues, because such rethinking will contribute to the future flourishing of the planet and, as it turns out, because Bauman's new concepts better describe the way things are.

Bauman's distinctive form of conversionism does not solely involve changing the concepts with which people live; it also includes changing *how* we hold our concepts, beliefs, and values. A theme running through Bauman's work is the problem of certainty. As his reconceptualization of religion suggests, Bauman thinks that it is largely because the agents of homogenization (globalization, colonization, Western religions, etc.) hold their concepts, values, and knowledge with *certainty* that they are led to impose their ways of life upon the rest of the world (2014, 30-31, 65, 68, 132). He writes, "The only certainty is that when certainty is imposed on the world love is impossible and violence is inevitable" (172). Indeed, he suggests, "fundamentalist beliefs, dogmas, bigotry, and just about all 'isms' can probably be linked to some sort of ultimate certainty" (10). Accordingly, Bauman insists that we embrace *uncertainty* by (a) recognizing the plurality of worldviews, narratives, identities, religions, values, and truths that exist and (b) acknowledging the necessary partiality of our own perspective (73).

Bauman explains that recognizing human plurality and the partiality of our own perspectives need not deprive us of meaning nor confidence in the insights of our points of view. He writes,

> Recognizing that one's perspective is both unique and ecohistorically located does not mean that it is relative and meaningless, but rather that it contributes a voice to the overall becoming process of an ongoing multiperspectival planet. One can be happy to contribute one's voice to the mix without suggesting that it is the voice of universal law. One can argue persuasively for one's own point of view without being dogmatic about holding onto that point of view. One can see many different possibilities for planetary becomings, choose

> some of those possibilities to act upon, and then take responsibility for the consequences of those actions. From such a perspective, there is no pure science nor pure religion, but rather there are multiple persuasions / (per)versions of religions, sciences, and their understandings of nature. (34)

This is a vision of a plurality of peoples from myriad places and traditions electing to inhabit some perspectives rather that others and each holding their particular view lightly in light of their awareness of this multiplicity. This vision is reminiscent of the calls by some neo-pragmatists, such as Richard Rorty, for a kind of general pragmatism (or ironism)—for the people of liberal societies to recognize the contingency of their perspectives, their historically conditioned truth and goodness (see, e.g., Rorty 1989, 60-69).[50] It is also, however, a vision that mandates one way of relating to the ideas, values, texts, rituals, stories, etc. that make up a worldview, tradition, or perspective. Thus, Bauman's advocacy for universal uncertainty has epistemically homogenizing implications.[51]

5.2 Inadvertent Conversionism

Bauman comments on a rich plurality of worldviews, religions, and cultures throughout *Religion and Ecology*. This plurality includes Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Indigenous traditions, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, dogmatic secular and scientific perspectives, and "fundamentalist" religions in general (e.g., 2014, 7, 10, 20, 23, 30-31, 38, 53-54, 67-70, 80-83).[52] As in the case of Callicott in *Earth's Insights*, it is difficult to imagine that Bauman somehow inhabits each of these perspectives. Yet never does this exteriority preclude his assessment of these views nor qualify his call for a species-wide transformation. With his preferred worldview in hand, he selects those elements of particular traditions worth retaining insofar as they conform to that worldview (2014, 67-70). For example, he suggests that the figures of the Trickster (from various Indigenous traditions) and Shiva

50. Bauman cites Rorty as a fellow traveler (Bauman 2014, 88).
51. Beyond the problem of homogenization, accounts such as Bauman's and Rorty's proceed as if treating, say, a belief as "certain" or "uncertain," "dogmatically" or "equivocally," means *one* thing. This assumption is eminently questionable, for such signs as "certain" can and do function in *all sorts of ways*. What such signs can mean and the range of ways in which they are (intelligibly) used is one of the topics of Wittgenstein's *On Certainty* (1969).
52. I do not further differentiate within these traditions because Bauman rarely does so. He does, however, explicitly reject essentialism when it comes to particular religious traditions and the idea of religion as such (see, e.g., 2014, 22-23).

(from Vedic Hindu traditions) both unsettle "reified worldviews" and express the idea of that all cultures are contingent and porous (69-70). Bauman endorses these figures because they harmonize with his perspective. However, as I've suggested above, by and large Bauman thinks most traditions need to transform themselves along the lines he prescribes. Like Crist, he insists that (transcultural) *humanity* needs to rethink (what he takes to be) fundamental concepts such as humanity itself, nature, science, religion, and identity. He also insists that we hold our perspectives without certainty.

Bauman argues that there is room for radical multiplicity within the strictures of his planetary perspective. "These new ways [of becoming human]," he writes, "do not need to be singular, as the wider planetary community has largely thrived on biodiversity, and human communities on biocultural-historical diversity. Rather, the point is that through this rethinking human becomings are thought back into the rest of the natural world and that this nature is understood as always already a political process" (2014, 60-61). Still, it is difficult to overlook that he has rather constrained the range of possible forms of "human becoming," thereby advocating for a form of wide-ranging worldview change. The homogenizing consequences of Bauman's argument are inadvertent and contradictory to his intention to defend differences of all sorts.[53] His thought is therefore instructive for the study of eco-conversionism: even a commitment to take human difference seriously does nothing to *secure* the fulfillment of that commitment. Faced with our ongoing environmental crises, it is apparently easy for environmentalists to slip into recommending that the people of the world convert to our preferred worldviews—even when we reject conversion.

§6 The Etiological Structure of Eco-conversionism

Some of us environmentalists are apparently relatively occupied with converting our conceptually deviant ecological others to our preferred systems of understanding. Influential

53. This pattern repeats elsewhere in his work (see, e.g., 2018; Bauman and O'Brien 2019).

scholars working in philosophy, science and technology studies, political theory, and religious studies are all immersed in such eco-conversion projects. The foregoing discussion considers four transformation projects, but as we saw in the Introduction this interest transcends these cases. Recall that Sideris has documented how scholars across the humanities and sciences are developing and seeking to disseminate through multi-media enterprises a transformative new cosmology to unite the world's people. Meanwhile, other environmental scholars and activists are trying to coordinate far-reaching eco-conversion by founding open-access journals and administering hubs like the Ecocentric Alliance or they call for the policing of troublesome worldviews and the transformation of environmentalism into a missionary movement. Others poll the public for adherence to an ecological paradigm and evaluate different techniques for improving the dissemination of such a paradigm. We might adduce further cases to continue filling out the eco-conversionist profile.

In addition to documenting this interest in eco-conversion among us environmentalists, the previous sections began tracing some patterns in it. I now want to gather together some of the noteworthy elements of that pattern. Again, I undertake this gathering in a spirit inspired by Wittgenstein, who encourages us to go much more slowly in our thinking than we may initially wish to, to attend as much as we can to what we assume in moving from one stage to another (see, e.g., 1967, §382; 1980, 34e, 68e). I want to slow down conversion-inclined environmentalists, to consider some of what we take for granted in our conversion projects. There are three elements in the resulting pattern manifest by the eco-conversionists discussed above, a pattern that I call the etiological structure of eco-conversionism: anxiety over not only ecological problems, but also the existence of others; a recurrent general picture of the conceptually deviant ecological other as such; and recurring examples of environmentalism's conceptual others. I will explore each of these elements in more depth in this section. After I discuss some limitations to eco-conversionism in the next chapter, the synthesis of this section, and in particular the general notion of the ecological other

that I describe, will provide a springboard for finding our way beyond this fixation on the modality of other-transformation in the rest of dissertation.

6.1 *A particular motivating anxiety*

The first element is motivational: each of the authors I've discussed advocate for embodied, axiological, and conceptual transformation or conversion as a central part of responding to ongoing ecological crises. Anxiety over ecological problems, then, is part of what drives these conversionist enterprises. Ecological crises of all sorts form the backdrop of Callicott's and Bennett's projects. Crist is particularly concerned with planetary biodiversity. Bauman worries about both social and environmental problems. In light of their respective problematics, each figure recommends widespread conceptual, affective, and moral change.

But anxiety over ecological crises can express itself in all sorts of ways. For example, one might chain oneself to a tree or blowup a pipeline. Or one might dedicate one's life to making renewable energy more reliable and affordable or to engaging local politics, campaigning on climate mitigation and resilience, wilderness protection, or environmental justice reforms and reparations. Just as plausibly, one might express one's perception of and anxiety over ecological crises by melting into a puddle of shame for one's part in those crises or freezing into a paralytic state in light of their overwhelming nature.[54] It is therefore noteworthy that we conversionists respond to environmental crises by recommending conversion. And not just conversion, say, of our own groups of people (friends, fellow citizens, etc.), but also of other groups, entire cultures, religions, nations.

In light of the fact that we conversionists respond to our perceptions of ecological damage precisely by recommending and pursuing the conversion of our conceptual others, I suggest that we are not solely haunted by ecological problems. We are also haunted by, feel exposed to our

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54. For extensive documentation of the former phenomenon, see Fredericks 2021. For a discussion of the latter and techniques for managing it, see Ray 2020.

ecological others. The move to conversion as I have documented it indexes not only many environmentalists' perception of problems involving the nonhuman and the need for worldview change, but also a perception of and anxiety over the reality of other people. Eco-conversion of the conceptual other as such implies the reality of other people (the not-yet-converted) and the desire for them to *not be other* (since through conversion they become *one of us*). I have highlighted this desire to convert the other above by noting how Callicott, Crist, Bennett, and Bauman all situated themselves outside of the perspectives they wish to change. I have also highlighted these authors' anxiety over conceptual difference by noting their repugnance, discomfort, and impatience with their others and the limitations of their intolerance for pluralism. For Callicott, some pluralism is acceptable, but not "untempered pluralism" (1994, 186-87); worldviews are to be tolerated insofar as they can be brought within the bounds of the evolutionary-ecological worldview. Likewise, Bennett rejects both the under- and over-animation of matter, though she cannot herself help but slip into viewing matter in the former fashion from time to time. Similarly, Bauman reassures us of the satisfaction that is still available once we recast our conceptual inheritances within his planetary perspective. Crist, in her turn, insists without demonstration that the world's non-Indigenous peoples share a worldview that must be replaced by her worldview of abundance. In *Abundant Earth* she tacitly acknowledges while seeking to minimize—through an appeal to globalization—the world's actual multiplicity. We saw a similar frustration over human multiplicity in the Introduction, such as when LeVasseur called for the *policing* of deviant worldviews and Rolston expressed his impatience with needing to accommodate Hindu perspectives in the short term.

I suspect this anxiety lurks behind additional eco-conversionist projects, such as the numerous polls mentioned in the introductory chapter that employ such rubrics as the New Ecological Paradigm to measure the degree to which the attitudes of various citizenries conform to

an eco-centric perspective.[55] Likewise, I see this anxiety at work in the writings of some of Sideris's New Cosmologists, such as philosopher of religion Loyal Rue who bemoans the failure of "Axial traditions" to curb the present day "hemorrhage of diversity," a problematic his narrative of cosmic evolution, what he calls "everybody's story," can finally solve (2000, 38, 41-43). Or, to introduce an additional example, for some time *The Ecological Citizen*'s website hosted a page, taken down sometime in late 2022 or early 2023, that sought to develop an ecocentric lexicon by defining important terms for fleshing out the ecocentric worldview while also marking off "troublesome" and "negative" terms such as "stewardship" (Ecological Citizen, n.d.).[56] Like *The Citizen*'s other tools, the idea is to help users to conform to the ecocentric worldview by guiding them through the subtle anthropocentric pitfalls that pepper everyday language. But what interests me is how the development of such a lexicon might plausibly be indexed to a certain anxiety over other people using all sorts of other lexicons. Imagine what it would be like to feel moved to sit down to list as many of the words and phrases that one can think of that other people should and should not use.

In the face of environmental catastrophes of many forms, we conversion-inclined environmentalists appear deeply unsettled by, anxious over human conceptual difference and that anxiety is part of what inspires us to respond to ecological problems by changing people who think, feel, and value differently than ourselves. Each of the projects described above and in the Introduction recognizes human conceptual plurality and environmental perils and disasters. In each account the authors respond to the latter by recommending, among other things, the *mitigation* if not wholesale *erasure* of the former.[57] This mitigation and/or erasure effectively functions as a kind of *absorption* of the conceptual other into the preferred worldview (cf. Tuck and Yang 2012, 9). The

55. As many analysists of empire have suggested, such anxiety over difference in settler colonial contexts can be a symptom of settlers' anxiety over the irresolution of the colonial situation. This anxiety often expresses itself through attempts to resolve that situation by, say, assimilating Indigenous peoples. For more here, see Tuck and Yang (2012).
56. Until the lexicon was removed, the fifth avowed aim of the journal was "to nurture an ecocentric lexicon"
57. With Bennett this is largely a silent recommendation implied by her intolerance of competing animisms.

envisioned process is one of transforming the *other* into a conceptual *fellow*, from being one of *them* to being one of *us*. Eco-conversionism thus seems to indicate not only anxiety over environmental crises, but also over the ecological other, over conceptual difference. Absorption of the conceptual other is a way to escape conceptual difference, the strange and difficult reality of living with recalcitrant human differences. I am tempted to say we eco-conversionists *mistrust* our others. We mistrust, say, that they perceive the ecological harms that we perceive, that they will support the actions we see as necessary. Our grounds for such mistrust are precisely such facts as that other people do not seem to be doing what we are doing and think most everyone should do. This divergence might understandably unseat our reason, shoulder us out of commonsense—for how can anyone not *despair* in the face of ecological crises (cf. Diamond 2008, 46)? So, in response, we seek to make them perceive as we do through conversion, through changing them.[58] In a sense, then, conversion is an end-run around *persuasion* in the sense of offering reasons to someone as they are, a kind of avoidance of the other (cf. Cavell 1979, 433). I shall return to these themes below and in the next chapter when I take up Cavell's notion of "an absence of morality."

I note this initial, motivational element because I think it is essential to understanding and therefore responding to eco-conversionism. It is also regularly overlooked by scholars who criticize eco-conversionism and related phenomena. As I mentioned in the Introduction, within environmental philosophy and religious environmental ethics, various authors, often situating themselves within American Pragmatism, chastise other environmental scholars and activists for focusing on the development of new worldviews, axiologies, cosmologies, and so forth. For example, the influential environmental pragmatist Bryan Norton has criticized, for decades, many environmental philosophers' focus on the articulation and circulation of a nonanthropocentric

58. Interestingly, some analysts have suggested that mistrust lies at the heart of our environmental crises insofar as political conservatives in many places and especially the United States distrust scientists, scientific institutions, policy makers, and science communicators (Fairbrother 2017).

axiological perspective from conceptual and practical perspectives (see, e.g., 1984, 1991, 1992, 2005). In Norton's views, these environmental moralists, as he sometimes calls them (1991, 4), hamstring efforts to build effective coalitions by insisting that nature be understood, valued, and talked about a certain way (see, e.g., 1991, 6-7; 2005, x-ix, 155). Against these moralists, Norton argues that environmentalists should reject "ideological environmentalism" in favor of problem-oriented approaches, since environmentalists of different stripes often agree about what to do about ecological problems (1991, 240-43; 1992, 209)[59] and because a problem-orientation can side-step the gridlock that follows from using charged terms and seeking thoroughgoing consensus on politicized topics (2005, xii, 43, 149). A central role for environmental scholars in such approaches is to shift from insisting on that everyone value nature intrinsically, jettisoning the very idea of nonanthropocentric intrinsic value along the way (1992, 222), to developing conceptual tools that help specific diverse groups of people in particular places manage their ecosystems well (see, e.g., 1992, 209; 2005, 480).

Many scholars and advocates have followed Norton's lead or found themselves on similar paths. In the study of religion and ethics, Willis Jenkins's work is a noteworthy example. In *The Future of Ethics*, Jenkins singles out what he calls "the cosmological temptation" as a pitfall to avoid as ethicists and religionists respond to ecological crises. This temptation Jenkins describes as a preoccupation with proposing "a new worldview within which to make sense of the problems of sustainability and social justice" (2013, 4). Such an approach, he fears, "draws ethical attention away from concrete problems, scientific learning, pluralist negotiations, and the dynamics of cultural change" (4). By contrast, and in dialogue with Norton, Jenkins recommends that scholars engage in "reform projects," refining and supporting ongoing efforts to respond to eco-social problems (4-5).

59. This is Norton's so-called "convergence hypothesis" (see 1991, 240-43).

In addition to these practical limitations, such pragmatists sometimes attack conceptual problems in worldview approaches. It is here that their arguments come particularly close to my own. For instance, in an earlier piece, Norton suggests that emphasizing practical convergences between diverse parties on ecological problems may not dissuade advocates for establishing nonanthropocentric views until the preoccupation with this project is understood (1992, 209). What we need here, he explains, is a kind of conceptual therapy akin to the methodology of the present project, leading him to analyze the organizing assumptions of nonanthropocentric philosophers Callicott and Rolston. He discovers that these environmental advocates find themselves fixated on the task in question because they recapitulate the same dualistic paradigm of value – in which a subject values an object either intrinsically or instrumentally—that they often seek to challenge in their rebellion against the conceptual inheritances of Euro-American modernity (see Norton 1992, 208). This irony comes out in how these authors take for granted that the only way to argue on behalf of the value of the nonhuman is to first establish its objective value (213); they are in the grip of what Norton calls a "heroic" conception of intrinsic value, one that defeats itself not only practically but conceptually insofar as the authors seek with it to escape the Modern framework that gives the intrinsic/instrumental distinction its sense. Norton ultimately recommends jettisoning this distinction in favor of "relational theory of perception and valuation" within which "the question of whether natural objects have objectivity never arises" (217).[60] "Once we reject the Cartesian, locational criterion of objectivity," Norton explains, "it is possible to seek alternative epistemological justifications for environmental goals and values" (221-22).

I have enormous sympathy for these environmental pragmatists. Norton's critique of the intrinsic/instrumental dichotomy is, by my lights, a devastating examination of organizing

60. "Anyone who adopts a post-Cartesian epistemology," he continues "the whole question becomes a classic example of a philosophical pseudo-problem, a bewitchment of ossified language" (217).

distinctions for the philosophers in question. And his and scholars like Jenkins's practical complaints are sound. Indeed, I will not only echo but significantly bolster their strategic concerns in Chapter 2. Nevertheless, observe the absence in these pragmatists' accounts of how the bare existence of other people factors into the efforts of their foils, the absence of those whom Norton's moralists or nonanthropocentrists and Jenkins's cosmologists hope to persuade, change, or reorient to nature. Surely the reality of such objects of worldview, axiological, or cosmological change are among the animating conditions that make the activities of such eco-conversionists intelligible at all. This analytical void suggests to me that these pragmatists misjudge the gravity of the ecological other in the eco-conversionist imagination. Again, many of us environmentalists are *haunted* by the fact that conceptually different people exist and that they may not understand, perceive, or care about the environmental crises that, as often as not, *wound* and *consume* us, to which we feel *exposed* (Diamond 2008, 46). To be told to set aside the concern with ideal worldviews (and their dissemination) in order to focus on solving concrete problems, usually in conversation with people who we think fundamentally misunderstand the nature of reality, the nature of, say, *ecology*, is hardly a response in the register of our concerns and motivations. It is no wonder that the construction of ideal metaphysical systems and worldviews as well as the promotion of the dissemination of those worldviews has proceeded and even increased despite pragmatic criticisms. Recall for instance, in his reply to Sideris's work, how Rolston concedes that "perhaps provisionally, perhaps *pragmatically*," it makes sense to allow Yamuna devotees to think what they will about the sacred river, before insisting that "eventually that account will have to be 'deconstructed' into a more scientific explanation" (Rolston 2015, 201; my emphasis).[61] Think about that: even if environmental goals might be accomplished by appealing to local values, *eventually* the other *must go*. In Rolston's remark,

61. In a similar fashion, other eco-conversionists acknowledge the immediate practical limitations on their conversionist efforts, but commit to secreting the ultimate telos of worldview change (Assadourian 2016, 255).

the very ecological crises that seem to inspire eco-conversionism disappear or appear negotiable, while the nonnegotiable transformation of the other comes to the fore.[62] In contrast to the pragmatic dismissal of environmental anxiety over conceptual difference, I want to take such anxiety seriously and to intervene in the corresponding register. To do so first requires acknowledging that anxiety, appreciating the difficult realities to which eco-conversionists feel exposed. This move is part and parcel of my inheritance of the therapeutic ordinary language methodology which begins by trying to understand the utterances and animating concerns of one's variously occupied interlocutors (cf. Cavell 1976b, 239-40, 247-48).[63] Next, we should look at some of the assumptions about *ecological others* that conceptually help get eco-conversionism off the ground.

6.2 A Particular Picture of the Ecological Other

The second element in the pattern exhibited by the eco-conversionists above is the proliferation of an implicit picture of the ecological other as such, what I call the *transparent and trivial picture*, which makes conversion seem reasonable and even commonsensical. The other here is thought to be *trivial* on questions of living well with the more-than-human (e.g., how the nonhuman should be valued, attuned to, affectively related to, treated rightly, factored into political coordination and policy, etc.). That evaluation, paired with eco-conversionists' avowed and plausible exteriority to their others' perspectives, implies the transparency or obvious sense of the other, their perspective, the *sense* of their behavior and talk. If ecological concern and anxiety over difference

62. I sense a similar bait and switch in how Crist and Callicott cast what they see as the unavoidability of global worldview change, thanks to globalization, as desirable.

63. My analysis of the pragmatic reply to the worldview-focus by environmentalists echoes the ordinary language critique of classical and many neo-pragmatists vis-à-vis philosophical problems. The latter tell us to set aside certain concepts and certain projects since they lead to philosophical confusions. The former point out that a haunting skepticism inspires those concepts and projects and to be told not to be haunted is to have salt rubbed in the wound. If you wish to extract the nerve that leads to philosophical confusion, you shall have to do the labor of finding and extracting it; and that means taking it seriously, which is what Wittgenstein's therapeutics aim at. Hence the superiority, in the view of ordinary language philosophers, of the Wittgensteinian treatment of philosophical dilemmas. For excellent discussions of this difference between Wittgensteinian ordinary language philosophy and many forms of pragmatism, see Cavell's "What's the Use of Calling Emerson a Pragmatist?" (1998) and Russell Johnson's "Pragmatism without the '-ism'" (2019).

motivate eco-conversionists to do *something* about environmental disasters, this picture of the other seems to license *conversion* as one of the central things to do. I will expand on each of these points.

In the writings considered above, each eco-conversionist construes her or his conceptual others' distinctive perspectives on and life with the more-than-human as insignificant, frivolous or shallow, trifling, or in Rolston's turn of phrase from the Introduction as having "only antiquarian interest" on questions of living well with the nonhuman (2015, 201).[64] Or in nominalized terms, the other is imagined to be an *amateur*, *trifle*, *fool*, *child*, or *primitive* on ethical questions involving the nonhuman. The other's triviality is conveyed not only by how each author represents the views of would-be converts but by the recommendation of conversion itself. External conversion relegates the other's displaced worldview to triviality through *the very pursuit of conversion*. For if the other's perspective were *nontrivial*, if say, the other could transform our own perspective in valuable ways or if its continuance might support environmental ends, then trying to transform it through conversion would be undesirable in the absence of other over-ruling considerations. Even if such competing considerations arose, such as, arguably the ecological crises that animate eco-conversion, the forfeiture of the other's nontrivial perspective through conversion might be cited as a drawback by conversionists. But these possibilities do not seem to readily arise. Conversionists show this merely by advocating for and pursuing widespread conversion, rarely if ever citing any drawbacks to absorbing our others to our preferred perspectives. Our preoccupation with conversion tacitly declares that from our point of view, the stakes of transforming our ecological others are relatively low compared with the goods won by conversion.[65] The other here is only ever insignificant in relationship to eco-normative questions, except as a *barrier* to environmental goals.

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64. This last specification is important because of course each author construes her or his others as in fact problematic vis-à-vis ecological crises.

65. Insofar as evaluation implies comprehension, to judge that our conceptual others are trivial, to imagine them as trifles implies the transparency of their concepts. Yet, as we saw with Crist's discussion of Indigenous peoples, the inverse does not necessarily hold. To imagine that our others' concepts are transparent to us does not imply a negative

But if as the eco-conversionists discussed above repeatedly imply—and the very idea of seeking *worldview change* seems to necessitate—such trivial others are also *conceptual* others—are people who live with distinctive conceptual capacities from our own—then we should add that our others are not only trivial but also *transparent* to us. This transparency is implied when the *sense* of the other's concepts, say, *Yamuna*, or of the signs that signify them (say, a sentence uttered or written about *Yamuna* or some segment of behavior that refers to her), can be read off from a perspective external to life with those concepts. *What* someone is doing, the *sense* of their speech act or other behavior, or if you prefer what someone *means* (or better *how they understand* their acts and utterances) is legible from a perspective outside of life with those acts, meanings, and understandings. This picture is in play when the fact of *conceptual difference*, when the fact that another lives with concepts with which we do not live, creates no barrier to *evaluation* and the *understanding* assumed therein. Each of the authors discussed above represents his or her conceptual others in this fashion, as both conceptually other to them and yet meriting conversion, implying their others' transparency. In the cases of Callicott, Crist, and Bauman, an impressive plurality of perspectives is so construed, while Bennett's account is more limited to various overly-animistic accounts (recall that she figures herself as partially within a perspective that under-animates matter). Insofar as such authors imply both (a) that they understand the others they wish to convert while (b) not living with the concepts that constitute their other's perspectives and forms of living (for they stand *outside* and seek to change them), they imply further (c) that those others are transparent to them.

Together, these features of transparency and triviality characterize how the eco-conversionists studied here tacitly imagine their opponents. I am construing this fact by suggesting that a particular conception, model, or picture of the other seems to organize their conversionist

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evaluation of our others; we can approve of their understandings and values regarding the nonhuman. Nevertheless, in most cases the transparency of concepts tends to go with negative evaluations.

projects. If we imagine our ecological others along these lines, as transparent to us and trivial from our perspective, then it seems perfectly reasonable to try to convert them so that, say, they might be worried as we are about the extinction crisis. This picture, latent as it is, seems to say to us: *Despite living with disparate concepts, we understand our others*. Moreover: *nothing is lost in converting the conceptual other to our perspective; for when it comes to living well with the nonhuman, their perspective is trivial.* Since the eco-conversionists discussed above repeatedly cast themselves as outsiders to the views they want to convert (implying transparency) and offer no qualms over the displacement of the views in question (implying triviality), I submit that the proliferation of this picture of the other helps to explain the environmental interest in conversion. In the context of our anxiety over ecological problems and the reality of conceptual others, this picture casts conversion as commonsensical.

Doubtless, this picture of the other finds grounds in very real, everyday facts about our lives with others, namely, that others can be quite different from us, understood by us, and rightly judged to be in some sense morally frivolous. Think, for instance, of Norton's tale of encountering a child helping her family harvest sand dollars on a beach of the barrier island Longboat Key, in Florida. The girl's task is to transport the fresh sand dollars from the harvesters in the lagoon to a sand bar. Passing her on foot, Norton says, "You know, they're alive." The eight-year-old replies, "We can put 'em in Clorox at home and they'll turn white…My Momma makes 'em outta things" (1991, 3-4). The family sells the resulting creations and the left over sand dollars in a local craft store. Faced with the family "strip mining" the sand dollars and then with this explanation, Norton feels indignation at the crudely economic conceptualization of the creatures, a manner of understanding and relating to them that he plainly does not share but seemingly grasps quite readily, indicating a kind of ordinary transparency, and I think rightly sees as expressing a sort of moral immaturity or poverty, or as a relatively trivial perspective when it comes to thinking well about the significance of nonhuman beings. These sorts of scenes should be plainly familiar and indeed make up some important part of

our lives with others.[66] But eco-conversionism and the picture of the other as decidedly transparent and trivial transform, tacitly and in practice, these mere possibilities into a paradigm for all instances. For eco-conversionists, the significance of the ecological other—both (a) the meaning of their signs and meaningful or conceptualized behavior and (b) the potential value of those signs and non-linguistic behavior—is not a *question*, but something settled: the other is plainly (transparently) a mere barrier to environmental aims (and otherwise trivial with respect to those values)—a child on the beach hoarding sand dollars for nickels. Again, the paradigmatic status of this picture is signaled by eco-conversionists sheer preoccupation with worldview change.

Taken together with eco-conversionists' anxiety over the existence of the ecological other, the excavation of the general pattern according to which that other is conceptualized reveals some curious imaginative habits. In the eco-conversionist sensibility we find, simultaneously, a keen attunement to, awareness of alterity, a sensitivity to the existence of others, connected to the animating anxiety, and yet also, to modify a phrase from Cavell, a certain absence of alterity (see 1979, 274). By saying that the eco-conversionist imagination is partially characterized by an absence of alterity, or a concept of otherness, I mean that this is a perspective in which there are no true strangers, no real *others*. There are only familiar people here, or I want to say: additional but not *other* people. If not quite a friend, since a would-be convert, the transparent and trivial other is a figure of *intimacy*, an other *known*. Or with David Byrne, the other here is "*strange* but not a stranger."[67] This

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66. We can also imagine such quotidian scenes among people from radically different worlds, say, different cultures, in which some manner of understanding occurs even amidst all sorts of non- or misunderstanding. Imagine Norton finds himself confronted by speakers of another language on another continent but with a translator. Of course, what we will say is "understood" here may be thinner than in the English-speaking, Florida family case. But we entertain an overly metaphysical conception of understanding if we think Norton might still be utterly baffled by the non-English-speaking sand dollar harvesters after hearing the translator's account. Allow simply that "understanding" is a mere quotidian thing that looks a certain way in such a case—in all its contingency and precarity. Look up from this writing and think of how you get on in places where you do not know the language or norms. Does all fall to pieces? Always? Here as elsewhere there is understanding and non-understanding, if we allow those words their ordinary life. More on these matters in Chapter 3. In any event, my point is that these quotidian possibilities, what Wittgenstein and Diamond would call rags, do not belong only to peoples who share a natural language.

67. Lyrics from the Talking Heads track "Burning Down the House."

absence of alterity is peculiar because the anxiety that gets eco-conversion going is precisely a worry over people who are substantially different from conversionists. If we imagine, for practical purposes, that alterity has two sides—the other's familiarity and transparency to the self and the other's depth and distance from the self[68]—we might say that these environmentalists, amidst their conversion projects, have forgotten the second side, forgotten the full grammar of alterity. In Chapters 2, 3, and 4, I will invite us to question the absolute adequacy of the eco-conversionist picture of the other, in part by, so to speak, pressing on this absence. I will suggest that are other ways to imagine our others, inspired by other ordinary facts from our lives with difference; the transparent and trivial picture is not forced on us. When we start imagining our others otherwise, conversion too will be refigured as noncompulsory.

6.3 Inhabitants of the Eco-conversionist Imagination

The third and final element in the pattern manifest by the eco-conversionists discussed above is that certain perspectives repeatedly appear as conceptually-other-to environmentalism. I think of these reiterated examples of particular ecological others as mere instantiations or specifications of the general conception of the ecological other that organizes eco-conversionism. This is shown by the fact that whatever differentiates these others from each other, they are consistently cast as understood and trivialized by the eco-conversionists in question. Often, these specific others need to be converted, but occasionally they are exempt from conversion since they already conform to the preferred worldview. I have highlighted two such recurring ecological others, though many additional imagined subject locations also recur. These examples will help me in the next chapter to elucidate the limitations of conversion. They will also help me in Chapters 5 and 6 as I explore possibilities for relating to ecological others besides conversion.

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68. Cf. Richard Miller's construal of our lives with others as "ineluctably [oscillating] between intimacy and otherness" (2016, 5).

First, generally "anthropocentric" perspectives repeatedly arise in the accounts above as other-to environmentalism, perspectives which either give human beings an exalted place in the cosmos, limit moral-considerability to humans, or both. Within anthropocentrism, the Abrahamic traditions and especially religiously and politically conservative forms of Christianity recur. In every case discussed above, representations of politically and religiously conservative forms of such traditions are positioned as particularly problematic ecological others. Recall that it is the "biblical" view of land that Callicott, following Leopold, is particularly concerned to displace. Likewise, for Crist Western religion and philosophy are largely to blame for codifying human-supremacist worldview, and religious fundamentalists (i.e., certain conservative religionists) are to be excluded from a global ecological federation. The conservative Christian "culture of life" is Bennett's paradigmatic case of the over-animation of matter. For Bauman, it is traditional and dogmatic forms of Western religions, repeatedly represented in *Religion and Ecology* by Christianity, that are particularly disturbing and therefore particularly in need of the epistemic modesty of his perspective (see, e.g., 2014, 7, 20, 36, 38, 75; 2015, 344). By thus representing anthropocentric perspectives and especially conservative Abrahamic religions as problematic from an environmental point of view, these conversionists discursively construct these perspectives as opposed to their particular agendas and standing in need of conversion if they are to be tolerated at all.

Secondly, Indigenous perspectives regularly emerge as conceptual others to the eco-conversionist projects considered here. This is perhaps unsurprising since, for better or probably for worse, Indigenous forms of life have long captured the Western environmental imagination. The image of the "Ecological Indian" has partially organized this imagination for some time as a romantic conception of human life with the nonhuman (see, e.g., Gilio-Whitaker 2020, 56, 59, 95-97, 103-4; Krech 1999, 15-28). This image, which represents Indigenous peoples as particularly attuned to and in harmony with ecological systems and nonhuman individuals, is an inheritance of a

modern Euro-American conceptual apparatus: the "Ecological Indian" is a variation of an older trope, that of the Noble Savage, which has its conceptual twin in the image of the Ignoble Savage. Together, these images, both of which associate Native peoples with wilderness in opposition to civilization, have helped structure the Western imagination since the colonial era, licensing settler colonialism along the way (ibid.; see also Trouillot 2003, 14-18, 21-23).

Given this history, it is not surprising that Indigenous peoples come up in the writings of settler eco-conversionists. However, Indigenous perspectives occupy an ambiguous place in the projects discussed above. Crist, on the one hand, casts Indigenous peoples as already inhabiting the worldview she commends, the worldview of abundance. Accordingly, such peoples do not need to be converted, unlike the rest of global humanity. Crist is aware of the "Ecological Indian" trope, and so her commendation of Indigenous forms of life is a qualified one (2019, 125-27). She tries to avoid recapitulating the colonialist representation while nevertheless marking a distinction between human-supremacist and Indigenous points of view.[69] As I mentioned, Crist also positions herself in distinction from Indigenous perspectives; they remain her others, but friendly others.

On the other hand, Callicott, for example, includes Indigenous traditions among those ecological others that need to be scrutinized and transformed according to the frameworks of contemporary science. Bennett does not directly discuss Indigenous perspectives in *Vibrant Matter*, but, again following Weston, it is reasonable to infer from (a) her rejection of Christian soul vitalism and "traditional animism" and (b) her general desire to animate matter to a very specific degree (not too much nor too little), that (c) Indigenous animisms may not pass muster. Bauman's account has elements of Callicott's view as well as Crist's. He calls for a planetary transformation, which would seem to implicate Indigenous peoples, but he also mentions some Indigenous ideas that already

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69. I am not convinced she succeeds in avoiding this recapitulation nor other colonialist implications. I return to this matter in the Postscript.

conform to his preferred worldview, including the figure of the Trickster (2014, 69-70). Despite these differences, these discussions are unified by the apparent transparency of Indigenous perspectives. Crist (and Bauman to an extent) thinks Indigenous perspectives are nontrivial and so excludes them from conversion. The others (Bauman again to an extent) disagree. But all suggest that they are both *other-to* and outside of those perspectives while yet in a position to evaluate them. I will return to this ambiguity throughout the following chapters.

§7 Conclusion

Some environmentalists are engrossed by the practical possibility of converting their conceptual others—people who live with worldviews other-than and overly-divergent-from our preferred worldviews. I preliminarily illustrated this focus with examples in the Introduction, such as Sideris's New Cosmologists and the founders of *The Ecological Citizen*, as well as in this chapter by examining in some detail the conversionism of Callicott, Crist, Bennett, and Bauman. Building from that close reading, I have suggested that this captivation with conversion seems to arise from the combination of at least three factors, which I have called the etiological structure of eco-conversionism. Each of the above authors articulates his or her vision of eco-conversion differently. Callicott, for example, advocates for the *displacement* of certain worldviews with others or else, like Bauman, for the reinterpretation of other worldviews in terms that conform to a preferred worldview. Meanwhile, Crist envisions a great *shedding* of the distorting human-supremacist worldview in favor of the primordial worldview of abundance. Bennett, in turn, advocates for the cultivation of attunement to vibrant materiality through the use of such technologies as her specialized vocabular and the telling of "onto-stories." Despite such differences, however, each is seemingly motivated by both ecological concern and an apparent anxiety and discomfort over the existence of other people, doubly exposed to the difficult realities of ecological crisis and human alterity. Likewise, each implies that conceptual difference presents no barrier to evaluation and that

the drawbacks of displacing the views in question are few from an environmental point of view. The ecological other here is always already understood and their perspective trivialized. Furthermore, certain specific conceptual others reiterate as *other-to* the preferred perspectives and relevant to the project of conversion. While this third element in this structure is a mere inventory of some of those whom eco-conversionists consistently cast as potential candidates of eco-conversion, the first two spur eco-conversionism and render it intelligible. For in an imaginative horizon inhabited only with other people (1) who do not seem to care or to care rightly about ecological and other nonhuman crises (the source of anxiety), (2) whose perspectives are easily understood by just anyone (hence, say, the capacity to judge that they do not care rightly), and (3) the disappearance of whom, in their conceptual-affective-ethical specificity, threatens no drawbacks (say, through the loss of insight, etc.), then what could be more reasonable than to try to change those inhabitants so that they understand the nonhuman as the subject of this imagination sees fit? In a world filled only with variations of the transparent and trivial ecological other, why wouldn't we pursue conversion?

This pattern will guide my subsequent explorations of an alternative conception of the ecological other in Chapters 3 and 4 and of additional practical possibilities of living with difference in Chapters 5 and 6. To garner curiosity to say nothing of investment in those explorations, however, it may not suffice to document and analyze this preoccupation with conversion, to show the narrowness of some of our imaginations, as this chapter has done. Chapter 2, therefore, seeks to make this narrowness less attractive and inspire us to explore alternative conceptions of our others and modalities of relation besides conversion. In that chapter, I want to offer some reasons conversion-inclined environmentalists should think twice about the default status of eco-conversion among our imaginative habits, of our preoccupation with worldview change.

Chapter 2: Ethical and Political Limitations of Eco-conversionism

We need to push back against anything that's developed about us without us. We must eliminate the practice of endorsing campaigns, policies and movements that are designed without our input and be aware that this practice is only increasing with the rise in the recognition of the importance of traditional ecological knowledge systems and the effectiveness of Indigenous Peoples' solutions to climate change. Unless these basic criteria are met, even the most well-meaning policies, coalitions and partnerships can effectively erase generations of Indigenous Rights advocacy.

Janene Yazzie, *Rights and Responsibilities*

In what has become one of the greatest deceptions of our day, radical environmentalism is striving to put America and the world under its destructive control. This so-called Green Dragon is seducing your children in our classrooms and popular culture. Its lust for political power now extends to the highest global levels. And its twisted view of the world elevates nature above the needs of people, of even the poorest and the most helpless. With millions falling prey to its spiritual deception, the time is now to stand and resist.

Cornwall Alliance for the Stewardship of Creation, *Resisting the Green Dragon*

We live amid bewildering complexities. Obtuseness and refusal of vision are our besetting vices. Responsible lucidity can be wrested from that darkness only by painful, vigilant effort, the intense scrutiny of particulars. Our highest and hardest task is to make ourselves people "on whom nothing is lost."

Martha Nussbaum, *"Finely Aware and Richly Responsible"*

§1 Introduction

The examples from the Introduction and last chapter illustrate a preoccupation among some Western environmentalists, a certain enmeshment with transforming the worldviews of their ecological others. Those examples also suggest that this focus on conversion seems to arise from the combination of at least three factors, which I called the etiological structure of eco-conversionism: anxiety over the reality of the ecological other, the tacit acceptance of the transparent and trivial of this other, and the recurrence of certain peoples as ecologically other. I claimed in Chapter 1 that this structure, and especially its picture of the other, constrains the moral imaginations of conversion-inclined environmentalists. This constraint is suggested in part by the mere proliferation of the desire for and labors to effect eco-conversion.

But why take pause at the suggestion of an imagination constricted to the conversionist modality? Is it not the case that certain perspectives *are* historically entwined with the origins of our

ecological crises? Don't many of our conceptual others in fact treat nonhuman individuals and systems with flagrant disregard, disgust, brutality? Should we not try, then, to change how they conceptualize, value, and affectively-relate to nonhuman reality so to preserve particular animals, places, species, ecosystems, the entitlements of future generations, and so on? I want to hold such questions in abeyance and merely reiterate that I am not particularly interested in ruling worldview critique and transformation out of court. There may be occasions when worldview change is the fitting thing to pursue or the only tolerable course, whatever other principles we might violate or whatever reasons tell against it as a general policy.

While I am not arguing that environmentalists need to abandon the possibility of worldview transformation, I am interested in some of the ethical and strategic limitations of eco-conversion as a default relational modality when it comes to interacting with the ecological other, as a preoccupation, an -ism. I am also interested in how the default status of conversion crowds out other possibilities within such interactions. I will start exploring those alternatives in subsequent chapters. In this chapter, I discuss four limitations of eco-conversionism, of allowing changing the other's whole outlook a default status in our imaginations.

I think that a capacious moral imagination, an expansive repertoire for imagining and relating to others, connected to a subtle and elastic capacity to judge and act well, is desirable as such. Following such writers as Aristotle and some of his modern heirs (e.g., McDowell 1998a, 1994; Nussbaum 1990a), I see the interdependent tasks of moral perception and action as requiring "agents [to] always look at what is appropriate in each case as it happens, as do doctors and navigators" (Aristotle 2014, 1104a10), a conception that relegates moral rules to the status of mere potential, if often reliable, utility (think here of conversion as a rule applied to all cases, the answer given by the preoccupied conversionist to the question "what should be done" each time it arises). This conception corresponds to a picture of reality as too dynamic, complex, and perpetually novel

to be adequately accounted for in antecedently available rules for action.[1] "The world of change," writes Martha Nussbaum of Aristotle's vision, "confronts us with ever new configurations, ever new situations for the determining of the virtuous course" (1990a, 71). By contrast, she explains, "A system of rules set up in advance can encompass only what has been seen before—as a medical treatise can give only the recognized pattern of a disease" (ibid.). Nussbaum, therefore, compares good deliberation to the improvisation of the actor or musician, "where what counts is flexibility, responsiveness, and openness to the external; to rely on an algorithm here is not only insufficient, it is a sign of immaturity and weakness" (74). She writes, "people of practical wisdom must meet the new with responsiveness and imagination, cultivating the sort of flexibility and perceptiveness that will permit them, in the words of Thucydides…to 'improvise what is required'" (71). I am persuaded by such conceptions of moral responsiveness to the shifting demands of mutable reality and accordingly see imaginative narrowness and fixation as kinds of irresponsibility to the quotidian real. To adapt a term from Ian Hacking, given the open-ended complexity of moral reality it behooves us to familiarize ourselves with a range of *descriptions under which to act*, developing along the way robust capacities to respond well to unforeseen, and unforeseeable, contexts and demands (1995, 234-36).

But the strongest version of my argument should not assume that everyone agrees on this conception of moral imagination or agrees to the same degree. Nor should it neglect that some eco-conversionists might think that that good must simply be subordinated to other pressing concerns such as mobilizing widespread action on climate change—that from urgency, capaciousness should submit to narrowness. I therefore set aside the question of the good of a capacious imagination and adduce the following limitations as an attempt to earn a hearing for the exploration of alternative modes of other-relation, as well as the picture of the other that helps bring them into view. One

1. Following Wittgenstein, the neo-Aristotelian McDowell see this uncodifiability as connected also to the nature of conceptual life, of which our use of moral concepts is positioned as one dimension (see, e.g., 1998a).

might multiply further limitations. These four, however, suffice to start casting doubt on the default status of conversion in the ecological imagination.

The first two limitations relate to eco-conversionists' obtuseness, in their rhetoric of worldview change, to social antagonisms, a form of inattention that invites conflict with multiple political blocks along various lines. Following Karera, I see this this inattention to social conflicts as a convenient refusal to engage in politics and political analysis, an end-run around peoples who demand political negotiation, one that secrets and promises to recreate those antagonisms in the pursuit or actualization of its imagined future (see Karera 2019, 50).[2] In my first case, discussed in section 2, I suggest that advocating for eco-conversion uncritically risks conflict with Indigenous American sovereignty and decolonial movements, inadvertently aligning eco-conversionists with settler colonialism. Call this a moral problem. It also unnecessarily alienates potential political allies, which I will call a strategic problem. On the other hand, in section 3 I argue that the rhetoric of eco-conversion also unwittingly exacerbates U.S. conservative opposition to environmentalism. Conversion-talk plays into narratives of the right that cast environmentalists exactly as a secular missionizing force, narratives that help to ground conservative resistance to environmental policy change. Eco-conversionism thus risks driving antinomy toward environmental goals, another strategic limit, and becomes enlisted in the processes spurring political fragmentation, another moral problem. Beyond these ethico-political limitations, the third problem is that the satisfaction of the eco-conversionist dream would result in largescale conceptual homogenization, which has ecological and other stakes. I introduce this problem in section 4 and return to it in Chapter 4. Lastly, I argue in section 5 that allowing the conversionist modality of other-relation a default status in our imaginations expresses an absence of moral relation altogether. Eco-conversionism regularly casts

2. Karera is particularly interested in racial antagonisms. My criticisms of some environmentalists avoidance of such conflicts echo some of the claims developed by Michael Shellenberger and Ted Nordhaus in their famous paper, "The Death of Environmentalism" ([2004] 2009).

the ecological other as a mere impediment to pre-given ends, rather than someone who might be owed things, such as, in the very least, treatment as more than a mere impediment. In light of these limitations, my cumulative claim in this chapter is that an imagination constrained to the possibility of transforming others' worldviews is a moral and political liability on a damaged, multifarious planet. Eco-conversionists should, accordingly, seek to expand and refine our repertoire of other-relation, which takes us into the rest of the dissertation.

My decision to describe these four limitations depends on two different rationales. The first is argumentative and tied to the influence of therapeutic ordinary language philosophers on this work. A recurrent observation such thinkers make to their interlocutors, as part of their deflationary practice, concerns the persuasive limitations of reason-giving in everyday life. These thinkers often find themselves in dialogue with metaphysical philosophers and other theorists who seem to wish to establish incontrovertible reasons for thinking this or that, say, that someone understands a rule, as if *that establishment* would somehow also establish another person's agreement. But a pervasive, if in some contexts easily-overlooked, feature of our lives with other people is that even our best reasons may not move them, may not even be seen by them *as* reasons (see Wittgenstein 2009a, §217). Indeed, even trying to offer such reasons, say, by way of argumentation, may be enough to set an interlocutor against us. As Diamond observes, "if we are talking about convincing *human beings*, surely it is a fact about many of them that one certain way of *not* convincing them is to try arguing the case" (1991a, 292). Conjure the best reasons, conceptions, evidence, arguments you can, dependent on the best research or reflection, and now what does that *secure* for you vis-à-vis other people? Persuasion, even the most reasoned, waits upon the other. And it may wait some time. As I said in Chapter 1, I suspect that a certain appreciation for the limitations of reason-giving sits behind many eco-conversionists' move to worldview change, for such changes precisely set the groundwork

for certain reasons to be taken as persuasive.[3] It is precisely the curse of the exposed to take as unsettling something that others may not take that way (Diamond 2008, 43). I will signal my appreciation for the ordinary limits of reason-giving at various points in the pages to come. I mention them now because I take seriously both those constraints and the task of persuading the eco-conversionist or would-be eco-conversionist, and that means not hanging my argument on one set of criticisms. Again, the strongest version of my argument can only be developed against the strongest form of opposition to it, a position that is precisely unmoved by the bare idea of a constrained imagination and might take any number or even all of the limitations I offer here in stride. But I cannot list limitations all day (there are meals to make, children and animals to feed), so I limit myself to four with the consolation that, while fewer than five, they are still more than three.

Secondly, I give *these* four limitations because I think they are particularly illustrative of how eco-conversionism ill-suits the difficult realities that animate eco-conversion to begin with. However you esteem imaginative capaciousness, these limitations show why an imagination constrained to the modality of worldview change is a liability in our circumstances on an ecologically marred world, characterized in part by resolute others.

§2 Eco-conversionism and Indigenous American Decolonization

Talk of worldview change by settler environmentalists, a category to which all of the eco-conversionists considered so far belong, as crucial for addressing ecological crises and securing global and national civilizations in some variation of their current shapes announces a dreamlike inattention to ongoing colonialist and otherwise racialized social antagonisms. This obtuseness is suspect and I shall draw out some of its problems in dialogue with one of the ecological others isolated in Chapter 1, namely, Indigenous peoples. I will suggest that the colonial and racial

3. Environmentalists know well the limitations of appealing to evidence to change how others will behave.

obliviousness of eco-conversionism in general and with respect to Indigenous struggles in particular is morally problematic, insofar as it preserves the settler colonial status quo, and has strategic drawbacks, insofar as it uncritically invites conflict with Indigenous political blocks.

Eco-conversionists' obtuseness to settler-Indigenous antagonisms has a few characteristics and takes a few specific forms; I will delineate two expressions of this obtuseness that are specific to certain accounts and two that are shared by all. The first shared feature may be stated briefly, namely, eco-conversionists, even while referencing Indigenous peoples in various direct and indirect ways, are either silent on matters of ongoing Indigenous struggles against settler colonialism, as with the majority of those considered here, or else, as with, say, Bauman, minimally allow those concerns to shape their overarching aims (say, by merely saying they oppose imperialism and homogenization of all kinds). This shared feature conditions all of the others and helps render them suspect. The second shared feature, which I shall treat lastly, is the presumption of Indigenous transparency to settlers across conversionist accounts, something Indigenous and Black studies scholars have consistently critiqued. Thirdly, some but not all eco-conversionist accounts express their carelessness regarding Indigenous struggle and ongoing settler colonialism in their explicit call or tacit desire for the displacement or assimilation of Indigenous perspectives to a settler environmental perspective. In such projects, Indigenous peoples are ecological others that need converting. Other accounts avoid the limitations of that expression by positioning Indigenous peoples as exempt from conversion, but show a fourth form that inattention to Indigenous resistance can take. In this group, conversionists position themselves as already in solidarity with Indigenous peoples without in fact engaging and thereby displacing Indigenous anticolonial aims.

Since my focus is on Western and especially North American environmentalism, and, as we have seen, not only Indigenous peoples in general but Indigenous Americans recur as conceptual others in the imagination of this movement, I shall take the interface of eco-conversion discourse

and Indigenous American decolonization and sovereignty movements as illustrative. Indigenous liberation movements and the liberationist movements internal to settler states are not monolithic; this illustration is not meant to cover all cases. We should also constantly keep before us that the referent of "Indigenous Americans" is not a homogeneous group, but rather a heterogenous, shifting, and sometimes conflictual collective of distinct and internally diverse Native Nations (federally recognized and not) and their members, whose identities are likewise multiple and hybrid (see Whyte, Cadwell, and Schaefer 2018, 155).

To appreciate the obtuseness that interests me, we must sort out the sense of Indigenous American resistance projects, including both struggles against settler-colonial subjugation and for political sovereignty and cultural resurgence, and that requires a brief examination of the structure of U.S. settler colonialism and its many techniques for displacing and disappearing Indigenous Americans. This structure forms the context and backdrop of historical and contemporary oppositional and constructive decolonial efforts. Settler colonialism is not a one-off event of a bygone era called "colonial," but rather an *ongoing structure* that functions to secure Indigenous lands for settlers and the settler state, land which this structure converts into *property* and *resource* (generally for the security and accumulation of wealth) (Gilio-Whitaker 2020, 24; Tuck and Yang 2012, 5). A central function of this structure is the displacement and erasure of Indigenous people from the land, which must be emptied of inhabitants if it is to be settled and developed.[4] The mechanisms of displacement and erasure are manifold, ranging in the U.S. case from the literal expulsion of Indigenous Americans from their ancestral lands by armed forces and other government agents to forced cultural, linguistic, legal, and religious assimilation; from the kidnapping, enslavement (starting with Columbus), and forced sterilization of Indigenous Americans to the imaginative disappearance of Native inhabitants from the land through, say, the fantastical and ideological

4. What Patrick Wolfe calls the settler colonial "logic of elimination" (2006, 387).

doctrine of discovery and the myth of the pristine American wilderness, with much beyond and in between (see Alfred 2005, 48; Barker 2005a, 13, 16; Delgado-P. and Childs 2005, 75; Gilio-Whitaker 2020, 35-72; Kauanui 2005, 89, 94-95; Miller 2005, 133-36; Pegoraro 2015; Tuck and Yang 2012).[5]

The persistence of the U.S. settler-colonial structure is evidenced not only by the continued presence of settlers on lands that were inhabited by Indigenous peoples prior to colonization, but also by such facts as (1) the continued violation of Indigenous-U.S. treaties, (2) the perpetuation of misleading myths about Indigenous Americans and "nature" in America, and (3) the continued refusal by federal agencies and the federal government to legally codify (and amplify the codification of) Indigenous territorial and legal sovereignty and acknowledge its history of pursuing systematic, genocidal settler colonialism (see, Barker 2005a, 17-22; Gilio-Whitaker 2020, 3, 27-33, 103-6; Krech 1999; Tuck and Yang 2012, 15).[6] Other forces of erasure include but are not limited to (4) the metaphorical invocation of "decolonization" by settler social justice advocates, (5) the legal and social representation of Indigenous people as minority groups alongside others within the settler state, (6) blood quantum regulations on Native status,[7] and (7) an endemic of violence against Native women in North and Latin America (called Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women or MMIW)[8]

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5. The doctrine of discovery asserts that title to land is established through development, especially agricultural cultivation; in the absence of such development, land is undiscovered and up for proprietary grabs (Barker 2005a, 8). The doctrine was wielded to justify settler annexing of Native lands.

6. Though not the only defensible definition of genocide, the international-legal definition codified in the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide of 1948 suffices to categorize various moments in U.S. policy vis-à-vis Indigenous Americans as such. Here is it: "genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group" (*Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide* 1948). On the value of conceptually differentiating genocide and settler colonialism, see Wolfe (2006).

7. As Tuck and Yang explain, blood quantum laws work inversely for Black and Indigenous Americans: the one-drop rule ensures that future generations of Black people retain their blackness, which under slavery meant inheriting enslavement and increasing their owners' wealth. By contrast, minimal quantum regulations on Indigeneity help ensure that future Native generations inherit less "nativeness," and thereby less title to Native land.

8. Analysts suggest that Native American and Alaska Native women are "135% more likely to be found dead and remain unidentified than women of other races/ethnicities" (Hawes, Slakoff, and Anguelov 2022, 10). Scholars and activists repeated connect MMIW to the structure of settler colonialism (see, e.g., Hawes, Slakoff, and Anguelov 2022, 18; MMIW USA 2023).

(see Barker 2005a, 18; Hawes, Slakoff, and Anguelov 2022; Tuck and Yang 2012, 11-12). Likewise, as scholars such as Kyle P. Whyte observe, crises such as climate change are predominantly caused by historically colonialist nation-states. The effects of those crises disproportionately impact Indigenous peoples, including Indigenous Americans (by, say, dislocating them again or disrupting ecosystems that support cultural practices). Accordingly, such phenomena should themselves be seen as extensions of colonialism (see, e.g., Whyte 2017; see also Liboiron 2021).[9]

Environmentalists have played, most generously, an ambiguous role in the history of U.S. settler colonialism. As Coville citizen Dina Gilio-Whitaker recounts, Indigenous Americans and settler environmentalists have repeatedly come into conflict, often resulting in the alignment and achievement of settler colonial and environmental goals. Such antagonisms have arisen over, for example, wild-game habitat management; the creation and management of the national parks and other wilderness-protection efforts; the appropriation of the stereotyped image of the "Ecological Indian" as a symbol for environmentalism; traditional Native hunting, fishing, and whaling practices; and Indigenous land development projects, say, for gaming (see Gilio-Whitaker 2020, 22, 93-108).

This excursus on U.S. settler colonialism helps reveal the logic of decolonization and how the rhetoric of eco-conversion might conflict with it. Among contemporary Indigenous American liberation movements, decolonization, most broadly, refers to the removal of settlers and their institutions from Indigenous land (either all pre-conquest lands or all land guaranteed by treaties) along with the removal of settler material and semiotic culture (e.g., food and medicine systems, religious formations, models of relationships, metaphysics, values, language) (see, e.g., Barker 2005a, 25-26; Gilio-Whitaker 2020, 149-50, 158; NDN Collective 2021, 2022, 2023a, 2023b; Tuck and Yang 2012, 2, 7). Along with this subtractive aim, decolonization affirms "the reclamation of everything stolen from the original peoples: land, language, ceremony, food, education, housing, healthcare,

9. As Gilio-Whitaker observes, however, settler colonialism has always been environmentally enacted (e.g., 2020, 24).

governance, medicines, kinship" (NDN Collective 2023a). That is, decolonization insists on the re-instantiation of Native control of traditional lands and Native material and semiotic culture, what is sometimes called Indigenous cultural resurgence (see, e.g., Coulthard 2014, 48-49).

Historically, *sovereignty* has been an important sign for referring to the positive vision of decolonization. As analysist and Lenape citizen Joanne Barker suggests, the significance of sovereignty is historically contingent and subject to "rearticulations" in different contexts (2005a, 21). Barker writes, "How and when ['sovereignty'] emerges and functions are determined by the 'located' political agendas and cultural perspectives of those who rearticulate it into public debate or political document to do a specific work of opposition, invitation, or accommodation" (ibid.). When we look at the historical record, Barker suggests, we will see sovereignty employed to do all sorts of work, even solely within the history of Indigenous liberation movements on Turtle Island.[10] Yet patterns arise in the history of Indigenous uses of the term, most notably that Indigenous Americans have consistently used it tactically and oppositionally (see ibid., 22-24).

Historical uses have been tactical insofar as sovereignty is a non-Indigenous term and concept that Indigenous peoples have taken up in order to participate in settler discourses on their status; these uses have been oppositional insofar as Indigenous peoples have repeatedly taken up the term to resist and combat the machinations of the settler state and its cultures (ibid., 17-22). As settler forms of control and erasure transform, Indigenous invocations of sovereignty have responded in turn in order to sustain the stance of resistance.[11] Indigenous self-determination, capaciously conceived, has been and remains under perpetual threat; *sovereignty* has been a tool in combatting that threat. The European genealogy of sovereignty led decolonial analysts and activists

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10. For an overview of different Native uses of sovereignty, see Barker (2005a, 18-23).
11. Thus, for example, in the era of European imperial conquest, sovereignty was used by Indigenous peoples to affirm their nationhood (in a context in which denying nationhood licenses conquest). By contrast, in the post-war era, sovereignty was increasingly used to deny that Indigenous people were one among many ethnic minority groups in the care of the settler state and insist instead on their distinctive legal, political, territorial, and cultural identities, which entitled them to certain rights under international law (see Barker 2005a, 3, 6, 18-19).

to criticize its use, especially in the 1990s and early 2000s (see, e.g., Alfred 2005). Accordingly, the term has receded from decolonial discourse in some contexts, though it has hardly disappeared (see, e.g., NDN Collective 2021, 2022); indeed, anthropologist Audra Simpson calls it "a critical language game in the conditions of settlement" (2014, 105). What I want to hold onto is the historical oppositionalism of its use, paired again with an affirmation of Indigenous territorial, legal, social-institutional, linguistic, and broadly cultural control.

The staunch oppositionalism of sovereignty assertions and the absolutism of decolonial calls index not only the intrinsic and significant value of Indigenous forms of living and governance and the correspondingly profound wrongs inflicted by attacks on them; this resolve also indexes many Indigenous Americans' keen appreciation for the insidious and relentless mechanisms for undermining Indigenous territorial, legal, and cultural autonomy, as well as the well-being of Indigenous individuals. This appreciation has given rise to entire activist and academic discourses on Indigenous refusal, say, to even engage settlers and certainly to use settler discursive frameworks.

For instance, writing in the November 2023 issue of *LandBack Magazine*, NDN Collective's Southwest Regional Director Janene Jazzie explains that rejecting the conceptual frameworks and languages of settler societies while affirming and cultivating distinctively Indigenous perspectives is essential to Indigenous self-determination. She writes,

> Throughout our history, words written in colonizer languages have brought great physical, spiritual and cultural harm by carrying out agendas of genocide, forced religious conversion, education, and assimilation through the development of policies and laws. As a result of the limitations of colonizer languages, we have, and continue to be, engaged in a form of intellectual warfare when it comes to advancing Indigenous Peoples rights. It's within this context that the language we use in our movement, strategy and policy work is especially critical for our success. Our fight for our cultures and languages is fundamentally interconnected with our fight for our lands and sacred sites, as well as our rights to self-govern, and our rights to protect and preserve our traditional knowledge systems and practices. (Jazzie 2023, 56)

Given the entanglement of language, worldviews, and either settler domination or Indigenous resurgence and preservation, Jazzie insists that Indigenous liberation movements "be clear that

Indigenous Peoples are not fighting for equality within unjust, unsustainable, and patriarchal colonial systems; this is counter to our desired goals and future. Rather, we are seeking the collective rights to build community rooted in *our traditional values, worldviews, and practices* and to define our own futures based on our unique lived experiences, languages, and lands" (61; emphasis mine). Here refusal of non-Indigenous frameworks is cast as one facet of the defensive "intellectual warfare" Indigenous peoples are waging, one aspect of their efforts to resist disappearance under settler occupation.

Such refusal is likewise not only analyzed but expressed by what Audra Simpson calls her own "ethnographic refusal," or her declination to narrate parts of Mohawk difference, to tell a story of Mohawk culture and politics that purports to be *the* story, unavoidably confirming the categories and fetishes of professional anthropology, which in turn function to control and dispossess Mohawk peoples (2014, 96-99; see also 2017). She resolutely illustrates and theorizes the political stakes of a proliferation of interruptions effected by historical and contemporary Mohawks, interruptions precisely of settler political expectations and imperatives. But what she writes is explicitly the outcome of "an ethnographic calculus of what you [the reader] need to know and what I refuse to write" (105). She explains,

> My notion of refusal articulates a mode of sovereign authority over the presentation of ethnographic data, and so does not present 'everything.' This is for the express purpose of protecting the concerns of the community. It acknowledges the asymmetrical power relations that inform the research and writing about native lives and politics and it does not *presume* that they are on equal footing with anyone. (ibid.)

Simpson is interested in how such methodological refusal might open up new ethnographic practices that avoid the "discursive containment and pathology" of prior efforts to study Iroquois peoples (ibid.), but I cite it now as expressing a certain commitment to refusing, from an intimate and rigorous appreciation of, the subtle techniques of settler domination.[12]

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12. For further academic theories of Indigenous refusal, see Simpson (2017) and Coulthard (2014). I discuss Coulthard's work at some length in Chapter 5.

These kinds of refusals reflect an appreciation for Frantz Fanon's negation of the colonial, including all things that depend for their intelligibility on colonialist conceptual schemes (see, e.g., Fanon 2008, xiii-xvi, 197, 200-206).[13] They include contestations of the very ways in which settlers wish to discuss ecological crises such as climate change, which such critics see as tacitly displacing Indigenous conceptions and seeking to secure settler futures (see, e.g., Whyte 2017).[14]

Against the persistent mutation of U.S. settler colonialism's means of control, erasure, and harm, such resistance and refusal has become fused with many Indigenous identities and a policy of the strict and total removal of settler forms of governance and culture is often seen as required for Native survival, to say nothing of flourishing. As Gilio-Whitaker puts it, "Indians have always had to fight to defend their lives, lands, and treaties. Resistance became a way of life a long time ago; only the tactics change" (2020, 161-62). Few current movements exemplify this resolve as much as LandBack, a campaign organized by the all-Indigenous organization NDN Collective (see NDN Collective 2023b).[15] While the LandBack movement emphasizes thoroughgoing decolonization, as its name suggests it insists in particular on the return of Indigenous lands to Indigenous control (see, e.g., NDN Collective 2022, 72; see also 2023a, 2023b).[16]

Among other things, the discussion so far suggests that many Indigenous Americans are committed, sometimes quite actively and vocally, to avoiding assimilation to cultures other than their own (in particular settler cultures), to affirming their own traditions and inheritances, and to resisting and opposing insidious attempts by settlers and the settler state to further control, displace, and

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13. Of Indigenous American resistance, we might then say with James Cone, writing of the relentless cunning of anti-blackness, that "sometimes because of the very nature of oppressed existence, the oppressed must define their being by negating everything oppressors affirm" (2020, 48).
14. Such refusals transcend Indigenous/settler struggles in North America. For instance, Jione Havea critiques how climate change discourse as sustained by the Global North subordinates and displaces Indigenous Oceanic conceptions of the nonhuman and ecological change (2010, 354).
15. Yet perhaps no *slogan* captures the relevant spirit quite so well as "Threaten our existence, expect resistance" MMIW USA 2023).
16. The LandBack campaign emerged from demonstrations at Mt. Rushmore in 2020, in the wake of the catalytic Standing Rock NoDAPL protests from 2016 into 2017 and the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor in 2020.

erase them. If they are open to considering collaborations at all, it is not uncommon, as a result of these commitments, to see Indigenous activists and authors stating that a condition for their solidarity with other movements and for accepting others' solidarity is that Indigenous particularity be acknowledged, including Indigenous people's particular experiences of historical injustice and cultural, legal, conceptual, linguistic, political specificity. Just coalitions, some say, require the recognition of past injustice and the acknowledgment of current cultural and political difference (see Gilio-Whitaker 2020, ix, 12-13, 151-54, 161; Tuck and Yang 2012, 7, 28-35; Yazzie 2023, 71).

In this context of resistance to disparate forms of settler domination, including with respect to how environmental justice and sustainability are conceived and sought, of refusal of all things colonial, what should we expect of Indigenous decolonial and sovereignty movements vis-à-vis the eco-conversionist desires and projects discussed in the last chapter? Recall first how some eco-conversionists call for or otherwise express the desire for the transformation of Indigenous worldviews. Remember, for instance, Callicott's approval of Indigenous notions of kinship *insofar as*—and only insofar as—the idea of kinship is validated by the contemporary sciences. By so transforming such notions, Indigenous people can become "cocreators" of a shared universal narrative. Likewise, recall Rolston's suggestion from the Introduction that Indigenous Hawaiian conceptions of a volcano, Native conceptions of the (so-called) Grand Canyon, and the self-interpretations of Australian aboriginals all have merely "antiquarian interest" since science offers "the definitive interpretation" (2015, 201). Cultures that cannot slip vast amounts of "science" into their worldviews are "not worth listening to" (203). Recall also Bennett's cavalier dismissal of so-called overly-spiritual animisms and Bauman's call for *humanity* to "reground" our meaning-making practices such as religion according to his particular anthropology and conception of nature (Bennett 2010, ix, xiii, 36, 69, 81, 118, 120; Bauman 2014, 3, 109).

What these scholars seem to desire (Bennett) or explicitly recommend (Callicott, Rolston, Bauman) is the displacement of the worldviews of peoples who have been violently dominated by the colonies of Western empires for centuries and who since the colonial encounter have refused to submit to the settler colony, who today are actively resisting such displacement through refusal, political action, land reclamations, and cultural resurgence projects, such as resuscitating traditional practices and languages. That is, worldview change is precisely one the elements of settler colonialism some Indigenous Americans are resisting and seeking to counteract. Indigenous oppositionalism and refusal precisely reflects how subtlety the absorption and displacement of Indigenous outlooks can occur. Hence the rejection of certain kinds of speaking (Jazzie 2023), of discursively engaging at all (Simpson 2014), and of renewing other ways of talking, thinking, and acting (Coulthard 2014, 151-179). Viewed within the history of settler colonialism, attempts, say, to critique and reassemble Indigenous American perspectives so that they cohere with the latest ecological evidence and theories closely resemble prior efforts by colonizing powers to reshape the cultures and subjectivities of these peoples.[17] As it happens, the scholars in question are citizens of the nation-state that currently occupies those people's stolen land. It is difficult, therefore, to avoid the impression that the eco-conversion of Indigenous peoples in settler-colonial contexts is—inadvertently or otherwise—part and parcel of the colonial projects of those contexts. From the perspective of the study of empire, eco-conversionism resembles the desire to resolve the colonial situation through, in the words of Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "the absolute and total destruction or assimilation of original inhabitants" (2012, 9). In the very least, the tacit and explicit trivialization of Indigenous perspectives and desire for their transformation resembles their historical and ongoing displacement or assimilation.

17. It would take some labor, in my judgment, to show that such efforts are not mere extensions of colonialism, distinct but hardly new expressions of imperial power.

Eco-conversionists' inadvertent collusion with settler colonialism is morally suspect as such. But their obtuseness to Indigenous resistance is also politically unwise: calls for the transformation of how Indigenous people understand themselves and the world uncritically invites conflict and unnecessary dissent among potential coalitional allies (however temporary and fragile the coalitions).[18] We need not guess how conversionism might be received. In addition to the fact that the whole drift of decolonial efforts is characterized by opposition to settler understandings, values, and political formations, Indigenous scholars, activists, and allies have explicitly critiqued environmentalists for imposing their conceptions of the nonhuman and virtuous human-nonhuman relations on Native peoples. In their chapter "Callicott's Last Stand," authors Lee Hester, Dennis McPherson, Annie Booth, and Jim Cheney respond to Callicott's discussion in *Earth's Insights* of subordinating Indigenous perspectives to his post-modern scientific worldview. They see this work as an "attempted intellectual coup d'état of Indigenous thought," that not only assimilates and trivializes but also distorts Indigenous perspectives (2002, 253, 264). They also refer to the "inoculation" of the world's cultures with "Western attitudes and values" as a "strategy of imperialism" more effective than "military or biological assault," a kind of "cultural vaccination" in place of the proliferation of the "smallpox virus with blankets" (256, 275ft11). Indeed, the authors suggest that their entire response to Callicott risks obfuscating Indigenous perspectives insofar as their argument is determined by the problematics and norms of environmental ethics (275ft1).

Consider also the reactions from some members of the Makah Nation of the Pacific Northwest Coast to animal-rights and environmentalist criticisms against their revitalized whaling practices. In a 2019 interview with the *New York Times*, Janine Ledford, the executive director of the Makah Cultural and Research Center, said in response to such critics, "It doesn't make sense to me, in this day and age, that anybody thinks they have the right to tell us what should be important to

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18. I say unnecessary dissent and uncritical conflict because not all dissent or conflict is negative nor undesirable.

us" (Eligon 2019). In the same article, Patrick DePoe, a tribal councilor, is reported saying, "People argue that you haven't done it for 70 years, you don't need to do it anymore… They're not Makah. They don't understand what it means for us" (ibid.). Similarly, in a 2001 article, Wayne Johnson, who captained the successful hunt in 1999 (the first hunt in seventy years), wrote in response to furious critics, "Every protester who insults my family and my culture and every government official who finds some excuse to delay our rights just helps put me in the company of my ancestors who endured the same" (Johnson [2001] 2015). These cases express, among other things, some Indigenous Americans', and allies', refusals to submit Indigenous modes of understanding, co-constituted through various practices, to the terms of settler environmentalists.

But eco-conversionists' inattention to settler colonialism and Indigenous American struggles not only expresses itself through explicit calls or implicit desires to convert Indigenous peoples, but also in more indirect ways, and even when conversionists excuse Indigenous peoples from conversion, such as Crist and occasionally Bauman. The notion of "settler moves to innocence" developed by Tuck and Yang in their seminal essay "Decolonization is not a Metaphor" (2012) helps us to see how. "Settler moves to innocence," Tuck and Yang explain, "are those strategies or positionings that attempt to relieve the settler of feelings of guilt or responsibility without giving up land or power or privilege, without having to change much at all. In fact, settler scholars may gain professional kudos or a boost in their reputations for being so sensitive or self-aware. Yet settler moves to innocence are hollow, they only serve the settler" (2012, 10). Tuck and Yang contrast such moves with non-metaphorical decolonization, which, in their view, is among the ultimate goals of colonialized people. Non-metaphorical decolonization refers to the literal return of the land to those from whom it was stolen along with settler's vacancy. Settler moves to innocence are the myriad ways in which settlers putatively ally themselves with colonized peoples—putatively rendering themselves innocent of the sins of colonialism—while obfuscating or erasing this decolonial goal. As

Tuck and Yang observe, even social justice movements are guilty of such moves, when, for example, they metaphorically employ the language of decolonization to refer to all liberationist movements and meanwhile work to advance the interests of particular groups *within* the structures of the settler colony, thereby consolidating the latter and working *against* decolonization (17-22).

I fear that when eco-conversionists represent Indigenous peoples as Crist and occasionally Bauman do they perform such moves to innocence. For example, Crist excludes Indigenous peoples from needing to convert to the worldview of abundance because in some sense they already inhabit it. They are *already* joined up with Crist's vision; already in solidarity vis-à-vis how we all need to live with the nonhuman. But note that literal decolonization is no part of Crist's plan. She elides the goal of decolonization by casting Indigenous peoples as allies, as sharing her goals, as already on board with what she is proposing. What is more, that project includes Crist's prescriptions for how global humanity is to organize itself. Crist's vision thus forecloses "Indigenous futurity" by investing in her own (Tuck and Yang 2012, 14). Indeed, Crist goes so far as to model her global federation of ecologically sound bioregions on Indigenous social and political structures without once remarking on the history of settler colonies coercively extracting not only land and life from Indigenous peoples but also culture, artifacts, and ideas. In this respect, Crist's project resembles what Tuck and Yang call "settler adoption fantasies," in which settlers adopt Indigenous practices and knowledge, signifying their nativeness and distancing them from their settler inheritance (2012, 14).

When Bauman isn't calling for his version of conversion, he makes a similar move. Suggesting that the Indigenous concept of the Trickster already conforms to his recommended framework, Bauman indirectly allies Indigenous people with his project while simultaneously passing over Indigenous decolonial goals in silence (2014, 69-70). Indeed, Bauman's anticolonial and anti-homogenization rhetoric exemplifies Tuck and Yang's concerns over the conflation of all liberationist movements with literal decolonization. As Tuck and Yang argue, to elide literal

decolonization while putatively allying yourself with the colonized merely reinforces the settler-colonial status quo.

If eco-conversionists' silence on ongoing settler colonialism and Indigenous resistance conceals those realities, then such moves to innocence exacerbate that obfuscation, representing another permutation of settler colonial erasure. Such moves to innocence help explain why some Indigenous liberationists emphasize the need for explicit recognition of Indigenous particularity and specific histories of injustice under settler colonialism. Tuck and Yang, for instance, call for the recognition of the incommensurably of the ends of literal decolonization and settler social justice movements (2012, 28-36). Coalitions formed on the basis of this recognition can only seek discrete immediate goals (since the respective ultimate goals diverge) and can dissolve when that incommensurability becomes too much to bear. The particularity of Indigenous liberation is thereby preserved. These kinds of conditions precisely target even well-intentioned forms of Indigenous erasure. Insofar as the obfuscation achieved by eco-conversionists' putative alliance with Indigenous peoples protects the settler colonial status quo, it is again morally condemnable as such; insofar as some advocates are explicitly on the lookout for such moves to innocence and call for the explicit recognition of Indigenous specificity, such eco-conversionist rhetoric is strategically obtuse.

Before turning to a second limitation to eco-conversionism, I want to mention a final way the authors discussed above might invite uncritical conflict with Indigenous American sovereignty and decolonization movements. A shared premise unifies those eco-conversionists who would replace Indigenous perspectives (e.g., Bennett, Callicott, Rolston) and those who would not, who assimilate Indigenous aims to their own (e.g., Crist, occasionally Bauman). Although these parties disagree over the value or triviality of Indigenous perspectives, they agree that those perspectives are *transparent* to outsiders such as themselves. I suspect that this is the starting point for the other problems I have discussed. As scholars such as Vine Deloria Jr. and Charles H. Long have

suggested, the presumption of putatively understanding the Indigenous other, of their simultaneous strangeness and yet familiarity, their transparency, has historically been essential of the operation of settler colonialism (Deloria 1988, 1-27; Long 1995, 204-10). Hence, the mere presumption that white settlers understand the perspectives of Indigenous and other racialized others is consistently criticized by scholars of empire and race. For in one move this presumption (a) licenses treating Indigenous peoples (and other racial others) one way or another—as, say, savage wanders who have failed to developed the land (Barker 2005a, 6-8) or underdeveloped welfare groups requiring intrusive government services (Deloria 1988, 3, 12-15)—and (b) indefinitely displaces their actual perspectives (Deloria 1988, 1- 2, 5, 9, 12). By ignoring the Indigenous other's potential opacity (by presuming transparency), the settler ensures that opacity while acting as if it had been dissolved (cf. Karera 2019, 49). It is noteworthy that all of the authors discussed here seem to share this premise of the Indigenous other's transparency, and that this premise alone, if Long and Deloria are any indication, might invite resistance to eco-conversionism. Here eco-conversionists' obtuseness is expressed by their inattention to some Indigenous peoples' insistence on alterity, on otherness and difference, on disparate ends and perspectives.

None of the authors discussed here would explicitly endorse settler colonialism.[19] But, I want to register that the sorts of conversion they call for or their justifications for suspending conversion in certain cases risk alienating Indigenous peoples from non-Indigenous environmental projects, continuing a history of conflict between settler environmentalism and Indigenous peoples, and inadvertently maintaining the settler colonial status quo.

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19. See, for example, Callicott's astonished and offended reply to Hester et al. (2002), who accused *Earth's Insights* of being colonialist (Callicott 2002a, 325).

§3 Eco-conversionism, Conservative Resistance, and Political Fragmentation

In response to the first limitation, it might be said: Fine we should avoid unnecessary conflict with decolonial movements and even seek collaboration with them. We, the response continues, can make an exception for Indigenous peoples, and even refuse to assimilate them as partners in our singular ecological visions (on, say, Crist's model). Indigenous peoples and their liberation movements are hardly the problem anyway, hardly the peoples most in need of conversion. The real focus should be on converting resolutely anthropocentric peoples. This response is natural and I tend to think that most eco-conversionists have a malicious anthropocentrist in mind when they call for conversion, whomever else they talk about as well.

Nevertheless, there are also limitations vis-à-vis this other, and the one I want to emphasize concerns political fracturing in the West, and especially the U.S. I contend that environmentalists' emphasis on worldview change may contribute to political polarization around environmental topics in the U.S. and thereby inadvertently impede meaningful responses to climate change and other crises.[20] Here again eco-conversionists' obtuseness to social antagonisms shows itself to be a liability. It is crucial to differentiate this criticism from the increasing, and familiar, mobilization of the ideas of polarization and "divisiveness" by the American right, such as the Alabama legislature's SB129, an authoritarian bill that outlines restrictions on teaching and discussing so-called "divisive concepts" at public institutions, signed into law in March 2024.[21] Invocations of division and fracture of this sort

20. As Nicole Seymour observers, "public animosity toward environmentalism," and especially to environmental moralism, is hardly confined to conservatives, but rather "runs rampant" (2018, 17-19). Seymour cites a study titled "The Ironic Impact of Activists: Negative Stereotypes Reduce Social Change Influence," which found that "participants had negative stereotypes of activists (feminists and environmentalists), regardless of the domain of activism, viewing them as eccentric and militant" (Bashir et al. 2013, 614; cited in Seymour 2018 at 2).

21. Such concepts include, "that, by virtue of an individual's race, color, religion, sex, ethnicity, or national origin, the individual is inherently racist, sexist, or oppressive, whether consciously or subconsciously" (SB129, 32-35), "That individuals, by virtue of race, color, religion, sex, ethnicity, or national origin, are inherently responsible for actions committed in the past by other members of the same race, color, religion, sex, ethnicity, or national origin" (36-40), and "That fault, blame, or bias should be assigned to members of a race, color, religion, sex, ethnicity, or national origin, on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, ethnicity, or national origin" (41-44). The bill prohibits public institutions and state agencies from, among other things, "direct[ing] or compel[ling] a student, employee, or contractor to personally affirm, adopt, or adhere to a divisive concept" (72-73) and requiring students or employees "to attend or participate in" any

function as a bulwark against difficult and ethically and politically unavoidable discussions and analyses, protecting the oppressive hierarchies that structure life in the U.S. Such machinations should be criticized, but they should not dissuade us from scrutinizing the real aspects of political division in the U.S., and such scrutiny hardly entails the avoidance of "divisive concepts."

By political polarization, I mean the phenomenon of citizens in democracies sorting themselves along party lines on particular issues, such as climate change.[22] Polarization often has a circular relationship to socio-politically fragmented and antagonistic multi-party governments: a hostile, divided government (usually the political elite within that government) politicizes various issues, which in turn function as fodder to reinforce political divisions (see, e.g., Ehret, Boven, and Sherman 2018; Van Boven, Ehret, and Sherman 2018; McCright, Xiao, and Dunlap 2014).[23] Moreover, in politically polarized contexts, political alignment is often partially constitutive of citizens' self-conceptions; concomitantly, in these contexts party stances on particular issues, such as climate change, fold into individuals' identities (see, e.g., Fieldling and Hornsey 2014; Jacques 2008; Longo and Baker 2014; Ma, Dixon, and Hmielowski 2019; McCright, Xiao, and Dunlap 2014).[24] When party membership becomes so entwined with individual identity, expressing one's party's stance on an issue and resisting the stances of other parties become practices of self-expression—arts of signaling membership in a particular group to oneself and others.

Numerous quantitative studies show that political polarization on the environment is widespread, especially in the U.S., and a serious impediment to meaningful environmental policy (e.g., Birch 2020; McCright and Dunlap 2003; McCright, Xiao, and Dunlap 2014; Pew 2019a, 2019b;

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events or *coursework* "that *advocates for* or requires assent to a divisive concept" (76-77). Such constraints on education, besides blatantly preserving the racial, gender, and sexual status quo, exemplify authoritarian intervention.

22. Most of the work I cite in this section implicitly or explicitly employs a version of this definition.

23. By "politicize," I mean members of these political systems, usually the political elite, make a topic (such as environmental regulation) an object of political discourse, usually in such a way that the citizenry is compelled to take a stand on that topic; in fragmented contexts, that stand-taking often amounts to self-sorting along party lines.

24. Scholars have also examined the history of how environmental issues were absorbed into this cycle in the United States (see, e.g., Jacques, Dunlap, and Freeman 2008; McCright and Dunlap 2003, 2011; Veldman 2019).

Smith and Mayer 2019).[25] Other studies show that polarization is significantly driven by how environmentalists frame environmental crises. Even prior to explicit calls for eco-conversion, analysts suggest that environmental discourse alienates conservatives by prioritizing identities and values that conflict with and exclude their own (e.g., Rode et al. 2021; Wolsko 2017; Wolsko, Ariceaga, Seiden 2016).[26] These analysts suggest that aggressive approaches to environmental skeptics, such as striving to convert their worldviews, will likely exacerbate political fracturing and opposition to environmentalism (sometimes called "backfiring" effects) (Wolsko 2017, 292; see also Dixon, Bullock, and Adams 2019; Ma, Dixon, and Hmielowski 2019; Rode et al. 2021).

Qualitative studies make explicit the connection between conservative resistance and conservatives' perception that environmentalists want to convert them. For example, Robin Veldman's 2019 book *The Gospel of Climate Skepticism* argues, among other things, that conservative White American Evangelical opposition to environmentalism is closely tied to Evangelicals' identities and "sense of embattlement" with a hostile secular culture. This sense of embattlement includes the impression that climate change is not only a hoax, but "a tool wielded by secular elites

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25. According to a July 2022 Pew Report, 82% of Republicans and conservative independents say the Biden administration's climate policies are "taking the country in the wrong direction." By contrast, 79% of liberals say "Biden is moving the country in the right direction." The policies in question include, for example, rejoining the Paris Climate Agreement and Biden's infrastructure bill which included funding for renewable energy. That same report finds rising conservative opposition to policies that require power companies to use more renewable resources or impose taxes on corporations based on their carbon emissions (Pew 2022). While in the U.S. the number of outright skeptics of crises such as climate change has continued to shrink, the citizenry remains politically divided on *how to respond* to these problems (see, e.g., Pew 2022; see also Rode et al. 2021). Analysists have also suggested that non-White Americans are less likely to be politically polarized on climate change (Schuldt and Pearson 2016).

26. For example, researchers have found that environmental messages that emphasize the importance of *protecting nature from harm* or *pursuing justice for nature and humans* are more likely to ostracize conservatives than messages that connect environmental policies to patriotism and respect for authority or God (see Wolsko, Ariceaga, Seiden 2016). Other scholars argue that environmental messaging, even when it merely emphasizes basic facts about, say, climate change, can trigger "psychological reactance," "an oppositional response to perceived pressure for change that occurs when a person believes that a message threatens [his, her, or their] agency or freedom" (Nisbet, Cooper, & Garrett 2015, 42). In polarized circumstances, a message designed for *persuasion* that challenges an individual's political identification is likely to trigger psychological reactance. Social psychologists have found that basic messages about climate change, evolution, fracking, and nuclear power elicit reactance differentially according to political ideology. Messages on climate change and evolution often elicit reactance from conservatives; while messages on fracking and nuclear power elicit reactance from liberals (Nisbet, Cooper, & Garrett 2015, 46-47; Ma, Dixon, and Hmielowski 2019; see also Steindl et al. 2015, 205). Thanks to Russell Johnson for suggesting the relevance of reactance theory to this chapter.

to undermine the Christian worldview" (88). Veldman finds that many Evangelicals resist climate policy in part because they think that environmentalists want to displace and convert them.

Anecdotal examples bolster this connection. In a 2021 article published in *National Review*, longtime conservative climate commentator Kevin Williamson concludes his discussion of COP26 in Glasgow by writing, "The true-believing environmentalists have very little interest in common ground or a middle ground, insisting instead that 'climate justice' requires a complete transformation of both the individual and society. As politics, that is totalitarianism; as religion, it is fanaticism." Williamson's conclusion follows an extended discussion of environmentalism as a religious cult, replete "with creeds, rituals, and *infidels*," seeking to "dominate" traditional Western life.

The Cornwall Alliance for the Stewardship of Creation, a conservative Christian (anti-) environmental think tank, likewise represents environmentalism as a conversionist movement that seeks to displace Christianity and a conservative worldview. The promotional video for "Resisting the Green Dragon," a series of audio-video lectures on environmentalism created and distributed by the Alliance, positions "radical environmentalism" as a "religious and political … movement" with "a whole worldview," including "doctrines of God, of creation, of humanity, of sin, and of redemption" (Cornwall Alliance 2017).[27] This "Green Dragon" is allegedly seducing children, trying to regulate human population and the economy, and, in sum, "striving to put America and the world under its destructive control" (ibid.). Such views are increasingly echoed in popular (purportedly) nonfiction books such as *Eco-fascists* (2012), *The Inconvenient Facts: The Science that Al Gore Doesn't Want You to Know* (2017), *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Climate Change* (2018), *The Climate Chronicles: Inconvenient Revelations You Won't Hear From Al Gore—And Others* (2018), *The Mythology of Global Warming: Climate Change Fiction VS. Scientific Facts* (2018), *The Green Reich* (2019), *Apocalypse Never: Why Environmental Alarmism Hurts Us All* (2020), *The Weaponization of Weather in the Phony Climate War*

27. For a rhetorical analysis of the Green Dragon campaign, see Amos, Spears, and Pentina (2016).

(2020), and *False Alarm: How Climate Change Panic Costs Us Trillions, Hurts the Poor, and Fails to Fix the Planet* (2020).[28] These books not only accuse environmentalists of trading on questionable science. They also consistently connect environmentalists' use of purportedly bad science to a sinister agenda for cultural and worldview transformation. Authors of such books regularly refer to environmentalists as secular religionists and often describe environmental crises as ploys for establishing environmentalists' worldview.[29]

The causes of political polarization in the U.S. are complex and environmentalists are not responsible in any simple way for conservative resistance to environmental reforms. Environmental skepticism and opposition are largely products of disinformation campaigns organized by the fossil fuel industry, conservative think tanks, conservative media, and political leadership (Birch 2020; Dunlap and Jacques 2013; Jacques 2006; Jacques, Dunlap, and Freeman 2008; McCright and Dunlap 2000, 2003; Veldman 2019). Indeed, the "Resist and the Green Dragon" campaign illustrates how these same actors are partially responsible for the very idea that environmentalists want to transform conservative worldviews. Further, many of the conservative perspectives I have cited seem to invoke a sense of the left's encroachment as a mere means to obfuscate and shore-up their actual power.

Nevertheless, whatever the origins of this perception, whatever its tactical aims for the conservative political elite, the fact remains that many U.S. citizens perceive environmentalists as seeking to displace their worldviews, and this perception contributes to their opposition to environmental policies. I suggest, therefore, that when we environmentalists advocate worldview

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28. See Dunlap and Jacques (2013) for a discussion of the connection between conservative think tanks and climate denialism books. In their study, they examine 108 such books published through 2010. As my show list suggests, conservative think tanks hardly stopped publishing such texts that year.
29. We find similar perceptions of environmentalists trying to displace conservative perspectives and ways of life in local politics. For example, see the remarks of Andrea Zupancich, Mayor of the rural mining town of Babbitt, MN in an interview with *Fox News* (Zupancich 2020) and in a co-authored opinion piece in the Duluth News Tribune (Novak and Zupancich 2020). See also the open letter signed by six northern Minnesotan mayors endorsing Donald Trump for President in 2020 (Cuffe et al. 2020).

conversion, we risk uncritically playing into these perceptions and narratives on the right, thereby fueling political fracture and impeding effective policy action.

The stakes of polarization are not limited to environmental policy gridlock. U.S. citizens, across the political spectrum, are increasingly tolerant of politically-motivated violence (see, e.g., Wintemute et al. 2022; see also Schwartz 2022). Such tolerance is inextricably connected to political fracturing and polarization and indexes the instability of American democracy. We environmentalists should be working to mitigate such problems, for the good of humans and the more-than-human. However, our preoccupation with conversion—paired with our persistent demonization of the political and religious right—may instead make us complicit in them.

§4 Worldview Transformation and Biocultural Homogenization

The third limitation I want to discuss returns us to a theme we saw in Bauman's work, namely, conceptual homogenization. Eco-conversionism is in its essence homogenizing. By definition it strives to turn the other into a version of the self; it strives to transform the conceptually different into the conceptually same. Some of the authors discussed above try to mitigate this implication by claiming that there is plenty of room within their worldviews for plurality. For example, Bauman claims there is room for wide "biocultural-historical diversity" in his planetary perspective (Bauman 2014, 60-61). Similarly, Callicott aspires to "a unity and harmony *in multiplicity*" within the evolutionary-ecological worldview (1994, 186; my emphasis). Likewise, Crist's worldview of abundance contains either a "diversity of cultures" or "diverse individualities" containing multiple cultures (2019, 79). I am not convinced by these purportedly consoling pluralisms. From what I can tell, such constrained pluralism amounts to requiring that the people of the world subscribe to a shared metaphysical framework, the elements of which they are free to call

by their preferred, culturally or religiously peculiar names. That does not add up to a multiplicity of worldviews; it amounts to a singular worldview that can be discussed with different signs.[30]

Why might homogenization be a limitation to eco-conversion? I think there are instrumental and intrinsic problems here, which I can only touch on briefly. I develop my thoughts on this issue more extensively in Chapter 4, where I discuss the potential nontriviality of a conceptual other's life with the nonhuman vis-à-vis one's own. Preliminarily, one instrumental reason why homogenization is problematic from an environmental perspective concerns the marriage of biodiversity and cultural diversity. As Riccardo Rozzi and others have argued, cultural homogenization contributes to biological homogenization, so to protect biodiversity we should strive to conserve biocultural diversity (see, e.g., Rozzi 2013, Rozzi et al. 2018a). Accordingly, these authors advocate for defending cultural diversity as a means to protecting biodiversity.

Beyond this instrumental limitation, there is a distinctive kind of loss that I want to call *moral* that comes along with conceptual homogenization. Advocates for the conservation of biocultural diversity offer a crisscrossing approximation of my interest here when they talk about the intrinsic value of cultural diversity, of particular distinct biocultural assemblages, of particular cultures and languages (see, e.g., Bromham et al. 2022, 169; Crystal 2014, 47-55; Harmon 2002; Rozzi 2018a, 304; Rozzi 2018b, 36-39). For me—I have no one else's reasons to offer—I cannot help but think that there are numerous, very different ways for humans to flourish and for human-nonhuman congregations to flourish together, and that this multiplicity is good. There is something profound, striking about the fact of multiplicity itself that we can too easily pass over; it implies that *I* could *flourish* with some other ensemble of human and other-than-human entities than those with which I

30. Invoking Wittgenstein's distinction in the *Tractatus* between a *sign* ("that which can be perceived of a symbol," e.g. a *word* or *sentence*, written or uttered) and a *symbol* (that which a sign *does*, its function), one could say that these conversionists care not what signs one uses in life but have strict requirements for what symbols are used (see Wittgenstein 2001, §§3.2-3.328).

now (strive to) flourish. This fact is shown by the fact that people radically different from me can, have, and are so flourishing with the nonhuman (cf. Miller 2013, 1).[31]

I do not have satisfactory words to articulate why the idea of destroying this multiplicity offends me.[32] My reasons here run out, and I am tempted into a grand expression of the sort Rolston offers about anthropogenic species extinction, namely, that it is "a kind of superkilling" (Rolston 1985, 723). This is a strange but telling phrase. It is strange because species are not the normal sort of thing we think can be killed. Something must be *alive* to be killed. Species are in an important sense only ever alive in the *individuals* that represent and constitute them. If you kill all the individuals, then there goes the species. But it is also true that one need not literally kill the last individual of a species to have helped kill the species. One could *allow* the last Gray Wolf *to die* alone in the wilderness—and who here would be, say, harmed?—and yet be party to the destruction of the species. This is all part of what makes the idea of killing a "species" strange.

Nevertheless, Rolston's turn of phrase is telling and evocative because it tries to give words to something that he thinks, rightly, is profound, overwhelming, unsettling—namely, that we could be party to the elimination of an entire *kind* of existent. I want to say something similar about the narrowing of possible forms of human-nonhuman flourishing through conceptual homogenization. This too is a kind of extinction, a kind of superkilling.[33] Since I want to call homogenization a kind of wrong, a kind of evil, I expect some will insist that I am implying that some good is lost or some harm done, and then they'll want to know what that good is or who is harmed. For these questions I am at a loss. I cannot imagine an explanation that would convince someone who needs one *here* that

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31. That there is such multiplicity is doubtlessly connected to the dynamic and open-ended nature of conceptual/semiotic understanding, and/or what we might call the freedom internal to the use of concepts, connected to the sui generis or emergent nature of understanding as such. My thinking here is informed by McDowell in particular (see 1994, 12-13, 24, 67). Thanks to Richard Miller for suggesting the place of this explanation.
32. The appeals to "intrinsic value" cited above disappointment me, fail to capture my sensibility.
33. Eco-linguists commonly compare languages and cultures to species, a comparison felicitous to analogizing the destruction of either kind of thing (see, e.g., Mühlhäusler 2011).

this is horrible. I will return to related matters in Chapter 4, where I try to articulate some senses in which the conceptual other's life might be nontrivial vis-à-vis one's own. Among other things, I will argue that conceptual multiplicity enables the proliferation of epistemic, moral, and political paradigms, which can mutually sharpen and qualitatively enhance each other. For now, I merely list—alongside the ecological stakes of conceptual homogenization—my sense, for those who might share it even inchoately, that there is something intrinsically undesirable about the homogenizing of forms of human life, and that these two implications of conceptual homogenization constitute another limitation to eco-conversionism.

§5 Eco-conversionism and the Disappearance of Morality

The unreflective conflicts, political fracturing, and conceptual homogenization risked by a preoccupation with conversion call for an investigation into its ethical limitations as a default approach to other people as such, which takes us to the final problem I wish to describe. In the last chapter, I discussed how eco-conversionism seems to reflect in its picture of the other a certain absence of alterity, taking inspiration from some of Stanley Cavell's ideas. I now turn to those ideas themselves to develop a fourth criticism. Allowing conversion a default status in our relationships with others, I will propose, implies what Cavell calls "an absence of morality," or a refusal to engage others with the sort of consideration they might merit if morality were present, if they were conceived as others to which something is owed.

Cavell develops the idea of an absence of morality in *The Claim of Reason* (1979) as part of his critique of moral philosopher C. L. Stevenson's arguments about reason-giving in moral discourse, which Cavell thinks "vitiate the concept of morality" altogether (275). Stevenson argues that from a "neutral" point of view, there is no important difference between the concept moralist (one who offers moral reasons) and the propagandist (one who offers effective reasons) (Stevenson 1944, 252). Moral reasoning, he proposes, is the offering up of reasons with the hopes of shaping others'

attitudes, and anything may be said to alter the attitudes of others if the speaker thinks the statement in question will be effective (see Cavell 1979, 275, 287).[34] In this conception, *other people* only factor into the moralist/propagandist's considerations insofar as they provide criteria for the selection of effective reasons. The moralist/propogandist has a desired course of action in mind; to get others to follow that course, she selects "reasons" tailored to these others that will achieve that end.

The attitude toward other persons expressed in Stevenson's account, Cavell suggests, subverts the very idea of morality. Moral reasoning, he argues, is differentiated from propaganda precisely because others factor into the former in a fashion that exceeds the obligations owed them in the latter.[35] For morality to be present in an encounter between individuals is, for example, for reasons to be offered in a fashion that extends beyond one person merely trying to get the other to feel or act as the first wishes. Cavell elucidates these differences by connecting the concept of morality to that of justice. If Stevenson's conflation of morality and propaganda is true, he writes,

> then the concept of morality is unrelated to the concept of justice. For however justice is to be understood —whether in terms of rendering to each his due, or in terms of equality, or of impartiality or of fairness —*what* must be understood is a concept concerning the treatment of *persons;* and *that* is a concept, in turn, of a creature with commitments and cares. But for these commitments and cares, and the ways in which they conflict with one another and with those of other persons, there would be no problem, and no concept of justice. (283)

Justice, Cavell claims, however we wish to further specify it, is a concept concerning how persons are treated and, in particular, concerned with the conflicts that can and do arise among one individual's cares and ties as well as among individuals' commitments. Such creatures and conflicts are internal to the concept of justice itself; its sense depends on these other realities. Likewise, Cavell is suggesting, it is internal to the concepts *morality* and *moral reasoning* that there are things that precisely should not be treated without a kind of acknowledgment, precisely should not be solely

34. This position depends on Stevenson's rejection (generally presumed and unargued, as Cavell notes) that moral conclusions are only ever *invalidly* drawn from factual premises; that is, the former merely reflect our emotional approval of the conclusion in question (see Stevenson 1944, 21-22).
35. Relatedly, propaganda is what it is precisely because it, sometimes appropriately, overrules these obligations.

considered as mere *impediments* to be *managed* effectively but, say, *honestly reasoned with* (see Cavell 1979, 283, 287, 289). There are numerous reasons some of us think people should not be merely managed, merely influenced and caused to feel and act this way or that (think of all the talk in academic ethics of intrinsic value and dignity). But Cavell's point is that the very idea of persons, of existents to whom something more than manipulation is owed is internal to the concepts morality and moral reasoning. When the former goes missing, as it does Stevenson's account, then so does the latter.

I propose that there is an absence of morality in the conversionist writings considered in the last chapter, which amounts to saying that there is an absence of the concept of another to whom a modality of relation exceeding management or manipulation is owed. Eco-conversion as a default approach to others, as an -ism, is a way *around* the other rather than a facing-up-to the other; it seeks to install the conditions for effective reason-giving—it is not moral reason-giving itself.[36] It desires another who reasons as the self already reasons rather than undertaking, say, the precarious art of speaking with or learning to speak with another. Do we not hear a reaction to this absence of morality in the insistence by decolonial voices that the differences between Indigenous aims and forms of life be acknowledged by any would-be collaborators? Is there not a perception of this absence in the citation of left-secular hatred by conservative anti-environmentalists?[37] Is the resistance considered above not precisely, among other things, opposition to being cast as a mere hurdle to others' plans? Can environmentalists and our allies really tolerate such a disappearance of morality, and with it such concepts as person, in our ecological plans and projects? For many of us, myself included, it is simply (and *profoundly*) internal to very concept of a person that *they are not the sorts of things to be merely gotten over or around*, to invoke this work's epigraph, mere *inconveniencies*. And

36. Though of course each conversionist offers reasons for conversion.
37. Which is to ask, as much as hatred of the right by the left is constructed by the political elite, is it not often also true that many on the left in fact hate the right, feel no sense of owing conservatives the considerations of moral reasoning? Which, of course, does not imply that there are no reasons or explanations for such an absence here.

many of us are unwilling to go without such a concept. Conjure whatever justification you like for treating others and their forms of living with a modicum of dignity and you will simultaneously conjure some reasons against allowing morality and such concepts as person to disappear in your approach to the other.[38] Whatever reasons one wants to offer against defaulting to manipulation, to imagining others as mere barriers, those will also count against defaulting to conversion as we reflect on how to respond to ecological crises and the reality of pluralism.

§6 Conclusion: Reimagining the Ecological Other

There are ethical and strategic limitations to eco-conversionists' preoccupation with transforming the worldviews of their ecological others. This preoccupation uncritically obscures and invites conflicts with Indigenous American sovereignty and decolonial movements; inadvertently plays into conservative narratives about environmentalists *as conversionists*, narratives which fuel conservative resistance to environmental action and political division; leads to conceptual homogenization, which undermines the aim of biodiversity conservation and aspires to profoundly flatten the shifting variety of human forms of life; and signals that eco-conversionists do not imagine their relationships to their others to be moral ones, relationships in which these others precisely ought not be treated as mere impediments to pre-given ends.

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38. Kant thought it had to do with humanity's rationality (see, e.g., 1993, 77-78, 91; 2012, 4:402n, 4:428-29). Many Jews, Christians, and Muslims will here invoke the *imago dei* (Gen 1:27). I do not myself go in for foundational justifications that purport to explain why humans are objects of value, meriting respect, obligations, etc. I have never found such a justification that, qua moral foundation, does not fail to disappoint me. I am persuaded, instead, by such accounts of the concept of person as suggested by Cavell above or by Cora Diamond (see, e.g., 1991b). Diamond, inhabiting the Wittgensteinian realistic spirit, describes ideas such as responsibility and obligation as mutually shaping such ideas as person. We mark persons with such signs and what we do with them, and we simultaneously make this concept person what it is with our talk of duty, virtue, etc. and through innumerable other activities, such as not eating people while eating other things that can be very much like human people, such as cows (see Diamond 1991b, 322-26). We could add to the things we say and do that go into making this concept such signs as *rationality* (á la Kant) and various religious utterances, but these performances would then have a more horizontal rather than vertical and justificatory relationship to the sentence: people are not mere things (cf. Cavell's horizontal construal of the logical relation of is and ought statements [1979, 315-22]).

In addition to these limits, recall the plain fact that conceptual difference seems unlikely to go away. The desire for the total absorption of the conceptually-different ecological other seems doomed to dissatisfaction. On the one hand, the very project of trying to conceptually convert the other seems to breed resistance to that conversion, pitting the other in opposition to the conversionist, resolutely reinforcing their otherness. On the other, the task of trying to get a plurality of people to use a set of concepts in the same way, to live with the same worldview, seems impossible in light of what our lives with concepts are like. The meanings of our words are too multivalent, productively vague, and dynamic to be controlled in the fashion implied by eco-conversionism. These different forms of the other's stubbornness are part of what makes the ecological other's reality a difficult one, one that can invite deflections for how it unsettles us.

In this context, one in which conceptual difference seems a recalcitrant reality of our future on an ecologically-damaged planet, a preoccupation with conversion indexes an impractically narrow range of possible ways of living with difference, and such narrowness is a liability in an uncertain context that requires adaptive flexibility. I have said that a certain picture of the ecological other helps moor this preoccupation, and the metaphor of mooring is suggestive in another direction as well. Imagine a boatperson who defaults to using the portside stern cleat to moor their vessel and feels that this is truly the best approach to securing it. (Perhaps this curious habit originates in how they learned life on the water, the preferences of their teacher, or contextual happenstance.) Doubtless, there will be occasions in which such a peculiar preoccupation will suffice or even excel for docking the boat—say, when the currents and winds collaborate in such a way that only this cleat reaches a dock, or when there is not enough room on a crowded or small dock to use other cleats. However, if our boatperson refuses to use any but the port stern cleat, they shall encounter difficulty when needing to dock on the starboard side, to say nothing of the starboard bow in particular. When a storm picks up—and don't they often, and when you least expect—a

disinclination to use all of the moorings will prove a liability: picture them now clinging to their precious cleat and the flotsam to which it is attached. Like the persistent unpredictability of impudent waves and currents, which demand of the navigator that they employ a host of adaptive techniques, conceptual difference is not going away and conversion is, like the preoccupation of our curious boatperson, only one way of relating to it. As we wade deeper into the Anthropocene and continue coping with ecological crises that transgress human-drawn boundaries, it is incumbent upon us to refine and expand our capacities for living with the indelible reality of the other.

If eco-conversionism has these limitations, and yet the transparent and trivial picture constrains our imaginations, inviting us to channel our ecological and social anxieties into trying to convert others, what options remain? Two replies: By studying and delimiting eco-conversion in this and the previous chapter and explicating the conversionist picture of the other, I have tried to start loosening the grips of both on our imaginations. That the possibility of conversion is merely one from a range of options and the elements of the transparent and trivial picture are merely one way to conceptualize the other are facts that we can pass over without a thought. Heeding Wittgenstein, I have tried in this chapter and the last to help conversion-inclined environmentalists to slow down, to explicate what we take for granted. I have tried to make conversion and the transparent and trivial picture explicit objects of thought so that we might refrain from assuming them, and also to start problematizing conversion as a default relational-modality.

Beyond this explicatory, problematizing exercise, we can also start exploring alternatives to eco-conversion. I suggest we begin by assembling another picture of the conceptually-different ecological other. We can initiate that project by mulling over facts about our lives with others that are obscured by the transparent and trivial picture. That picture construes the other's life as transparent and trivial vis-à-vis one's own. In Chapter 1, I observed that there is obviously something to this picture, for our conceptual others can be transparent to us and their conceptual

lives can be trivial in one respect or another. So the transparent and trivial picture is clearly not purely fantastical. However, it is just as clear that this conception distorts other aspects of our lives with alterity. For just as much as the other can be transparent to us, they can be opaque; and as much as their conceptual lives can be trivial in some respect or another, there are people in the world, people much different from ourselves, who live nontrivial lives, whose perspectives could, say, inform or change one's own in profound and valuable ways. The conversionist picture overlooks these possibilities, these plain facts from our lives with others.

If we refuse to take for granted the facts about our lives with difference encapsulated in the transparent and trivial picture and turn to other possibilities in our goings-on with others, distinct relational modalities come into view. In Chapters 3 and 4, I will begin examining such possibilities, focusing on the facts that others can be opaque and nontrivial to us, and on that basis elaborate a picture of ecological other that tries to keep the possibility of their strangeness and significance before us. I call this alternative conception the opaque and nontrivial picture of the ecological other. Then, in Chapters 5 and 6, I will extrapolate on some of the possibilities for relating to our others that come into view when we take this alternative picture seriously.

Chapter 3: The Ecological Other's Potential Opacity

A main cause of philosophical disease—a one-sided diet: one nourishes one's thinking with only one kind of example.

Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*

§1 Introduction

To begin expanding the eco-conversionist imagination, an imagination preoccupied with the relational possibility of changing others, I want to generate a picture of the ecological other to compete with the conception that licenses that preoccupation, the image of the other as transparent and trivial. An alternative picture emerges when we dwell on quotidian aspects of our lives with alterity that are overlooked and obscured by the prominence of the latter conception. This chapter initiates that process by collecting illustrations of how people who use different concepts can be opaque to each other. One effect of considering the ways in which a conceptual other can be opaque, or not understood to a particular subject, is to further denaturalize the fixed status of the first aspect of eco-conversionism's conception, namely, that despite living with disparate concepts, the other is reliably understood or consistently transparent. A second will be to conjure another image of the ecological other, namely, as a genuine stranger, shifting nimbus, or nebulous shroud.

In the next section, I will suggest that individuals who live with different concepts can be opaque to each other in innumerable senses. To offer a glimpse of this multiplicity, I differentiate between three general ways in which an individual may or may not understand a conceptual other: she may or may not *know that* the second uses some set of concepts, *how* to use those concepts as the other does, or *why* one would use them. I will suggest that a distinct variety of opacity attends each such mode of possible understanding, that to fail to achieve understanding in a given mode will leave that which is there to be understood opaque. I develop these ideas in dialogue with Gilbert Ryle's famous discussion of knowing that and how (2009).

New questions arise as a result of the discussion in section 2, most notably the matter of how we decide when another is opaque in the concepts they use, or, amounting to the same, how we know that we understand them. I will offer two replies to this query. The first I give briefly in section 3: building from the discussion of knowing that, how, and why, and especially the point that achieving understanding in one of these modes entails nothing about the others, we might say that others remain opaque to us when we have accomplished understanding within one mode, but not others. Vis-à-vis the latter, opacity remains.

Section 4, however, offers the heart of my response to the question of how or when we know that we understand others, namely, that there is no absolute reply to give for there are no shortcuts when deciding this question. I develop this reply by turning to Wittgenstein's discussion of rule-following in *Philosophical Investigations* (2009a). Among other things, in that discussion Wittgenstein is interested in how we can be tempted to seek criteria for deciding when someone, including ourselves, understands a concept. By deflating attempts to develop metaphysical models of what understanding involves, which might furnish principles that secure for us when someone understands a concept, Wittgenstein's thought shows us how such attempts to circumvent the difficult everyday labors of deciding when someone understands fail to deliver. In place of such shortcuts, his writings suggest, we have only the ragged, quotidian techniques we in fact use in our ordinary dealings—our own making the best of understanding. Those techniques, in turn, hardly secure for us when understanding is reached, leaving us perpetually susceptible to discovering that understanding has not been reached or has, at some stage, gone off the rails.

There are two senses, then, in which I want us to appreciate the potentiality of our conceptual others' opacity. First, it is an ordinary possibility of our lives with conceptual others that we may not understand them. But, secondly, this is a kind of ordinary possibility, given what our lives with others are like, that can recur, for opacity can remain even when we have advanced our

understanding in one dimension of another's conceptual life, or re-emerge when we think we have settled that we understand the other (and then, say, find out otherwise). The other can be opaque, can retain opacity in certain spheres of understanding despite our achievements, and can perpetually show herself to be opaque insofar as her transparency is never secured once and for all. When I say that the other can be opaque, that they may be a genuine stranger, I want to call to mind both of these senses: the other can be a stranger in familiar ways; and they may always yet show themselves to be a stranger—the veil may always drop or show itself to have dropped—despite our best efforts or evidence that we understand.

Contemplating possibilities for conceptual opacity and the difficulty of settling the question of opacity generates another possible picture of environmentalism's conceptual other: the figure of the opaque ecological other, the other who, however much we come to understand them, may always yet again show their opacity. In the next chapter, I will explicitly charge this figure with value by considering some of the ways in which conceptual others can factor into our lives in epistemically and morally nontrivial ways, can show themselves to be significant. That discussion will cast the figure of the stranger developed here as, say, the stranger who may bear gifts; construe the image of the shifting mist as a charged thunderhead, a storm that may promise revolution by lightening, relief and nourishment with rain, eerie silence, or a passing breeze. Together, then, Chapters 3 and 4 give us another possible picture of the ecological other, as opaque and potentially nontrivial, a picture that might help eco-conversionists envision relational modes besides worldview change.

As should be implied by my use of the indeterminate *can* (in the observation that others can be opaque and can continually show themselves to be opaque), I am not suggesting that instead of thinking of others as essentially transparent we should instead think of them as always opaque, say,

because *in fact* they are always opaque, are in essence opaque.[1] To insist on the other's necessary opacity is as much an indulgence of the metaphysical attitude resisted in this project as the presumption of the other's transparency.[2] The possibility of the other's opacity is ordinary and likewise the possibility of their transparency. Understanding and nonunderstanding, even across great distances, happens, can happen, a quotidian fact we may be more willing to see if we can metabolize that what understanding and nonunderstanding *look like* outside of theoretical texts is often far less grand than our fantasies about them suggest. Both are everyday matters.[3] Rather than asserting that the other is essentially opaque, then, in what follows I am conjuring concrete ordinary illustrations of how they sometimes can be and will then invite us to ask how we might relate to them when our schemes take flight from such possibilities.

A term I will want for my discussion of Wittgenstein in section 3 is *language-game*. Wittgenstein uses this notion in different ways.[4] In general, it refers to the circumstances of a word's or sentence's significant use (2009a §23; Conant 1998, 233). One specific way Wittgenstein uses this term is to draw our attention to the fact that when we are speaking, we are *doing* something. On these occasions he uses language-game to "emphasize the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life" (2009a, §23).[5] Accordingly, he will sometimes refer to the various things we do when we speak as different language-games.[6] Wittgenstein also uses language-game to

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1. Think, for instance, of how the notion of "the absolutely Other," of "an alterity which refuses to be totally domesticated," arises in some contexts (see Derrida 2004, 147-49).
2. Cf. Cavell on the myth of the body as veiling the mind (1979, 368).
3. As this chapter will suggest, questions of understanding and not understanding are precisely not settled in advance of actually sorting them out and may only avail themselves of banal resolutions that hardly satisfy us in abstraction, but can and often do "satisfy" us in many instances (insofar as we in fact get by on them, which may be a mere, and perhaps paradoxically disappointing, kind of quotidian satisfaction).
4. Language-game, like other terms in Wittgenstein's lexicon, is a term of art internal to his therapeutic practice rather than a metaphysical unit that might be part of building a theory of language. He writes, "Our clear and simple language-games are not preliminary studies for a future regimentation of language—as it were, first approximations, ignoring friction and air resistance" but rather "stand there as *objects of comparison*" (§130).
5. Recall the discussion of the logical priority of pragmatics to semantics in the Introduction.
6. Thus in §23 he provides a list of language-games (or activities or shapes of human living) and invites us to reflect on their variety and to imagine others. The list includes giving and acting on orders, constructing objects on the basis of a

refer to simple illustrations of words being used or learned. He develops multiple such simplified illustrations in his work, employing them as "objects of comparison which, through similarities and dissimilarities, are meant to throw light on features of our language" (2009a §130; see also §§131-33). Below we will examine cases in which individuals are teaching and learning language-games such as how to consistently apply "Add 2" in the context of elementary mathematics.

§2 On (Not) Knowing That, How, and Why (Others can be opaque)

People who live with concepts other than those we live with, including those who preoccupy eco-conversionists, may not always be opaque, but surely they are *sometimes*, sometimes they *can* be. To specify this *can*, the present section outlines some of the circumstances in which we might intelligibly say that someone who uses some set of concepts is opaque to someone else who does not, a series of perspicuous descriptions designed to recall the quotidian possibility of a conceptual other's opacity to us. Take these illustrations as some of the unremarkable rags of what understanding and especially not understanding can be like. To draw out some of the variety of contexts in which utterances of conceptual nonunderstanding might make sense, as well as develop a challenge to the transparency presumed by eco-conversionists, I will distinguish three general ways in which one might know or understand or *not* know or understand someone else: knowing or not knowing *that* something is the case about them, such as that they use some set of concepts; knowing or not knowing *how* they do something, such as use a given set of concepts; and knowing or not knowing *why* they do something, such as, again, the point of using a certain concept or set thereof.

2.1 Knowing That

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drawing, inventing and reading stories, play-acting, round singing, riddle-solving, solving applied arithmetic problems, and language translation. He concludes with "requesting, thanking, cursing, greeting, praying."

To *know that* something is the case about someone else can involve *having information* about them, to be able, for instance, to predicate of them, in thought, speech, or writing, true statements.[7] In his own discussion of *knowing that*, Ryle offers such examples as a child who can accurately recite the rules of a practice, such as playing chess, and a non-English-speaking scholar who can state the theory of English grammar (2009, 29-30). Whatever else these individuals know or don't know, the former *knows that*, say, the knight, relative to its starting position, can never move in anything but the "L" shape formed by two vertical squares and one horizontal, while the latter knows that "To be a proper sentence, a string of words must contain a noun and verb," or "The use of a definite article, notably *the*, indicates that the noun attached to the article is specific rather than general."

To develop this conception in the direction of our relations with people with different concepts than our own, we need only replace the rules of chess or English grammar with descriptions of the concepts they use and *that* they use them. For instance, in the present work, consider how many true sentences the eco-conversionists considered in the Introduction and Chapter 1 might be able to think, utter, and write about their ecological others and their concepts. Although on their own accounts they do not or do not fully inhabit the perspectives of such potential converts, our eco-conversionists seem to know a lot *about* those perspectives, to know *that*, for instance, various peoples, such as Evangelical Republicans and both liberal and fascist vitalists, are prone to use the concept *life* in relation to the concept *matter* in all sorts of ways (Bennett 2010, 83, 88-89); that some Indigenous peoples use concepts that one might translate as *kinship* (Callicott 1994, 109-111), some Jains use the concept *ahimsa* in relationship to those things they refuse to kill or harm (54-55), and some Muslims use the concept *Caliphate* (2015, 160); that some pre-conquest Indigenous Americans used concepts that might be translated as *person* in their dealings with

7. Such knowing that implies, following Ryle (and Wittgenstein 2009a, §31), *know how* to do something, such as thinking or saying sentences (2009, 19).

nonhuman creatures and some Ancient Greeks, Jews, and Christians used a concept that might be translated as *person* in their dealings with human beings (Crist 2019, 125); that some Indigenous peoples use a concept translated as *Trickster*, some Vedic Hindus use the concept *Shiva*, and some Christians use the concepts *God* and *Revelation* (Bauman 2014, 109, 69-70). Or recall some of what Rolston knows about some people in Northern India who use the word *Yamuna*:

> I was at the Yamuna River in India recently, a major river that flows from the forested Himalayas through Delhi and into the Ganges and Bay of Bengal. Pristine at its origins, the river becomes dangerously polluted downstream from erosion due to forest cutting, from industrial pollution, and from human wastes. By Hindu accounts the river has (or is) a mother goddess. Krishna is said to have delighted in the river. (Rolston 2015, 201)

Rolston, of course, tells us that he does not "believe that mythology," but nevertheless he can recite it for us, he can tell us that *these people do this or that*, live with this concept, say *these things* about it; he knows *that* much.

Corresponding to this initial way of understanding the other, we can specify an initial sense of another's potential opacity like this: someone, call her Q, might be opaque to another person, J, if the latter *does not know that* something is the case about the former. Here opacity consists in a kind of epistemic lack, a void of information, *ordinary ignorance*; some body of true facts, which might be formulated at descriptions, exist about someone, here, Q, and they are unknown by someone else, namely, J. With respect to these facts, Q might be said to be opaque to J. Shifting to circumstances of conceptual difference, perhaps the reader did not know *that* some people in Northern India use the word *Yamuna* in their daily lives and imaginative and practical dealings with a particular river, or perhaps Rolston does not know that some people in Oceania use the notion *tapu* (see Havea 2010, 347-351)[8] or, better, that some people who use *Yamuna* think the corresponding divine river is impervious to its pollution, while others disagree (see Haberman 2006, 176-78). He may not know

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8. Jione Havea translates this term as a kind of profound or "sacred" quality inhering in the land and ocean for those Islanders that use it (2010, 347).

that they say these different things about her. In each case, we might say, prior to the "filling-in" potentially achieved by reading these last sentences, that the *Yamuna* and *tapu* users were in some sense opaque to the reader or Rolston.

2.2 Knowing How

Besides knowing or not knowing that something is the case about someone else, it is also possible to *know* or not know *how* to do something that they do. Thus, to remain with Ryle's cases, it is possible to not only know *that* some people play chess or speak English, but also *how* to do what they do, namely, play chess and speak English—to not only know the rules for chess and English grammar, but how to play and talk. One of Ryle's observations of course is that, though they may sometimes resemble each other,[9] these two modalities of knowledge or understanding can be distinguished, in part, by the fact that achieving understanding with one of them guarantees nothing with respect to the other. These points come out when we appreciate that our criteria for deciding whether someone *knows that* often differ from those we use to determine whether they *know how*, and that someone can satisfy the criteria in one case without satisfying them in another. In the cases of knowing that considered so far (e.g, the rules of chess and English or that some people use *Yamuna*), one might be said to know such and such is the case after having recited the known descriptions (in thought, writing, or speech), thus demonstrating *understanding that*. In cases of knowing how, by contrast, we often rely on other criteria, such as, to speak with Ryle, "a modest assemblage of heterogeneous performances," performances of or related to the know-how in question, which establishes "beyond reasonable doubt" whether someone knows how to do this or that (33). Ryle illustrates the latter sort of criteria and the relative autonomy of these modes of knowing when he

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9. There are similarities and differences between knowing how and knowing that. We talk of *learning* both (*learning how* to play a musical instrument and *that* something is the case). Likewise we *find out* or *wonder* how and that. However, we do not usually ask someone's grounds (as opposed to historical explanation) for knowing how to play cards (though such reasons might be given in teaching or learning), while it is quite normal to ask someone's reasons for thinking that such and such is the case (Ryle 2009, 46).

observes that even if a child knows all the rules for chess, in the sense of being able to recite them (knows *that*), the evidence of that knowledge (viz., her recital) says nothing about whether she knows *how* to play the game.[10] Rather, she must, "be able to make the required moves" (29). He writes,

> She is said to know how to play if, [even if] she cannot cite the rules, she normally does make the permitted moves, avoid the forbidden moves and protest if her opponent makes forbidden moves. Her knowledge *how* is exercised primarily in the moves that she makes, or concedes, and in the moves that she avoids or vetoes. So long as she can observe the rules, we do not care if she cannot also formulate them. It is not what she does in her head or with her tongue, but what she does on the board that shows whether or not she knows the rules in the executive way of being able to apply them. Similarly a foreign scholar might not know how to speak grammatical English as well as an English child, for all that he had mastered the theory of English grammar. (29-30; see also 36)

From the fact that someone knows (that) something is the case, then, it does not necessarily follow that they have related capacities of know-how (for to recite rules, say, is not *to apply* them, to say nothing of applying them well; *that* evidence ensures nothing over *here*), and, likewise, that someone knows how (to do something) does not entail that they can tell you all the related sentences or information *that* they know, or even prove to you that they know those sentences (know that) (for one can satisfy the criteria of *know how* without such demonstration—and don't we every day?).[11] Ryle points out that it is quite possible, and indeed exceedingly common, to learn *how* without ever encountering the explicit rules for a practice. Consider, for example, how young children learn to use their initial concepts. Rather than learning the rules for a practice first, Ryle suggests, "We learn *how* by practice, schooled indeed by criticism and example, but often quite unaided by any lessons in the theory" (28-29). We may in fact encounter rules for the activity we are learning, but such encounters are not essential to learning *how* to participate in the activity.

In the end, Ryle suggests that *knowing that* is an instantiation of, for it implies, *knowing how*, since in acquiring or demonstrating knowledge *that* one *does* something; the recitals mentioned so far,

10. I tire of Ryle's prejudice and exchange his uses of masculine pronouns regarding the chess player with the feminine.
11. This inability to state all that one knows or understands in relationship to what one knows how to do is a familiar point taken for granted in many parts of the humanities.

then, should be seen as among the "assemblage of heterogeneous performances" that tell us someone knows *how* to know *that* (33).[12] We might therefore cast the relevant distinction between modalities of understanding considered so far as one between kinds of know how: to know how to know that, and so in fact know that, is not necessarily to know how to do other things, for our evidence of this kind of know how (reciting the rules of chess) differs from other sorts (playing chess). In any event, I retain the distinction between knowing that and how for the sake of the varieties of potential opacity it will allow me to describe. In contrast to knowing that, the modality of understanding *how* suggests a distinctive conception of nonunderstanding, or circumstances in which someone might be opaque to someone else, namely, when, whatever else the second person knows, they *do not know how to do* what the first does. Think here of when Wittgenstein writes,

> We also say of a person that he is transparent to us. It is, however, important as regards our considerations that one human being can be a complete enigma to another. One learns this when one comes into a strange country with entirely strange traditions; and, what is more, even though one has mastered the country's language. One does not *understand* the people. (And not because of not knowing what they are saying to themselves.) We can't find our feet with them. (2009b, §324)

There are layers of potential opacity and transparency in play here. Perhaps one layer involves the mode of knowing *that*, namely, the case of mastering a language, in the sense of being able to recite its grammar in theoretical terms, but not understanding a people; this would be akin to Ryle's non-English grammarian visiting London. But I am inclined to think that all the layers here involve knowing and not knowing *how*, and when Wittgenstein adds the specification, "even though one has mastered the country's language," he implies two different states of potentially opacity pertaining to know how. First, one can enter a country without knowing (how to use) a language and then find others opaque. Here, J literally does not understand the signs Q uses; Q utters, writes, gestures, etc. and J is slack jawed. But even when this linguistic opacity is in some sense overcome, as

12. This part of Ryle's argument closely resembles Wittgenstein's remarks on all that one must know to ask for or receive explanations and different sorts of descriptions (2009a, §31).

Wittgenstein notes, a further kind of not-knowing-how can remain, for language is bound up with a host of practices that one may not know how to do, or "entirely strange traditions." Here *all* that Q knows how to do is something only glimpsed by J in learning Q's language. Wittgenstein underscores that a kind of not-knowing-how is as work here in the phrase about not finding one's feet with a people: picture not knowing how to walk, run, or dance with them as they do. Despite all that J knows *about* and even knows *how* to do vis-à-vis Q (say, in being able to speak with her), other understandings that Q has, things Q knows how to do, remain opaque to Q. Or with Wittgenstein: Q may be yet "a complete enigma" to J.

There can plainly be a rich complexity in this mode of know-how and potential opacity, which we might envision as a spectrum. Indeed, as Wittgenstein's remark captures, it seems too stringent to require that one person know how to do something exactly as another knows how to do it for some understanding to be present. There can be degrees here, precisely of the sort that enable a music critic to competently comment on a performance—appreciating where the performers' execution of their know how goes well or poorly, where peculiar mistakes and confusions, internal to this practice, occur, etc.—without being capable, having the know-how, of performing well herself (Ryle 2009, 41-42).[13] Indeed, as Ryle observes, the existence of degrees here is part of what can mark knowing or not knowing how off from knowing that, for one can partially know *how* but one cannot usually partially know *that*. For example, one isn't usually said to partially know that Minnesota is a U.S. state (even if one can partially know the states of the nation; i.e., know that Minnesota is a state but know no others). However, it is perfectly familiar to only partially know *how* to play an instrument. Champion performers often have more knowledge of how to do something than lay persons. Accordingly, many lay persons may only partially understand what, say, a champion

13. Inversely, as Ryle points out, it does not follow that someone proficient in practice is a competent critic (43).

athlete knows how to do. Learning *how* (acquiring a skill) may thus be differentiated from learning *that* (acquiring information) precisely in terms of the notion of partial understanding (46).

Knowing and not knowing how, then, can admit of degrees in a certain sense, and so we might imagine degrees of opacity that connect to how much someone understands of what another knows how to do, along the lines suggested by Wittgenstein's remark. With respect to differences in conceptual capacities, we might say that Q, who knows how to use the concept *Yamuna* in an open-ended host of intelligible ways, can, in her use of this concept, be opaque to J who does not or hardly knows how to use this concept, and if J has some facility with Yamuna, but not the same know-how as Q, we might say that Q is opaque to J when it comes to those uses beyond J's ability. Within that range Q might be said to be opaque.

I want to differentiate between two sorts of possible opacity within this field of not-knowing-how. On the one hand, it is possible to not know how to do something and yet in some sense see that *it* is being done. Thus, one might not know how to play chess, and yet know when it is being played; not know how to perform particularly difficult music phrases or athletic feats, and yet understand when others accomplish such tasks; not know how to use Yamuna in all instances, from jokes to worship to casual chats to esoteric disputes, etc., and yet understand when someone else is subtly joking, worshipping, etc. while using this concept. Opacity here is a kind of technical non-understanding, the sort of not being able to *do* signaled by such utterances as, "I have no idea how de Kooning achieves his effects." One knows *that* some doing is possible and may even know when it is done, but is not capable of doing it.

On the other hand, it is possible to not know how to do something and, as a result, *not know when it is being done*. Thus, one who does not know how to play chess might also not know when it is being played. Perhaps J has *never heard of chess* (knows neither how nor that), and so takes Q and Z's playing for a *different* game or *no game at all* (but, say, idle silliness or a prolonged greeting ritual—

indeed, with Wittgenstein, games of another sort) (cf. Ryle 2009a, 17; Wittgenstein 2009a, §23). Or perhaps though J does not know how to play chess, she has heard of it and can even recite some of the rules (knows that), and yet Q and Z are using nontraditional pieces and so J cannot see the game for what it is. Or Q and Z play another game with the traditional pieces, or only *pretend* to play and all this goes past J. Or perhaps Q and Z play correspondence chess and J only knows the game in real time and always with a board. Imagine in a case in which Q and Z in fact play, that Q, in two moves, deftly parries Z's offense. Shall we say of J, looking on, and having such general concepts as parry and offense but not knowing *how to play*, that she see how *this* (what Q does) is a parry? In some sense we may, but in others I will want to say that J indeed sees *hardly anything at all*, understands very little or nothing, may literally think nothing of what is done, or not think at all.[14] Similarly, if J does not know how to use *Yamuna* to the same extent as Q, then J may not understand what Q is doing on a particular occasion, or even that Q is using this concept a particular way. If J has never heard of Yamuna, surely the possibility, when Q uses it, of J missing what is done is all the more plausible. Imagine a specialized usage, now a usage that invokes not the *sign* Yamuna but trades tacitly on the notion. Here one's lack of *know how* results in another sort of opacity, indeed a kind of not-knowing-that, namely, not understanding *what* someone is doing, indeed, even *that* they are doing something in particular at all or *that* their particular doing is even possible.

Take as another illustration here William James's remarks on missing how his chauffer and his chauffer's people use such notions as "clearing," "coves," "axes", and "stumps." James, travelling through the mountains in North Carolina, finds himself passing stretches of wild woods cleared—cut, scorched, and flattened—for homesteading. "The forest," he recalls, "had been destroyed; and what had 'improved' it out of existence was hideous, a sort of ulcer, without a single

14. Think of winks and nods between expert athletes or musicians after subtle performances that escape the eyes and ears of even learned critics.

element of artificial grace to make up for the loss of Nature's beauty. Ugly, indeed, seemed the life of the squatter" (7). Taken aback, he seeks an explanation from his companion, a local:

> Then I said to the mountaineer who was driving me, "What sort of people are they who have to make these new clearings?" "All of us," he replied. "Why, we ain't happy here, unless we are getting one of these coves under cultivation." I instantly felt that I had been losing the whole inward significance of the situation. Because to me the clearings spoke of naught but denudation, I thought that to those whose sturdy arms and obedient axes had made them they could tell no other story. But, when *they* looked on the hideous stumps, what they thought of was personal victory….In short, the clearing, which to me was a mere ugly picture on the retina, was to them a symbol redolent with moral memories and sang a very pæan of duty, struggle, and success. (1900, 8-9)

James's interest in this scene lies in the potential opacity of the full sense of what someone is up to when doing something they value, including an aspect that I will momentarily discuss under the rubric of knowing *why*. For now, I want to focus on how James's mountaineer might be understood as offering James a lesson in conceptual know-how, in how to do something he could not quite do before, namely, use the concepts that organize this group of people's understanding of what they are doing on the wooded slopes. Prior to this education, though James *thinks* he grasps the sense of the situation, he discovers he had hardly glimpsed what was underway; he missed what was being done. It may of course be the case that from the start James is adept with the mountaineers' uses of coves, cultivation, etc. and here makes an ordinary error—as if J, who knows how to play chess, passes Q and Z playing chess, and mistakenly thinks they are playfully moving the pieces about in no order. In the course of things, then, Q or Z, like James's chauffeur in corresponding circumstances, might correct the observer: no actually, we are playing chess (or, to James, "making moral memories"). But when James remarks, "I instantly felt that I had been losing the whole inward significance of the situation," he helps us take this scene in the sense that interests me, namely, as one in which he did not know *how* to understand the situation as these people understood it, *how* they were using their concepts, *what* they were doing with them in the forest. Faced with burnt stumps, destruction, and debris, James uses "clearings" etc. along with "ugly" and "denudation" and *cannot imagine* the scene

understood otherwise. Meanwhile, these loggers use "coves" and the rest right alongside "happy," and James eventually ascribes to them also "duty, struggle, and success." In an instant, James learns his error and starts to learn new concepts, or if you prefer, new uses for concepts he thought he knew quite well. Thanks to this new know-how, James realizes that he had not seen *what* was done, *that* these others were doing anything other than what James took them at first to be doing, namely, making ugliness and ruin. In his not-knowing-how, these conceptual others were opaque to him.

Let the examples considered so far, and the James and Wittgenstein passages in particular, serve as scenes in which someone might be opaque to someone else because the latter does not know *how* to do something; and let the James case and final chess and Yamuna illustrations with J, Q, and Z serve specifically for what it can look like when someone is opaque to another because the second does not know how to use the concepts of the first. I now want to consider a third possible mode of knowing and its attendant forms of unknowing, namely, *knowing why* someone does something, and especially, why they use a set of concepts.

2.3 Knowing Why

One might know or not know why (someone uses some concepts) in the mode of knowing that. Knowing that Q uses *Yamuna*, J might also be able, in some sense, to "know why" she uses it, namely, insofar as she can say or recite the sentences Q might utter when asked for her reasons. J might also *not* know *that* here, that is, might not know those sentences; here Q's *why* is opaque to J, again, as a kind of plain piece of ignorance. I am interested, however, in a mode of (not) knowing why that relates to the general mode of knowing how, while remaining distinguishable from both knowing that and how. Knowing why here is a matter of understanding the point or grasping the reason for doing something, such as using a set of concepts (cf. Wittgenstein 2009a, §564). The specific variation of such knowing why that interests me has a nonreciprocal dependence on knowing how, or we could say that, in the relevant cases, knowing how is a necessary but insufficient

condition for knowing why. This nonreciprocal dependence can articulate itself in numerous ways. For instance, knowing *how* Q uses Yamuna, J *might also* know why she uses it, where *knowing why* is a matter of seeing the *point* of using it. At the same time, Q may not know how (to use Yamuna or play chess) and therefore also not know why (one would ever do either), insofar as knowing why *here* depends on also understanding how. If J does not know how to play chess, then in some circumstance we will say she cannot see the specific point of playing (and so the specific reasons Q loves to play are opaque to her).[15] James's remark about the mountaineers illustrate this sort of opacity I think, for a certain not-knowing-how to take the loggers' activity means he cannot see the point of what they are doing; indeed, he ascribes to them the *wrong* point, namely, that they *aim* at desolation. Once he grasps how they understand the situation, then the point comes into view (take this *then* either logically or chronologically). James's case also shows how not-knowing-why may *signal* that one does not know how. In the least we might say that if you do not know *why* something is done, some concept is used, it is *left in question* whether you know *how* (to do or use it). If you cannot see why one would use Yamuna or play chess, then we might ask if you in fact know what it is to do these things. And we have sayings for when we think that someone does not see *why* because they do not (yet) know *how*, such as, *If you have to ask, you'll never know*. So in these senses, then, knowing why can depend on knowing how.

The possible nonreciprocal dependence of knowing why on knowing how also expresses itself in the fact that two people can in some sense be said to know how to use a set of concepts while the first may wish to use them, or see their point, while the second does not. Thus, Q and J may both, by all accounts, know how to play chess (to use all the concepts that make up that practice) while Q loves to play and tries to whenever she has a chance and J cannot see the point of ever playing. We might say in such a case that, despite both knowing *how* to use the concepts in

15. Think here, following MacIntyre, of the goods internal to a practice (2007, 187-93).

question, J does not know why Q does what she does; here Q is opaque to J. Knowing how, then, hardly guarantees understanding why, and can result in the sort of opacity that hides Q's why from J. Wittgenstein's remark about not finding one's feet with the enigmatic person, having mastered their language and yet still not understanding what they do, or why they do it, the overall sense of what they do, starts to push us in the direction of this kind of opacity, situations in which one knows how but not why.

I want to enflesh this last possibility of not-knowing-why and how it can coexist with at least some degree of know-how rather more by looking at two cases. The first comes from Larry McMurtry's western *Lonesome Dove* (1985). In this scene, one of the secondary characters, Clara, sits beside the body of her husband, Bob, who has just died, and reflects on their unsatisfying marriage. Here is some of what she ponders:

> She wondered if Bob could hear his two lively daughters laughing, as he lay dying. She wondered if it helped, if it made up in any way for her bad tempers and the deaths of the three boys. He had counted so on those boys—they would be his help, boys. Bob had never talked much, but the one thing he did talk about was how much they would get done once the boys got big enough to do their part of the work. Often just hearing him describe the fences they would build, or the barns, or the cattle they would buy, Clara felt out of sorts—it made her feel very distant from Bob that he saw their boys mainly as hired hands that he wouldn't have to pay. He sees them different, she thought. For her part, she just liked to have them there. She liked to look at them as they sat around the table, liked to watch them swimming and frolicking in the river, liked to sit by them sometimes when they slept, listening to them breathe. (McMurtry 1985, 746)

Shall we say of these two, while Bob lived, that they used the same concept of *child* or *son*, both knew how? Surely in some sense we must. In numerous cases we would say they both know how to use the same concept—for, say, they discussed having children and fed them and often they did not find themselves thrown into nonunderstanding. On the other hand, McMurtry here illustrates a certain possibility of divergence, of different ways of and reasons for using some set of concepts that can render people unintelligible to each other.[16] In important instances, Bob uses these concepts

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16. That Clara was often opaque to Bob was an important aspect of their marriage. See McMurtry (1985, 592-97).

differently than Clara, implies that perhaps he has entirely different general understandings of their children. Clara seems to know how Bob is using these concepts here. *That* is not what immediately separates them. Rather, she does not know *why* he would think of their sons and imagine relating to them in this way. The *point* of using these concepts like *this*, Bob's *reasons* for thinking and feeling *along these lines*, say, because of the labor he'll reap from his sons' backs, appear to Clara as either *abysmal* reasons or *no reasons* at all. If she sees the putative point of using these concepts as Bob does, then she does see why anyone would take that point as something to aim at. In this sense, Bob's *why* is lost on her; he is opaque.

There is some sense, then, in which Clara seems to know how (to use child and son as Bob does) and yet does not know why. Something further that interests me in the *Lonesome Dove* passage is how not-knowing-how and why start to blur into each other, a point captured by stating that Clara does not understand *how* Bob *could* relate (in thought and talk) to his (their) sons in this fashion, how he could take *those* reasons (free labor) *as reasons*. The sort of bleeding together of knowing how and why at work here is something we know and express in such quotidian interrogatives as, *How could you*? That is a question that asks *why*, but in a certain key, in the idiom of *how*; it asks how some course of action was even possible, let alone undertaken. For Clara, not knowing why (how) *here* renders Bob opaque to her in a specific sense. She cannot see why (does not know how) Bob would conceive of his own children with such poverty, as mere servants or worse. This blurring of how and why occurs in the next case as well.

While we might reasonably say of Clara's situation *either* (a) that she sees Bob's reasons but thinks them bad *or* (b) she does not see his reasons *as reasons* at all, misses the point of using *child* and *son* like *this* as *a point*, our second case illustrates the latter sort of not-knowing-why rather more than the former. It is something J. Baird Callicott wrote about Christianity, which I discussed in Chapter 1: "How a religion centered on human sacrifice and a ritual of symbolic cannibalism and one

condemning unbelievers and unrepentant sinners to eternal damnation in hell, turned out to be the most popular on Earth is a mystery to me—and not the kind of mystery that evokes awe and wonder" (2018, 340). Surely it is possible that Callicott does not know how to use the concepts in question, so then the *point* of using them could be lost on him. But the case is I think more difficult. By his own account, given elsewhere, Callicott "grew up in the Bible Belt, in Memphis, Tennessee" (2017, 33). "Practically all my schoolmates," he explains, "from the first grade through the twelfth went to same damn church: Central Avenue Baptist" (ibid.). So we have reason to think that he is not totally unaware of how to use these concepts. And yet his expression of not-understanding-why, of the opacity to him of why one would use the Christian concepts, takes the form I chose to give to Clara's not-knowing-why, namely, of a kind of not-knowing-how, which again shows how the two can blur into each other. Callicott knows how, to some degree, but still cannot see why in the relevant sense, cannot see reasons or points of using these concepts, cannot see those reasons *as reasons*. Callicott has at least some sense of what his imagined Christians do with their concepts, but it is unintelligible to him what point there could be to pursue such doings.

Beyond illustrating how knowing why can depend on knowing how, in the sense that one might know how and yet not why, then, these cases also show how, in moments when knowing-why and how blur together, not-knowing-why can not only possibly indicate a lack-of-know-how, but actually invite questions about whether certain kinds of know-how are shared between minds. Clara and Callicott, in articulating their not knowing why in the verbiage of not knowing how, show how discovering that one does not know why can inspire questions, even from the subject herself, as whether there is knowledge-how in a case. For Clara, the point of using child and son as Bob does, Bob's apparent reasons, are either so unacceptable *as good points* or unintelligible as points at all that Clara is led to question whether she understands what Bob is up to at all—whether he knows how

to use the concepts she uses as she does and vice versus. And we might say something similar of Callicott's case.

There are apparently multiple ways in which we might say that people who live with different concepts can be opaque to each other. These illustrations only scratch the surface of potential forms of conceptual opacity that might occur in our actual dealings with conceptual others. Still, I hope they serve their purpose as reminders of some of the ordinary ways in which one person might be conceptually opaque to another. Q might be opaque to J because J does not know that Q lives with certain concepts, or because J, while knowing Q lives with some set of concepts, does not herself know how to use them or to the same extent as Q. In her not-knowing-how, J may be technically unable to do certain things with the concepts in question or may know so little about how the concepts are used as to miss *when* they are used at all. In either case, Q, who knows how to use these concepts, will be distinctly opaque to J. It is also possible that J will not know why Q lives with some set of concepts, because, say, she does not know Q uses them or her reasons, does not know how to use them, or, even if she does know how, cannot see the point of using them. I want these illustrations of possible occurrences of nonunderstanding to start conjuring for us the image of the conceptually distant ecological other who is potentially opaque, who may live with concepts we do not know about, do not know how to use (and so miss the use of), or the purposes of which we cannot see. The other here figures not as always already understood, as transparent, but as potentially not or misunderstood, as a potential *stranger*, a figure in outline, *shrouded*, *veiled*, *vaporous*.

The fact that shrouds shift, veils drop, and vapors evaporate is an important one—both an essential aspect of our lives with others and also, therefore, an important consideration in recalling the potentiality of opacity to the eco-conversionist imagination. That opacity is not a necessary and fixed characterization of our lives with others, that is, that sometimes we understand other people, including conceptual others, is something my logically-indeterminate, recollective observation that

others *can* be opaque takes in stride, indeed implies. I am not saying that others are always veiled to us, ever-shrouded, but that sometimes, in quotidian ways and every day, they are, they can be. Sometimes, in plain ways, we do not know *that* and sometimes, in equally familiar ways, we do; likewise with understanding how and why.

The irrepressible question that arises next, of course, is, fine "they *can* be," but when *are* conceptual others opaque? When and how do we settle this potentiality and determine that another is transparent or, as of yet, still opaque? I have two replies to this urgent line of questioning. The first I give briefly in section 3, while the second I develop in section 4.

§3 The Relative Autonomy and Multiplicity of Modes of Understanding

One lesson we should draw from the forgoing survey of modalities of not-understanding is *how much there can be* to understand of the other's conceptual life, and therefore also much that might be missed. Another is how, relative to each other, the different modes have a certain autonomy, such that overcoming opacity in one mode entails nothing or very little about whether understanding or nonunderstanding inheres in another. To know that someone uses a concept is not the same as knowing how to use that concept, and even in the realm of know-how there can be degrees of understanding, to say nothing of the fact that one might in some sense know how to use a concept without understanding why one ever would. Indeed, if one only or primarily knows *that* someone uses some set of concepts, it is not clear what they really know about the concepts in question, and their users, at all—for the life of our concepts is found not in listing what they are, but in using them (Wittgenstein 2009a, §432). And if one does not know *how* to use the concepts in question, it is hard to imagine that they will understand *why* one might want to use them. The relative independence of modes of understanding suggests that achievements in understanding in one mode may yet leave other spheres of opacity. And the multiplicity of modes understanding suggest that there may be many such spheres. Without conflicting with these lessons, we could say, in general

terms, *another's opacity might be said to dissolve in specific instances and forms when one advances within one modality of understanding their concepts* (moving from not knowing that to knowing that, and so on). But since (a) understanding in one fashion entails nothing about understanding in other senses and (b) given how much there can be to understand about others' conceptual lives, indexed to the various modalities of understanding only sampled above, any such achievement within a particular modality is a kind of haunted understanding, an understanding aware that there may be more to grasp. Obviously this haunting can characterize particular modalities, reflecting, say, that within knowing *that* there are things about others that one does not know, or, within knowing *how*, that there is more, whatever one has achieved so far, that one could learn (how) to do. But this haunting arises also between modalities of knowledge, for another will remain conceptually opaque when some further mode of understanding their life remains un-grasped by someone else, whatever other understanding the second person has achieved; and it will be a persistent haunting if there is a great deal to understand and numerous modalities of understanding.

This initial reply to the question of *when* understanding is reached, or when the other is opaque or no longer opaque, is not totally useless: others are no longer opaque when we advance within a mode of understanding their conceptual lives, but their opacity in other modes may remain (and may remain as well within the modes that are understood). The utility of this reply comes out, for instance, by inviting questions about how individuals talk about, imagine, and engage the lives of their conceptual others, such as eco-conversionists. As I mentioned above, the conversionists discussed in Chapter 1 and the Introduction plainly know a fair amount *about* the concepts that some of their ecological others use; they are relatively adept, let's say, in the mode of knowing *that*. But insofar as knowing *that* does not amount to knowing how nor why, I wonder how much we should say these conversionists understand about their others. Rolston, for instance, plainly knows something *about* Yamuna devotees, knows *that* such and such is the case about them. Yet when it

comes to knowing how and why, knowing *that* counts for little. It is unclear that he and the conversionists of Chapter 1 all know how to use the concepts they wish to displace, again, to say nothing of knowing why. We have too little information, hardly any of the right sort to decide if they know how in all these cases. Still, I find it difficult to imagine that they have such know-how, or indeed much more than one needs to compose summaries, sometimes rather brief, in pieces of writing. Again, Rolston's examples include not only Hindu understandings of the Yamuna river, but Indigenous Hawaiian conceptions of Kilauea, Paiute conceptions of the Grand Canyon, and Aṉangu self-conceptions while Callicott, Crist, and Bauman each examine an equally or more ambitious range of perspectives (Callicott 1994, 2002a, 2015, 2018; Crist 2019; Bauman 2014), and Bennett positions herself against traditional animisms and modern materialism (2010, 4-5, 83). What would it be like to know how to use, to any significant degree, all of the concepts that these conversionists wish to subordinate to or displace with their preferred perspectives, to say nothing of why one might use any of them? I have doubts that such vast understanding is possible. That the eco-conversionists considered here may not know how to use their would-be convert's concepts, or why they use them, raises the further question of whether these environmentalists, despite positing the transparency of their others, in fact understand their others' concepts, and so their others' themselves, or instead simply desire and advocate for the transformation of that which, it turns out, they do not understand. Or if we allow these environmentalists *some* knowledge *that*, *how*, or *why* vis-à-vis their others, I wonder how much they think is *enough* to recommend the transformation of those concepts, and how they factor in all that might still be unknown? If someone knows how to move all the pieces on a chessboard without violating the rules of play, but cannot form a strategy, shall we say they know how to play the game well enough to decide that it should no longer be played?[17]

17. In other words, might we not say in some such instances that the "player" in question does not know enough to make such a call, that they are inadequately-credentialled in the practice in question?

My initial reply spurs these sorts of questions, which start recasting eco-conversionism, as exemplified in the cases studied in the Introduction and first chapter, as a mode of relating to others that seeks to change them whether they are understood or not, and that recasting invites further questions for eco-conversionists. For instance, how exactly should we make sense of apparent criticisms of other peoples' concepts that do not demonstrate an understanding of those concepts in the corresponding mode? How should we understand, say, more specifically, Rolston's assertion that he "does not believe" the Yamuna mythology and his call for a change in how that concept is used, how the river is understood, how Yamuna devotees understand themselves and world, when we have little evidence to suggest he knows how to use that concept as these peoples do, to say nothing of the various degrees of their knowledge and their understandings of why to use it? Indeed, we have reason to doubt his know-how insofar as he indicts such a wide, indeed global, range of conceptual sets. There is plainly the ethical question of whether this represents a sort of conceptual chauvinism, in which eco-conversionists' estimation of their preferred perspectives leads them to feel and think that *whatever others may be up to with their concepts*, their own perspectives should replace these others. That is, if there is not, say, knowledge how or knowledge why *here*, then it starts to look like such knowledge *is not necessary*, to eco-conversionists, to justify the displacement of the views in question.[18] Beside these ethical questions, there are also conceptual ones, for how shall we understand what these eco-conversionists are doing with their words when they purport to criticize within one modality of understanding, say, critiquing *how* someone uses a concept, using only what appears to be knowledge from another mode, say, mere knowledge *that*. To remain with Rolston, how shall we understand his supposed negation of the Yamuna mythology when it is not clear he understands how to use the concepts that constitute and indirectly render that mythology intelligible

18. Knowledge that someone uses other concepts, then, might serve merely as a signal as to where the preferred perspective needs to be pushed next.

to those who use it? If he does not know *how* here, can we take his negation of sentences he does not understand, which is to say, sentences that are nonsensical or unintelligible to him, as anything more than the negation of the nonsensical or unintelligible? But, surely, as Wittgenstein and his readers sometimes observe, the negation of a piece is nonsense, the ascription of an F to that which says *nothing*, is merely the production of a further piece of nonsense (Crary 2000b, 139; Wittgenstein 2009a §§464, 2009b §349).[19] To what extent, I wonder, do Rolston and the others *say nothing*, or speak a special kind of literal nonsense, when on the basis of merely knowing *that* or minimally knowing *how* they criticize, otherwise evaluate, and recommend sweeping changes to other conceptual perspectives? There is, after all, such a thing as *empty* criticism (cf. Crary 2000b, 136, 139). Insofar as it renders conversionism sensible to eco-conversionists, such nonsense would surely retain a certain productivity—though *saying* nothing, *doing* much.

These questions and the related recasting of eco-conversionism illustrate the potential value and sense of my initial reply to the question of when it is that we understand a conceptual other, or when it is they are opaque. Still, that reply is useless in other respects. It might even be seen as a kind of truistic evasion that begs the real question of deciding when understanding is achieved or not. For what sort of response is "The other's opacity dissolves when progress is made in understanding within one mode or another, etc." to the question, "When do we understand, or when is the other opaque"? When this question arises I think we want to know how we can be sure, how we can know, that we understand, that we have, for instance, *in fact* progressed in knowing that, how, or why. My second reply addresses this form of the question of deciding the other's (non)opacity.

19. The intelligibility of evaluating a sentence in terms of truth or falsity presupposes that the sentence in question is a candidate for such evaluation.

§4 No Shortcuts: Wittgenstein on the Rags of Understanding

How shall we tell that others are opaque? How can we know that we understand them? In my second reply to these questions, I want to focus on the modality of know-how, of understanding how to use a concept. Since, in my conception of these modalities, knowing that is a particular form of knowing how and knowing why can depend on knowing how, any reply to the question of when do we understand that and why, will eventually need an answer to the question of when we know how, of how we know that we know how. Moreover, understanding how to use a concept, insofar as that is important in understanding the sense of a concept at all, is the central mode of understanding at stake in the question, When is the other opaque? What we want here is to know when we understand *what* other people are doing, including when they are talking. We wish to know that we understand their concepts, what they are doing with them, and that involves a degree of knowing how to use them, for otherwise, like James or J seeing Q playing chess but not knowing how to play, we might *miss* what they are up to.[20] Achieving such understanding may take us into understanding that and why, but we begin with knowing how.

Reply 2 to the question of how we know when another is understood or not: *Well, how do we, every day? How have you decided this today, this morning?* That is a reply that resists a general response—a response dependent on an abstract conception of what understanding involves, what it *must* involve—and hopes to turn us, instead, away from *this writing* (on your screen or in your hands) and to our (you, yours, reader) lives with understanding and nonunderstanding. To thicken that reply, I offer another, which supports the first, namely, that there are no abstract criteria that will decide this question for us—some abstract principles, rules, or fixed conditionals, say, which once satisfied will ensure for us that, yes, now we understand how to use a concept or how someone else is using it, and so they are not in this case opaque. Some such criteria may sometimes prove *useful*, but

20. This is an appeal to the priority of linguistic pragmatics to semantics. See the Introduction.

otherwise there are only the quotidian, everyday means we have of deciding when ordinary forms of understanding are reached or missed—those rags to which the initial part of this second reply turns us. In brief, to speak with Diamond, there are no shortcuts in deciding the question of the other's opacity, and that shall mean again that our sense of understanding others is subject to a kind of haunting (Diamond 2018, 222) or what Cavell calls exposure (1979, 432-33).

By way of elaborating this response, I want to examine parts of Wittgenstein's discussion of rule-following in the *Investigations*, which inspire my view. The rule-following sections (for my purposes, §§138-242) are concerned with the very concept of a rule and how it is that we can follow rules. However, like much of the *Investigations*, the rule-following remarks more generally attend to the phenomenon of learning concepts or *learning (to follow the rules for) a concept's intelligible use*.[21] A recurrent question for Wittgenstein's interlocutor(s)—that polyphonous chorus of foils with whom his later writings dialogically unfold—is precisely how we tell when someone is following a rule (for a concept's use), that is, how we know when someone else or we ourselves understand a concept. Among other things, Wittgenstein is interested in how we can answer such questions in fantastical, metaphysical ways that depend on distorting explanatory models, or pictures, of what happens when one learns to use a concept. His therapeutic practice in these remarks largely consists of turning us to the ordinary rags of what learning a concept can be like and how we tell that understanding has been reached while also deflating the fantastical models invoked by other voices in the text. Such deflations show how the imagined models fail to speak to the very needs that generate them, such as

21. For examples of scholars who treat the rule-following discussion as addressing the broader question of the intelligible use of a concept, see Cavell (1976a, 49-52), Crary (2016, 46-49), McDowell (1998a-c), and Fogelin (2018, 43). For Wittgenstein connecting the concept "rule" and the meaning or intelligible use of a concept, see, e.g., (2009a, §§68, 82, 84; 1969, §§61-65). Diamond describes the later Wittgenstein's discussion of rules as part of his attempt to sort out a "non-psychological treatment of the mind" in contrast to the psychological or empirical investigation of particular *minds*. She writes, "The capacities picked out by '*the* mind' are those for coherence and commitment in thought and language; they are capacities characteristically exercised in going on intelligently and intelligibly, in giving and following rules, inventing kinds of rules, applying rules in matter-of-course ways and in penetrating, imaginative, and unexpected ones, and in play with rules, as for example in crossword puzzle clues that play with what *definition* is" (Diamond 1991d, 5).

the desire to know when someone understands a concept.[22] As a result, the very idea of such explanatory pictures are rendered attempted but misbegotten shortcuts, which, rather than taking us around the task of sorting out understanding and opacity, making that process easier, securing for us that we understand, in fact deflect us from this ordinary, often difficult and unresolvable, work.[23]

4.1 Philosophical Investigations §§143 and 145: The Difficulty of Learning and Teaching

I will focus on one of the examples that Wittgenstein weaves throughout the rule-following remarks, beginning at §143. In this section, Wittgenstein introduces a language-game where an individual called A gives an order, and another individual, B, is expected to "write down series of signs according to a certain formation rule." (Formation rules and surrounding ideas are the "concepts" B is learning.) The first series that B is taught is that of the natural numbers in the decimal system. "How does he come to understand this system?" Wittgenstein asks. "First of all," he explains, "series of numbers are written down for him, and he is required to copy them." Already we have here some of the quotidian rags of what might be involved teaching and learning, coming to understand, how to use a concept or some set. In the very next sentence Wittgenstein notes that B may react in a normal or abnormal way. For instance, B may simply start drawing on the paper before him and fail to notice that A wants him to *draw something in particular*. So then A might start guiding B's hand in writing out the series 0 to 9. Now, everything else—the possibility of future communication about this activity, the possibility of B joining *this* practice, of B *acting rightly* on A's orders, doing what A expects—will depend on B catching on and starting to write down the series by himself. But here again Wittgenstein invites us to imagine a misunderstanding: we can imagine

22. Such misleading conceptions can entice us precisely because *the arrival of understanding impresses us*—it strikes us as remarkable, as something worth talking about—and, relatedly, because misunderstanding is such a pervasive feature of life with concepts and other concept users (see §§138, 152, 191-192, 197, 217).
23. My reading of the rule-following sections is influenced by Diamond's general reading of Wittgenstein's realistic spirit and also her approach to Wittgenstein on rules (1989). My approach is also indebted to the influential readings of John McDowell (1998a-c). However, I depart from McDowell in important ways, which I mention in ft30. As far as I know, no one has developed a Diamondian reading of the relevant rule-following passages against the McDowellian.

that B will start copying figures down, but not in the right order. Perhaps he writes 1, 9, 0, 5, 2, writing the figures down *randomly*. At that point, communication stops again. A will need to sort out what has gone wrong. It appears B has not understood key elements of what A is trying to teach him. Or, Wittgenstein imagines, B might make a "systematic" mistake, by copying the series 1, 2, 3, 4, 5… with 1, 0, 3, 2, 5, 4, … Here Wittgenstein invites us to imagine the possibility of B understanding *something* but not what A is trying to teach him. B has *understood wrongly*.

Wittgenstein concludes §143 by adding that the line between the random mistake and systematic is not sharply drawn. He invites us to see is that *some* understanding and misunderstanding occurs in both cases. We can imagine that what looks like a random mistake in the first case may be the result of a systematic mistake at an earlier stage in learning the practice while the systematic error we think we perceive in the second case may in fact be the result of a random error on the student's behalf. We may be able to correct either sort of error, but whether or not that is the case and *how* we correct it will depend on the student, the circumstances, and what sorts of explanations might correct the problem. Nothing will guarantee that we can correct it. We may have to invent ad hoc ways of copying the series and attach these to the student's odd approach. For example, we might tell the student "For each pair of figures you copy down, ensure you reverse their order, so that after writing 1, 0, you then write 0, 1. And so on with 3, 2, etcetera." And then there is the plain fact, of which Wittgenstein often reminds us, that the student's ability to learn simply "may come to an end."

§145 takes up the thread. Wittgenstein invites us to imagine the following:

> Suppose the pupil now writes the series 0 to 9 to our satisfaction. – And this will be the case only if he is *often* successful, not if he does it right once in a hundred attempts. Now I continue to guide him through the series and draw his attention to the recurrence of the first series in the units; and then to its recurrence in the tens. (Which means only that I use particular emphases, underline figures, write them one under another in such-and-such ways, and similar things.) – And now at some point he continues the series by himself—or he does not.

Again, these are rags—descriptions of the quotidian possibilities of what can be involved in teaching and sorting out whether someone understands a concept, and they may seem frail, far too little to go on. Indeed, at this point an interlocutor, overlooking what he has been given and why, looking for more, interjects, "But why do you say that? *That* much is obvious!" (Referring to "at some point he continues…or he does not.") To which Wittgenstein responds: "Of course; I only wished to say: the effect of any further *explanation* depends on his *reaction*." That is, subsequent lessons will be superfluous, useless, if previous lessons are not learned (if you do no grasp how to write, how will you write a series of figures?). Simultaneously, and captured tersely in Wittgenstein's "or he does not," it is part of the ordinary business of teaching someone (how to use) a concept that at no stage in the process is understanding guaranteed, especially not by the techniques used, like explanations. The teacher waits upon, is dependent upon the student catching on, and they may not. No pedagogical techniques *necessitate* the dawning of comprehension, at any of the stages of learning how to use a concept. If a student does catch on to an earlier stage (say, writing 0 to 9 correctly over and over), then some of the necessary conditions *may* be in place for subsequent explanations—but again, those conditions may not be sufficient, for the student may yet misunderstand, say, in the transition from single to double digits.

In §§143 and 145, Wittgenstein recalls to us, by illustrating the plain stuff of teaching concepts, how there are no shortcuts when it comes to *teaching or learning* (coming to understand) concepts. Misunderstanding or nonunderstanding can enter from innumerable angles, at all stages, and while we can and sometimes do correct these, our corrections too are subject to misunderstanding or simple failure. Wittgenstein keeps these difficulties before us in the rest of remarks I shall consider. But in 145 he also shifts to a related difficulty, the central one that interests me, namely, the question of *when we know* that someone, including ourselves, understands a concept.

4.2 Philosophical Investigations §§145 and 185: How Do we Know we Understand?

Momentarily suspending the fact that nothing ensures that a would-be concept-learner will learn a concept, Wittgenstein continues on, "Now, however, let us suppose that after some efforts on the teacher's part he continues the series correctly, that is, as we do it. So now we can say that he has mastered the system," and immediately this thought is interrupted with the question, "But how far does he have to continue the series correctly for us to be able rightly to say that? Clearly you cannot state a limit here" (§145). But why can't we? Wittgenstein suggests a response in §146, where he writes, "Suppose I now ask: 'Has he understood the system if he continues the series to the hundredth place?' Or, if I shouldn't speak of 'understanding' our primitive language-game: has he got the system if he continues the series correctly up to *this* point?" The answer he expects is a resounding "no" if this question implies that the student has reached an established limit, satisfied a prefixed condition, the satisfaction of which signals understanding more or less definitively. For, of course, when we say that someone "understands the rule" at work in extending a series of numbers, we expect that they can extend the series more or less *indefinitely*. When we say, B understands "Add 2" we do not mean, B can add 2 from 0 to 12 or 1000, but rather, B can add 2 in all or a vast, open-ended range of relevant cases. Wittgenstein imagines someone formulating a version of this point like this: "to have got the system (or again, to understand it) can't *consist* in continuing the series up to *this* or *that* number" (§146; first emphasis mine). There is an important sense in which this is right. We *do* expect that B's competency with the rule extends beyond the particular point in the series where he has paused. Understanding does not *consist* of applying a concept rightly up to a set limit; rather, as an interlocutor observes, applying a concept rightly up to a set limit is simply one manifestation, or set of manifestations, of understanding (ibid.).[24] With Ryle, such applications give

24. So we cannot "state a limit" if that implies an identification between understanding and reaching that limit.

us “a modest assemblage of heterogeneous performances,” which indicate but hardly exhaust the student’s know-how.

Nevertheless, when we decide whether someone understands or not, we only have exactly the information we have in hand to go on; hence the apparent sense of imagining that the satisfaction by a student of some range of demonstrations will tell us they understand. That we only have what we have to go on, paired with the fact that we think understanding (a concept) extends beyond the capacity to use that concept up to a specific limit invites all sorts of deflections from Wittgenstein’s interlocutor, who starts to imagine, for instance, the mind as a kind of apparatus that grasps the meaning or rules of a concept, as an idealized cart grasps rails, or as a kind of imagined computer that, once the right algorithms are entered, will infinitely derive correct applications from whatever input is fed in. Such pictures would (1) explain how it is possible for a student to learn how to use a concept in an indefinite range of cases after exposure to a finite range of exercises (for in those exercises, the rails are grasped, the formula integrated), (2) satisfy our sense that understanding transcends the capacity to meet a finite set of criteria (for the rails or rules extend beyond those cases; those cases merely manifest an understanding that transcends them), and (3) allow us to treat the satisfaction of such a finite set of criteria (through demonstrations) as indicating understanding: when the criteria are met, an understanding that transcends finite demonstrations is achieved—the cart is on the rails, the algorithm up and running (see §§146, 149, 156-157).

Wittgenstein sympathetically undermines this sort of conception throughout the rule-following discussion, but the final remark I want to focus on, and which has preoccupied the literature on rule-following (see, e.g., McDowell 1998a-c), namely, §185, is particularly illuminating. This remark picks up the thread of the language-game of §143, where A is teaching B the series of natural numbers. Wittgenstein writes,

> Now judged by the usual criteria, the pupil has mastered the series of natural numbers.[25] Next we teach him to write down other series of cardinal numbers and get him to the point of writing down, say, series of the form
>
> 0, n, 2n, 3n, etc.
>
> at the order of the form "+n"; so at the order "+1" he writes down the series of natural numbers. – Let's suppose we have done exercises, and tested his understanding up to 1000.

Then Wittgenstein invites us to imagine a problem. We are to imagine that we say to the pupil: "+2." And he adds two all the way up to 1000. But then as he continues past 1000 he writes 1000, 1004, 1008, 1012. Flabbergasted, we say with A: Wait a minute, look what you're doing! B gives us a blank stare. We say, you should have added two. Remember how you went before 1000? B replies, "Yes, isn't it right?" Wittgenstein then points out that it would be no use to repeat our old explanations and examples, for some fundamental misunderstanding has gone on. "In such a case," he writes, "we might perhaps say: this person finds it natural, once given our explanations, to understand our order as *we* would understand the order 'Add 2 up to 1000, 4 up to 2000, 6 up to 3000, and so on" (§185). This case, he suggests, resembles one in which someone looks from our fingertip to wrist when we pointed at an object.

§185 dramatically illustrates that a student can, "judged by the usual criteria," satisfy us that they have understood a concept and then, crucially, *show us that we were wrong*.[26] This possibility deflates the model of the mind as reliably grasping the rules for a concept as if an inerrant apparatus—as an idealized cart attaches to rails or a computer executes an algorithm. For, again, all we have as evidence that the student, or we ourselves, understand a concept are the finite demonstrations that that is the case. And that evidence, as finite, *fails to demonstrate* that someone has grasped *all* the rules for correctly applying the concept, can do something correctly *infinitely*. Rather, such evidence shows that someone, "*judged by the usual criteria*," understands up to this point or that.

25. A gloss on an answer to the question, How do we know if the pupil understands the series?
26. This is a philosophically skeptical point.

In §185, that point is 1000. To say that on the order "+2" B wrote 12, 14, 16, etc. is to say *merely that*; that B wrote 12, 14, 16, etc. says *nothing necessarily* about what B might do in the future.

But then it is not clear what relationship the mechanical model is supposed to have to the case. If B is grasping the fixed rules for +2 when B writes 10, 12, 14, 18, etc. after seeing A write 2, 4, 6, 8, then *B would never make a mistake in applying +2*. But no evidence we can adduce to say that B understands +2 can rule out the possibility of a future mistake. We only have exactly what we have in hand to judge B's comprehension. Even if we were to posit the mechanical picture as true, any evidence that we adduce to support the claim that B has understood a concept (e.g., continuing correctly up to 1000 on the order "Add 2") is in principle consistent with B proceeding in a future case to go off the rails (continuing after 1000 with 1004).[27] The only way to support the explanation with evidence would be to show B correctly applying the concept in *infinite* cases. But what would it look like to show that? Infinite evidence? The mechanical picture moves from a learner correctly applying a concept in a finite set of cases (which is *all* we ever have to go on) to imagining that the learner has grasped all the rules of the concept—from a finite demonstration of competency to a state of inerrancy. But the former is not evidence of all the rules being grasped; rather, it is exactly *evidence of a learner correctly applying a concept in a finite set of cases*. "The pictured state then," as John McDowell puts it, "always transcends the grounds on which it is allegedly postulated" (McDowell 1998a, 59). Of course, we are ourselves in the same position when we understand a concept: we also can offer no evidence that we have grasped some body of fixed rules ("the meaning") of a concept that ensure we will rightly apply it in all future cases by offering past examples of where we have shown our understanding (2009a §159; Diamond 1991g, 63; McDowell 1998a, 60).[28]

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27. Future evidence has not yet arrived.
28. Hence Wittgenstein famously differentiates between *thinking* you are following a rule and *following a rule* (2009a, §202). Cf. Ryle's discussion of a similar point (2009, 40-41).

Besides deflating the particular models of mind that his interlocutor conjures, §185 renders all such models, insofar as they promise to secure for us when understanding is reached, as attempted shortcuts around the difficult work of sorting out whether someone, including ourselves, understands a concept, shortcuts that fail to speak to our needs. Again, one of the central needs such models might address is our wish to know when understanding has been reached. How far does someone have to go, Wittgenstein asks in §145, to show that they understand a concept? Models of mind that theorize what understanding a concept consists in can generate criteria that purport to tell us when understanding has been reached. But the satisfaction of those criteria is an *a posteriori*, not *a priori* affair; the evidence of understanding (the satisfaction of criteria of understanding) guarantees nothing of the future, is at most a kind of *promise* for the future, one that will be broken if it turns out a random or systematic mistake, say, is at work in one's putative understanding, a mis- or nonunderstanding that simply hasn't shown itself yet in the demonstrations so far given.[29] All we have are "the usual criteria" to go on, such as particular demonstrations, and that means we are never released from the difficulty of sorting out whether the other understands, or whether we understand, whether others are opaque.[30] I will return to these difficulties in Chapter 5 when I

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29. The radical implications of §185 are easily overlooked: Wittgenstein's observation humiliates all attempts to lay down criteria that will tell us when someone understands, however theoretically sophisticated and empirically rigorous the models of mind those criteria presuppose (see §158). For again: any evidence adduced to support the arrival understanding, satisfying whatever criteria, will always, as such, amount to *less* than *proof* or a *guarantee* for what has not yet happened, namely, proof of continued, future understanding. Evidence of *that* is, as such, yet to come.

30. Under the influence of McDowell's influential readings of these remarks (1998a-c), some of the literature around rule-following has concluded from Wittgenstein's deflation of the mechanical model that the rules that organize the intelligible use of our concepts are uncodifiable. I have learned a great deal from McDowell on Wittgenstein and rules, but I no longer think that this conclusion follows from what Wittgenstein does in §185. That remark shows how the evidence we have that someone understands is in principle compatible with them going wrong even when we think they understand. At most that means that we cannot prove by evidence that when someone understands they grasp all of the rules for using a concept. To show empirically that *that* is what happens, would require verification, or evidence of using all of the rules. But we cannot provide that evidence, in part because there would be an infinite amount of it, since an infinite number circumstances in which a concept might be applied will require corresponding specifications. All we have is some finite amount of evidence. To say that such models as the mechanistic grasping of all the rules are unsupported by the evidence we have is to say that the models lack grounds, exceed the available grounds. But that does not amount to showing that the rules in question are uncodifiable, merely that the assertion of their codifiability lacks proof. So when McDowell concludes from §185 that the meaning of our concepts is uncodifiable, he moves too quickly from the lack of support of the competing model (apparatus grasping codified rules) to positive claims about the nature of understanding. I do not think that the sense of our concepts is codifiable either. But §185 does not demonstrate that

describe the labor of trying to understand someone as apprenticeship and enumerate some of the limitations that can attend and undermine that labor. At the risk of overly anticipating that discussion, we might at present say that Wittgenstein's remarks on rule-following position us as perpetual apprentices, as regularly needing to "look and see" whether we understand others, to what extent and on what basis (2009a, §66).

§5 Our Exposure to the Other, the Other as Nebulous

The conceptually-disparate ecological other can be opaque. We may not know about their concepts, how to use them, or why. And nothing secures for us either that we will come to understand how they use their concepts nor tell us when we have. Turning to the source of Diamond's idiom of exposure, we might say with Cavell that when it comes to understanding others, we are subject to a twofold exposure: "exposed to the other," in the sense of depending on them—and ourselves, our openness to them—for (some of) our knowledge of them, as well as exposed to our "concept of the other," in the sense of having no guarantee of getting them right (1979, 432-33). Accepting this exposure, Cavell writes, "seems to imply an acceptance of the possibility that my knowledge of others may be overthrown, even that it ought to be" (439).

That our understanding of others may or even possibly should be overthrown does not entail that it always will be. That B goes off the rails after 1000 in §185, hardly entails that no one ever understands "Add 2." After all, A gets it, and learned it from someone else. As Wittgenstein puts it in §240, "Disputes do not break out (among mathematicians, say) over the question of whether or not a rule has been followed. People don't come to blows over it, for example. This [i.e.,

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lack, and I see the ascription of the uncodifiability view to Wittgenstein as potentially violating his therapeutic commitments. Wittgenstein deflates attempts to codify, but does not defend the view that meaning is uncodifiable (even if it is and his thought harmonizes with that idea). Crary seems to accept McDowell's reading of §185, but I suspect she senses slippages as well; hence her simultaneous invocation of McDowell on Wittgenstein on rules and her suggestion that uncodifiability is something best shown negatively, following Charles Travis (2016, 47-49, 72-76).

agreement that the rules are being followed] belongs to the scaffolding from which our language operates (for example, yields descriptions)." The quotidian rags Wittgenstein offers us tell not only of ordinary mis- and non-understanding, but also of familiar forms that genuine understanding can take, though they may look paltry if we desire more from our lives with others and concepts. The error that occurs in §185 (1000, 1004, 1006, etc.) is an ordinary sort that may be addressed with a word or require greater remedial action. Maybe B will catch on with more practice. There may be ordinary limits to how far such action can go (e.g., the student doesn't care to address the problem or their exhaustion makes correcting this misunderstanding unmanageable at present, etc.). But the error in §185 does not call into question that arithmetic teachers and their students, mathematicians and others know what "Add 2" means when it is uttered in suitable contexts.[31] "The signpost," as Wittgenstein says, "is in order–if, under normal circumstances, it fulfils its purpose" (§87). What his remarks show us instead is how difficult it can be, since there are no shortcuts, to discern that purpose and whether we or others agree on it.

Wittgenstein's remarks on rule-following may not undermine that we ever understand or know that we or someone else understands a concept's use, but if we take them seriously they do help reveal the precarity of such understanding and knowledge, of what he calls "agreement in judgments" and "form of life" (§§241-42). Perhaps no single passage better captures what Wittgenstein in the remarks discussed above wants us to appreciate about our lives with others, language, and concepts than when Cavell writes,

> We learn and teach words in certain contexts, and then we are expected, and expect others, to be able to project them into further contexts. Nothing insures that this projection will take place (in particular, not the grasping of universals nor the grasping of books of rules), just as nothing insures that we will make, and understand, the same projections. That on the whole we do is a matter of our sharing routes of interest and feeling, modes of response, senses of humor and of significance and of fulfillment, of what is outrageous, of what is

31. That our understanding will always come apart is a conclusion toward which Wittgenstein drives an interlocutor who entertains another, interpretative model of understanding (2009a, §§198, 201, 213, 239). Wittgenstein wishes for the intolerability of this conclusion to deflate that model.

> similar to what else, what a rebuke, what forgiveness, of when an utterance is an assertion, when an appeal, when an explanation—all the whirl of organism Wittgenstein calls "forms of life." Human speech and activity, sanity and community, rest upon nothing more, but nothing less, than this. It is a vision as simple as it is difficult, and as difficult as it is (and because it is) terrifying. (1976a, 52)

As Cavell suggests, Wittgenstein's discussion of rule-following invites us to recognize that nothing guarantees that we will catch on to the use of a concept, such as the mind grasping universals or fixed rules. That picture, which might then help us know when understanding is reached, is idle, a deflection. Instead, what Wittgenstein shows us in his rule-following remarks are individuals coming to share "routes of interest and feeling…of what is similar to what else" and everything else (and more) that Cavell lists above under the phrase "forms of life" (see also 2009a, §§16, 23, 198-99). As Cavell's remark suggests, Wittgenstein and his readers sometimes use form or forms of life in particular contexts to turn our attention to the irreducible host of things (rags again) that often go into humans teaching, learning, using, and generally sharing concepts. The term connotes both *order* (form) and dynamic, material *activity* (life); it summons the image of *life* given *shape*. Cavell and Wittgenstein strive to impress upon us how very many things go into people coming to share forms of life, share judgments about what is the same as what or different, what of valuable or interest or humor, which is to show us how very much there is that can go wrong, and how little control we have over that. Hence the terror Cavell describes; hence also my suggestion that we should feel haunted by the possibility of the recurrence of the other's opacity, the evaporation of agreement.

I want this chapter's recollective descriptions of the possibility of others' opacity, and the problems and questions that possibility generates, such as how we know when we understand, to start suggesting to the conversion-inclined a distinct picture of the ecological other. Insofar as our understanding of our others may be partial (knowing *that*, say, and not *how*), they may remain opaque in some respect, shrouded, veiled, strange—though not necessarily or essentially. Insofar as we have no guarantee that we understand them, or always will, it may be that they are shrouded and we do

not know it. The other can be, may be, nebulous, a question mark, a vague stranger. No shortcuts will tell us when they are in fact opaque or understood, but when we explicitly start envisioning them as only partly understood or potentially not understood, despite what we think we already understand, new relational modes start to make sense. For instance, it might now make sense to work to understand them, to try to dissolve their opacity, a practical possibility I will call *apprenticeship* in Chapter 5, or, when such dissolution is not forthcoming, to try to learn to live in ignorance of their perspective, to knowingly receive them as a dense cloud, a possibility I call *accepting opacity* in the same chapter. Or, in the light of the image of the other as opaque and always potentially disclosing further opacity, we might develop arts of scrutinizing our preconceptions of them, such as the possibility of thinking against our readymade evaluations of them, what I call *re-reading* in Chapter 6. Any number of further relational modalities might also come into view when we recast eco-conversionism's always-already transparent ecological other as someone unknown.

Before describing these relational alternatives in more detail, I want to finish conjuring my alternative conception of the ecological other. In the next chapter, I will describe some of the ways in which that other can, despite the insistent triviality ascribed this figure by the eco-conversionists, valuably factor into the lives of environmentalists. I hope that discussion will start to motivate a certain curiosity in the ecological other, pictured then as not only opaque, and always potentially opaque, but also potentially significant. Through my description of the various ways that the ecological other can come to matter to environmentalists, I want to start electrifying the figure of this other as strange stranger, as shifting nimbus—to saturate it with an open-ended capacity to affect a given subject in variously valuable ways. As if before a congregation of storm clouds on the horizon, I want us to feel a barometric shift with respect to what this figure might promise.

Chapter 4: The Ecological Other's Potential Nontriviality

People all over the world have developed ways of surviving in partly dangerous, partly agreeable surroundings. The stories they told and the activities they engaged in enriched their lives, protected them and gave them meaning. The "progress of knowledge and civilization"–as the process of pushing Western ways and values into all corners of the globe is being called–destroyed these wonderful products of human ingenuity and compassion without a single glance in their direction. "Progress of knowledge" in many places meant killing of minds.

Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method*, *Introduction to the Chinese Edition*

It is not part of the nature of things that ethical theories should come in two sorts, deontological and teleological. Our habits of classification of ethical theories and modes of ethical thought, based on false and oversimple notions of the aim of ethics, impede our understanding and distort our perception. No principles of classification are forced on us by the nature of ethics; we shape what ethical discussion is in part by what we choose to bring together, by the patterns of resemblances and differences in ethical thought that we trace and display.

Cora Diamond, *Losing Your Concepts*

§1 Introduction

To expand the eco-conversionist imagination beyond its fixation on conversion, I have undertaken to develop an alternative conception of the ecological other, one that might compete with the transparent and trivial picture that helps organize and motivate that preoccupation. This alternative takes inspiration from features of our lives with alterity that the transparent and trivial picture occludes, namely, that others can be opaque to us and can have nontrivial perspectives. Chapter 3 focused on the first part of my picture: the idea of the other's conceptual opacity, or the senses in which *what the other is up to* and *why*, say, in their talk and action vis-à-vis the nonhuman, may be opaque to outsiders who do not understand their concepts and forms of living. This chapter develops the second aspect: the idea that the other's life with and perspectives on the nonhuman might be nontrivial, even from the perspective of conversion-inclined environmentalists, on the latter's terms. The picture of the ecological other that constrains the eco-conversionist imagination casts this figure as trivial in relationship to environmental concerns, say, the mitigation of climate change, the conservation of biodiversity, or the cultivation of a sensitive and rich understanding of the more-than-human and its value. To speak with Rolston, the ecological other's views on such

matters "have only antiquarian interest" (2015, 201). Such a devaluation of the other's perspective is implied precisely by desires and calls for the displacement of this figure's perspective. If the examples of eco-conversionism considered so far are any indication, such wishes and advocacy see only progress and no draw-backs in the transformation and subordination of the other's view to environmentalists' preferred perspectives. This chapter contests such trivialization by describing ways in which the ecological other can be significant in relationship to environmental concerns.

My articulations of the ecological other's potential nontriviality mirror the mode of valuing implied in the transparent and trivial picture. This picture raises the question of the other's value in relationship to given concerns, namely, environmental concerns. I call this the question of the other's *value for us*, in this case, us ecologically-concerned conversionists. Given my interest in this question, I set aside the fact that there are *other reasons* why we might say our others and their worldviews are valuable, reasons that do not refer to their value for us. For instance, it is plain that our others' perspectives likely matter *to them* and that our others, as such, may matter *to us*. The other, their mere existence, may be intrinsically valuable to us, with no reference to how their perspective or forms of feeling and understanding might be valuable *for* us, might, say, *help us out* (think of how some Christians and humanists talk about valuing human persons as such or how some Buddhists talk of valuing all sentience intrinsically). Likewise, the other, their perspective and mere existence may be said to be intrinsically valuable to them, a relation that again implies no necessary reference to their value for other people (see, e.g., Crystal 2014, 47-52; Rozzi 2018a, 304; Whyte, Calwell, and Schaefer 2018, 157). That the other is valuable to us or that their perspective is intrinsically valuable to them might shape our actions in all sorts of ways. However, I am interested in deflating the transparent and trivial picture of the other and developing an alternative to it. My discussion, therefore, contemplates the mode of valuation at work in that picture: the value of the

other's life *for one's own*. At the end of this section, I will address potential confusions around my focus on the mode of *value for*.

I am particularly interested in how others, especially people with different conceptual repertoires, can develop and even transform our understandings of ourselves and nonhuman entities in indelibly ethical ways. For analytical and therapeutic purposes, that is, to both sharpen the sense of the particular forms of nontriviality that interests me and start deflating the idea of the other's triviality, in the next section I will introduce three additional ways environmentalism's conceptual others might be valuable to it, which I draw out of the discourse on biocultural diversity conservation. To help encapsulate these possibilities of value in images, I will associate a figure with each. First, I suggest that the conceptual other's continued existence with their concepts, as conceptually distinctive, can support environmental purposes, such as biodiversity conservation, in what we might think of as a relatively instrumental fashion. Here the other is figured as *Device*: collaborator in, bracer and bastion of, in their mere persistence, the achievement of environmental ends. The locus of value here is not anything the conceptual other proffers us, say, besides *their existence as them*, as conceptually particular, which in itself helps achieve other goals. Our interest in the other as Device is our interest in how the perpetuation of the other as other, as conceptually *them*, relates to environmental concerns.[1]

Next, I suggest that others can have at least two kinds of epistemic value for environmentalists. On the one hand, conceptual others can offer access to valuable information about the nonhuman world; on the other, conceptual others can offer transformative metaphors and paradigms for acquiring information about the nonhuman world. I associate the figures of the other

1. Sometimes in environmental thought talk of "mere existence" is associated with the intrinsic value of something: its mere existence is valuable; it is not valuable for *other reasons*. This is not how the other's mere existence factors into the value of the other as Device. Here the other's simple existence, rather than *anything else* they might do *for us*, is valuable in relationship to other goods, such as biodiversity conservation.

as *Informant* and as *Epistemic Revolutionary*, respectively, with each of these forms of value. Our interest in the other as Informant or Epistemic Revolutionary is not in how their continued existence as them might support environmental ends, but how their *knowledge* and *structures of knowing* might support those ends, say, by telling us more about something we care about or by improving ecosystemic management.

With these initial figures in place, sections 3 and 4 develop distinct possible iterations of others' nontriviality in relationship to our lives with the nonhuman. In these forms of value, the other again proffers us something besides their mere existence. This proffering differentiates these shapes of value from the value of the other as Device, as with the epistemic forms represented by the Informant and Epistemic Revolutionary. In contrast, however, to the significance of the other as Informant or Epistemic Revolutionary, these additional forms of value are not reducible to epistemology, narrowly conceived. Our interest in them is not an interest in acquiring *information* about the more-than-human world or in new paradigms for better acquiring such information. Rather, our interest, if we have it, is in cultivating a lively and rich understanding of the more-than-human, and of more generally conceiving, feeling, acting, and broadly living well, justly, or virtuously in relationship to it. Our concern here is with a kind of goodness in understanding and how the other might help us achieve it. I thus conceive of these forms of value as distinctly ethical. In contrast to the value of the other as Device, Informant, or Epistemic Revolutionary, these further forms of significance cast the other as valuable not because their bare existence helps achieve environmental moral ends (e.g., biodiversity conservation), nor because they might increase our knowledge of nature, but because of the moral work the other can do on subjects' self- and world-understanding.

To develop these further forms of moral nontriviality I turn to some of Cora Diamond's ethical writings. Diamond's moral philosophical work is relevant for two reasons. First, she draws

our attention to forms of value that speak to the evaluative mode that interests me, namely, the value of the other *for us*, forms that also exceed narrowly instrumental and epistemic categories. Drawing on Diamond's writings, I will elucidate these forms of value suggesting that others can enrich, develop, and transform our understanding and moral experience.[2] With these kinds of value I associate the figures of the *Quickener* (one who enlivens another's understanding) and the *Metamorphic* (one who changes the structure of moral understanding).

Secondly, Diamond's moral writings are adamantly anti-reductionist. In the spirit of Wittgenstein, many of her moral writings deflate attempts to reduce the dynamic multiplicity of what we might intelligibly, and rightly, call moral life to simple and static models. If there is one theme running through the majority of Diamond's ethical writings, it is her devotion to unmasking attempts by moral philosophers and cultural critics to fix what moral activity *must* be like: to take an example of what moral life *can* be like as representative of what it *is* in total.[3] These aspects of Diamond's writings are important for our discussion because I will suggest that the ways in which other people might be morally nontrivial to us environmentalists cannot be reduced to a limited range of possibilities, such as those illustrated by my figures. The other's potential moral nontriviality, I will claim, is *unbounded*. I shall consider Diamond's anti-reductionism in my reading of her papers, which will start indirectly indicating the boundlessness of the other's potential nontriviality. However, I will also consider, in section 5, one of Diamond's arguments about the irreducibility of valuing as such. That review will facilitate a fuller articulation of the unboundedness of the others' potential significance, an argument that builds from Diamond's insight that the grammar of value has no single structure.

2. Taken in the realistic spirit, the spirit in which I intend them, these observations are banal, but forgotten in the context in which I recollect them.
3. I discuss some examples of this practice below.

Note that I refer to the other's significance as *potential* throughout because it is obviously not the case that our others are necessarily nontrivial. It is an ordinary possibility that even after prolonged contact with some other, one learns little or one's life is changed in more or less unremarkable ways or for the worse. I also wish to mark with my use of *potential* that deciding whether someone else has epistemic or moral insight is not something that can be determined ahead of looking and seeing, ahead of learning to understand them and judging one way or the other—of joining them in their particular perspective, gardening with them, reading their novel, etc. We do not know ahead of time whether a relationship, an experience, or some years in the field will change us for good, ill, or otherwise. Nevertheless, the potential remains for such change—and for it to be valuable *a posteriori*.

1.1 On Misreading the Therapeutic Recollection of Value-For

Before turning to the variety of the other's potential value in relationship to different environmental concerns, I want to head off a potential misconception of my focus on the modality of *value for*. In particular, it might be thought that in attending to this mode I thereby allot the other *merely* instrumental value.[4] Such an interpretation would depend on multiple wrong turns; I address the three most pressing. First, I suspect that a perspective that would ascribe such a view to me inhabits the metaphysical spirit; specifically, this misreading suggests a commitment by such a critic to a particular axiological preconception in which modes of value come in two sorts: intrinsic (valuing X itself) or instrumental (valuing X as a means to Y). This critic then assimilates the mode of *valuing for* to the second option, perhaps because it is easy to imagine cases of *valuing for* that look a lot like what we imagine "instrumental valuing" to look like, say, valuing a wrench merely because it tightens or loosens (and what, otherwise caring nothing for it?). My discussion of the figure of the

4. Multiple readers have taken my writing down of the ordinary fact that others can be nontrivial in relationship to things we care about in precisely this fashion, as casting the other as a mere means. One friendly critic suggested that I may even commodify the other in thinking in terms of value for.

Device, in particular, and the ways in which this figure can be nontrivial for certain environmental ends, may seem to lend support to the reliability of this binary: surely this is a case of merely valuing the other as a means. But the binary is not as reliable as it purports to be, as my imagined critic *takes it to be* in assimilating the entire mode of *valuing for* to instrumentalism. Rather, to echo Diamond above, this distinction is one "habit of classification of…modes of ethical thought," that *may* prove useful in some instances, but hardly corresponds, say, as a mirror (see Rorty 1979, 12-13), to "the nature of things." It is instead one way *we* bring certain features of our worlds together.

I touched on the limits of this distinction in Chapter 1 when I reviewed Norton's deflation of its role in environmental philosophy; my multiplication of the ways others might be *valuable for* in this chapter will continue such deflation, for not all of modes of *valuing for* are easily reducible to either side. And that is what disappointments me about the distinction: how it proves only marginally useful in helping us think well about the dynamic, polymorphous nature(s) of valuing. This distinction misses what it can be to value through its simultaneously narrow and overly abstract typology. Preliminarily, observe how the distinction fails to capture what it is to value a *teacher*. Doubtless, many of us will say we love, or deeply care for, care about our teachers—or some or a few of them; others, doubtless, we dislike, resent, think nothing of, etc. With those for whom we care, we value *them*, not merely *what they give us*. But surely we care deeply for all sorts of people and admit that there are particularities involved in what it is to value a teacher *as a teacher*, connected, in part, precisely to what it is they can give us, or rather, what they *teach* us or might—to say nothing of the particular reasons why we might appreciate *this* teacher or *that* (likewise might be said of, say, a friend, sibling, parent, neighbor, or colleague). That we may value our teachers as such, say as *persons*, is distinguishable from and even potentially irrelevant to the particular shapes valuing a teacher can and does take. For an internal part of what makes them *them* to us, namely, a teacher, is that they (may) have much to show us, to help us to do, to understand. Indeed, we can value them in this way,

as teachers, *even if* we dislike them or have little care for them otherwise. Doubtless such value can take crude forms, in which students merely wish to get what the teacher has to give, as if to juice knowledge from an orange. But will we say that that is what is involved in every case of valuing a teacher as a teacher? Indeed, should we even say that such crude valuing represents an understanding of the concept *teacher* at all? I am inclined to say, rather, that to value a teacher as a teacher is not to value them instrumentally, say, as we value a wrench (and by the way, aren't wrenches wonderful? I *love* mine!), but simply, irreducibly, *itself* (and this too, we will see, takes many forms). Should we then call this valuing the teacher as a teacher intrinsic valuing? Feel free to, but nothing *forces* us to speak this way. Such an abstract category, which now sets valuing the teacher "intrinsically" as, say, a *person*, alongside valuing them "intrinsically" as a *teacher*, hardly captures in detail what is involved in *any* sort of non-narrowly-instrumental valuing, that is, why some of us value in *this* way or *that* and others don't.[5] The *sense* of teacher differs in important ways from the sense of, say, *person*. The reasons we might give for valuing the first, *as teachers*, differ from those might give for valuing the latter and include our interest in what the first might proffer us. It can be very useful to differentiate the intrinsic and instrumental, say, to help articulate what offends us about racial and gender objectification.[6] But that utility is not undermined by the fact that the distinction is something we make, not, say, discover behind the ephemera of ordinary experience, the shifting quotidian reality of life with value; to grant this distinction a higher status, to play metaphysics with it, will lead us away from attending in detail to all that valuing can involve.

The value of the other as Device is indeed a kind of instrumental value, though, as I will note in a moment, the other hardly need be valued *merely* as Device in my view, and we should also

5. I am inclined to think that we picture something akin to a bleached-out scene of divine communion or confrontation when we speak so abstractly about valuing people intrinsically, instead of speaking in detail about specific ways of valuing. Such a picture makes a certain sense if Cavell is right that the figure of the Other takes the place of God after the latter's death among seculars, but it hardly erases the quotidian reality of myriad forms of value (1979, 470).
6. Think of all that, in their own ways, Aristotle and Kant accomplished with variations on this distinction (see, e.g., Aristotle 2014, 1094a1-25; Kant 2012, 4:400-403; 4:428-433). I likewise rely on it for the sake of analysis.

appreciate how very different it is to value a wrench, say, for loosening and tightening, versus what it is to value someone for doing their own thing and along the way supporting something you value.[7] As for the other variations on the mode of *valuing for*, my other illustrations and figures, none of these can be reduced to instrumental sorts of value without distortion, for each can be thought of along the lines of the figure of the teacher: valued not for what their bare existence achieves, nor narrowly merely in themselves, but in specific ways for the peculiar goods they proffer, for what they teach. Indeed, we might think of the *Informant, Epistemic Revolutionary, Quickener,* and *Metaphoric* as different sorts of teachers, each showing in her particular way the distinct shapes that valuing teachers, as teachers, that is, for, among other things, what they *teach* us, can take. To refuse those particularities by insisting that in all these cases we have mere instrumental valuing shall almost certainly be to *miss* them, to miss some of the distinctive, *sui generis* shapes value *here* can take.

Second concern: Imagine now that value comes in only two shapes, namely, intrinsic or instrumental. Why should discussing the latter preclude the simultaneous operation of the first? That is, only a curious prejudice would assert that contemplating the modality of *value for*, and setting aside *for my purposes* other modes of valuing, *rules out* those other modes, as if to value someone for some specific reasons, entails that you must not also value them in other ways, say, "intrinsically." Hence Kant's emphasis on the problem of valuing someone *merely* as means (2012, 4:429). My focus on the value of the other in relationship to other things one values in no way rules out other ways of valuing the other; it merely corresponds, again, to the modality of trivialization at work in eco-conversionism's picture of the other. Indeed, in Chapter 2 I complained against eco-conversionism that it allows a merely incidental, or impedimental, role to the ecological other, positioning this figure as someone or thing to be managed, gotten around or over, not treated as someone to whom *precisely more* than that is owed, that is, as an entity to which *something* is owed. At different points in

7. This last is a point about the radical diversity of ways in which one might "instrumentally value."

the present work, then, I am approaching the question of the other's potential value from various angles. Again, I should like good reasons, reasons that overrule those that warrant this motley of modalities of valuation, and especially my focus on *value for* in this chapter, to exclude some of these angles. Even in its most narrowly instrumental instances, *value for* is a genuine, and ordinary, axiological structure—for aren't wrenches and teachers great, *as* wrenches and teachers? Can't they be?[8] However you answer that, when I discuss the kind of instrumental value connected to the figure of the other as Device, nothing rules out valuing such others in additional ways.

Thirdly, besides the foregoing misconceptions of, let's say, the metaphysics of morals, to say that I allow the other merely instrumental value by focusing on their potential *value for* signals a misunderstanding of the present methodology. For I am not interested in *delimiting* the conceptual other's potential value at all, *value for* or otherwise.[9] The final nature or essence of the other's value is not my problematic, nor even intelligible as anything more than a fantasy within my framework.[10] Rather, my problematic is that eco-conversionism casts the other as necessarily, *essentially* lacking-value-for—*as trivial in relationship to* those things eco-conversionists, and other environmentalists, care dearly about. That is how the picture of the other as transparent and trivial casts the ecological other, so that is the conceptualization I must parochialize, and that means conjuring counter-examples in the corresponding register, examples that show how the other *can* be valuable for us. Those counter-examples will eventually also generate another picture of the other, who is distinct from the eco-conversionist picture precisely with respect to such specifics as whether the other is valuable for or not, and hence uniquely valuable to a perspective confined to one answer to the question of the other's *value for*. I do not arbitrarily focus on the modality of the other's *value for*, but

8. For more on the place of instrumentalism in our ordinary, value-laden lives, articulated in the verbiage of objectification, see Martha Nussbaum's "Objectification" (1995).
9. Indeed, below I will argue that value as such has no single structure, and that argument would give us grounds to say that the other might value in innumerable ways.
10. The very idea that they might such a thing is the sort of problematic my methodology aims at.

rather parasitically ruminate on a modality that I have isolated as underwriting eco-conversionism. My foil holds tight to *this* idea, *viz.*, the other's lack of value for; while other appeals might affect that perspective, it is incumbent upon me to address this core idea. The strength and precision of the methodology I inherit from Wittgenstein and his readers derives in part from remaining with precisely these sorts of fixed particularities, taking seriously the preconceptions that animate and organize troublesome preoccupations. To loosen the jaw of such preconceptions' grip on a given imagination requires the application of pressure to its hinge, not, say, other joints in the vicinity. To fail to focus on *value for* would deflect me from the etiology of eco-conversionism, and so from the task of loosening the hold of conversion on some environmentalists.[11]

Enough preamble. Onto some of the shapes the ecological other's *value for* environmentalists can, may, and *does* take.

§2 Three Figures, Three Forms of Nontriviality: Device, Informant, and Epistemic Revolutionary

2.1 Conserve Culture, Conserve Nature: The Other as Device

From an environmental point of view, the conceptual other's distinctive forms of living with and understanding more-than-human reality can be of value to certain important ends in a relatively straightforward and, for many environmental scholars, familiar sense: the conservation of cultural

11. Relatedly, insofar as I seek to persuade a perspective in the grips of an image of the ecological other as trivial-for nonhuman matters, the strongest form of my argument will address itself to a stringent version of this perspective, namely, one that will not ultimately be moved unless *this* image is deflated. Perhaps emphasizing conceptual others' value as such (to eco-conversionists or themselves), as I undertook in Chapter 2, will suffice to dissuade some conversion-inclined environmentalists from a preoccupation with conversion. I tend to think environmental problems weigh too heavily on us conversionists for this to be the case, crowding out our other commitments, but it is not impossible. It seems unlikely to me, for instance, that any of the eco-conversionists discussed in Chapter 1 would be moved by the appeals of Chapter 2 alone. The repugnance each expresses toward various others raises questions about appeals to the other's, say, "intrinsic" value; it might even be thought that it honors their value to improve their worldview. Further, I doubt any of them doubt that the perspectives they want to convert are valuable to the people who hold them. In any event, whether those suspicions have legs, the strongest version of my argument will address itself to the most difficult form of opposing views, and that will take the shape of the eco-conversionist who thinks the ecological other's perspective is trivial in relationship to her own concerns and is unconvinced that the other should be permitted to keep their trivial view simply because they value it or they are, as such, of value, whatever their views. Hence again my focus on the modality of value for.

diversity, and therefore conceptual diversity, generally supports the conservation of biological diversity (and vice versa). This tendency depends upon the (1) entanglement of nature and culture, (2) the multiplicity of extant, fuzzy-bordered, dynamic units of entangled nature-culture, and (3) the historical fact that modifications to one side of this distinction tend to cause changes to the other (see Maffi 2005, 600; Rozzi 2018a, 28-39).[12] That is, changes in the biological and broadly material makeup of a place tend to change how people conceptualize and live with that more-than-human system and its constituents; likewise, changes in the languages, concepts, economic ideologies, politics, values, and practices of a people tend to change the biological and material makeup of the more-than-human systems with which those people live. Of particular relevance to this discussion, it has historically been the case that as peoples' patterns of conceptualizing, interacting with, valuing, and broadly living with the more-than-human homogenize—through such processes as colonization, international development, global trade, the nationalization of languages, and technological revolutions (say, in agriculture or trade)—the makeup and structures of the world's bioregions likewise tend to homogenize. The inverse is also the case. Such processes and their effects are often referred to as *biocultural homogenization*, defined as the nonlinear generation of biocultural sameness through the "simultaneous and interlinked losses of native biological and cultural diversity at local, regional, and global scales" (Rozzi et al. 2018b, 2).

Linguists were among the first to draw attention to and offer sustained analysis of cultural homogenization as an environmental problem. In the 1980s, the global biodiversity crisis started coming to consciousness as information accumulated regarding our ongoing, global, anthropogenic mass extinction event. In the early 1990s, linguists began realizing that many, if not most, of the languages of the world were likewise endangered, particularly minority and Indigenous languages

12. As many scholars these days acknowledge, such interdependence and evidence for it belies the ontological status of the distinction (see, e.g., Haraway 2016c, Latour 2017, Rozzi 2018b).

(Maffi 2005, 601; see also Mühlhäusler 1995, 2011; Crystal 2014, vii-viii). Linguists then projected that by 2100 40-90% of the over 6000 living languages would be *sleeping*[13] (ibid.; cf. Crystal 2014, 3).[14] Analysts began studying the relationships between biodiversity and cultural diversity, taking linguistic diversity as a one indicator of the latter; this work laid the groundwork for what would become the interdisciplinary field of biocultural diversity (Maffi 2005, 602). Coincident and bound up with this founding was the birth of ecolinguistics, the contemporary systematic study of the relationship between specific languages and their biological contexts (see Mühlhäusler 2011, 198).[15]

Over the past two decades biocultural diversity has grown into a robust interdisciplinary research site, attracting scholarship from across the academy. Anthropologists, biologists, philosophers, political theorists, scholars of religion, sociologists, and theologians have contributed to a growing literature on threats to and techniques for defending and reviving biocultural diversity (see, e.g., Rozzi et al. 2018a). Along the way, these scholars have worked to clarify the ontological, epistemological, and axiological premises of biocultural diversity as well as the methodologies for taking its measure (Rozzi 2018a; Rozzi et al. 2018b).[16]

Analysts advocate for biocultural conservation on a number of grounds: linguistic and broadly cultural diversity are intrinsically valuable to the particular humans that speak the languages and inhabit the cultures in question (Bromham et al. 2022, 169; Crystal 2014, 47-55; Rozzi 2018b,

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13. Sleeping is the preferred term used by many speakers of endangered languages to refer to extinct and threatened languages (see Bromham et al. 2022, 165).
14. Today, half of the roughly 7,000 documented languages are considered endangered. The most recent rigorous and global syntheses on language endangerment conservatively estimate that language loss will at least triple in the next 40 years, with a minimum of 1,500 languages ceasing to be spoke (Bromham et al. 2022, 169). The greatest "absolute losses" are predicted to occur "in the west coast of North America, Central America, the Amazon rainforest, West Africa, north coast of New Guinea and northern Australia" (Bromham 2022, 169). With respect to species extinction, 28% of assessed species are threatened with extinction, including 41% of amphibian species, 27% of mammals, 34% percent of conifers, 37% of sharks, 33% of corals, 69% of cycads (IUCN 2022).
15. Peter Mühlhäusler, an early and influential ecolinguist, observes that this shift in focus remains a departure from the norm in modern linguistics, which tends to focus on language as such and its general principles rather than particular languages and their historical/material contexts (2011, 198).
16. Among philosophers, Ricardo Rozzi's individual and collaborative work stands out in particular (see, e.g., 2011, 2013, 2018a, 2018b).

36-39); linguistic and cultural diversity is intrinsically valuable to humanity as such, representing achievements of human ingenuity, knowledge, and existential possibilities (Crystal 2014, 55-70; Harmon 2002; Rozzi 2018a, 304; 2018b, 27-28, 40); biocultural diversity is intrinsically valuable insofar as the human-nonhuman co-inhabitants of particular biocultural communities are subjects (not mere objects) and therefore entitled to protection from non-voluntary destruction and/or assimilation (Rozzi 2018b, 36-39).

Notably, advocates for conserving biocultural diversity often also emphasize the conservation of cultural diversity as a means to protecting endangered flora and fauna and supporting ecosystemic, including human, flourishing. Influential biocultural philosopher Ricardo Rozzi writes,

> Habitats entail biophysical, linguistic-cultural, and institutional realms that have historical and socioecological dynamics at different spatial and temporal scales. The protection of these unique biocultural habitats favors the expression of unhomogenized biocultural life habits. The continuity of these habits depends on the conservation of these habitats; at the same time, the continuity of traditional life habits favors the conservation of native habitats. (Rozzi 2018b, 28)

Rozzi defines "life habits" as "ways of understanding and of inhabiting the world" (Rozzi 2018b, 27). In the above passage, he emphasizes the importance of conserving a diversity of forms of understanding and inhabiting the world as part of the project to conserve biological diversity (and vice versa). As I mentioned, many biocultural conservationists cite intrinsic human goods alongside more-than-human goods when advocating the conservation of cultural multiplicity. For now, however, I cite the discourse on biocultural conservation as one site in the sphere of environmental concern where we can trace the instrumental value of conceptual difference for certain environmental ends, namely, biodiversity conservation.

The simple sustained existence of cultural and linguistic multiplicity, then, can be instrumental to the environmental aim of conserving and reviving biodiversity. This sort of instrumental value of the other is distinct from, but similar to, the way some environmental scholars

speak instrumentally about religion. Environmental authors sometimes speak of religions as offering "resources" to support environmental causes (see, e.g., Callicott 1994, 186, 191; Hulme 2017; Tucker 1997, 3-6). The idea seems to be that religions offer broadly ethical, "spiritual," and imaginative energy to whatever it is they commit, and that that energy might be tapped and channeled toward supporting ecological causes (my use of this extractive idiom is not unwitting). What religions give environmentalism (energy) differs from what cultural multiplicity offers (sustaining biodiversity). Yet, the relationship at work, the role of the other in the environmental imagination, is similar: the other's value derives from the utility of their particularity to given environmental ends. Religion and cultural multiplicity, then, function here as two different sorts of tools. I associate the figure of the Device with this way of valuing others.[17]

2.2 Conserve Culture, Know Nature: The Other as Informant and Epistemic Revolutionary

Alongside the figure of the other as Device, nontrivial in their alterity from a narrowly instrumental moral perspective, I want to describe two figures of the other as epistemically valuable. I shall trace these figures in some of the writings of influential ecolinguist Peter Mühlhäusler. The first is that of the other as Informant, or as having knowledge of nonhuman reality that may be instructive to us environmentalists. We see this figure emerge in the following passage from Mühlhäusler:

> The argument I wish to put forward is that our ability to get on with our environment is a function of our knowledge of it and that by combining specialist knowledge from many languages and by reversing the one-way flow of knowledge dominating the world's education system, solutions to our many environmental problems may be found. In particular, learning from local knowledge, such as learning from the insights and errors of traditional rainforest

17. We can indefinitely multiply versions of this mode of relation or valuation. For another example, consider Indigenous studies scholar Dina Gilio-Whitaker's argument that codification of Native land and cultural rights, an anti-colonial acknowledgment of Native sovereignty, can function in practice as a check on land development and fossil fuel extraction and transport (2020, 149). Here, from a settler environmentalist perspective, the Indigenous other's sovereignty is cast as a means to environmental ends. We can sharpen the instrumental role the other plays in such cases by comparing them to the ends sought by *rights of nature* movements, which seek the codification in law of ecological entities' and systems' intrinsic entitlements (see, e.g., Gilio-Whitaker 2020, 154). This kind of relation is not unidirectional: scholars such as Gilio-Whitaker see the codification of the rights of natural entities as potential instruments for securing the protection of Native lands.

> dwellers or desert nomads, could result in *a more informed base* for the sustained survival of our species. Such knowledge, I argue, is closely linked to language. (2011, 200; my emphasis)

Different languages, Mühlhäusler suggests, embedded in particular places and cultures, could help inform our species' response to environmental problems. The "sustained survival of our species" might hang on such knowledge.

Mühlhäusler develops this argument by comparing two sets of cases. The first is the threatened language of Enga of the New Guinea Highlands. Enga, he explains, contains a massive lexicon referring to and differentiating between the trees of Papua New Guinea. Among other things, this system of terms and differences relates its referents (e.g., the trees themselves, tree elements, tree fruit) to various human purposes: medicine, construction, food, etc. (2011, 201). As this lexicon currently stands, it contains numerous tree names that Western botanists have not yet accounted for. Poor forest management, resulting in fires, and large-scale logging paired with the proliferation of industrial agriculture threaten the forests of Papua New Guinea; meanwhile, Enga and the ecological knowledge it embodies are threatened by mandatory non-traditional government-run education and an increased dependency on imported, mass-produced foods (201-2). Knowledge of the trees transmitted by Enga is therefore endangered.

Mühlhäusler's second set of cases are the histories of the British colonization of Pitcairn and Norfolk Islands in the South Pacific. These histories dovetail with the Enga example, for they show how long it can take to establish knowledge of an ecosystem or, what amounts to the same, to recover the knowledge lost with the death of an established language. In both cases, British colonists and colonized Tahitians settled the islands in question, eroded their ecosystems, and over a period of two hundred years generated only a crude and partial lexicon of native flora and fauna (Mühlhäusler 2011, 205, 208). Mühlhäusler concludes that the "adaptation of any language to a new environment takes several generations of speakers" (206). Accordingly, he suggests, we should conceive of established languages as "repositories of past experience," which will require great effort to recover

if such recovery is possible at all. The implications of such loss from an environmental perspective are, by Mühlhäusler's lights, straightforward. He writes, "There is an important aspect to any type of management: one can manage only what one knows; and a corollary: that one knows that for which one has a linguistic expression" (208). Numerous parts of the world remain unexamined by contemporary ecology. With the loss of ecologically adapted languages beyond the boundaries of established ecological knowledge, we lose extant conditions for measuring and evaluating ecological dynamics. Such analysis depends upon knowledge of the ecosystems in question, and such knowledge is sustained and transmitted by the particular people living in those ecosystems and through their particular languages. With the disappearance of the latter, the former is put at risk. For there is no guarantee that what is known in threatened languages (viz., the ecosystems in question) will remain the same to be known later by contemporary ecology; indeed, we have reason to believe those ecosystems are disappearing along with the languages and cultures of their human inhabitants.

With the figure of the other as Informant, the other's conceptual difference is not terribly significant. The particularities of their conceptually constituted practices and forms of living entwine them with particular places, and this makes them usefully located, well placed; they are literally in a position to be valuable for the accumulation of ecological knowledge. But the value of the other as Informant is contingent upon the possibility of assimilating their information to more or less established systems of knowledge. Doubtless, paradigms may shift through the accumulation of these data; but the contrast I am developing hinges on appreciating the other qua Informant not primarily as a shifter of paradigms, but as an information source for environmental ends (e.g., developing a fuller picture of nature, or better managing an ecosystem).

Besides the informational value of a conceptual other's perspective, some scholars also emphasize the idea that such others may have what I'll call structural or conceptual epistemic insight, what some call *metaphorical* insight (see Mühlhäusler 1995). Here the other figures into our lives as an

Epistemic Revolutionary: the generator of new paradigms, models, patterns for organizing reality that enable and structure the accumulation of information about the world.[18] Mühlhäusler again offers an example. In the 90s and early 2000s, he called for projects that study "metaphors others live by," playing off the title of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's distinguished book (1980). In these papers, Mühlhäusler argues that "human beings interpret the world through culture-specific metaphors" and that "most advances in the sciences are a consequence of the adoption of new metaphorical interpretations" (281).[19] Furthermore, he claims that the line between the literal and metaphorical is never neutrally drawn nor absolute; metaphors can function as heuristics, guiding pictures, to generate knowledge of the real. Moreover, languages, such as English in Mühlhäusler's account, can be dominated by a narrow range of metaphors that constrain how certain aspects of reality are conceived and studied. Two of his examples of such dominant and constraining metaphors are "time is money" and "languages are systems" (282).

Turning to the place of other languages and cultures in our epistemic lives, Mühlhäusler argues further that the metaphors of others can solve problems in one's own linguistically and culturally specific context. He writes, "Seen from the perspective of a Westerner, by studying the metaphorical systems of other cultures and by feeding the results of such studies back into our own culture, we might be able to solve problems such as social, technological, environmental and philosophical problems" (1995, 282). Mühlhäusler lists multiple potential problematics here, generating a number of distinct grounds for taking others' metaphors seriously. I return to the idea of others' relation to our moral lives below in my discussion of Diamond. For now, I want to isolate the epistemic dimension of the work of others' metaphors in Mühlhäusler's discussion.

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18. I mean for the figure of the epistemic revolutionary to conjure Kuhn's vision of scientific revolutions (see 1996).
19. A broadly Kuhnian conception of scientific progress informs this account. See Mühlhäusler (1995, 281) and Kuhn (1996). Mühlhäusler cites Kuhn (1979).

One of Mühlhäusler's examples is how biologists understand modes of existence. He draws this example from the writings of zoologist Konrad Lorenz (1977). Lorenz, Mühlhäusler reports, suggests that Western biologists have been conceptually hamstrung by their inability to differentiate modes of being. "The existence of a self-contained cell," writes Mühlhäusler, "is qualitatively different from the existence of an organism consisting of a number of interdependent cells, or one which exhibits the kind of cell specialization found in human beings" (Mühlhäusler 1995, 282). However, biologists have a very limited number of verbs to describe this variety in existence, such as "to be" in English or "ser" and "estar" in Spanish. The insensitivity of this repertoire, Mühlhäusler reports, has limited biological progress (ibid.). Turning again to Enga, Mühlhäusler notes that this language, by contrast, has at least eight verbs that can be translated as "to exist," "each of them reserved for a well-defined group of entities" (284). *Lyi*, for instance, is used as a predicate to refer to the existence of one range of entities, including bees, while *enda* is predicated of another range, including women. Given this range of possible modes of existing, of possible literal predications, the boundaries between literal and metaphorical predication are differently drawn here than in English. In English the same verb (to be) is used to predicate the literal existence of bees and women. In Enga, the use of the same verb to predicate existence for these two entities applies a metaphor to one of them (i.e., using the *lyi* of women or *enda* of bees). Mühlhäusler admits that Western biologists and philosophers may not be impressed or satisfied by Enga patterns for differentiating existents and their corresponding metaphorical possibilities. However, he writes, "the very existence of different verbs or different kinds of existence (animate vs inanimate, individual animals vs animals existing as colonies, controlled vs non-controlled entities) would seem to predispose Enga-speaking naturalists to look for [ontological] distinctions in their observation of nature" (2011, 284). He invites us to ask how these different predispositions might advance biological knowledge by

broadening biologists' perspectives on their subject matter.[20] He writes, "An alternative system of metaphors can provide new perspectives and, to speak with Saussure, it is the perspective which defines a field of study" (287).[21]

I have suggested that others may be of value to us environmentalists in three ways so far: narrowly instrumental-moral value (other as Device), informational-epistemic value (other as Informant), and structural-epistemic value (other as Epistemic Revolutionary). Each of these figures invites further, especially ethical, reflection. What perils accompany, say, imagining the other as a Device? What are the constraints on accessing others' information or metaphors?[22] I will not answer such questions here, though I return to versions of them in the next chapter. At this stage, I am not interested in endorsing nor condemning these figures as such; my interest in them for now is

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20. Think here of Kuhn's suggestion that the proliferation of anomalies in a scientific revolution is ultimately overcome through the development of new paradigmatic problem models and solutions, which set the trajectory for the subsequent accumulation of new information (see, e.g., Kuhn 1996, 74-75, 88-91).

21. The kind of epistemic value in question resonates with the philosophies of science and mind developed by scholars such as Paul Feyerabend, feminist standpoint epistemologists, and analysts of postcolonialism. Feyerabend once argued, in the absence of a fixed and strictly rational and objective method for scientific inquiry, that increasingly objective (i.e., decreasingly prejudiced) knowledge depends upon the proliferation of disparate and potentially conflicting theories and hypotheses. Such a multiplicity mutually reveals prejudices through contrast, each individual body of ideas and speculation "forcing the others into greater articulation and all of them contributing…to the development of our consciousness" (2010, 14-15). He referred to the method cultivating and contrasting competing theories and hypotheses as "counter-induction," one technique of an anarchic or Dadaist scientific program (5, 13, 16, 48). Through the proliferation of competing and mutually sharpening ideas, counter-induction attempts to "break the circle" of familiar concepts and procedures by inventing or borrowing (from the past or the "outside") new concepts, systems, results—thereby enabling otherwise impossible perceptions and corrections, and all for the sake of improving our knowledge (15, 56-59). And Feyerabend thought that cultures and religions besides those of the traditional scientific practitioner could be resources for such epistemic striving.

These lines of thought also resonate with feminist standpoint epistemology, which emphasizes the inclusion of marginalized voices in the generation of questions of inquiry, problem solutions (theories, models, and hypotheses), as well as in the practices of scientific testing and observation. Such inclusivity, the argument goes, strengthens the objectivity of a society's scientific practices and the knowledge produced therefrom by privileging the epistemic perspectives of marginalized positions. See, e.g., Haraway (1988), Harding (1992), and Kukla (2006).

Likewise, many postcolonial scholars seek to reveal how the world appears from the perspectives of the colonized or formerly colonized. "To translate oneself from the perspective of the dominant to that of the subordinated," Robert Young writes, "from being seen as an object to being a subject is the core structural and political move that postcolonialism involves" (2015, 150). Young suggests that these structural and political moves are crucially epistemological in orientation: they reveal suppressed and contingent prejudices in the production of knowledge by dominant social groups and generate alternative systems of understanding (see Young 2015, 152-3; see also Fanon 2004, 2008). Such postcolonial and feminist standpoint epistemologies have in their backgrounds the epistemic privilege afforded the slave and proletariat in Hegelian and Marxist dialectics respectively (see Lukács 1971, 149-222).

22. For instance, such a conception might render sensible to some the neocolonial extraction of Indigenous biological knowledge. See Whitt (2009) and Weaver (forthcoming).

therapeutic and analytical. Therapeutically, this selection starts to indicate the variety of ways in which environmentalists' conceptual others might figure into our lives in non-trivial ways, a practice that starts to deflate the eco-conversionist picture of the other as inconsequential. Analytically, laying out these figures will allow me to sharpen the forms of nontriviality that I want to describe next. In particular, the forms of nontriviality that interest me figure the other less instrumentality than the other as Device. The other in these instances does not merely satisfy prior moral ends, but rather qualitatively alters one's understanding. Additionally, while the sorts of moral nontriviality that interest me have epistemic dimensions (most resonant with the figure of the Epistemic Revolutionary), I want to avoid the easy assimilation of this sort of value to epistemic categories, to curb the temptation to read this kind of value in an overly epistemic rather than more strictly ethical way.[23] Our interest in the kind of value that I will turn to next is not the same as our interest in gaining information about the more than human world (other as Informant), nor about overcoming stagnation in such accumulation (other as Epistemic Revolutionary). Rather, our interest in this sort of value, if we are interested in it, concerns thinking, feeling, acting, and generally living well.

§3 Diamond and the Idea of Moral Experience

Diamond's paper "Ethics and Experience" (2020) is a particularly illuminating starting place to develop the forms of nontriviality that interest me. I want to borrow the accounts of moral experience that Diamond develops in this paper, accounts that will help me in the next section to describe how others can enliven and transform our moral understanding. But I also want to hold onto the contingent, therapeutic status of Diamond's ideas about ethics and experience—qualities that will become clearer as I proceed. To appreciate the status of Diamond's ideas, we need to consider the problem-space in which they arise as recollective deflations of philosophical thought.

23. This is a temptation that Diamond herself strives to fend off (see Diamond 2020).

"Ethics and Experience" offers a grammatical investigation of the relationship—or rather, relationships—between our uses of the words *experience* and *ethics*. A grammatical investigation is a "convening of our criteria for the employment of a particular concept" (Conant 1998, 249), where "criteria" themselves are understood as *intelligible uses of that concept*. Such an investigation, then, collects examples of a concept, or in this case concepts, intelligibly-at-work in order to elucidate that concept's *sense* or *grammar*, or the patterns of similarity and difference in its use. Investigations of this sort are undertaken in dialogue with individuals who have *forgotten* this grammar and found themselves in the cul-de-sacs of philosophy. In this paper, Diamond is interested in how particular conceptions of experience can impede our appreciation of all the ways experience (or various notions of it) can relate to ethics. It can be difficult, she thinks, to appreciate this relationship, or rather its many forms, and especially difficult in analytic philosophy. For often, and especially in philosophy, we take for granted specific notions of experience, which close off alternatives from our imaginative view.

In analytic philosophy, Diamond suggests, *experience* often means experience-involving-the-senses (2020, 14). This notion enters Western philosophy in various ways through the traditions of empiricism, rationalism, and transcendentalism. The empiricists give a certain priority to sense experience in our epistemic lives, claiming that "sense experience [is] composed of sense atoms, as it were, that are contingently associated in complex experiences"; the rationalists and transcendentalists are concerned with "what we bring to experience" (ibid.). Despite their differences, both groups overlap in a crucial way: they are interested in how sense experience relates to knowledge, and especially knowledge of the objective world.

But, Diamond observes, "there are different ranges of human activities dependent on experience" besides those taken for granted by these philosophers. We see this by observing "how very far the sorts of experience discussed by philosophers are from what we usually think of as

experience" (15). For instance, she invites us to imagine the sorts of things high school seniors write about on the topic "the most interesting experience I've had," and she lists such things as "giving birth, interviewing the President, swimming the English Channel." She wagers that whatever our seniors write about, their experiences would not fit within the categories of experience that philosophy tends to employ; "nor," the observes, "is it at all obvious that it could be analyzed into some complex of experiences that would" (ibid.).

Diamond surveys a range of philosophers writing about the relation between experience and ethics in particular. Her examples include Mill and Hume, but she focuses more on recent accounts of this relationship, in the writings of Sabina Lovibond, Mark Platts, and John McDowell. These authors draw a parallel between moral experience and sense experience to develop accounts of moral realism—accounts in which a realm of moral facts exist, along the lines of the existence of secondary qualities such as colors. Through the acquisition of the relevant conceptual capacities, they suggest, humans can come to experience this realm of facts. One of the aims in these accounts of the analogy between sense and moral experience is to dissolve the fact/value distinction, the "supposed distinction between evaluation and description" (16-17). Indeed, the parallel goes beyond a mere phenomenological similarity in these sensory versus moral experiences to the epistemic claim that each sort of experience garners knowledge of the world (natural and moral respectively) (17). This epistemic dimension is important for these realist accounts, which develop in opposition to various anti-realist, non-cognitivist positions. The latter, as we find in the emotivism of A. J. Ayer (1971, 142-3) or C. L. Stevenson (1944, 21-22), admit that moral experience *seems* similar to sense experience, but consider that similarity *illusory*. McDowell, Lovibond, and Platts disagree. In a fashion similar to how we learn to apply descriptive concepts to sense experience, these realists claim, we learn to apply evaluative concepts to the circumstances we learn to perceive as manifesting

them (Diamond 2020, 17). This is not a matter of inferring, say, that Jo behaved courageously; rather, Jo's courage is seen, immediately and objectively—it is an experiential fact.

The analogy between sense and moral experience, Diamond suggests, is unconvincing, and not because non-cognitivists get things right. One way to frame her dissent is to say that these realists take a part of moral experience for the whole. In their analogy to sense experience, these realists allow moral experience in general to be conflated with sense experience. But not all moral experience is like sense experience. Moral experience is like sense experience when, say, we perceive Jo's act as courageous. This may be phenomenologically similar to when we perceive an object as red. At the same time, to talk about and imagine the Apostle Paul returning to Rome despite knowing he will be executed is also to imagine, talk about, and describe courage, and moreover, to have a kind of ethical experience. And yet that practice is nothing like the perception of courage in a specific act—it is not something, say, that we perceive with our sense organs. What we have in the latter case is more akin to learning, through imaginative experience, the significance of certain forms of acting, the definitions of certain terms (17).

Observing this disanalogy between sense experience, on the one hand, and reflecting and talking about Paul, on the other, is Diamond's initial therapeutic wedge; it shows that the moral realists in question take for granted a particular conception of experience (namely, sense experience) and then develop the relationship between ethics and experience on the basis of that conception—as if for ethics and experience to be related it must be on the model of the relationship between the ideas of sense perception and sense experience. Observing that this model does not fit another case of what we might reasonably call moral experience shows that the relationship between ethics and experience need not, as a matter of necessity, be conceived as the realists so conceive it—for their model does not in fact cover all cases.

To further illumine the narrowness of the moral realists' conception of experience, thereby further deflating the compulsory status of their model of the relationship between ethics and experience, Diamond examines a range of cases in which various authors discuss experience in fashions that are relevant to ethics but do not conform with contemporary philosophy's conception of experience as sense experience. I want to review three of her examples. Diamond's discussion of these cases develops relationships between ethics and experience in ways that are immediately relevant to my discussion of the nontriviality of other people's lives and perspectives.

Diamond's first example is William Blake's conception of perception, which she sees illustrated in this remark:

> "What," it will be Questioned, "When the sun rises, do you not see a round disk of fire somewhat like a Guinea?" O no, no, I see an Innumerable company of the Heavenly host crying "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty." (Blake 1925, III, 162; cited in Diamond 2020, 18)

Blake, Diamond observes, develops a contrast here between the *guinea sun* and the *chorus sun* in order to criticize an empiricist account of perception. Although Blake is thinking of Locke's account, the criticism holds of later accounts of perception as well, such as Kant's and those of the post-positivist moral realists discussed above. Blake, in Diamond's reading, is not adding something extra to the guinea sun; he is talking about different perceptual capacities, different experiential possibilities.[24] Diamond writes, "He thinks of the perception of the guinea-sun as perception by a mind afraid to exercise its powers, dulled, paralyzed by a desire for a kind of conformity" (18). By contrast, the perceptual capacities of one who sees the chorus sun are lively, sharp, enthusiastic. Blake's remarks involve a conception of experience as *something that can be dulled or lively*. It also allows, as Diamond

24. He does not, say, *infer* or *impose* the chorus sun; this is not an *interpretation* if that word implies a triadic structure: interpreter, pre-interpreted referent, interpretation—as if all *that* might be set out before us. In this comparative context, the structure in question is resolutely dyadic.

puts it, "for a notion of genius in perception as opposed, at the extreme, to perception by a mind reined in by doubts, desires, fears" (ibid.).

It is easy, Diamond suggests, to overlook the Blakean notion of perceptual experience in societies such as ours. In such societies, she suggests,

> people are trained so that their experience and their description of it are not Blakean. Thus, for example, one of the aims of schooling, among us, is that there be consensus in children's representations of what they see. The child who sees as Blake did is taught that that is not *what he sees*; he may then come to see as he is expected to; he may then come to give the sort of description of what he sees that he is expected to. (ibid.)

In many societies, including much of the North Atlantic, education has a particular style, involving particular forms of training with language and perception, much of which aims at achieving common agreement in the descriptions that people offer of what they perceive. Such training can form the backdrop of how we then go on to talk about what we see, what sorts of perceptions and discussions we expect. If we are concerned, say, in philosophy, with developing an account of the external world, we might be very interested in how what we and others see might fit into that account. "But," Diamond points out, "we may not be looking at things in the world and saying what we see with that sort of interest" (19). The Blake example shows this; his interest is not in describing sense perception on the Lockean model, namely, for the sake of developing a theory of nature. Are we then to say it is not perceptual experience? Alongside the Blake example, Diamond puts that of seeing "anger in someone's eyes" and "someone's seeing life in mountains, trees, rocks, and rivers" (ibid.). Sure, Diamond concedes, you can assimilate these latter experiences to the practice of developing a theory of nature, and dock them for, say, being "animistic." But it is not self-evident why one should not, rather, take them in the Blakean spirit—as indexing a kind of vibrant awareness, a lively perceptual capacity, what Iris Murdoch, and Diamond following her, sometimes calls an enriched "quality of consciousness" (see Murdoch 1956, 34-36; Diamond 1996, 95)—or in some *other* way. And the fact, Diamond observes, that people of so-called scientific cultures, such as

Blake, can have such perceptual experiences tells against dismissing comparable perceptions of peoples from supposedly "non-scientific" cultures as being "unscientific" (2020, 19-20).

Blake gives us a notion of perceptual experience as something that can be alive and sharp or deadened and dull. This notion, Diamond thinks, exceeds the image of perceptual experience in many philosophical accounts insofar as the latter prize experiences—both sensory, and on that model, moral experiences—that are (purportedly) sober, publicly confirmable, and related to the idea of objective knowledge.

I will return to the question of the value of Blakean experience below. Now I want to consider another notion of experience that Diamond mentions, citing a remark by Wittgenstein:

> Life can educate one to belief in God. And *experiences* too are what bring this about; but I don't mean visions and other forms of sense-experience which show us 'the existence of this being' but, e.g., sufferings of various sorts. These neither show us God in the way a sense-impression shows us an object, nor do they give rise to *conjectures* about him. Experiences, thoughts,—life can force this concept on us (Wittgenstein 1980, 86e; quoted in Diamond 2020, 20)

Wittgenstein's notion of experience here is of "experience as changing and developing our understanding" (Diamond 2020, 20). However, Wittgenstein's way of thinking about experience shaping or educating us falls beyond of the scope of how many philosophers relate experience to learning. Sense-experience is often thought of as showing us the qualities of sensory objects. Such experience teaches us about those objects, say, as in Wittgenstein's passage, that they *exist*. Sense-experience may also give rise to conjectures about the world and then can also test and refine or destroy those conjectures. These typical ways of connecting experience and education are closely tied to belief—experience gives rise to or invalidates or refines beliefs and/or knowledge (ibid.). But Wittgenstein's account of experience-educating us is different from such models and explicitly not about belief or knowledge in these typical senses. Wittgenstein's individual *cannot help* but live with the notion *God*. Life *forces* it upon him. There is a *sense* to the idea of *God* for this individual; this person might even give reasons or explanations, when asked, for why he lives with this notion. But

his appeal will not be to "evidence of the senses" but to experience of another sort.[25] Diamond observes that we may be tempted by, many analytic philosophers may leave room for, a purely psychological explanation: that some people "*just go* from having experiences of *x* to beliefs that *y*" (21). But, Diamond writes, "The relation between their suffering and what they are thus led to can be imaginatively grasped, its sense can be seen" (ibid.). Wittgenstein suggests that there is a *sense* to what happens, not merely a *cause*.

Diamond connects Wittgenstein's notion of experience and education to ethics like this: "The relation which Wittgenstein says may hold between suffering and belief in God is a relation of the same character as may hold between experience and ethical vision" (ibid.). She uses a few examples to develop this idea; one is the relationship between William Wordsworth's life experiences and his subsequent thought, perceptions, and actions. She writes,

> the fells, the sights of shepherds, the fear struck into his heart by a looming cliff, the death of his father—all the feelings of the week of that death, all that he went through, have formed a permanent part of his soul. And all this may be thought of as *present in* what happens much later: it might be present years later in his thinking a "moral thought" or in his carrying out some kind act (for example), and its presence would then go to fix the character of the thought or act. (44-45)

Seeing the sense, Diamond suggests, of Wordsworth's moral thought, his actions and feelings, the character and logic of it all, involves seeing the shape given to his life, his embodied mind, his experiential capacities by a host of prior shaping experiences, some acute (a parent's death), other's less so (traversing the fells). Indeed, understanding his subsequent doings involves seeing the sense wrought in them by those prior experiences. The latter mold and color his *vision*, his orientation to and understanding of the world and himself, of the possibilities for each.

One way Diamond articulates the idea of experience educating one's moral capacities (i.e., moral vision, later moral experience) is in terms of the specialized uses we give to words. For

25. He might, say, cite his sufferings.

example, she discusses all that those of us who share a certain understanding of proper names can do and experience with them, and how we enable such experiences through teaching such uses to others, such as children. The Vietnam memorial is one of her examples. It is important, she suggests, that all of those proper names are written out on it. We are doing something in particular that would not be achieved by a plaque reading "For all those who died serving their country in Vietnam" (Diamond 2020, 34-35). She writes, "we make *human loss* an object of our thought through language, art, ritual and the like. We make certain ways of experiencing and thinking about loss possible through the use of words, including the connection we have forged between the proper name and what loss means" (35; emphasis original). This connection—between death and loss, on the one hand, and certain parts of our language, such as proper names, on the other—is essential to making sense of the memorial, to the act of writing out all of the names. Without that connection, it is difficult to explain *why this*. And it is through cultivating that connection through training into life with proper names (as some of us live it) that these sorts of practices of making loss a part of human experience and thought are made available to other people.[26]

Diamond is interested in how such examples show the limitations of philosophies of language that seek to develop a general and singular theory of meaning that might, say, provide universal principles for the translation of any sentence in one language into that of another.[27] For, she suggests, such examples and the experiences they enable cannot be so translated without distortion. Diamond writes, "When I say that we make certain ways of experiencing and thinking about loss possible through the use of words, I mean that these ways of experiencing loss are not

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26. We can thicken Diamond's observations by setting other examples alongside them, such as the monument to *the unknown* enslaved people organized by the Louisville-based IDEASxLab (see https://ideasxlab.com/unknown). Part of the gravity of the project stems from the fact that *we do not know these people's names*. Or consider the installation *Remembering Other* (2022) by Vietnamese American artist Teo Nguyen. The piece fills its gallery hall and consists of sixty austere stacks of white paper. Although they are blank, we are to imagine the names of all those Vietnamese and Americans killed in the Vietnam War listed on each sheet of paper. One stack represents the Americans who died; fifty-nine represent the Vietnamese.

27. She is thinking in particular of Donald Davidson's work (2001a; see also 2001b).

available without the cultural traditions involving the significance of proper names" (35). Her argument on these matters is nuanced; but my own interest in the Vietnam memorial example is, for now, in the mere notion of experience it involves—the notion of experience, in this case of loss and, say, anger, as *particular* (i.e., markedly distinct from other experiences involving the same words, say, proper names) and as an *achievement of thought and feeling*. Through learning to live with proper names in specific ways, particular, weighty experiences are enabled.

"Ethics and Experience" shows us Diamond at work to deflate preconceptions about how ethics and experience supposedly *must* relate. This paper also develops notions of experience that I want to take with us as we think about the other's potential value. The relevant notions include experience as something that can be shaped by prior experiences (from relatively unremarkable—e.g., Wordsworth on the fells—to intense—sufferings, the death of a parent), as something taught, say, by learning certain language practices (e.g., the use of proper names), something that can be livened or dulled (e.g., perception of chorus sun), weighty or trite (making of loss and death what we make of them). I think of the sorts of experiences made possible by prior experiences, especially quickened and weighty experiences, as kinds of experiential goods—valuable qualities and possibilities of experience. In the next section, I will suggest that other people, including our conceptual others, can give us these goods.

First, I want to connect the notion that certain language practices can enable certain experiences to the idea of *conceptual goods*. Diamond introduces this idea in "Losing Your Concepts" (1988), in which she explores "what kind of good a concept is," and correspondingly, "what kind of loss it is to lose concepts" (256). The notion *conceptual goods* refers to the intelligibility, the order and understanding certain concepts can bring to our lives and that includes the possibilities of further evaluation, value, senses of gravity, pleasure, loss, etc. that those patterns of understanding enable. One of Diamond's examples in "Losing Your Concepts" is the concept of parenthood as many of

us live with it, and how it structures our lives in specific ways that make available to us particular possibilities of betrayal, horror, joy, love, seriousness, and play (see 1988, 271-72). The same thing can be said of the notions of experience discussed above. What we do with proper names at the Vietnam memorial is a conceptual possibility as much as it is an experiential one; it is a possibility for experiencing and doing certain things made available by certain concepts, certain language-games involving our conception of proper names, individual persons, death, loss, etc. Likewise, Wittgenstein's believer employs the concept *God* in his experience, and Wordworth's and Blake's perceptions depend on all sorts of particular notions. These experiences draw on repertoires of concepts, and the value of these concepts is, in Diamond's view, indelibly linked to these further experiential possibilities.

We now have before us the idea that experience can shape our understanding; that living with certain forms of language, certain concepts can enable various experiences and possibilities of evaluation, feeling, gravity, weight in our lives; and that our experience and understanding can be enriched or dulled. I next want to connect these ideas to our relationships with other people and how they can be valuable for our moral-experiential-conceptual lives. Drawing from Diamond's writings, literature, and anthropology, I will suggest that other people, including our conceptual others, can enrich and transform our understanding in ways that matter for us, if they do, not because of our narrow epistemic concerns, but rather because of our interest in understanding well, richly, or deeply.

§4 Experience, Conceptual Goods, and the Other

4.1 The Enrichment of Concepts: Fowler on Sister and Animal, and the Figure of the Quickener

The first example takes inspiration from Diamond's discussion of written narratives in "Losing Your Concepts." I am particularly interested in Diamond's suggestion that novelists and other writers can enrich our understanding of our concepts. I want to connect this idea of

enrichment with the last section, especially the Blakean notion of experience. My idea is that others can enliven or develop our moral understanding and experience in a fashion reminiscent of the notion of experience Blake deploys. If we value such possibilities, our form of valuing them is distinct from narrowly epistemic concerns, from, say, concerns with more or more objective knowledge; instead our interest is in having a qualitatively improved quality of consciousness, a more sensitive or animated understanding of some part of life. I associate with the other who effects such invigoration the figure of the Quickener.

Diamond illustrates the possibility of such enrichment with the examples of Leo Tolstoy in *War and Peace* and Primo Levi in *"If This Is a Man" and "The Truce."* Such authors, she suggests, can enrich our lives with the concept human being or person by showing us, through imaginative descriptions and narrations, some of what can be involved in life with these words. Diamond foregrounds how Tolstoy and Levi illustrate that, "It is part of the concept of a human being that an immense amount of what being human is for us can be present in a look that passes between two people; it is part of the concept that *all that* can equally be denied in a look" (264). That we can in a look acknowledge or deny *what it is,* for some of us, *to be human* belongs to the meaning of human being. Diamond suggests that writers, such as novelists, can put this aspect of our concept human being before us as well as develop it for us. They do so by showing this recognition and denial in action.[28]

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28. For example, in *War and Peace*, Pierre, the protagonist, is brought before a general as a prisoner. As Diamond recounts the scene, the general initially only sees Pierre as a prisoner. Then something in Pierre's voice invites a second look. Quoting from the novel, Diamond writes, "At that moment, 'an immense number of things passed dimly through both their minds.' Tolstoy says nothing of what things are; but they may be such things as scenes of childhood, of courtship, of the death of a parent or sibling, … they may be hopes and dreams…. In that second look, human relations between the two men are established" (Diamond 1988, 264). That second look, Diamond explains, saves Pierre's life. Alongside this case, Diamond sets Levi's works. In the relevant scene, Levi, a chemist and prisoner in Auschwitz, is considered for a position working for the Reich. If he is given this position, he will be saved from the lethal promises of the camp. He comes before the supervising chemist, "and the look that passes between them 'was not one between two men'" (Diamond 1988, 265, quoting Levi 1979, 111). These sorts of narrative illustrations, Diamond explains, "show us what there can be in a look, what sense of the sharedness of human life, what denial of that solidarity, what the depth may be of recognition and of its denial" (1988, 265). This showing, in turn, can "illuminate" the notion human being for us and can also "elaborate and deepen it" (ibid.), say, by heightening our sense that such possibilities belong to these

As Levi, Tolstoy, and other authors can quicken our understanding of "human being," so too our other people can enrich our understanding of the nonhuman. Consider, for instance, the work Karen Joy Fowler does on the concepts sister and animal in her novel *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* (2013). In the idiom of the last chapter, Fowler and her narrator are people who know how do something with these concepts that Fowler's readers may not know how to do, even though they—we—in some sense share those concepts with her, know how to use them in other ways. These further uses, which may be opaque to us at the outset of the book, themselves have a certain liveliness, and one effect of Fowler's narration, insofar as she is successful, is to convey that energy to us, to our understanding of sisters and animals.

Fowler's novel tells the story of the Cooke family in the first-person from the perspective of twenty-two year old Rosemary Cooke, its youngest member and a college student at U. C. Davis. We enter the narration in Rosemary's present, 1996, which is, she tells us, already in the middle of the Cooke story. This middle is characterized by—"is all about"—the absence of Rosemary's siblings: it is ten years since Rosemary saw her older brother, Lowell, and seventeen since her sister, Fern, the middle sibling, disappeared. We are told nothing more of this disappearance early on. Besides Rosemary, the remaining Cookes include her mother and father. In the early chapters of the novel, we are made familiar with the remaining Cookes' relationships with each other and the poignant and quotidian tensions and resentments that make up familial relations. For instance, we learn that years have passed since Rosemary spoke at length with her father, and her mother now refuses to mediate. Rosemary's parents, we are told, "persisted in pretending [they] were a close-knit family, a family

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concepts, our sense of the stakes and precarity of living in a world with beings who might be done great evil or good by our "looks" and other forms of (non)acknowledgment. To grasp what these authors show us is to understand the concept human being in *this* fashion (i.e., as connected to these possibilities and this weight). As a corollary, to miss what these authors do is to not have the concept of a human being as one might (ibid.).

who enjoyed a good heart-to-heart" (17). Rosemary calls this "a triumph of wishful thinking" in the shadow of her missing siblings.

As she introduces us to her family, the reader gradually gets to know Rosemary herself—her distinctive way of thinking and attending to the world. Her manner of thinking comes out in a narration that flits from topic to topic, freely associating. We are told of the present, of college life and new friends. But we get glimpses of the past as well, as Rosemary's narration meanders. We are told, for instance, of her childhood home where her brother and sister would climb an apple tree in and out of their of their bedrooms. Some such images are vaguely remembered, the wispy memories of childhood. Others have more detail, or perhaps saturation, such as this one of Fern: "Though I was only five when she disappeared from my life, I do remember her. I remember her sharply—her smell and touch, scattered images of her face, her ears, her chin, her eyes. Her arms, her feet, her fingers. But I don't remember her fully, not the way Lowell does" (55). Eventually we hear a story of Rosemary being sent to her grandparents as a child and returning home to find her brother furious, her mother distraught, and that Fern has disappeared, been "given away." Rosemary had been frightened then and, shamefully, relieved—in the way a child can be—that it was not her who had been given up (56). As an adult she never speaks and rarely thinks of Fern, but hopes to see Lowell someday (55). He "hated [her] guts" when he left, we are told, blaming her for Fern's disappearance (47).

We gradually learn of how Fern's (so far mysterious) disappearance, understandably, affected the entire family. In addition to Lowell's anger, their mother became "vaporous" and hardly ate, keeping to her room for long stretches. At the same time, we slowly start to hear surprising things about Fern: that a grandmother was perhaps glad she was gone, that she had eaten a beloved photograph, that neighbors and other family members do not understand the family's turmoil. "Anyone would think Fern had died," her grandmother says (67).

It is not until page 77 that we are told that Fern is, of course, a chimpanzee. Some readers, the narrator acknowledges, will have guessed this; others will be annoyed. But she has reasons, most importantly she explains to the reader: "I wanted you to see how it really was. I tell you Fern is a chimp and, already, you aren't thinking of her as my sister. You're thinking instead that we loved her as if she were some kind of pet" (77).[29] But, Rosemary insists, "Fern was not the family dog. She was Lowell's little sister, his shadow, his faithful sidekick" (77-78), and Rosemary's older sister, with whom she competed, slept most nights, went everywhere.

Fern and Rosemary were raised together from infancy as a part of their father's psychology research.[30] They spent many hours playing games and running exercises under the observation of a team of affection graduate student researchers. But the Cooke parents eventually sent Fern away, telling the children she'd gone to a farm. She was increasingly unpredictable, they said, and ever stronger with age. She bit one student and threw another. She was too much of a liability. Rosemary suspects, however, that Fern's disappearance had as much to do with Rosemary telling them that she was afraid of Fern after a bloody incident with a kitten (269-70). It also comes out that Fern had not been sent to a farm, but rather a large research facility where she was treated roughly and lived with other chimpanzee research subjects.

The narrator's entire persona is inflected by this early relationship and the scars of its breaking. For instance, of her descriptions of childhood memory she tells us to "please assume that I am talking continuously in all the scenes that follow until I tell you that I'm not" (57). This talkativeness was connected to the fact that her parents were observing comparative linguistic development across species, with Rosemary and Fern as subjects. A relic of it remains in the narration as Rosemary recounts numerous factoids at the start of most chapters loosely connected

29. Note the parallel with how Blake and Diamond insist the chorus sun experience is not a third object, a mediating interpretation on top of the facts. In both cases, *this* (sister, chorus sun) is how things are.
30. Fowler gives us a number of nonfictional examples of such experimental practices.

with the time period she is reflecting on. However, as an adult, she speaks infrequently, in a kind of inversion of her hyper-active speaking as a child. Similarly, she repeatedly asks the reader's forgiveness for her reactions to events in the story, such as her surprise when she finds a near stranger waiting for her in her apartment after a trip. She does not know, she tells us, what a normal response is, and she has regularly struggled with such things. Such struggles, we learn, are connected to the norms and expectations established in her early intimacy with Fern versus those expected in kindergarten, elementary school, or adulthood. Chimps, for example, touch each other with a frequency and familiarity that may seem violative in the kindergarten classroom—a hard lesson for five year old Rosemary (30).

In these ways, through both memories, of skin, fingers, etc., and the scars of loss and betrayal, Fowler conveys the intimacy of Fern and Rosemary's sisterhood throughout the novel. Think of all that the sign *sister* can bear and here much of it is borne, by Fern. It is Fowler through Rosemary who helps us to appreciate this possibility. She does this by narrating the relationship between Fern and Rosemary as one of sisterhood, narrating the loss as the loss of a sister, and then eventually telling us one of the two is a chimpanzee. The thick relationship conveyed in the early chapters comes to form the backdrop of subsequent events, helps us feel better, for instance, the depth of the betrayal between them when Rosemary eventually goes to the facility holding Fern and they see each other for the first time in almost twenty years. In these ways, Fowler shows us the potential intimacy, mutual understandings, and shared sense of fairness between these creatures, that *here* there can be not only some abstract "kinship" but sisterhood. One effect of these techniques may be, though nothing ensures it, that the concepts sister and chimpanzee, or ape, or animal, will be qualitatively changed for us, if only to some degree, in a fashion I should like to call enrichment, a kind of quickening or making alive and vibrant in the manner of Blake's remark.

Fowler's novel, if it is successful, shows one way someone with distinct uses of concepts can relate to matters we may care about, namely, by elaborating and enriching our understanding of our concepts of the nonhuman in a fashion irreducible to narrow epistemic concerns. Our interest in what she does, if we have it, like Diamond's in Tolstoy and Levi, is not an interest in learning more facts about sisters or chimps; it is, rather, in how she teaches us to hold these concepts with new appreciation, an enriched sensibility, an enhanced saturation. I associate with this possibility the figure of the Quickener—one who enlivens our life with a set of concepts.[31]

4.2 Transformations in Understanding: Socrates in the Crito and the Figure of the Metamorphic

Diamond also discusses the ways in which others can not only enrich and develop concepts we already have, but transform our patterns of conceptualizing, and therefore of understanding, experiencing, feeling about a situation or ourselves. I call the figure associated with this possibility the Metamorphic. This figure comes out clearly in Diamond's essay "Missing the Adventure" (1991f). The topic of this paper, as she puts it, is moral attention and inattention or obtuseness (309). Her opening case is of "philosophical obtuseness": William Frankena's discussion of Socrates in the *Crito* in his influential introductory text *Ethics* (1973, 1-3). Frankena takes Socrates's reasoning about whether to escape from prison as "an example of ethical thinking" (Frankena 1973, 2). In Frankena's reading, Socrates offers three arguments against escaping and breaking the state's laws, each with two premises: "a general moral rule or principle and a statement of fact" (Diamond 1991f, 309; see Frankena 1973, 2). Here is Diamond's summary of those arguments: "first, we ought never to harm anyone, and if Socrates escaped he would be harming the State; secondly, we ought to keep our promises, and if Socrates escapes he will be breaking a promise; and thirdly, we ought to obey or respect our parents and teachers, and if Socrates escapes he will be disobeying his parent and

31. That the others here are novelists is merely illustrative (this work is not peculiar to novels, though they may accomplish it in distinctive ways).

teacher" (Diamond 1991f, 310; see Frankena 1973, 2-4). These arguments, Frankena claims, are instructive: they show a serious moral agent at work applying moral principles to specific cases. From here, his discussion turns to how a reflective agent might justify the principles themselves.

Frankena's account, Diamond observes, will seem unremarkable to many of us. She insists, however, that it is very odd.[32] Diamond illuminates the peculiarity of the account by reconsidering the third "statement of fact," "that if Socrates escapes he will be disobeying his parent." "That," Diamond observes, "is not a fact unless it is a fact that the Laws of Athens are Socrates's parents" (1991f, 310). This observation, namely, that Frankena calls an ordinary fact what is no ordinary fact, is Diamond's therapeutic opening. For this observation shows that Frankena is in the grip of a picture about what moral reasoning is like and is merely applying this picture to the *Crito*, rather than attending with care to what Socrates is, in actuality, up to when he calls the Laws of Athens his parents, and therefore to what moral reasoning can involve. Frankena has assimilated the *Crito* to his picture and proceeds to explain Socrates's doings in terms of his own conception. In particular, Diamond explains, Frankena "does not envisage as a possibility that any moral thinking goes on in what one takes to be the facts of a case, how one comes to see them or describe them" (310). If one is doing ethics, then, in Frankena's picture, the facts are more or less settled and the real question is how they inform our principles of action.

What is amazing about Frankena's account, Diamond notes, is that Socrates's description of the facts of his situation in the *Crito* is an act of remarkable, original, and imaginative moral thought—casting moral activity as anything but merely applying principles to settled facts. This imaginative work is hard to miss; indeed, the peculiarity of Socrates's descriptive behavior is an important part of the dialogue. These facts index Frankena's narrowness of vision (311). Here is

32. We merely overlook its oddness, she suggests, because we are so used to Frankena's way of talking about ethics.

Diamond's summary of the exchange between Socrates and his friend Crito over whether it is right for Socrates to escape prison and execution:

> When Socrates asks Crito whether, if he escapes without persuading the State to let him go, he would be treating someone badly, and not just treating someone badly but treating badly those whom least of all he should, when Socrates follows that with the question whether he must stand by his agreements or no, Crito has no idea how to answer; he does not understand the questions, does not know how to bring the terms of the questions into connection with the case before him. Socrates then by an exercise of moral imagination involving the personification of the Laws enables Crito to see the situation differently. (310-11; see Plato 2002, 49c-50a)

In addition to displaying Socrates's moral imaginative powers, Diamond suggests that from the start of the dialogue we also see Crito's imagination at work. He tries to imagine why it is Socrates might not be seeking escape (see Plato 2002, 44e-46a). As Diamond observes, we see him imagining life after Socrates dies, what life will be like for Socrates's friends and children—full of resentment, shame, and anger with Socrates (Diamond 1991f, 311; Plato 2002, 45c-46a). But through Socrates's invitation to examine together the situation, and Socrates's understanding of it, Crito is encouraged to reevaluate his own understanding and to reimagine the lives of Socrates's friends, family, and country after his death (Plato 2002, 46b, 54c). As Diamond explains, Socrates "wants to teach Crito and his other friends to see what he is doing, wants to give them a way into his story" (Diamond 1991f, 311). His central technique for helping them into his story is to personify Athens and its Laws as his parents, and to imagine Socrates and Crito conversing with this personification (Plato 2002, 50a-54c). "Look at it this way," Socrates says, and then he describes the laws and state confronting and questioning him and Crito as they envision fleeing the prison (50a).

Diamond writes that Socrates's

> imaginative description of his situation, including the personification of the Laws, is an exercise of his moral creativity, his artistry. It is as much a significant moral doing as is his choosing to stay rather than to escape, or, rather, it in fact goes to any full characterization of what Socrates is doing in staying: the story of his death includes the imaginative understanding of the death by his friends, the understanding to which they are led by his remarkable redescription of the situation. (Diamond 1991f, 311)

To ignore these imaginative aspects of the *Crito*, "takes some doing" (311). The personified voice of Athens' laws speaks for nearly half of the dialogue (Plato 2002, 50-54d). More importantly, to ignore how Socrates conveys his understanding of his situation is to miss "what it was he was doing, what he was making of his death in prison"—to miss his thought itself and what it shows of what moral thought can be (Diamond 1991f, 311). It is striking that Frankena can assimilate Socrates's imaginative description of his situation to a model of moral thought in which the description of the facts of a case is straightforward.

Again, I want to hold onto both Diamond's general deflationary and specific expansive suggestions. With respect to the latter, she is interested in Socrates's activity, in his capacity to bring new understandings of a situation into view for his friends through his particular arts of description and imagination. This is something other people sometimes do for us, something Socrates in the dialogue does for his friends. Diamond writes, "What is possible in Socrates's story is something unthought of by his friends, and depends on his creative response to the elements of his situation, his capacity to transform it by the exercise of creative imagination, and thus to bring what he does into connection with what has happened in his life" (312). Through an extraordinary act of improvisation, Socrates, Diamond suggests, brings new, previously unthought of moral possibilities into view for his friends, he enables new moral-experiential perceptions of his situation. Diamond is also interested in how Frankena's preconceptions about what moral thought is like impede his capacity to appreciate Socrates's imaginative accomplishments. I want to associate with this figure of the other who transforms our understanding the figure of the Metaphoric—one who moral-conceptually transfigures.

4.3 The Other and the More-than-human: Kohn and the Risk of Soul Blindness

I see no *a priori* reason why the possibilities of moral quickening and transformation we see performed in Diamond's writings by novelists and philosophers such as Socrates should not belong

to how others might shape our lives with the more-than-human, including people living even with radically different concepts from our own.[33] (I will discuss *a posteriori* reasons why this possibility might not be actualized in Chapter 5.) To illustrate this possibility, I look to another example. A growing body of research into multispecies forms of living gives us many examples of individuals, namely, ethnographers, having their conceptual/experiential capacities transformed and/or refined by learning to understand the nonhuman on their interlocutors' terms. Eduardo Kohn's influential *How Forests Think* (2013) exemplifies this pattern.

Kohn's book results from sustained ethnographic engagement with the Quichua speaking Runa people of the Ávila village in the Upper Amazon of Ecuador (11). The text has many aims, including the development of a semiotic theory that undermines the conflation of sign-use with language-use; through his encounters with his interlocutors' forms of conceptualizing the more-than-human, and in dialogue with the semiotics of Peirce, Kohn develops an account of how all living things—"whether bacterial, floral, fungal, or animal"—use signs, an account of *life* as necessarily and constitutively semiotic (Kohn 2013, 6). Kohn suggests that the fact that life as such uses signs opens new disciplinary avenues for anthropology, and one of his interests is to start exploring such an anthropology "beyond the human" (6-7). These aspects of Kohn's work are immensely interesting. However, I will foreground some of the conceptual-moral-experiential possibilities that the Ávila Runa make available for Kohn's life and potentially his readers by initiating him into their conceptual worlds.[34] Through his immersion in Runa life, Kohn's moral-conceptual possibilities are augmented and enriched, changes illustrated with two related examples:

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33. Indeed, there is an important sense in which Socrates, for instance, does live with a different set of concepts than Crito, and that he makes those available to him through their dialogue. I will return to these differences below when talking about why one might not care about the forms of potential nontriviality I discuss here.
34. This extraction from Kohn's book is consistent with his aims in multiple senses. His guiding questions include, "What kinds of insights about the nature of the world become apparent when we attend to certain engagements with parts of that world that reveal some of its different entities, dynamics, and properties?" (10; see also 14, 23).

Kohn's learning new possibilities for attending to the world and the novel risks that accompany such possibilities of attention.

The Ávila Runa take seriously the notion that the world is populated by other-than-human selves, what Kohn calls an "ecology of selves" (16). This taking-seriously is signaled by how the Ávila Runa talk about nonhuman entities *seeing* humans and other entities—*recognizing* other entities, as, say, either prey or predator (see, e.g., Kohn 2013, 106-7). Interspecies relationality, Kohn explains, is "overwhelmingly predatory" in this ecology of selves; entities are understood through predatory-prey relations (120). Beings are thought to understand themselves and each other through these relations – *as prey* to something, *predator* to something else (respectively, say, agouti—a large forest rodent—to jaguar, agouti to vegetation). The *alma* or soul for the Runa is a quality that emerges in such relations: one has a soul if one can relate to other souls in specific ways, say, as a jaguar relates to an agouti (as predator) or an agouti to a hunting dog (as prey). Kohn writes, "What *kind* of being one comes to be is the product of how one sees as well as how one is seen by other kinds of beings" (120). In such relations, predators and prey use signs to represent, remember, and react to each other; therefore, each lives with representations of the other, tacitly of themselves, and is said to have an *alma* (106-7).

The predatory-prey relation is unstable within the forest and liable to reversal. "Who counts as an *I* or a *you* and who becomes an *it*," Kohn explains, "is relative and can shift. Who is predator and who is prey is contextually dependent" (119). The Runa take great pleasure in talking about how these roles get reversed (ibid.).[35] And they also try to harness this reversibility. For instance, the Runa think that men lose their soul-stuff in intercourse, rendering them ineffective predators and

35. Kohn recounts a story told in Ávila of a jaguar that lost a tooth in a tortoise's shell and was unable to hunt. The tortoise, with the tooth still in its shell, is later seen eating the jaguar's starved corpse. The predator/prey relationship was thus reversed (119).

unthreatening to game. So when their partners get pregnant, such men are taken with hunting parties to attract animals (123).

As they hunt (often with their dogs), fish, and trap, and try to avoid becoming prey themselves, the Runa regularly practice assuming and managing the perspectives of the forest's many selves. This of course involves first recognizing that all these entities have points of view, and that those points of view matter for how the Runa wish to get on in the forest. If you and your dog fail to appreciate how an agouti (a large forest rodent) might see you as a predator, you may come home empty handed. If you and your dog fail to appreciate that a jaguar might see both of you as prey, then you may fail to come home (see Kohn 2013, 107). In light of their dependence on the forest, Kohn explains, the Runa are forced "to recognize that these creatures inhabit a network of relations that is predicated in part on the fact that its constitutive members are living, thinking selves" (17). "The Runa," as Kohn puts it, "enter this ecology of selves *as selves*. They hold that their ability to enter this web of relations—to be aware of and to relate to other selves—depends on the fact that they *share this quality* with the other beings that make up this ecology" (17, my emphasis). The play of the predator-prey dynamic depends on both parties: one is predator or prey not only because of how one sees oneself, but also because of how other selves see one. If the selves of the forest do not recognize the Runa as part of this dynamic, then the Runa will not successfully interact with those selves—for the failure of recognition by the forest selves indicates that the Runa are not successfully predator or prey. Selfhood for the Runa is thus widely distributed, *sharing in* this distribution is a necessary condition for the interaction between selves, and *recognizing* this distribution is a condition for *fruitful* interactions.

Kohn reports that the Runa display "an inordinate interest in situating perspectives," which in turn "encourages an almost Zen-like mindfulness to one's precise state of being at any given moment" (127). Kohn contrasts the Runa's attention to multispecies perspectives with

anthropology's relationship to multicultural perspectives. Both involve a kind of defamiliarizing reflexivity, but of different sorts. Through disorienting immersion in other, often foreign cultures, ethnographic fieldwork can defamiliarize aspects of one's own culture. By contrast, Runa practices of defamiliarization involve attentive and imaginative immersion in "a different kind of body" (125). "Natures," Kohn writes, "are what become strange here, not cultures. Bodies are multiple and mutable, and the human body is only one of the many kinds of bodies that a self might inhabit" (ibid.). This kind of imaginative work can be unsettling, Kohn reports, such as when two of his interlocutors realize that while urinating in the forest, a jaguar had been nearby watching them. Imagining the jaguar watching them in this vulnerable, private moment is disturbing, making one viscerally aware of one's vulnerably to such predators (127). Thanks to his experiences in Ávila, these forms of attention, and their denaturalizing possibilities, enter Kohn's life. Generalizing about the Runa's insights, he writes, "Some notion of the motivations of others is necessary for people to get by in a world inhabited by volitional beings. Our lives depend on our abilities to believe in and act on the provisional guesses we make about the motivations of other selves" (118). I take such generalizations to express Kohn's metabolized acquisition of the Runa's attentive concerns, to reflect a set of new ways of conceptualizing his own life in relation the more-than-human.

The same insights that attend the Runa's concern with nonhuman selves introduce novel challenges. Kohn calls one such risk *soul blindness*, which refers to "various debilitating forms of soul loss that result in an inability to be aware of and relate to other soul-possessing selves in this ecology of selves" (117). Soul blindness denotes an incapacity to recognize other selves as selves. This possibility enters Runa life in many ways. Hunters can be rendered soul blind by shamans who steal their hunting soul, suspending their ability to differentiate animals from the environment. In dreams, hunters can kill the souls of animals, disabling their capacity to detect predators. Likewise, shamans can steal the souls of the aya huasca plants used by rivals, robbing the plants of their powers.

"Caught up in the webs of predation that structure this forest ecology of selves," soul blindness can be disastrous (116-17). Kohn writes, "To remain selves, all selves must recognize the soul-stuff of the other souled selves that inhabit the cosmos" (117). If one loses the ability to recognize "the soul-stuff" of other selves, say, that *that* is a predator and *this* prey, then one risks the permanent dissolution of oneself. "It would be impossible," he explains, "for people in Ávila to hunt or to relate in any other way within this ecology of selves without treating the myriad beings that inhabit the forest as the animate creatures that they are. Losing this ability would sever the Runa from this web of relations" (118).

Soul blindness is Kohn's term for a particular possible threat that haunts Runa life, a life that simultaneously acknowledges the ensoulment of nonhuman entities and requires the non-acknowledgment of that ensoulment (through the objectification and consumption of other animals and plants). The term itself is Cavell's (see 2008, 92-93); Kohn adapts it as part of his attempt to make intelligible to himself and his readers a form of understanding and some of its concerns that have entered his life through his prolonged encounter with the Runa of Ávila. The inability to recognize other selves as selves as a disaster—*this* is a new kind of possibility, a new kind of inattention, a new potential problem that now partially shapes Kohn's life and potentially that of his readers. Ian Hacking gives us useful vocabulary to describe this shaping. Commenting on G. E. M. Anscombe's analysis of intention, he writes, "When new descriptions become available, when they become the sorts of things that it is all right to say, to think then there are new things to choose to do. When new intentions become open to me, because new descriptions, new concepts, become available to me, I live in a world of new opportunities" (1995, 236). Following Hacking, we might say that the Runa make more descriptions under which to act available to Kohn and, potentially, his reader. Since the changes affected in Kohn include these sorts of new conceptual and moral

possibilities, I am inclined to associate the figure of the Metamorphic with the Runa in relation to his life.[36]

§5 The Unboundedness of the Other's Potential Nontriviality

In dialogue with Diamond's writings, I have suggested that other people, including people living with very different concepts from our own, can enter our lives and enrich or powerfully transform our understandings of ourselves and the world, effecting changes that are indelibly moral. That is one way to flesh out another person's nontriviality for us. There is nothing particularly philosophical about this suggestion. There is nothing, say, *necessary* about it; it is an ordinary possibility, a familiar possibility that only gains salience in a context in which it has disappeared from view. I am arguing that we eco-conversionists find ourselves in such a context insofar as we are preoccupied with conversion, held in the grips of an image of the other as trivial, as inviting or even necessitating conversion.

The figures I have developed are simplified illustrations. I have offered them to give us something to hold onto while I unfold the idea of others' potential nontriviality. Yet, the ways in which another person might valuably impact one's life, might show their nontriviality are unbounded. There is no limit to be drawn. I have tried to show this to be the case in my procedure so far. The mere multiplication of simplified figures of the other—as Device, Informant, Epistemic Revolutionary, and now Quickener and Metamorphic—aims not at a complete inventory of how

36. However, there may also be a sense in which the Runa's effects on Kohn more so resemble the work of the Quickener; it may be fairer to say that the Runa refine, enrich, enliven Kohn's understanding. It may also be that both sorts of effects are at work. Here the heuristic, recollective significance of my images return. Their function is to keep certain kinds of possibilities before us. I see no problem in saying aspects of each figure are work in this case insofar as we appreciate the sort of moral nontriviality of the Runa vis-à-vis Kohn's life that interests me.

others might matter but rather at spurring the recognition that others can figure into one's own life in numerous significant ways.[37]

The open-endedness of the other's potential significance is also indicated by the contingency of my description of the Quickener and Metamorphic. Just as the post-positivist moral realists presuppose one way of bringing ethics-talk and experience-talk together (namely, by collapsing the former into the latter), the connections between ethics and experience I have drawn from Diamond's writings to develop these latest figures of the other are merely one more set of connections—not the last or only. If we were to draw ethics and experience together in another way, some further relation to the other might come into view. There is no one way to relate our ideas about, say, ethics and our ideas about experience, something we might describe in the abstract and hold to be true in all cases. There are only all the possible ways we might actually, intelligibly bring these words and related ideas together, and those actual possibilities are not fixed, but dynamic, as dynamic as the meaning of the words *ethics* and *experience* themselves. Similarly, insofar as the other might prove significant vis-à-vis moral life in whatever way we bring ethics and experience together, there is no one way, or fixed set of ways, the other might factor in but an open-ended range of possible relations and related effects. Each time we change how ethics and experience relate, we open a new range of ways others might factor into that relation.

But the unboundedness of the others' potential ethical significance can be bolstered further. For there are no bounds on what valuing can look like, on what it can involve. I shall turn to a final paper from Diamond to elaborate this claim. The upshots of the boundlessness of the shape of value are at least twofold. First, with respect to the figures of the *Metaphoric* and *Quickener*, insofar as

37. As Wittgenstien puts it in a relevant remark, "In giving all these examples I am not aiming at some kind of completeness…They are only meant to enable the reader to shift for himself when he encounters conceptual difficulties" (2009b, §202).

there are no bounds on the structure of value, there are none on how others might value the nonhuman, and so likewise none on how the other, as *Metamorphic* or *Quickener*, might teach us to value the nonhuman, might quicken, shape, and reshape our understanding of the nonhuman. Secondly, with respect to the other as such, there are no bounds on how it is we may value the other, how the other may come to matter to us, for us and what we care for. Valuing is an open-ended, motley affair, and so how others might teach us to value or come to value for or to us is likewise unbounded.

Diamond offers numerous sources to develop these ideas (see, e.g., 2018, 2020), but few are as explicit as her paper, "Suspect Notions and the Concept Police" (2021). In this piece, Diamond argues that "there is no grammar of value in general, no general understanding available to us as philosophers of what it comes to, or can come to, for something to be of value in human life" (17). Diamond develops this open-ended, polymorphic conception of value over and against our tendency to think that what it is to value something is one thing, that we can fail to see that what it is to value something can be many things, including things we haven't imagined. In the paper in question, Diamond articulates these ideas in dialogue with a number of philosophers who fail precisely on these points. Central to her discussion is philosopher Guy Kahane's misinterpretation of the shape of value at work in Michael Sandel's 2007 book *The Case Against Perfection*, in which Kahane tries to assimilate the shape of value in question to a prior paradigm and ends up missing it all together.

Sandel, Diamond tells us, argues against the use of technology to "design children" according to their parents' desires. As part of his discussion, he cites William F. May's remarks at the President's Council on Bioethics in 2002. May had spoken of "the role in human life of openness to the unbidden;" his examples to illustrate this idea included all that people do not elect and yet receive or must cope with when they elect a partner or try to have children (Diamond 2021, 8).

Sandel, in turn, refers to May's remarks to suggest in relationship to the idea of designing children that parenthood can teach us openness to the unbidden. He suggests that such openness is a kind of good, a praiseworthy value that invites us "to abide the unexpected, to live with dissonance, to reign in the impulse to control" (quoted in Diamond 2010, 8-9). Diamond suggests that a spirit of mastery or control emerges in Sandel's account as the disposition that opposes openness to the unbidden; Sandel, she thinks, objects to such mastery—or desire for it—as we might see it at work in the designing of children. What he means by such a stance or orientation is difficult to ascertain. This is the sort of thing that shows itself in someone's behavior. Such an orientation may be shown in how someone thinks, speaks, and acts, in the sorts of things someone takes seriously, what they trivialize or understand, how they make room for the particular cares that make up their life (21-22). She writes, "Sandel's idea of *openness to the unbidden* as something we should take to be of value makes sense in the context of the erosion of that possibility through the transformation of *having a child* into an activity in which we can get what we want through the exercise of technological mastery" (22). In the example of parenthood, then, we see the stakes of the "erosion" of our openness to the unbidden. In an important sense, we end up with distorted notions of and relationships to children.

Kahane, in turn, asks what Sandel can mean by endorsing openness to the unbidden. That is, he takes Sandel's terms to be unclear, especially the meaning of "mastery" and what is "unbidden." He argues that Sandel misunderstands these concepts and as a result his arguments in favor of openness to the unbidden are confused and groundless.[38] Sandel appeals to the value of openness to the unbidden in his objection to the spirit of mastery. So Kahane asks whether the unbidden is of value and if so of what sort. If it is of value, Diamond recounts, "we should (Kahane says) be able to give some account of the supposed value in other 'corners' of human life" (10). This leads him to

38. Kahane's own argument, on the other hand, relies on a correct understanding of the relevant notions and what openness to the unbidden involves (See Diamond 2021, 10).

explain what the unbidden is, which amounts in his account to *that which we do not elect to effect*. On the basis of this definition, which Kahane sees as the clear and proper meaning of the term unbidden, he considers what it would be to try by action or inaction to increase the unbidden in various parts of life. He concludes that it would be absurd to endorse such increases, as if we should hoorah each weed that sprouts in our garden.[39] There appear to be no reasons to take openness to unelected happenings in any particular way at all, let alone to endorse such openness. This leads Kahane to complain against Sandel that the latter endorses letting whatever happens happen (11). In Kahane's hands, such an endorsement looks like so much silliness. To merely embrace whatever happens, he thinks, is to refuse ethically relevant distinctions and decisions, to turn away from the difficulty of moral judgment and moral progress. In Kahane's account, then, openness to the unbidden is irrelevant to practical life, if not condemnable.

Diamond suggests that Kahane misunderstands Sandel because the latter does not "speak of value *with a certain conceptual shape*," namely, as a kind of object aimed at in action that can be increased or decreased (17; emphasis original). She suggests further that if one assumes that talk of value must be talk of something that shares the presumed conceptual shape, then you may misunderstand and distort the speech and thought of others. "You will," she writes, "try to interpret remarks like Sandel's so they are about something *with that conceptual shape*" (ibid.). And the fact that Kahane sees Sandel's remarks as requiring translation, and then arrives at an absurd conclusion,[40] suggests that for Kahane there is "no conceptual room" for Sandel's meaning "given Kahane's understanding of what it is to mean that something is of value" (ibid.).

It is obvious to Kahane, says Diamond, that if something is valuable, "one should try, if it is possible and not impermissible on other grounds, to bring it about" (24). This rule is supposed to

39. Sandel, Diamond observes, never speaks of the unbidden as something to be increased.
40. One that Sandel in fact anticipates.

help us discuss practical problems. Diamond uses the example of selecting the sex of embryos. Kahane's principle will invite us to look at the consequences of such selection. For instance, this practice might lead to social destabilization resulting from skewed sex ratios. And that might count as a reason against the practice. But within this construal of the situation, other sorts of considerations will be made invisible—for they do not fit within the picture. For instance, "*the attitude towards life that is expressed in the exercise of technological control of the sex of children*" is excluded as a consideration from the model (ibid.; emphasis original).

Diamond's interest in the misunderstanding between Kahane and Sandel is only indirectly related to the substance of each view. One gets the sense that she is sympathetic to Sandel's position and skeptical of Kahane's, but we will miss key aspects of her argument if we focus too much on whether "openness to the unbidden" is good or not. Rather, Diamond is interested in how *what it is to value* is not one thing but instead a family of things, and how we can be tempted to overlook this family's multiplicity. Kahane's position illustrates this possibility. He is in the grips of a picture of what valuing must be like. This renders Sandel's mode of value invisible to him and leads to all sorts of confusions that start off from assuming a false account of the former's views. Attending to Sandel's work in fact deflates Kahane's presumption that all valuing must look as he thinks.

To show how Kahane's model excludes not only Sandel's esteem for a certain orientation toward life, but also other shapes of value, Diamond reviews two additional sets of cases of valuing, which continue show the motley character of value as such. The first includes cellist Pablo Casals and philosopher Bernard Williams on music; the second is novelist D.H. Lawrence on his relationship with his cow Susan. She hopes by reviewing these cases to elucidate the recognition that what it means for something to be alive as valuable in the life of a person, family, friendship, or community, say, is not one thing (and not because a peculiar aliveness corresponds to each of these

categories, though some version of that idea may be true).[41] Accordingly, we cannot say what the aliveness-of-something-as-valuable is like in advance of looking at human lives with value. She writes, "We see [what value can come to] as we come to recognize in this or that case how a particular value is alive as a value in human life. Only there do we see what responsiveness to that value may be, and only there do we see what failure of responsiveness may be" (17).

Diamond attends to how Casals speaks "of how playing Bach's music brings him to awareness of the wonder of life" and "of music as filling him with a feeling of the incredible marvel of being a human being" (18).[42] Casals struggles, Diamond suggests, to express his reaction to music, to its existence, and his view of the world when he appreciates music's reality in it. He responds to it as a kind of grand gift. The existence of music, as this is appreciated by him in certain circumstances, and the "wonder of the world" that such a thing might exist. To try to assimilate the value of music and the world that emerges here, that Casals expresses in various ways, to a moral theory in which things of value are consequences sought by actions, to be increased or decreased is to miss the shape of value here. Casals isn't saying there should be more music, nor, quite strangely, that there should be more of the (wondrous) world. There is no determinate *it* or *thing* here to be quantitatively increased. To so assimilate the shape of his valuing to such a theory is to miss, as Diamond puts it, "what it may be to say 'Music is *wonderful*'" (19). Diamond explains, "A person who says this may be trying to put into words something that shapes her sense of what life is. That there is such a thing as music is *wonderful*" (ibid.). Living with music in this way, thinking of it like this, Diamond observes, may factor into courses of action in all sorts of way. But that does not entail that the form of valuing going on here is accurately described with a moral action theory like Kahanes, in which that which is valuable is to be increased.

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41. She calls this the "background idea" of this series of examples.
42. Diamond cites Casals and Kahn (1979).

Williams supplements our understanding of this form of valuing music. Diamond suggests that in Williams's book on opera we see "his thought about what it is to take a piece of music fully seriously" (19).[43] We see him, she reports, "attempting to respond at the level which, given all that is in the music, is appropriate to it—to all that is in it" (ibid.). This sort of response, seeing its demandingness, appreciating how one feels called to give, shows us another dimension of "how music may be alive as a value in someone's life" (ibid.). Music as an individual, such as Williams, understands it and understands what can be in it can demand of that person "a quality of response" (ibid.). This is a complex structure of value and, again, not one that requires an increase on the side of that which is valued (music) so much as *a new state* on the side of the valuer. Such demandingness, Diamond observes, is also a good example of how a value can be alive in a friendship—how a friendship can involve sharing this sense of demandingness from music. She also observes that in such a value structure, it is perfectly ordinary that the music lover, without forfeiting that name, might not always feel up to the demanding attention the object requires (ibid.).

D. H. Lawrence and Susan are a different sort of case.[44] We see the aliveness of the value of this relationship and of Susan herself for Lawrence, Diamond explains, in his description of what it is to search for her in the woods. Lawrence, says Diamond, aims to "make alive for us" a piece of Susan's "cowy mystery" and how their relationship has "widened and deepened" his life (see 19). Here the good in question is relatedness to another being, and in particular Susan (*this* being). As in the case of music for Casals and Williams, the fact that Lawrence values this relationship in this way does of course shape and inform his practical decisions (his *actions*, a central notion for Kahane) in all sorts of mundane ways, in his basic care for Susan. However, Diamond writes, "There would…be a confusion if one went on from the possibility of those sorts of practical activity

43. Diamond cites Williams (2006).
44. Diamond is reading Lawrence (1923, 1968)

(involving the recognition of the goodness of music or the goodness of relatedness to another being) to construing the kinds of goodness that are here in view as intrinsic goods on the model taken for granted by…Kahane" (20). The confusion would emerge from this fact: "The good of music as understood by Casals, the good of relatedness to a cow or a dandelion as understood by Lawrence, have a conceptual shape which is not that of something to be promoted or pursued or realized to some or other degree by our actions" (ibid.). What would it be like to try to increase "relatedness" or "the wonder of music," on the model of increasing discrete good things? Such a question strives to elicit the recognition that what is valued and how it is valued in these cases only lend themselves through distortion to a theory, such as Kahane's, about increasing or mitigating ends through our acts.

By reviewing these cases, Diamond encourages us to recognize that we can be tempted to think that *what it is to value something* is one thing, say, striving by our actions to increase that which is valued in all cases in which it might be reasonably increased. Whereas, what it is to value something can be many things, including things we have not imagined. Inviting this recognition, she asks, "How should one respond to the amazingness of there being such a thing as music? Or to all that there is in some particular work?" (20). We might add, How should one respond to Susan's cowy mystery? Or how should one respond to what happens in one's life that one does not choose, say, to the birth of a *particular* child, in all its peculiar and perhaps difficult specificity—to *this* child? Try answering those sorts of questions seriously, and Diamond thinks you'll realize that "[t]here isn't a general philosophical story about intrinsic good which runs ahead of what such goods come to mean in our lives" (ibid.). In light of the illimitable shapes that valuing can take, Diamond encourages us to conceive of valuing as something vague, shifting, unbounded; building on that insight, I am suggesting that the ways others might enter our lives in morally nontrivial ways are likewise limitless. Quickeners and Metamorphics might electrify or reshape our understanding in numerous senses;

and while the other might be some iteration of the Quickener or Metamorphic, if they come to value to us in some further fashion, they may yet be someone else, a figure of value not yet imagined.

§6 Conclusion

I have sought in this chapter to charge the figure of the ecological other as opaque and ever-possibly a stranger with possible, latent, and polymorphous significance—to transform the image of the nebulous mist into that of the storm. To that end, I illustrated how the ecological other may be nontrivial with respect to environmental concerns in various senses, including serving, in their very particularly, certain crucial aims; adding important information or effecting structural epistemic revolutions; and qualitatively modifying moral understandings. In addition, the other's possible ways of being valuable are not necessarily limited to these senses. The other as opaque and potentially nontrivial, that shifting storm cloud, may herald the Device, Informant, Revolutionary, Quickener, Metamorphic, someone further, or a series or combination of these.

To close, I want to acknowledge a limitation to my observations about others' potential nontriviality, especially in its final dimensions. Not everyone values experiential enrichment or augmentation. In the absence of that value, my observations about moral nontriviality might ring hollow. Diamond draws attention to similar limitations for her ethical papers. If you think the moral possibilities of the world are settled, she observes, that determining the facts of a situation is a straightforward matter, then the sorts of improvisational, imaginative, and transformative descriptions offered by a Socrates will seem irrelevant to ethics (Diamond 1991f, 316-17). If you do not perceive risks of in-attention to moral reality, of obtuseness of Frankena's sort, then the value of a Socrates may not even register. Likewise, to see the value of Blakean experience, of how novelists can enrich a concept, of Kohn's encounter with the Runa, depends on caring about the quality of one's moral understanding and experience. If you are not interested in the possibilities of understanding, loss, and satisfaction enabled by living in particular ways with language, as illustrated

with Diamond's examples of proper names or our concepts of parenthood, then you may not be interested in how others might teach you new ways to use your words, new depths of perception, conception, and feeling.[45]

One condition for the persuasive success of my observations about others' potential moral nontriviality is that conversion-inclined environmentalists value what the Quickener and Metaphoric might do for us. Absent this condition, I appeal to a void. That the other's potential nontriviality is unbounded might nevertheless haunt one who is not swayed by my particular examples, but I doubt such haunting will undermine the moral trivialization of others by such resolute conversionists. Here the present mode of reason-giving ("The other might enliven your sensibility") runs out. We might therefore ask what it would take to inspire our skeptical conversionist to value as we do. Depending on the case, we might, say, give them examples selected to show the goodness of Blakean experience, or of what novels and others can teach us, or perhaps arguments on the infinite complexity of the world and life, the limitations of epistemic finitude and the historical situatedness of moral outlooks—arguments that call on us to take improvisation and other perspectives seriously, to see moral life as the kind of thing that needs Quickeners and Metamorphics. But none of these

45. In "Ethics and Experience," Diamond explains that our interest in having certain concepts, of being able to do certain things with words such as what we do with proper names, is "in the end seeing what words, what language, one would not want to live without" (2020, 39). It is a profound good to some of us, she remarks, to have such words. Some of us want to have the right words for certain desperate experiences. In another paper, Diamond illustrates this good by citing Simone Weil's discussion of a group of French workers who are unable to express the injustices done to them and to make claims about justice. They lack the words they need. This wrong, Diamond reports, is the result of systematic deprivation and it is compounded by the fact that union and other left-political leaders distort the workers' desires and perceptions. The leadership puts the workers' experience into the wrong words, "the vocabulary of economic bargains" (1988, 270). Of this case, Diamond remarks, citing Weil: "A great good to be done them would be to find them the right words: words which can express their aspirations, on the one hand, and 'words which express the truth of their affliction,' on the other" (ibid.). The good of concepts here is the good of having what one needs to articulate important experiences, a good valued for innumerable reasons. It is a distinct and particular wound to be deprived of this good. More to my point above, however, Diamond notes that to see this good as a good depends on two things: First, to appreciate this good as a good, depends on how you see the relation between experience and thought. "Can that relation," she asks, "go wrong in ways which make people badly off in comparison with some conception of what is humanly good and appropriate? Can that relation go wrong in ways which affect the goodness of a community's life?" (ibid.). Can problems arise here for you? Not everyone thinks so, and that helps explain why some overlook the good of human articulateness. Secondly, to see articulateness as a good depends on whether you value thinking well about certain things. And that, in turn, depends on how you conceive of the nature and value of thought (270-71).

techniques are surefire. Wittgenstein famously expresses what it is like to run into such boundaries like this: "If I have exhausted the justifications I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned" (2009a, §217). This refers to an ordinary, if difficult, reality of life with other people, one I mentioned in Chapter 2 and that ordinary language philosophers return to often because it is often forgotten in philosophical reflection, namely, that no matter how rigorous or well-researched or morally righteous our views, we cannot guarantee that other people will take things as we do (see, e.g., Cavell 1976a, 52; Diamond 2008, 45-46; McDowell 1998, 61-65). Despite this limitation, I proceed in the next chapter on the assumption that many of us do value an enlivened moral experience and the goods that can come with having our moral understanding enhanced. Recalling also the lessons of the last chapter, Chapter 4 asks, What possibilities for approaching others come into view when we no longer take for granted their transparency and triviality?

Chapter 5: Augmenting the Repertoire of Other-relation: Apprenticeship, Refusal, and Accepting Opacity

The thought of opacity distracts me from the absolute truths whose guardian I might believe myself to be.

Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*

§1 Introduction

In the constructive part of this dissertation I am trying to expand the imaginations of eco-conversionists (and would-be conversionists) beyond defaulting to worldview transformation in our relations with ecological others. This attempted augmentation has two phases: the first involves developing an alternative general picture of the ecological other while the second articulates the forms of relation that come into view thanks to that alternative picture.

Phase one is now complete and a distinct picture of the ecological other is before us: the picture of the other as a genuine stranger or enigma, charged with potentiality—like a thunderhead. This picture, developed in Chapters 3 and 4, invites us to imagine the ecological other as opaque in the sense that the meaning of their talk and behavior, which is expressive and constitutive of their embodied understanding, might be murky to us, especially if we have not undertaken the labor of sorting out that meaning. It also invites us to envision our others as potentially non-trivial on ethico-political matters concerning the nonhuman. The other might be the Quickener, Metamorphic, Epistemic Revolutionary, Informant, Device, or, crucially, someone else. I want this alternative picture to deflate the paradigmatic status of the conversionist image of the other as reliably transparent to outsiders and trivial on matters concerning the nonhuman. The latter lends conversion its default status: in a world inhabited with oneself and obviously trivial others, it might seem commonsensical to try to absorb those others to one's perspective (especially if such absorption seems like it will help everyone involved to better meet ongoing and future ecological

crises). By unsettling that model of the other, through the development of an alternative, I seek to make conversion less commonsensical and, moreover, to inspire additional ways to relate to others.

This chapter initiates the second stage of my imagination-expansion task by describing three clusters of modes of other-relation that the picture of the ecological other as transparent and trivial occludes and the opaque and potentially nontrivial conception helps bring into focus. First, engagement with this picture suggests the possibility of striving to dissolve the other's opacity and appreciating their forms of existence. I will call this kind of possibility *apprenticeship* and discuss it in section 2. The emphasis here is on the work of trying to understand the other, rather than the arrival of understanding itself, and such labor hardly entails the dissolution of another's opacity in part or whole.[1] I therefore distinguish between striving to understand and achieving it, offering what I hope are perspicuous illustrations of the former. Secondly, (a) the idea of the opaque and nontrivial other paired with (b) the possibility of apprenticeship invites reflection on (c) the sorts of limitations or impediments that might arise on the way to overcoming one's incomprehension of another. In section 3, I will examine four different limitations: the refusal of a would-be apprentice to be taken on in such a capacity, the fact that one may experience various barriers in one's capacity to understand once taken on, the possibility that apprentices (and their mentors) may be unable to decide whether they understand their others, and the possibility that would-be mentors might refuse to take us on. I discuss this fourth possibility at some length since it corresponds to how some

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1. I mean the terms "partial" or "whole" understanding in a non-metaphysical or ordinary sense. Recall from chapter 3 that I do not subscribe to a fixed, essentialized concept of understanding, the conditions for the correct application of which might be set out abstractly to ensure for us when to apply it. Nor a concept which might be clearly demarcated from and set in opposition to its binary opposite, nonunderstanding. Rather, this sign (understanding) is one we apply or refuse to apply or partly apply or hesitate on apply in innumerable, dynamic circumstances and conditions. Sometimes we understand that someone is asking us a question but cannot understand what it is they want to know. One might intelligibly utter here "I only seemed to partly understand." Other times *no questions arise* in an exchange as to whether something is understood. In reflection, we might take that as an example of whole understanding. A metaphysical reading of my use of "understanding" versus "non-understanding" or "partial understanding," one that, say, entertains what Derrida called the metaphysics of (semantic) presence (see, e.g., 1973a, 127-128; 1973c, 5-9, 25-26, 74-75, 77, 99-102; 1982a, 16-25), would distort of my use of the term and conflict with the therapeutic methodology and its realistic spirit. I return to similar methodological points in §2.

Indigenous activists, scholars, and organizations sometimes talk and write. I will suggest that the possibility of Indigenous refusal to mentor, say, settler environmentalists, is particularly noteworthy, especially in light of my critical examination of eco-conversionism, suggestion that others may have valuable insights on living well with the nonhuman, and many environmentalists' interest in "Indigenizing" non-Indigenous societies.

These initial possibilities set the stage for the third and final mode of other-relation I discuss, which I call *accepting opacity* and discuss in section 4. I suggest that (a) the picture of the other as opaque and potentially nontrivial held together with (b) the limitations that can attend our efforts to understand another not only throw our everyday ignorance of others' lives into relief but also (c) inspire the articulation of the idea of accepting the others' inscrutability, living knowingly with that void. Accepting opacity refers to this possibility of living with another's nebulousness while acknowledging that they may have insights, modes of expression, practices, or other goods that one might value. Having accepted opacity, one's life—say, silent behavior, talk, or political undertakings—reflects one's incomprehension of another's life.

My descriptions of these possibilities open a field of pitfalls and confusions, such as the idea that I am building a theory of relating to or understanding others or prescribing some possibilities rather than others. I will speak to some of these misunderstandings throughout the rest of the chapter. If my methodology is understood, however, I feel that very few such concerns find footing. Again, my aim is recollective vis-à-vis a fixation on conversion (understood as my interlocutors use the term or talk about changing their others). I am here therapeutically talking about a host of possibilities for interacting with others under the rubrics of apprenticeship, limitations/refusals, and accepting opacity in order to dislodge that fixation and simultaneously recall for those of us so fixated the open-ended variety of ways we have available to us to interact with others. This practice does not imply, say, that the concept apprenticeship has an essential or static meaning or that it

necessarily entails other concepts. Indeed, my rubrics *entail* nothing or very little.[2] The descriptions of this chapter, rather, amount to an excursus on familiar possibilities in our lives, such as that sometimes I do not understand what someone is doing and then I try to, sometimes with success or partial success, other times without, and in still others my success or failure is left uncertain.[3]

§2 Apprenticeship

The image of the other as opaque may suggest the possibility of trying to dissolve another's opacity, of working to see the sense in their behavior. Meanwhile, the image of the other as potentially nontrivial on matters concerning the nonhuman suggests a possible rationale or motivation for such striving: one might learn something valuable from the other, such as how to live with a new set of descriptions for action. To speak of striving to dissolve the other's opacity in this way is to employ somewhat grand terms for a family of familiar occurrences in our lives in which we labor to move from a position of not or minimally understanding someone (say, their utterance) or something (e.g., an action or practice) to a position of increased understanding. Everyday miscommunication—say, among two people who speak the same language and even know each other well—might involve these kinds of goings-on through efforts to remedy the breakdown. I shall use the term *apprenticeship* to refer to this shifting constellation of activities. This section is largely dedicated to describing a series of examples of these doings. As we will see in the next section, it is also possible in circumstances of non-comprehension that no such effort is undertaken, that it is unsuccessful, or only minimally so.

The phenomenon I wish to call to mind by no means belongs to the sphere of ecological or

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2. This is an anti-metaphysical, logical point: that my use of signs such as "apprenticeship" entails nothing about what, say, trying to understanding someone else *must* be like. This is simultaneously a point about my use of "apprenticeship" and related terms as well as a point about the grammar of *entailment*, namely, that the function of entailment as we use it in, say, mathematics and logic is not a function in play in all of our activities or in other activities in the same way. Of course, I think my therapeutical practice holds ethical and political promise.
3. My organization of these quotidian possibilities under my rubrics is a strategic consolidation for the particular purpose just mentioned (cf. Wittgenstein 2009a, §132).

more-than-human concern alone. To avoid giving that impression and also to display the variations that may be at work in what I am calling apprenticeship, I shall start with a case from outside of that sphere. A number of examples present themselves. For instance, we might return to the discussion of rule-following from Chapter 3, and the goings-on involved in B trying to see what A is up to using natural numbers or “Add 2.” Or we might consider the strivings of the racially oppressed and marginalized to make sense of the talk and behavior of white people and other dominant groups, building, for instance, on Charles W. Mills’s suggestion that “often for their very survival, blacks have been forced to become lay anthropologists, studying the strange culture, customs, and mind-set of the ‘white tribe’ that has such frightening power over them, that in certain time periods can even determine their life or death on a whim” (2007, 17-18). Equally suggestive is Susan Harding’s account of trying to make sense of her fundamentalist Baptist interlocutors, experiencing herself enlisted in their witnessing-conversion practices, of being “refashioned” by them, and finding herself later employing their modes of thought and speech in a near-death experience, asking herself “What is God trying to tell me?” (1987, 169). Any of these examples or a range of others might serve well in appreciating the possibility that interests me.[4] I shall begin, however, with something rather more unremarkable: trying to understand some bits of popular music.[5]

2.1 Example 1: Brandi Carlile and Joni Mitchell’s Blue

This example comes from Raina Douris’s 2021 interview with the musician Brandi Carlile on the radio program World Cafe (Carlile 2021). At the time of the interview, Carlile has recently released a new album, *In These Silent Days,* as well as published a memoir, *Broken Horses*. The

4. For a trove of further illustrations, see Trevor H. J. Marchand’s study of craft apprenticeship among minaret builders in Yemen, mud masons in Mali, and woodworkers in England (2008). The reason for mentioning all of these cases, only to set them aside, is therapeutic: this myriad is designed to start indicating the many different ways one might particularize and politicize the notion of apprenticeship. Additionally, this multiplicity is designed to curb the idea that there is a fixed essence to apprenticeship, a point to which I return at the end of this section.
5. I select a quotidian and perchance familiar case to convey the intimate banality of apprenticeship and help curb the potential temptation to deflect from this everydayness to thinking that apprenticeship names some special or specialized mode of relation.

conversation occurs in advance of a performance in which Carlile will perform the whole of Joni Mitchell's 1971 album *Blue*, something she has done on a few occasions prior and since. After discussing the new book and record, Douris turns the conversation to Carlile's relationship to Joni Mitchell's music. Douris explains that it took her some time to appreciate Joni. The artist's voice and songs, she explains, felt so very *feminine*, and this entirely blocked her from appreciating Joni's creations at all.[6] Things changed, she tells us, when Douris found herself working on a radio series and needing to compile the five essential tracks from Joni's catalogue. This forced her to immerse herself in the artist's body of work, and during this extended encounter something changed. She expresses disbelief that she could have discounted Joni's music for so long. Signaling her current impression, she exclaims: Joni is a genius. At each stage of Douris's excursus, Carlile chimes in with agreement. She then shares her own history with Joni's music. It was for the same reasons, she explains, connected with Joni's "feminity," that Carlile initially felt repulsed by Joni's music.

Things started to change during a trip with her wife, Catherine, when they were dating. They were living in two different countries and had planned a week together in a cabin. As part of the trip, they would each bring an album or two to share. Catherine had inherited her mother's love of Joni and brought *Blue*. As the first track played, "All I want," Carlile started laughing as Joni sang, "I want to talk to you, I want to shampoo you," some of those potently intimate and perhaps feminine lines that mark many of Joni's songs, and said to Catherine that she hated the track and wasn't a fan of Joni. Catherine was caught up short. What did Brandi mean? How could she hate it? There is something so flowery, so not tough about it, she explained. That "I want to shampoo you" thing, "it freaks me out." They had a fight and it came out that Brandi would need to make sense of Joni. "I don't know if we can get our heads around this," Carlile recalls Catherine saying, "if you don't know about Joni Mitchell. Do you know about 'Little Green'?"—another track from *Blue*. Carlile didn't

6. I use Mitchell's first name since Douris and Carlile do so.

and Catherine explained it was a song about the child Joni had given up for adoption. Carlile listens to the song and, at Catherine's prodding, attends to Joni's other pieces, working to understand them and questioning her initial conceptions. She recalls the memory of finally listening to "Little Green" like this: "I remember listening to it and it breaking my heart—not in a weak way, but thinking it was the toughest song I'd ever heard and it made me realize that I didn't get what femininity was, I didn't understand what it was, and I was viewing it through a misogynist lens." Today, of course, Carlile is performing the whole of *Blue* live. She also performs with Joni. The two are friends. Carlile explains that the second song from her latest album, "You and Me on the Rock," consciously channels Joni. If she hadn't dedicated a song to how Joni had shaped her, focused on channeling that influence, she continues, the entire album would have inadvertently become a tribute. That is how significantly Joni's music has shaped her, this side of her efforts to understand it.

Reflecting on how her relationship to Joni's music changed, Carlile describes it as a discovery, a "profound crash landing." Referring to Douris's journey with Joni, she says, "We are the same person when it comes to the, when you find Joni Mitchell. And you are so embarrassed that you didn't find her earlier. Or that the thing you didn't like about her means that you don't really get it yet, you know what I mean? That's the really hard thing." Then Carlile invokes a reference to the end of the children's film *The Neverending Story* in which the protagonist must face a mirror which will result in his death if he has not sorted out his demons. "It was like that with the Joni Mitchell thing," Carlile explains, "It's like when you're not ready to stand there and stare in the mirror yet, you almost cannot abide Joni Mitchell. It's not just a, 'I'm not a fan,' it's 'I am *not* a fan.'" She suggests that this might be something a lot of women go through and go through with Joni. Joni is discovered when they are "ready to make some kind of emotional transition in life, where they are ready to, like, look at themselves" (Carlile 2021).

What Carlile and Douris *do* in relation to Joni Mitchell's activity and creations—her songs and recordings, her particular ways of performing her music—and for Carlile in relation to Catherine's appreciation for Joni's music, these strivings are among the things I mean to conjure when I refer to apprenticeship. Notably, both Carlile and Douris initially find themselves in the curious and ambiguous position of thinking they understand Joni's music and perhaps understand others', say, Catherine's, appreciation of it. They feel this despite having limited experience with the music.[7] It is later, such as during this interview, that they cast that initial stage as one of ignorance and opacity, of nonunderstanding vis-à-vis Joni's music and her fans' life with it. This opacity is dissolved through such things as immersive and attentive engagement with the music. Here apprenticeship occurs in relation to the music itself and the practice of appreciating it—*those* are what the apprentice seeks to understand. The apprentice's work involves listening and relistening to the music. Sometimes tips are offered, such as Catherine's explanation of the background to "Little Green." Now relistening might happen with this story of giving up a child in mind. We might think of such tip-giving as a kind of mentorship. For both Douris and Carlile, the stakes of not attending seem to partially motivate the apprenticeship. For Douris, it is part of her job as a young laborer in radio to hang out with Joni's music. The gravity of Joni and of understanding Joni in Catherine's life leads Carlile to reconsider, to newly work to understand Joni's music. As a result of these undertakings, both Douris and Carlile observe shifts between not "getting it" and then "getting it." They also speak almost as if they could not live without what they have found in Joni, or that their living might be somehow hollower, that it is somehow richer, saturated with tragedy and honesty and devotion and—how much more? All thanks to the happenstances that led them to undertake to

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7. I return to the idea of such prejudgments in the next chapter when I develop re-reading the other as a particular iteration of apprenticeship.

dissolve the vague and initially even repugnant phenomena of Joni's songs.[8] As we will see, apprenticeship does not always result in understanding nor, when it does, in seriously valued, life-changing understandings.[9] Nevertheless, this case illustrates how efforts to understand sometimes have such results and how apprentices sometimes talk about them.

2.2 Example 2: Deer Hunters in the U.S. Rural South

Douris and Carlile give us an initial example of apprenticeship concerning music and its appreciation. The next two cases illustrate apprenticeship in connection to nonhuman entities and systems. The examples of Chapter 4 already started to illustrate this possibility, such as Kohn's work to understand Runa forms of living. That process might be called apprenticeship in the relevant sense. But since I want us to appreciate the open-ended variety of shapes apprenticeship might have, I offer further representations.

Consider first Jon Littlefield's dissertation "Subculture of Deer Hunters and the Negotiation of Masculinity: An Ethnographic Investigation of Hunting in the Rural South" (2006). Littlefield is interested in the consumption patterns that emerge as a result of the gendered socialization of his ethnographic subjects, outdoors people in the rural south,[10] in no small part through initiation into intergenerational traditions of hunting. By way of further illustrating what I mean by apprenticeship, now in a case involving nonhuman beings, I will recount Littlefield's description of this initiation process, focusing on those who start learning to hunt at a young age from their family.[11]

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8. The nontrivial upshots of such efforts should call to mind the potential fruits proffered to us by others in Chapter 4. Think of Joni and those who know how to listen to her, like Catherine, as Quickeners and Metamorphics.
9. We get a hint of this in Carlile's vague suggestion that shifts in how she understands herself as a woman were necessary for catching on to what Joni is up to and what others love in her. Without those shifts, perhaps her subsequent efforts would have been unsuccessful.
10. Littlefield does not further specify the region of his study nor mention the race or ethnicity of his interlocutors. He does identify them as mostly men.
11. Littlefield calls these "primary socialization" hunters versus "secondary." The latter learn to hunt later in life, as teenagers or adults (42). I focus on the first group because Littlefield's discussion of it is more detailed.

Admitting the great variation in how hunters are trained, Littlefield loosely divides the process into four stages: pre-hunter, neophyte, apprentice, and competent hunter. Among those who learn to hunt from their families, hunting and rituals surrounding it are commonplace and familiar from a very young age (42). Littlefield marks the start of the pre-hunter stage around 5 years of age, when the new hunter starts accompanying mentors on hunts. At this stage, the initiate is to observe and start appreciating the place of basic skills in the practice, such as navigating the woods with stealth, calmly and quietly waiting for long periods through shifting and often uncomfortable conditions, or safely carrying an unloaded gun (45).[12] Observation, appreciation, and practicing these basic skills are what apprenticeship looks like here.

The transition from pre-hunter to neophyte is a "slow and deliberate process," often marked by the mentor permitting the initiate to carry a low-powered loaded gun—a significant event in the life of the young hunter (47, 50). Demonstrating responsible gun handling is a central component in this stage of training, alongside preliminarily developing such skills as field dressing and butchering, game tracking, marksmanship, and hunting etiquette, all under the guidance of a mentor who demonstrates and offers advice (45-48). Another significant event in the neophyte stage is the first deer kill. Smaller game is killed at this stage as well. But as some of the largest common game in the regions Littlefield studied, deer hold a special significance (52-53). Eventually, the neophyte is also responsible for field-dressing the animal and dragging it from the woods, significant moments of learning to which I will return. Such skill development and events, Littlefield reports, are often accompanied by increasing inclusion in and recognition by a community of hunters (54).

As neophytes advance, they are eventually recognized as skilled and responsible enough to hunt independently. The transition to unsupervised hunting signals the transition to the apprentice stage. This developmental moment, generally in the mid- and late-teens, often involves using higher-

12. Littlefield recounts the keenly remembered difficulty of learning such basic skills among his interlocutors.

powered guns and bows, the refinement of previous skills as much as, or more than, the acquisition of new ones, an increased understanding of the practicalities of the whole hunting process (planning the trips, getting permissions and permitting, etc.), and an increased exploration of the initiate's preferences and identity as a hunter (58). In the life of apprentice hunters, the first independent killing of a deer represents a significant achievement in their advancement within the practice, again, to themselves and their hunting collectivity.

"Other family members and hunting partners," Littlefield explains, "signal to the competent hunter that he has advanced his skills, his values, and his experiences sufficiently to achieve competence" (64). In general, competence is acknowledged by the hunters themselves and their community in light of their demonstrated proficiency, range of experiences, and what Littlefield calls "adherence to core values," which I discuss further below. An important distinction between apprentices and the competent is their degree of self-consciousness around the practice. For apprentices, hunting regularly involves competition with peers and the desire to prove themselves as competent. The competent, by contrast, are variously oriented to a range of goods internal to the hunting practice, such as having a meaningful experience in nature or executing an excellent kill (67).

As individuals progress through these stages, gradually acquiring a range of capacities, including specific skills, and undergoing various quotidian and extraordinary events that shift their self-perceptions and others' perceptions of them, it is not uncommon for them recognize, sometimes retrospectively, moments of nonunderstanding and understanding. For example, one of Littlefield's subjects recalls hunting with a mentor and learning to "get an eye" for deer in the brush:

> ... he saw the deer moving up it and I didn't see it! [laughs] I was too young. But there was a couple moving through and I just didn't have the eyes for it. It's kind of weird how you can see something moving through the woods and you can plain out stare and they aren't just completely oblivious—you can't see it right off. So, I didn't really have the eyes for it yet and it wasn't until the last second that I saw one and it went behind a bush, not a huge bush or anything like that, but behind this bush. (47)

The neophyte here does not see, cannot see; *how to see*, how to do what the mentor does is something unavailable to him at this stage. What the experienced hunter does here is opaque to the student; the forest is quite literally opaque. But as this remark implies, this opacity dissolves with training ("I didn't really have the eyes for it *yet*"). Another interlocutor recalls discovering that hunting is "not all fun and games" when his father required that he drag the deer he had killed from the woods, a major physical challenge: "You have to pull it. You killed it. You gotta' drag it" (48-49). In a third instance, an interlocutor recalls a shift in his understanding after field dressing his first deer: "Killing something, that was made a little more relevant, and I actually had to field dress it—get in there and get bloody up to my elbows and just pull all of the internals out of it and then drag it back.... It was kind of disgusting and stomach-turning" (53). These reflections signal conscious shifts in understanding, shifts in which an initial understanding or putative understanding is newly and sometimes profoundly shaped or reshaped.

For Littlefield's interlocutors, the prolonged initiation process into hunting involves the discovery and shifting understanding of the constitutive values of the practice and of the significance of hunting as a whole. He centers his discussion around three values that emerged across his observations: success, patience, and stewardship (55). It is the neophyte, Littlefield reports, who is first explicitly trained in a rudimentary understanding of these values. For the neophyte, success in hunting is more or less equated with achieving a kill. It is also at this stage that the new hunter is pushed to cultivate patience, which amounts to learning to be seriously still and dead quiet. Many of Littlefield's interlocutors recall the difficulty of this lesson along these lines: "I can remember times going with [my father], just following along behind him and probably messing him up, but he put up with it because it was hard, I can remember it was hard to sit still and not move your feet or throw rocks or pick up a stick or something. I remember that was the part that you had to be still" (ibid.). For the neophyte, learning the value of stewardship means learning the difference between killing

with and without reason. "Stewardship," Littlefield explains, "is a value that meant taking a life is a significant act and should not be done lightly. Neophytes are typically trained to believe that not all killing is appropriate, particularly if the killed animal is not used" (ibid.). An interlocutor succinctly conveys how this lesson can go:

> ...the first lesson I had about per se 'don't kill it unless you intend to do something with it'... I guess I had shot a bird with a pellet rifle that I had... but anyway [my dad] didn't make a big deal out of it. He was probably like, you know, "Why did you do that? Just like I was curious why did you do that?" Well, I guess because I wanted to see if I could hit it. He was like well, "It looks like you had a pretty good shot, but why did you do that?" It made me think you know. It's kind of like, "Why did I do that?" And at the time I didn't really give it a second thought, but reflecting on it, it didn't make a whole lot of sense you know I am not going to eat it you know and it wasn't really bothering anything. (56)

As Littlefield observes, this individual was led to reflect on killing, its significance and purpose, through his father's questioning. What particularly interests me about this example is how the significance of the activity in question undergoes a change. This neophyte thought he knew what he and his father were up to as hunters, as, say, people around animals with guns. He thought the idea was something like *to kill things*, to succeed in hitting moving targets, animals. But it turned out his father had other ideas, was up to something else, and helped the initiate to appreciate that something else by teaching him to reflect on what he was doing.

Littlefield offers an illuminating discussion of how these values undergo transformations as the hunter progresses through the apprenticeship stage to competence, but already we have enough of a description of these hunting practices to illustrate the relational modality that interests me.[13]

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13. For apprentices, success often comes to be measured not in succeeding in killing, but in killing well, killing cleanly, as well as proving themselves to and out-competing their peers (62). Patience is newly inflected since the mentor is no longer present; it is now up to the hunter initiate to endure the wait and fire when appropriate (63). Stewardship, in turn, develops from a sense of only killing with a reason, to a concern that the meat of what is killed be used (64). For competent hunters, changes in their understanding of the purpose of the hunt involves shifting ideas about success. Littlefield documents a ranges of purposes among competent hunters, ranging from those who remain oriented toward killing well to those who focus more on new experiences with different technologies or animals or those who seek a meaningful experience through the hunt (67). Notably, the need to prove themselves recedes or disappears. The significance of patience likewise twists: the competent hunter tends to wait for the perfect shot, which is determined by the aims of the hunt. Sometimes this means, say, waiting for a particularly impressive animal; for others, the lines between patience and success almost dissolve insofar as the aim of the hunt is to relax and only take a truly "fine" shot

What Littlefield describes pre-hunters *doing* as they are socialized into hunting and develop into competent hunters I am calling potential elements of apprenticeship.[14] The strivings of the process include such things as observing the more adept; practicing stalking, waiting, carrying a gun, killing, and field dressing; reflecting on the purpose and nature of the practice; and adapting one's actions in light of a shifting senses of success, patience, and stewardship. This sort of apprenticeship apparently can result in new understandings, the arrival of which are often signaled by the recognition of mentors. Such new understandings include how to do something like wait or walk silently; what it can mean to personally kill, dress, and drag a deer; and what values animate and organize this practice. When I set the possibility of apprenticeship alongside that of conversion, as an alternative form of relating to others, I want to call to mind this process of individuals trying to learn to hunt. In these illustrations, individuals strive to move from a relation of opacity—of non-, preliminary, or only putative understanding—vis-à-vis competent hunters and the practices of hunting to a relation of comprehension. Indeed, Littlefield's interlocutors regularly cast their younger selves as in such a position of not understanding and then describe the work and discovery of understanding—sometimes conveying visceral and shocking memories of new comprehension.

Reflecting on his fieldwork, Littlefield presents himself as an apprentice in my sense of the term. "I also became a neophyte hunter," he reports, "and a member of this community and participated in a range of activities including safety classes, hunting trips, and gun shows" (27). His

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(68). In Littlefield's account, the trajectory of the revolutions in the significance of stewardship is less entangled with the aim of the hunt than the other values. Instead, this value seemingly undergoes continued refinement through the hunter's development, often culminating in distinct ideas about respecting the animals, in life and death, and critical evaluations of those who violate that respect. In life, respect is often connected to the idea of "fair chase," of hunting and killing "with a sense of fairness toward the game," which among other things means not using certain unfair techniques, such as spotlighting deer (72, 152). In death, respect is tied to making good use of animal flesh, of ensuring it has a purpose but also in handling it well. "For me," an interlocutor explains, "you want to work quickly, but you don't want to just sit there and make a mess. The way that we work-up our deer is kind of showing our respect for the animal. It's given its life for the nourishment of our bodies, so you want to do the best job possibly that you can" (69). Stewardship here involves delicate, efficient, precise, and clean (literally free of hair) field dressing and butchery that wastes as little as possible (68-69).

14. It is inconsequential to my discussion that Littlefield reserves this term for one stage in that development.

apprenticeship to these practices, he explains, gradually enhanced his understanding of his interlocutors, enabling him, say, to cultivate relationships with wary subjects (34). In my final illustration, I want to explore the ethnographer's position vis-à-vis their subjects as another potential case of apprenticeship, turning to Radhika Govindrajan's multispecies ethnography *Animal Intimacies: Interspecies Relatedness in India's Central Himalayas* (2018).

2.3 Example 3: Govindrajan, Goats, and People Who Love and Kill Goats

In Govindrajan's words, and as we saw with Kohn's work in Chapter 4, ethnography of this sort traces "the contours of multispecies worlds that are brought to life through the worlding labor of a multiplicity of beings, of which humans are only one kind" (19). *Animal Intimacies* focuses on some of the human-nonhuman animal relationships sustained in a group of villages in Kumaon, the eastern division of the Indian state of Uttarakhand. Govindrajan's interlocutors, then, include not only human subjects, specifically rural Hindu women, but also the specific nonhuman animals that share tangled lives with the former.[15] Nonhuman animals, both individuals (*this* cow) and discrete classes (e.g., a group of urban monkeys), factor into this account as subjects, as parties to modes of existence (see, e.g., 19-26). Central among Govindrajan's concerns is to conceptualize the senses of relatedness or kinship that specific humans and nonhuman animals in Kumaon feel as a result of their shared time, places or regions, activities, and often arduous labor (3-10). She seeks not just an appreciation of how her human interlocutors, say, interpret certain categories of animals, but also to make sense of the mutual understandings shared by the human and nonhuman animals in question.[16]

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15. Govindrajan explains, "To live up to the ethnographic promise implied in its title, the field of multispecies ethnography must focus on tracing the trajectories and outcomes of individual animal lives to see how they love, loathe, grieve, play, crave, and, indeed, relate" (20).
16. Like any familial or kinship relations, those revealed in Govindrajan's study are anything but simple and innocent, but rather involve various scales of violence, gender hierarchies, and a wide range of affects (e.g., frustration, annoyance, indifference, hatred, repulsion).

Animal Intimacies is primarily a contribution to scholarly discussions of human and non-human relations, but at present I am interested in the many forms of learning that Govindrajan undertook to produce it. Like many ethnographers, her scholarly reflections emerge from extensive time in the field, learning to live alongside and as a student to her human and nonhuman interlocutors, making her stories and reflections useful illustrations for thinking about apprenticeship. To conduct her fieldwork, to live in the villages of Kumaon, meant learning to live not only with its human but also its nonhuman inhabitants. For example, Govindrajan recalls learning to graze her friend Kusum's goats. In her first attempt, she was to stay relatively close to home and keep the goats from crossing a stream into a neighbor's field. The animals, seemingly sensing her inexperience, quickly spread across nearby fields, including crossing the stream. After hours and great effort, she managed to round them up—to much bleating, repeated headbutts, and the laughter of onlookers. Later, Kusum explained to Govindrajan that the goats misbehaved because they did not know her. "They decided to mess with you," said Kusum, "It will take some time. But once you understand them and they understand you, a relationship will be formed," and the goats will behave. Govindrajan then reports that as she spent more time with the goats, Kusum turned out to be more or less right. "I came to know them better," she explains, "and finally started to understand how to make them respond to me, even if the results were mixed" (30). After Govindrajan grazed the goats with more success some months later, Kusum appreciatively remarked, "See, I told you the relationship would be made. It's hard work, that's all" (ibid.). Here both Kusum and Govindrajan acknowledge a change brought about through the latter's strivings, a change in her ability to work with and cultivate a relationship with the goats.

Govindrajan's interlocutors freely employ the language of family when talking about their nonhuman fellows (9), classify children and goats together (41-45), and signal their sense of kinship with their animal companions using the term *mamta* (maternal love), reflecting the gendered

association of this work and these relations (45).[17] This vocabulary reflects the intimacy of the relations in question, an intimacy cultivated through the demanding work of livestock care. We are told, for instance, of the laborious making-of-kin through not only everyday caretaking practices, but also poignant events, such as the tender and strenuous midwifery of an interlocutor helping her goat through a complicated birth (see 45-46). Such care not only generates a sense of intimate relatedness, but also involves and enables all sorts of small communicative possibilities across the lines of species—the tugging on a horn to inspire compliance, offering a head scratch in response to excited jumping (47). Through her years living in Kumaon, Govindrajan catches a glimpse of the sense of these relations, their difficulty, and ambiguity.

Govindrajan's labor to understand her human and nonhuman interlocutors' relationships, what I am thinking of as apprenticeship, helps her start to make sense of some of their more surprising and complicated dimensions, such as the ritual sacrifice of goats by those who raise them. To the repugnance of many outsiders, including visiting family members from other regions (see 33-35), goats and other livestock in Kumaon are not uncommonly sacrificed to *devi-dyavtas* (local deities) as a form of propitiation. For Govindrajan's interlocutors, favorable turns in life (e.g., success in careers, the arrival of children) are understood as gifts from *dyavtas* to devotees for the latters' devotion and hard work. Ritual acknowledgments of such rewards, such as animal sacrifice show gratitude and appreciation, thereby sustaining the dynamic relationship between devotees and *dyavtas*. Such good fortune requires *real* sacrifice, a return of something beloved and good as an expression of true gratitude. Beloved animals can fill that role precisely because they are beloved. Vis-à-vis the

17. Throughout *Animal Intimacies*, Govindrajan returns to the gendering of this work as feminine and its corresponding disproportionate distribution to women (30, 44). The gendered demandingness of these multispecies relations, she reiterates, stuck with her years after her fieldwork. The bonds that tie livestock and their caretakers, predominantly women, in these villages, we are told, are "intimate relations of care and mutual subjection" (40).

animal itself, sacrifice is justified by the debt it accrues to the human caretaker.[18] The animal pays its debt through sacrifice,[19] which simultaneously fulfills the human's debt to the *dyavta*. Devotees routinely explain their practices by citing the debt due to *dyavtas*, their love of the animals and the pain they feel in the sacrifice—sometimes comparing it to "watching a child die" (35), and invoking "the everyday acts of labor they perform in caring for these animals" to explain their love (40-41).[20]

In light of this love, ritual sacrifice shapes the care given to animals in various quotidian ways, such as occasionally feeding a young goat shelled peas; it also inflects and haunts life in the aftermath of the sacrifice. The signs of pain and grief immediately surrounding a ritual killing of an intimately known animal include such familiar gestures as "a quick caress of a goat's head before he was taken to the kill area; the flinch of a body when the sacrificial blade came down to sever head from neck; tears streaming down a face at the end" (49). Likewise, long after the act small gestures index the significance of the animal other given up in sacrifice:

> An old man kept a notebook in which he made a little mark to represent each goat his family had sacrificed so that he could account for exactly how many deaths he was responsible. A *guru* told me that he muttered a little prayer for the soul of a goat before sacrificing him during midnight *pujas* to Masan, the lord of the cremation ground who comes in many different forms. A woman in her twenties told me she still wept every time she thought of the different goats that she had raised and then seen sacrificed; she said that she had taken a vow to never sacrifice an animal again. (50)

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18. Govindrajan explains that the use of beloved animals is a substitution of the animal for what the dyavta is truly, or once normally was, due: a human sacrifice (see 35-36, 39).
19. Something to which it is said to consent (33). This communicative possibility is perhaps rendered plausible to practitioners by the backdrop of communications described above. Govindrajan and some of her other interlocutors express reasonable suspicions that the idea of such consent seems to reach pass what is communicable here even in these thick multispecies relationships (59). Such suspicions do not undermine the notion of interspecies communication as such, however, especially if we adhere to capacious notions of communication and understanding—as I do and as Wittgenstein's writings free us to do. In my view, the fear that such notions of communication and understanding anthropomorphize the nonhuman risk implying narrow and anthropocentric accounts of communication, accounts that often imagine it to involve the exchange of "meaning" through the transfer of the verbal or written signs of a natural language. I see no reason to entertain such narrow definitions. I also perceive anxieties over anthropomorphism as regularly reinstating a metaphysical fissure between humans and nonhumans and prefer the risks of overstating nonhuman capacities of mind to those of understating them, what in the latter case the late ethologist Frans de Waal calls anthropodenial (1997).
20. There are resonances between these practices and those of the Evangelical hunters I discuss in the next chapter.

All these small gestures acknowledge the entanglement of lives and the responsibility of the devotees to their animal fellows and for their deaths. Such acts, Govindrajan suggests, paired with the extraordinary gestures of the sacrifices themselves, are part of a complex pattern of living with love and death, of dwelling in loss, of taking responsibility for one's part in loss (50).

Animal sacrifice is contested by other Indian Hindus and increasingly subject to state regulation. Indeed, Govindrajan recounts her own visceral reaction to seeing the remains of hundreds of sacrificed goats at a festival or accompanying an interlocutor and her family to sacrifice eight goats in gratitude for good fortune.[21] Activists and politicians often cast such sacrifices as superstitious savagery, a postcolonial corruption of true Hinduism, and/or blatant violations of animal rights enacted by ignorant rural farmers (53-59). These critics, Govindrajan's acknowledges, often raise essential ethical questions about the largescale killing of animals as sacrifices, criticisms that many practitioners perceive as unavoidable.

Some are led by such concerns to abandon animal sacrifice (59). Others continue their practices, in part, Govindrajan suggests, because these often blatantly politicized, lofty, and abstract criticisms hardly catch the gravity and granularity of the relations in question. She writes, "Over time, as I immersed myself in the social life of these villages, I learned that the meaning of sacrifice was too complex to be captured by any of the narratives authorized by reformers" (60). Through her fieldwork, she "absorbed the knowledge that people existed in a delicate balance of mutuality with *dyavtas*," and that animals are part of this world of "care and mutuality" (ibid.). She writes,

> After spending hours with people and animals at grazing grounds and in homes and sheds, I learned that raising animals requires multiple bodies to orient themselves in relation to one another. As different beings opened up to one another—a risky and rewarding process—their lives came to be entangled in ways that were rich with the possibility of care, concern, mutuality, and even love. It was through these entanglements that people and animals were constituted as kin. I was taught that this kinship had its own language, one that I came to speak haltingly and joyfully even if I was not always understood by people and animals alike. It was this kinship, I was told by so many, that gave meaning to ritual sacrifice. It was pain at

21. In these cases, the sacrifices were performed by ritualized decapitation.

> the loss of a being who was dear, whose presence in one's bodily horizon was a source of pleasure, that made sacrifice *truly* a sacrifice. (ibid.)[22]

Notice how Govindrajan grounds her impression that her interlocutors' critics misunderstand the relations in question in her experience of "learning the meaning of sacrifice" through living with the humans and animals in question. This disagreement points to her own achievements through apprenticeship. It is from her vantage point as an apprentice that Govindrajan sees that these critics do not see what her interlocutors are up to. Thanks to her time in the field, learning to graze goats, watching them delivered, and speaking with those who sacrifice them, Govindrajan glimpses a system of values and practices enmeshed in the everyday (see 49-53). Apprenticeship enables Govindrajan to ask and seek to answer the questions that organize her reflections on ritual sacrifice: "What is the nature of sacrificial connection between the one who sacrifices, the one who is sacrificed, and the one who accepts the sacrifice? Does sacrifice leave an imprint on everyday relationships that extends beyond the moment of ritual killing?" (31).

When I refer to apprenticeship in this chapter and suggest that the picture of the other as opaque and potentially non-trivial might recall this sort of thing to us, I want us to think of Govindrajan's learning process vis-à-vis her human and nonhuman interlocutors. Through careful attention to and participation in various activities, Govindrajan gradually dissolves some of the opaque relations sustained by her human and nonhuman others and emergent from a nest of shared activities. She goes from a state of not understanding the relations in question, even the sense and skills involved in their elements such as livestock grazing, to appreciating some of the sense in even the seemingly more difficult parts of these relations, such as ritual killing. She repeatedly says,

22. In a poignant scene, Govindrajan reports the reaction of an interlocutor when she mentioned that critics think those who sacrifice animals do not really care for them. Govindrajan reports her friend's reply like this:

> "Why do they think that we do not know about love?" she asked. "Have those people ever brought *pathiyas* (kids) into their home because they were worried that the leopard who came every night would eat the goats? Have they ever pounded *haldi* (turmeric) and applied it to a festering wound every day for a month?" She looked down at the kid who was nuzzling her side, the same kid that she had helped bring into the world, and then looked back up at me. "Is this not love?" (61)

keeping with the norms of her discipline, that the material in her book is only reportable thanks to her years immersed with the people and animals in question.[23] Addressing her human interlocutors in her acknowledgments, she summarizes some of what she has learned in the field like this: "Thank you for showing me how to bear the weight of attachments with joy, care, and thought" (ix). It was through her time in the field she learned to do this bearing, to understand it differently, newly. Prior to that apprenticeship these particular capacities were another's, not her own. Through her fieldwork, Govindrajan dissolves some these others' opacity and discovers that their forms of living and understanding are nontrivial; hence her gratitude.

2.4 Four Specifications

When, against our conversionistic inclinations, we imagine that our others might be opaque to us in their talk and other behavior, and that what they are up to, how they live with, conceive of, and value the other-than-human might be significant in various ways, a distinct set of possibilities for relating to those others may come into focus. One is the possibility of striving to dissolve that opacity and appreciate the sense of their patterns of life with the nonhuman. I am referring to this possibility as apprenticeship and have now offered some illustrations of what I have in mind with this term. The important aspect across the cases is that one might plausibly describe them as involving instances in which individuals try to shift, through various forms of work, of efforts to understand, from a condition of not knowing what someone means, what they understand and are up to in their practices, to one of understanding or increased understanding.

The discussion so far raises a number of new questions. By way of anticipating some of these, I offer four terminological, conceptual, and methodological specifications of my description

23. She writes, for instance, "After years on end of living with the actual animals who inhabited this landscape, some of whom were not only ethnographic subjects but friends and family, I could not deny that they responded to and offered up their own gestures of relatedness in the course of quotidian relationships with one another and humans" (6).

of apprenticeship. First, the apprentices in the above examples often talk about the fruits of their labor to understand in a fashion that may call to mind ordinary uses of the word "conversion." For example, Carlile and Douris speak of shifting from "not getting" Joni's music to "getting it" and speak as if they cannot now imagine life without it. Littlefield's hunters reflect on their training in similar ways, savoring their stories of discovering new interpretations of their practice or acquiring new skills. Govindrajan is filled with gratitude for how she has learned to newly perceive and live with more-than-human attachments through her time in the field. Although such talk may seem to invite the term conversion (as if each of these apprentices has been converted as they succeed in their training), as far as I am concerned the words these apprentices use are simply among the ordinary and familiar possibilities of what people sometimes say when they come to understand someone or something or reflect retrospectively on what that coming-to-understand was like. Call this conversion talk if you like or perhaps hold that most or all new arrivals of understanding are conversions of some sort, for no set of terms is forced on us for talking about these phenomena. But we should take care to differentiate what happens in these cases, in which individuals work to understand and then feel they do or partially do, and how I have been using the term conversion throughout this dissertation. I have used that term in a specialized way to talk about a particular possibility for relating to other people, namely, trying to replace or subordinate their worldviews with alternatives. That is what I have meant by eco-conversion up to this point. Here again nothing forces the term conversion on us, but to avoid confusion I reserve it for that and related possibilities and use understanding and related terms to describe the trajectory of apprenticeship.

The second point is conceptual. I have introduced the notion of apprenticeship with a series of cases in which, through their striving, the apprentices in question achieve or partially achieve the understanding they seek. Yet we should continue to bear in mind the distinction between the

striving of apprenticeship itself and that at which it aims, namely, understanding, as well as its actual results, such as understanding, partial understanding, failures to understand, etc.

Thirdly, apprenticeship as I am describing it should not be conflated with calls for taking on others' worldviews in place of one's own by some environmental thinkers and activists. Call this the possibility of *becoming the other*.[24] This possibility is oriented toward the others' worldview, practices, social and political formations, and the possibility of acquiring these things or versions of them. It is common to see calls for becoming the other articulated by Western advocates in relationship to Indigenous peoples in particular.[25] Consider, for instance, how ethicist Anna Peterson concludes the chapter "Native American Worldviews" in *Being Human*:

> Most contemporary Western cultures have lost their links to particular land areas that define communal and individual identity. Reestablishing such traditions—*becoming native*—requires a sort of cultural evolution, which takes time. However, Western cultures may not have generations to learn how to live sustainably on our adopted homelands. Is there a way, as Val Plumwood asks, that the West can come to see in native cultures "some fuller and better possibilities for reworking its own world-view and traditions"? Can we learn something from indigenous cultures' experiences of living lightly in places as diverse as the Alaskan boreal forest and the Arizona desert? Put another way, is it possible to speed up cultural evolution in the present condition, not only to conceive of but to *live by* an environmental ethic that makes long-term survival possible? And can we do so by learning from conservation-minded cultures whose development has taken millennia? If so, what do we borrow from those cultures? (2001, 126; first my emphasis)[26]

With her examination of the contours of Navajo and Koyukon worldviews before her, Peterson here recommends "becoming native" or "indigenizing" Western worldviews through a process of cultural transformation that involves learning and borrowing from Indigenous cultures. This recommendation is grounded in a positive evaluation of Navajo and Koyukon cultures according to

24. Cf. Édouard Glissant's criticism of the idea of "becoming the other" 2009, 193.
25. See, e.g., Rose (2005). We also gleaned this possibility in, for example, Bauman's interest in the Indigenous figure of the Trickster and Crist's desire in her global ecological civilization to model bioregional political units on Indigenous political formations and for anthropocentrists to return to a worldview of abundance, emulating Indigenous peoples. But these references to the virtues of the Indigenous other with respect to the nonhuman are ultimately oriented to converting a wide range of perspectives to these authors' preferred worldviews, the planetary perspective and worldview of abundance respectively.
26. The Plumwood quote is from *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (1993, 103).

ecological-ethical criteria. This idea of becoming the other is a possibility of relating to the other that, in some sense, inverts the conversionist preoccupation with making the other into a version of the self. While the conversionists aver some version of, "The ecological other should become us," the advocate for becoming the other asserts, "We should become them."

I have logical and ethical concerns with this interest in becoming the other,[27] but I outline it now by way of sharpening the meaning of apprenticeship. Following my critical engagement with eco-conversionism, which seeks to displace the ecological others' worldview, it might be thought that apprenticeship takes us in the direction of this possibility. Indeed, one might reasonably wish to call Peterson's efforts to understand the worldviews in question "apprenticeship" as well as the learning process she envisions for Western cultures to become their others. Yet my discussion of apprenticeship differs from calls to become the other in multiple respects. Firstly, I am not prescribing apprenticeship but rather describing it as part of an experiment in moral-imaginary augmentation, whereas Peterson and others advocate for certain transformations.

Conceptually, how the other figures into the imagined process of becoming native versus how the other figure into my illustrations of apprenticeship should not be overlooked. For advocates of becoming the other such as Peterson, what the other offers, what will be learned from them is in an important sense *known ahead of time*: these others supposedly know, say, how to be

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27. For some of the ethico-political problems with the assumptions of this perspective, see my discussions of Crist and Bauman in Chapters 1 and 2. For an analysis of the place of race in many left-liberal calls to become the other, and the desire for the racialized other, see bell hooks's *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (1992), especially Chapter 2, "Eating the Other." Regarding intellectual problems, consider, for example, that advocates of this position seem to want to say that the other is both *nonsensical* to them (i.e., is *other*, is in some sense unintelligible), for there is still something for a self to do—namely, become the other, to think, perceive, act, and value like *them*, and also *sensical* (i.e., intelligible), since there is something clearly grasped in the other's life that supposedly justifies the transformation of the self into the other. One might reasonably ask such advocates: if you already understand what you admire about your others, then what more, precisely, do you want? In what sense do these others remain other? Relatedly, how much does the desired perspective (into which the problematic view is to change) reflect a set of ready to hand values and ideas that are in fact projected onto others' lives? To the extent that the desired perspective is a kind of projection, what more is wanted from the other? In what ways might such projections in fact mask and assimilate the other to the desired worldview? There are doubtless some sensible responses to such questions, but I suspect they also point to an cluster of confusions that can attend admiration for another's life.

sustainable and we want to learn that from them. Those who advocate becoming the other, then, claim to not be the other and to have a relatively firm understanding of them—firm enough to call for one perspective (their own, say) to convert into the other's, for it is on the basis of this understanding (and therefore the other's transparency) that they call for the change. The other is *other* but *transparent* and, notably, also non-trivial in their lives with the nonhuman. Their lives are, indeed, desirable, even coveted. Thus, while eco-conversionism and calls for becoming the other differ in their evaluation of the other's life, and concomitant recommendations, they overlap on a conception of the other as transparent—as other and intelligible. As I discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, Indigenous peoples figure into the ecological imagination in an ambiguous way precisely because they are the objects of both preoccupations—objects of desire and impatience—and in each case transparent to the corresponding self-cast outsiders.

By contrast, the notion of apprenticeship as I am developing it is precisely a possibility that arises in relationship to someone who is initially opaque or not quite comprehended. This distinguishes apprenticeship from calls for becoming the other which ground such transformations in a supposed understanding and positive evaluation their ecological others. Apprenticeship, as I am describing it, posits no such thing. The other for the apprentice is not yet understood. Accordingly, that which the apprentice will learn, if successful, is not available ahead of time except in the most inchoate or thinly grasped sense, a sense hardly meriting the name understanding—this last point being one sometimes made by apprentices retrospectively, as we saw above.[28] Call the imagined process of becoming-the-other "apprenticeship" if you like, but when I invoke that term I do so with a picture of an opaque other in mind. I therefore differentiate between apprenticeship and the

28. My illustrations of apprenticeship sometimes resemble the process of becoming the other insofar as apprentices sometimes start with a putative understanding of that which is opaque to them, such as Carlile's supposed initial understanding of Joni's music or Littlefield's interlocutor who thought he understood that hunting was about hitting living targets with bullets until his father taught him otherwise.

possibility of becoming the other or very much otherlike, a mode of relation in which the other's life is putatively acknowledged as non-trivial ahead of the process of trying to become them.

Specification four is methodological. I want to head off some tempting ways to misread my *use* of the word apprenticeship, and especially the idea that it might bind me to some kind of metaphysical, specifically holist doctrine of understanding and meaning. For instance, my discussion of apprenticeship might seem to resemble McDowell's description of what it is like to dissolve another's opacity: "When the specific character of [an opaque other] starts to come into view for us, we are not filling in blanks in a pre-existing sideways-on picture of how her thought bears on the world, but coming to share with her a standpoint *within* a system of concepts, a standpoint from which we can join her in directing shared attention at the world" (1994, 35). Later in *Mind and World*, McDowell describes the learned appreciation of a conceptually constituted view of and engagement with the world as a process of initiation, a process in which initiates enter a "space of concepts" by acquiring conceptual capacities (capacities to live with certain concepts, including sensory-perceptual capacities) along with justificatory capacities (capacities to give reasons for and to critically reflect upon their judgments) (82-84).[29] He then situates this space of concepts within language, writing, "In being initiated into a language, a human being is introduced into something that already embodies putatively rational linkages between concepts, putatively constitutive of the layout of the space of reasons, before she comes on the scene" (125). Here the idea of tradition enters as well: "The feature of language that really matters is rather this: that a natural language, the sort of language into which human beings are first initiated, serves as a repository of tradition, a store of historically accumulated wisdom about what is a reason for what" (126). A kind of apprenticeship is built into

29. McDowell's notion of the space of concepts is a modification of Sellars's notion of the space of reasons (see McDowell 1994, 5-13, 70-86; Sellars 1997, 76).

this system from the bottom up: initiation first into a tradition, and then initiation into other spheres of understanding (such as those of someone with different languages, traditions, or concepts).

McDowell's conception of understanding is compelling especially insofar as it is part of a project in philosophical quietism.[30] This methodological point should commit us to turning to McDowell's account therapeutically, when we find ourselves slipping into the confusions it is designed to dissolve.[31] To treat his thought in this way, however, is to treat it as not trying to accomplish the philosophical aim of theorizing, say, the essence of understanding another.

Despite his quietist commitments McDowell sometimes sounds like he is defending a substantive theoretical, holist position on understanding and many commentators read him this way (see, e.g., Dreyfus 2013, 21-23; Honneth 2002, 246-47).[32] While I do not oppose semantic holism per

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30. McDowell is adamant in his philosophical quietism, that is, in his desire to bring thought to rest or peace through therapeutic constructions, which he explicitly inherits from Wittgenstein (see, e.g., McDowell 1994, 85-86; 2009).

31. The central problem McDowell deflates is how we reconcile two seemingly unavoidable and yet conflictual and equally unsatisfying positions. On the one hand, coherentism, which he associates with Donald Davidson, takes seriously the conceptual constitution of thought and experience and the dependence of any particular belief about the world on a whole host of other beliefs (with which it coheres) (1994, 14-16). This position takes seriously Kant's suggestion that "intuition without thought is blind"—senseless or unintelligible for thought—and astutely avoids what Wilfrid Sellars called the Myth of the Given: the idea that at the base of our experiential beliefs resides conceptually unmediated contact with elementary bits of reality (1997). Yet coherentism cannot offer us justification for what we believe, only exculpation: in light of the concepts and beliefs we have, we *cannot help but think* such and such is the case. This is logically distinct from justification: thinking such and such is the case *because it is*, because our reasons for thinking *that* are good ones (8). Coherentism conjures the image of our enclosure within a system of beliefs that we cannot escape and gives us no reason to think our beliefs are justified. This is an image, as McDowell famously puts it, of "frictionless spinning in the void" (87). It is intolerable since it robs us of thinking the world sometimes is as we think it is. On the other hand, recoiling to a kind of realism in which our thought touches the world as it is by the reception of "extra-conceptual impingements," a position represented for McDowell by Gareth Evans, inevitably leads us back to the Myth of the Given (7). Echoing Sellars, McDowell takes this myth to be unacceptable insofar as it contradictorily posits "unconceptualized content" that might have a logical relation (e.g., implication, probabilification, etc.) to a belief (ibid.; see also Lecture III). As we recoil from this myth by accepting the conceptual constitution of thought, we are driven back toward coherentism which can still only offer us excuses for why we think what we do. The limitations of each option thus lead to an interminable oscillation between them. McDowell's accounts of understanding and experience, which turn around his reimagining of the notion "second nature," are designed to neutralize this paradox.

32. That is, there are potential tensions in the methodology McDowell professes and his practice of it. Taken metaphysically instead of therapeutically, I wish for McDowell's vision to stand in for a range of meaning holists, such as Dreyfus and Taylor (see, e.g., 2015, 43-45), MacIntyre (2007, 222-25), or Quine (1951, 39-40). Gadamer's hermeneutical theory should also be on this list. McDowell cites many elements of Gadamer's elaborate system, which takes dialogue with a text as the paradigm of understanding (see Gadamer 2004, 311-317, 401-403, 459, 462-464). He cites Gadamer's "fusions of horizons" when discussing what it looks like to understand another (1994, 36n11), borrows the notion of prejudice when describing one's inheritance of a way of thinking (81n14), follows Gadamer's differentiation of nonhuman versus human understanding (115-19), and explicitly echoes Gadamer on tradition and understanding (126n16). Unlike many contemporary critics of such holisms, I do not think that any set of theories *entails* questionable ethics or politics (see, e.g., Morton 2019, 22). I merely undertake a task distinct from the development of such theories.

say, I want to avoid being misread in a similar fashion, that is, as advocating for a substantive metaphysical theory when I refer to and illustrate apprenticeship. In such a misreading, one might be led to think that my use of that word necessarily implies the abstract idea of *that to which one apprentices* as well as a necessary set of relations between these ideas (e.g., that understanding takes place within wholes, and it is such wholes to which one apprentices in coming to understand). One might even draw on my discussions of Carlile, Littlefield, and Govindrajan as evidence that I think there is some determinate abstract whole to which one apprentices, to which one necessarily apprentices if one is apprenticing, such as "hunting" or "goat sacrifice." My citation of apprenticeship, then, might inspire a holist metaphysical vision of what is involved in dissolving opacity, that it always involves "initiation" into "forms of life," "practices," "traditions," "cultures," or perhaps "horizons" of intelligibility through ongoing "fusions of horizons" (Gadamer 2004, 317).[33]

There are various ways to anticipate this misconstrual, including explicitly noting that it is not my aim to offer such a theory. In addition, I have offered multiple concrete and distinct illustrations of familiar happenings, and gestured to even more, that I want to call to mind when I refer to apprenticeship. Staying close to the "rough ground" in this fashion should focus our attention on concrete cases of what we might call apprenticeship, instead of my talk of apprenticeship leading us to abstract theories of "understanding others."[34] The cases above are offered in the realistic spirit: I am trying to describe the specifics not of what must happen but what *sometimes does* happen, what *can* happen in different cases in which someone starts out not understanding something or someone and tries to understand. Recalling Diamond's discussion of Wittgenstein's remark about the rags and the mouse (see Introduction; Wittgenstein 2009a, §52; Diamond 1991g, 47), we might say that the fact that we sometimes go from non-understanding to

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33. Some form of semantic holism can seem compulsory with the rise of post-critical holisms (e.g., Morton 2019, 18-42).
34. See Wittgenstein 2009a, §107.

understanding through work, what I am calling apprenticeship, is the mouse or the intriguing phenomenon about which we have questions. The rags are what happens in the particular cases. In one case, an individual thinks they understand some songs, someone else disagrees, and the first person reconsiders, listens to the songs again, reflects on them, hears them differently with time, and eventually understands them in a totally different way. That is not an abstract theorization about what happens, what will always happen, what we should expect to necessarily happen when someone apprentices to some abstract whole—a "tradition," say, or "practice." It is, rather, a collection of ordinary rags about what did happen, can happen, something one can call apprenticeship if so inclined (i.e., nothing in this case forces us to call it *anything at all*).

I also hope this attention to distinct specific cases will curb illusions that there is one simple thing called apprenticeship. We should appreciate the very different senses of the proposition "X apprentices to Y" when it is applied to the different cases above. These cases are, as far as I am concerned, contexts in which we *might* intelligibly say "X apprentices to Y." And yet, what it means for X to work to dissolve Y's opacity is not one thing across cases, but rather refers to a variety of different elements that might be arranged in a number of ways depending on the describer's interests.[35] What it is to reconsider one's prejudgments of a musician's body of work involves innumerable differences from what it is to do years of fieldwork in rural Eastern India, including learning to herd goats, to assist in their dramatic births, to witness and discuss their ritual sacrifice. These cases likewise show innumerable differences from what it is to teaching a child to track, see, kill, field dress, and butcher deer, all while training them in the values that order such practices. These disparate details matter. I emphasize plausible resonances, what Wittgenstein called family resemblances, across these cases by arranging these details in specific ways, but I do so with specific

35. I am thinking here of Wittgenstein's comments on Frazer's developmental arrangement of his ethnographic facts and the various ends to which different arrangements of the same facts might be put (see 1993b, 131).

aims and not because these reverberations are what *really* matter in these cases, what capture their essence. These examples might as easily belong to an argument that emphasizes the radical differences between them (say, between what it is to value living things, such as animals, versus non-living, such as music; what it is to raise and love livestock versus what it is to respect, stalk, and kill wild animals; or what it is to be mindful of one's responsibility in giving up animals in sacrifice versus talking about the animals that *you* kill "giving up their lives" for your nourishment). This act of emphasizing is undertaken to recall familiar possibilities of everyday life in a context in which they have been forgotten: to recollect that among the possibilities of getting on with others there can be the possibility of working to make sense of someone whom you do not understand, only think you understand, or only partly understand. This non-metaphysical observation, with its logical indeterminacy (there *can* be, not there always *is*) is offered up in a context in which some people, us eco-conversionists, have seemingly forgotten it, as our preoccupation with conversion suggests. The picture of the other as opaque and potentially nontrivial assists in this recollective exercise. It should combat the association of apprenticeship with metaphysics to recall the pragmatics of my reference to apprenticeship—what it is I am up to in referencing it, the context of this referencing.[36] I want this anti-metaphysical qualification to apply to the additional practical possibilities I explore in the rest of the chapter, but I will spare the reader further rehearsals of it.

§3 Refusal to Mentor and other Limitations on Apprenticeship

Apprenticeship is hardly the only possibility for relating to others that comes into focus with the picture of the ecological other as opaque and potentially nontrivial. In the remaining sections, I

36. If the reader insists on a metaphysical schema to account for such phenomena, despite my insistence that *that* is not my project and, moreover, that such a theory will not speak to the real need that calls for it, then so far as it is useful I would prefer the image, following recent post-critical holists, of the open whole—the "nontotal, ragged," and concrete *rest* to which some particular is connected in specific and dynamic ways (see, e.g., Haraway 2016a, 9; 2016c, 13, 173n2; Latour 2017, 35-36, 97-98, 135-137, 223; Morton 2019, 1, 16, 23, 139, 203). For consistency with my own method and commitments, any such invocations could be taken in the spirit of a *turning*, of a turning of our gaze back to the specific realities of what is involved in cases of non-understanding and then: striving for understanding.

want to consider some alternatives that are distinct from though closely connected to apprenticeship, and which that idea helps to articulate.[37] To begin, it seems plain that there can be various limitations to apprenticeship and that these are rightly counted among the possibilities that the alternative picture of the other brings into view. I am particularly interested in the idea that apprenticeship might be denied or refused by opaque others, what I call refusal to mentor, and the further possibilities that such failure throws into relief. First, I want to consider three other limitations to apprenticeship, which not only expand the inventory of other-oriented possibilities but also sharpen the distinctive qualities of having a mentor refuse an apprentice.

3.1 Limitation 1: Refusing to Apprentice

In her essay, "Living Treaties, Breathing Research" (2014), ethnographer, attorney, and Anishinaabe-Métis citizen Aimée Craft seeks to sort out the Anishinaabe understandings of Treaty 1 or the "Stone Fort Treaty," the 1871 treaty signed between the British Crown and the Anishinaabe and Swampy Cree nations of southern Manitoba. The treaty, Craft explains, "effectively opened up the west to settlement and expansion" (5).[38] Since its signing, "the Anishinaabe and the Crown have disputed the terms, understandings, and obligations that arose out of the treaty" (ibid.). In her description of the nine long days over which the treaty was negotiated, at a post of the Hudson Bay Company, Craft describes a particular scene in which Chief Ayee-ta-pe-pe-tung corrects one of the Queen's negotiators regarding his so-called "ownership" of the land, explaining that he was instead and in fact "made of the land" (Craft 2014, 16). Subsequently, Craft writes,

> Other Chiefs relayed their view that they had a sacred responsibility towards the land and that the future of the land was intimately linked to the future of Anishinaabe children: "The land cannot speak for itself. We have to speak for it; and want to know fully how you are going to treat our children." Chief Ayee-ta-pe-pe-tung explained that his land was a gift from creation and that he could not give an answer, as the future of his grandchildren was dark, based on the proposal before him. (Ibid.)

37. In the next chapter, I will describe a further possibility, what I call re-reading the other, which can be read as another iteration of apprenticeship.
38. Craft focuses on Anishinaabe perspectives and my discussion follows that lead.

Craft is rightly interested in how such details flesh out the Anishinaabe understandings of the treaty and its stakes.[39] She reconstructs late-nineteenth century Anishinaabe political norms in order to disrupt the hegemonic application of strictly Anglophone legal exegesis to such treaties—a just cause if there ever was one. However, what interests me in this scene is how Chief Ayee-ta-pe-pe-tung's correction and the other Chief's distinctive concerns and questions can be read as invitations to apprenticeship, to understanding their distinct conceptualizations of the matters at hand (land, children, gifts, relations to the foregoing). Not *that*, Chief Ayee-ta-pe-pe-tung says, *this*. This reading then casts the subsequent disparate understandings of the treaty as resulting from a kind of refusal, say, by the negotiators, to apprentice themselves to their interlocutors. Craft's entire examination is premised on the fact that the signatories to the treaty have different understandings of what it means, seem not to understand what the others take it to mean. This state of nonunderstanding is evidenced by the contests over the obligations and permissions agreed upon immediately following the signing. I want to foreground that this state of nonunderstanding is preceded by the Crown's signatories refusing opportunities for learning from or apprenticing under the Anishinaabe.[40]

3.2 Limitations 2 and 3: Incapacities and Indeterminacy in Learning

The scene from Craft's paper illustrates one possibility connected to but distinct from apprenticeship: that one may refuse *to be taken on* as an apprentice, to work to dissolve the other's opacity. I am construing this as a kind of limitation in relationship to the possibility of apprenticeship, one the would-be apprentice imposes. The next two limitations are not necessarily

39. Kyle Whyte has commented on this scene as well (see 2018, 127). It was Whyte's paper that led me to Craft's work.
40. Craft's paper also offers us another example of what can be involved in apprenticeship, for instance, in the passages in which she describes her interviews with her grandfather. She writes, "I told Mishomis (Grandfather) that I wanted to understand Anishinaabe inaakonigewin; Anishinaabe law. How long would it take? Would he be my teacher? He explained that he couldn't teach me all of it, that others would play a big role. I wondered if there would be limits placed on what I could learn because I was a woman, I was young, I was a lawyer. He told me to start on the land (aki)—to look at the land and to ask it some questions—this is where I would find out most of what I needed to know about law" (9-10; see also 2-3).

imposed by anyone, but have rather more complex places in projects of understanding. Some remarks from Wittgenstein help to illustrate both. Here is the first:

> In religion every level of devoutness must have its appropriate form of expression which has no sense at a lower level. This doctrine, which means something at a higher level, is null and void for someone who is still at the lower level; he *can* only understand it *wrongly* and so these words are *not* valid for such a person.
>
> For instance, at my level the Pauline doctrine of predestination is ugly nonsense, irreligiousness. Hence it is not suitable for me, since the only use I could make of the picture I am offered would be a wrong one. If it is a good and godly picture, then it is so for someone at a quite different level, who must use it in his life in a way completely different from anything that would be possible for me. (1980, 32e)

Set aside some of the ambiguities of this passage, such as the logical possibility that the Pauline doctrine of predestination is *in fact* "ugly nonsense" and that those who use it with *apparent* sense in their lives are in fact confused and lost. What interests me instead is the possibility expressed by Wittgenstein's sense of his own relationship to this doctrine. What comes out in this passage is the idea that one can labor to understand an opaque other, become a kind of apprentice, and yet fail to dissolve that opacity. In the above, Wittgenstein has tried to make sense of the Pauline doctrine but feels he has not succeeded—leading him to think he is on a different level from someone who does understand.[41] He does not understand, he judges, but not for want of trying. This point echoes the passage from the *Investigations* cited in Chapter 3, that learners' capacities to learn can come to end (2009a, §143). The explanation of such limitations might be psychological (perhaps stress or distractions or age impede this learning), but I see no reason why they must be. As much as there may be psychological blocks, there are also, after all, bad teachers and intellectual blocks. Sometimes one cannot make a connection because the right tip is never offered. Sometimes, even with plenty good advice, one progresses a certain distance in a practice, say, studying music theory extensively, and cannot arrive at other related understandings, such as why anyone would make or listen to

41. Again, it may be that he is wrong and that he does understand and the doctrine is irreligious. But that is an ordinary possibility, not one that rules out that one might be right to think one does not understand despite trying.

slowcore drone rock.[42] I see no reason to say everything learnable is learnable by everyone always unless psychological problems impinge.[43] The example of trying to understand certain religious ideas is a good one, and philosophy of religion bears many examples of philosophers, such as Wittgenstein, who *want* to understand, who *try* to understand, but feel they never do.[44]

The third limitation is closely relatedly, namely, that students can strive to learn, can study and apprentice, and feel undecided on whether they understand. As Diamond has argued, this is how Wittgenstein himself appears in the first lecture of his "Lectures on Religious Belief."[45] A relevant passage reads,

> If you ask me whether or not I believe in a Judgement Day, in the sense in which religious people have belief in it, I wouldn't say: "No. I don't believe there will be such a thing." It would seem to me utterly crazy to say this.
>
> And then I give an explanation: "I don't believe in . . .", but then the religious person never believes what I describe.
>
> I can't say. I can't contradict that person.
>
> In one sense, I understand all he says—the English words "God", "separate", etc. I understand. I could say: "I don't believe in this," and this would be true, meaning I haven't got these thoughts or anything that hangs together with them. But not that I could contradict the thing.
>
> You might say: "Well, if you can't contradict him, that means you don't understand him. If you did understand him, then you might." That again is Greek to me. My normal technique of language leaves me. I don't know whether to say they understand one another or not. (Wittgenstein 1966, 55)[46]

42. Cf. Wittgenstein's discussion of the limits there can be in learning to judge whether an expression of feeling is genuine and the potential place of teachers and tips in such learning (2009b, §355).
43. Doubtless many of these blocks have psychological dimensions, and the lines between, say, intellectual and psychological blocks may blur. Cf. Wittgenstein's discussion of aspect-blindness (e.g., 2009b, §257) and Cavell's discussion of aspect and soul blindness (1979, 360-361).
44. William James also comes to mind (see, e.g., 1956; 1987a, 606-19; 1987b, 457-69). When reading James on religion, it is sometimes difficult to avoid the impression that he seeks to convince himself of the sense of religious ideas and practices as much as openly inquire into them or defend them from critics. To multiply examples, we could consider Kuhn's discussion of the difficulty seasoned scientists can have in seeing the sense in new paradigms of research (e.g., 1996, 18-19, 90). Or consider the limitations imposed on trying to understand the racial, gender, or sexual other, or reality itself, by stereotypes, pernicious tropes, and other forms of prejudicial socialization (see, e.g., Harding 1992, 452-58; Mills 1997, 18; 2007, 20-35).
45. My reading of these Lectures is significantly indebted to Diamond's essay "Wittgenstein on Religious Belief: The Gulfs Between Us" (2005).
46. The "Lectures" derive from notes taken by Wittgenstein's students. As Diamond observes, the awkward transition between paragraphs one and two in this passage suggests that the note taker may have missed some material in the lecture or that the material is inaccurately ordered (Diamond 2005, 102).

The remarks leading up to the last paragraph seem to point to a commonplace but mistaken reading of Wittgenstein. In this reading, he is ascribed a substantive use-theory of language in which words are said to only have meaning in their language-games. From this premise it is said to follow that if you don't know how to play the game, you don't understand the word, and often also that one can only critique a use of a word or some doing within the language-game—say, pointing out a contradiction—from a position already allowed for in the language-game.[47] When Wittgenstein says he "can't contradict" someone who believes in a Judgement Day, that it would be "crazy" for him to contradict this person, that the religious person never agrees with Wittgenstein's restatement of the belief, it is tempting to read these remarks as suggesting that he and the believer are playing different language games, that the believer plays a game Wittgenstein does not understand. Indeed, this is what an interlocutor says in the last paragraph: If you cannot contradict, you must not understand.

This interpretation reads a binaristic model of understanding into the text in which only two alternatives are available: either you understand someone and can contradict them (if you disagree with them) or you do not understand them and cannot contradict them (here 'disagreement' is nonsensical). The disappearance of alternatives to such a stark dualism here signals the movement of the metaphysical spirit. Premised on ascribing a substantive theory of language to Wittgenstein, such a reading enlists Wittgenstein's above remarks in the project of substantiating that theory. But the positing of such a theory runs against the drift Wittgenstein's realistic spirit. We should therefore suspect that the lesson of the passage has been missed.

The penultimate paragraph read together with the final one suggests a different interpretation, one that coheres with Wittgenstein's methodology, explicitly challenges the above reading, and articulates a further limitation that can arise when we try to understand another. As

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47. For a good inventory of this kind of misreading, see Alice Crary's critical discussion in "Wittgenstein's Philosophy in Relation to Political Thought" (2000b).

Diamond suggests, to appreciate these passages, we need to take seriously how Wittgenstein adheres to the first person singular throughout them (2005, 104). He is not reflecting abstractly on the options that are available to us when someone says they believe in a Judgement Day. He is expressing his own relationship to this utterance, illustrating what that relationship can be like. The penultimate paragraph suggests that for him there *is* understanding here. The believer uses words that Wittgenstein knows, that he has uses for. In an important sense, then, he *does* understand what the believer says—he knows these language games. But clearly there is also a sense in which he does not seem to have a place in his life for the believer's uses of these words. They do not "hang together" with other thoughts (which does not amount to saying that he does not understand those uses or plays another game). This leads to the final and most important statement in the last paragraph: Wittgenstein denies his interlocutor's assertion that Wittgenstein must not understand. He says instead that his criteria for deciding whether he understands or not do not help him here.[48] *He cannot say* whether he understands—some things tell for it, others against. It is because he cannot say whether he understands that he feels he cannot contradict. Wittgenstein's resistance to being slotted into either understanding or non-understanding on the basis of abstract criteria for understanding signals the movement of the realistic spirit and, as Diamond notes, represents a rejection of the binaristic reading above (Diamond 2005, 107). His expressions of his experience draw attention to what our lives with others are sometimes like: they sometimes, perhaps often, involves these sorts of indeterminacies. His insistence on such indeterminacy deflates the idea that we will always be able to decide whether understanding is present and invites reflection on why we might imagine and desire such determinacy. His refusal to contradict the believer in his ambiguous state also signals a state of attentive consideration, a sense of trying to doing right by the case and

48. See Diamond (2005, 104).

the believer.[49] In these senses, this case illustrates the possibility that one can try to understand, even try to resist tempting shortcuts to deciding about understanding, and yet never feel certain that one does.

3.3 Limitation 4: Refusal to Mentor

We can refuse to apprentice ourselves to others even when opportunities arise, and we can discover limitations in our ability to understand others or feel that even with effort we cannot say, one way or the other, whether we understand. I lay out these possibilities because they are genuine.[50] But they also sharpen the next one, one that is critical for Western environmental thought, namely, that others can refuse to take us on as apprentices, in what I call *refusals to mentor*. This relation-possibility is the inverse of the refusal to become an apprentice. I will illustrate it with cases concerning Indigenous-settler encounters in North America. The possibility of having one's desire for apprenticeship rejected in this case is particularly noteworthy because, as we saw above with Peterson and with Bauman and Crist in Chapter 1, many environmentalists are interested in the idea of *becoming Indigenous*, of transforming their own perspectives and forms of living, and those of their cultures, into Indigenized variations. This deeply felt interest in the Indigenous other explains why I examine six different cases that help us appreciate the possibility of a refusal to mentor. This variety will not only enrich our understanding of this possibility, but also help indicate how plausible such refusal might be in our lives with these others. This multiplicity should persuade those committed to "Indigenizing," say, settler cultures, to take the possibility of refusal seriously and to think about how to respond well to it, a matter I take up, though scarcely exhaust, in the next section.

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49. Some of the ethical dimensions of the realistic spirit are thus foregrounded here, including the kind of *irresponsibility* to the real, including the reality of the other, involved in philosophical deflection.
50. Again, they also do not pretend to be exhaustive. We could continue to multiply such limitations to include, for instance, that others may be uncertain or deny that we understand even when we think we do. I cannot fathom a reason to suggest that we could finally list all the limitations that might arise in such efforts.

Example one comes from Vine Deloria, Jr.'s classic *Custer Died for Your Sins* (1988). Deloria begins the first chapter of this text by arguing that the "foremost plight" of Native Americans is their supposed "transparency" to settlers (1). This presumed understanding licenses all sorts of disastrous interventions in Indigenous life. He concludes that same chapter by writing, "What we need is a cultural leave-us-alone agreement, in spirit and in fact" (27). "Leave us alone"—this is the general form of response to the inquisitive non-Natives, would-be apprentices, that interests me. Subsequent examples will specify the multiple senses of this form.

Example two: in a 2021 interview, Patricia Marroquin Norby, a Professor of Native American Studies and the first Native full-time curator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, was asked what she thought was important when thinking about "cross-cultural encounters and exchanges between Native and non-Native artists and communities" (Thurston-Hamerski and Marroquin Norby 2021). Marroquin Norby responded,

> Listening. More specifically, listening without always responding or asking questions is a very important skill. Indigenous communities have their own voices, experiences, and perspectives to share when it is appropriate. As academics, we are encouraged to ask smart questions, investigate, and seek out information and answers. Historically, scholars have been very privileged in this regard and, at times, have entered into spaces uninvited. *It's important to realize that sometimes there is information that is not ours to know or not ours to share.* We need to respect these boundaries when building relationships with Indigenous communities and other communities outside our own. (ibid., my emphasis)

I am interested in the latter part of this passage, which instantiates an Indigenous individual saying that "non-Natives" can be disruptively presumptive ("uninvited") in attempting to access Indigenous spaces and forms of knowledge. This criticism is paired with a kind of reminder: there are things that some of us do not get to know, and relatedly, things and some of us do not get to teach or disclose to others. There can be limitations to what some others are willing to teach. These criticisms and limitations suggest the possibility of someone, say, a settler environmentalist, seeking certain knowledge and in some cases being refused access to it.

Examples three and four are two posts from a pair of popular Indigenous activist Instagram accounts.[51] In early January 2023, @decolonialmatriachs posted a series of "Indigenous Intentions for 2023." The fourth intention reads, "We will not waste our valuable time, energy, and resources on decolonizing colonial institutions. That means academia, health care systems, and colonial political systems. Because those systems are designed to colonize," and the fifth states, "We will set our boundaries and speak up, firmly, when we feel we are being tokenized or when we feel our knowledge is being hijacked for colonial/capitalistic/academic gain. 'No' will be a very common word we will say." Next, @native.mutt.spirit posted on January 5, 2021: "It is your duty, as an Indigenous person, to protect ancestral knowledge from white people. Not everything is for everyone. This TikTok phenomena of sharing our cultural beliefs for white viewers is weird. We aren't on display, we aren't an exhibition." These posts echo Marroquin Norby's assertion that there are cases in which non-Natives, specifically white settlers, should not be granted access to Indigenous knowledge.[52] The denial of such access is cast as a duty in the latter instance; "no" is to be a familiar response to inquiry in the former post. Each of these posts also explicitly connect such

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51. The discourse on the ethics of qualitative social media research is nascent. Some central considerations include the fact that many users do not think of their social media use as aimed a broad public even if they have public accounts, and likely do not anticipate that the content they create will be used as data in academic research. Such academic use becomes particularly pernicious when the content in question includes nude or partially nude images (Tiidenberg 2018) or the images of children (Ravn et al. 2020), but questions arise in the treatment of any media that is arguably aimed at a relatively narrow audience as if it were merely a public good. This discourse rightly problematizes the idea that use of a public social media account implies consent to the use of that content, entails the open-availability of the content of that account. Fortunately, the accounts I cite here are less ambiguous in their public status and by my lights fall outside of the forgoing concerns. They are public-facing, activist accounts that seek to educate and disseminate information to relatively wide publics, and the content I analyze excludes any information that might endanger anyone. They should be seen within the trend of multiplying social justice platforms that flourished online especially in the aftermath of George Floyd's murder in 2020 and almost exclusively publish activistic slideshows (see Nguyen 2020). These accounts are explicitly striving to reach wide audiences and explicitly address their posts to both Indigenous and settler audiences. As one indicator of this public orientation, I only reference accounts with over ten thousand followers. At this writing, @decolonialmatriarchs has 50.6k followers while @native.mutt.spirit, cited next, has 20.8k. These features position these accounts more so alongside other self-publishing authors and activists than, say, individuals imagining that they are sharing pictures of family with family and friends. Nevertheless, the mere indeterminacy of norms around digital research leads me to anonymize even these blatantly public utterances. Verification of their posts is available upon request.

52. Numerous Indigenous-led organizations and activist groups produce material that shares the sensibility of @decolonialmatriachs and @native.mutt.spirit.

refusal to colonialism. In the first, some institutions are set beyond the pale of decolonization, and concerns with tokenization and epistemic commodification are cited as grounds for refusing access to knowledge. In the second case, @native.mutt.spirit ties refusal to a criticism of new iterations of objectifying practices of displaying and exoticizing Indigenous thought and culture for white people. When I refer to the possibility that someone might refuse to take us settler environmentalists on as apprentices to their forms of living and understanding, I have these kinds of objections in mind.

Fifthly, consider the paper "Indigenous Lessons about Sustainability Are Not Just for 'All Humanity'" (2018) by Kyle Whyte, Chris Caldwell, and Marie Schaefer. Among the authors' aims is to develop the notion of "Indigenous planning," an "important way in which to exercise collective self-determination" (155). The sort of "planning" that interests them often refers to

> practical activities whereby a collective, such as a society or community or nation, envisions different futures that are more or less desirable for itself and its members, determines what capacities and strategies must be developed today to be prepared for different future scenarios, and revisits and revises its current capacities for preparedness to adjust to current and expected challenges. (155)

The authors are particularly concerned with Indigenous planning that responds to problems shared by many Indigenous communities, such as the forces of settler colonialism. Planning of this sort, they explain, involves the affirmation, protection, and recuperation of distinctively Indigenous worldviews and traditions since these things are intrinsically valuable to Indigenous individuals and because such practices are part of surviving and resisting ongoing oppression (157-58). "In planning," they write, "Indigenous peoples imagine themselves strategically in ways that are not reliant on settler and other oppressive desires, discourses, and needs" (164).

For instance, the authors consider the Menominee Nation's various ecological and especially forestry programs, focusing on the College of the Menominee Nation's Sustainable Development Institute founded in 1993. "The Sustainable Development Institute," they explain, "focuses on what can best be described as reflective planning processes of Indigenous sustainability. The processes are

rooted in what we can understand and recover from our experiences prior to and during settler colonialism and how our own interpretations can be used to support the continuance of Indigenous peoples" (174). The authors emphasize that much of what the Institute does "is not so much centered on Indigenous lessons on sustainability for all humanity. Rather, SDI's work considers what processes support Indigenous peoples' sustainability in the face of the challenges of settler colonialism." This focus differs significantly from "how some non-Indigenous communities seek to understand our lessons of sustainability for the purpose of saving themselves or humankind." Against the idea that Indigenous peoples, say, the Menominee, are guardians of ecological knowledge to be accessed or disseminated to others, Whyte, Caldwell, and Schaefer describe Indigenous planning "as a way of reflecting on Indigenous sustainability… about figuring out the planning processes arising from the contexts that we actually live in today, in which our societies are greatly limited and threatened by settler colonialism and other forms of oppression" (ibid.). They conclude their essay as follows:

> Whether settler and other privileged populations ultimately can achieve sustainability in the near- or long-term planning horizons is not so much our concern. Regardless of what happens with them, the odds are that Indigenous peoples will continue to face different forms of colonial oppression and must innovate strategies for protecting our continuance no matter what non-Indigenous populations end up doing. (175)

Whyte, Caldwell, and Schaefer again suggest that there may be things some Indigenous people know that outsiders may wish to know but may not be granted accessed to. Settler needs, desires, frameworks, etc. are strategically set aside in the sort of planning that interests them. The authors connect such limitations to the ongoing and historical threats of settler colonialism. They also explicitly tie such refusal to another idea, namely, to Indigenous cultural and political resurgence, a topic made central in the final example.

My sixth case is the argument by Dene Yellowknives political theorist Glen Sean Coulthard in his *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (2014). This case not only vividly

illustrates the possibility of refusal, but also theorizes the grounds of such refusal. Coulthard calls for a "resurgent politics of recognition" among Indigenous peoples, which involves a turn away from settler forms of Indigenous-settler reconciliation and toward the recovery and re-inhabitation of Indigenous forms of living. This recommendation builds from a particular analysis of settler colonialism.[53] Following Fanon, particularly in *Black Skin, White Masks* (2008), Coulthard suggests that settler colonialism has structural, or objective, and psycho-affective, or subjective, dimensions, both of which should be overcome to achieve genuine liberation. The structural dimension refers to the political and economic structures (e.g., institutions, policies, and naturalized practices) that facilitate the domination of Indigenous peoples by the settler-colony. Drawing on a modified account of Marx's theory of primitive accumulation, Coulthard argues that this domination in many settler-colonial contexts, and particularly in Canada, consists largely in the "dispossession of Indigenous peoples of their lands and self-determining authority" (Coulthard 2014, 25).[54]

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53. Coulthard is thinking in particular about the First Nation/Canadian political context, though he rightly sees his reflections as bearing on other settler colonial situations (Coulthard 2014, 2). He is particularly interested in encouraging Indigenous peoples to reject what he calls the "liberal politics of recognition," by which he means "recognition-based models of liberal pluralism that seek to 'reconcile' Indigenous assertions of nationhood with settler-state sovereignty via the accommodation of Indigenous identity claims in some form of renewed legal and political relationship with the Canadian state" (3). These models strive to acknowledge or recognize and accommodate Indigenous claims to political and cultural sovereignty and particularity through "a combination of land claim settlements, economic development initiatives, and self-government agreements" (3). The operative good here is *mutual recognition* among two or more parties, a good that, so the argument goes, has been denied to Indigenous peoples by the settler state and its citizens. Calls for recognition and accommodation seek to rectify this denial. According to Coulthard, in the past half-century, the politics of recognition and accommodation has achieved hegemonic status in Canadian political discourse, including among many of the Indigenous peoples who are negotiating life under Canadian settler colonialism (1-3, 6, 23). He rightly credits Hegel with contributing this model of recognition to political thought and philosophers such as Charles Taylor with continuing to refine and popularize this notion (see 27-31). Despite its promise of reconciliation, however, Couthard argues that the politics of recognition in fact "serves to reproduce the very forms of colonial power which [Indigenous] demands for recognition sought to transcend" (23-24) by "subtly [reproducing] nonmutual and unfree relations rather than free and mutual ones" (17). Rather than representing an overcoming of the settler-colonial relation, then, for Coulthard the dominance of the politics of recognition represents a shift in the modus operandi of settler colonialism in Canada: from blatantly violent forms of domination to more concealed modes of governance, extraction, and assimilation (3-6, 25).53 In effect, talk of recognition and reconciliation tend to create a façade of decolonial justice, while tending to leave relatively untouched the structures and subjective processes that facilitate the continued dispossession of Indigenous lands. As I discuss below, Coulthard's resurgent politics of recognition seeks to avoid these problems with two moves: the rejection of settler forms of thinking and being and the quasi-Nietzschean form of self-affirmation that spurns settlers and seeks to materialize Indigenous political and economic systems.

54. For Fanon and Coulthard, in actual settler-colonial contexts, the (liberal) politics of recognition tends to focus too much on questions of recognizing cultural difference and autonomy rather than the structures of the capitalist system that conduce to the exploitation of Indigenous land (Coulthard 2014, 35). In practice, when concessions are made to

In addition to this material-structural aspect, Fanon famously argues that colonized populations tend to develop "psycho-existential" or "psycho-affective" attachments to the structures of settler colonialism and to how settlers understand or (mis)recognize them (Fanon 2008, xvi; see also 2004 wretched; Coulthard 2014, 26). This subjective dimension of settler-colonialism is how Fanon and Coulthard explain the reproduction of colonial rule without the perpetual use of explicit force. In addition to explicitly violent means, the settler-colony maintains control through "the production [in the colonized mind] of the specific modes of colonial thought, desire, and behavior that implicitly or explicitly commit the colonized to the types of practices and subject positions that are required for their continued domination" (Coulthard 2014, 16). For example, it is common for members of the subaltern to internalize colonists' dehumanizing images of them (as, say, intellectually impaired, beastly, sexually excessive, ugly, filthy, wicked, evil), thereby naturalizing such images and the structures wrapped up with them (say, segregation, disproportionate policing, the creation of ghettos, etc.) (See, e.g., Fanon 2008, vx, 41-42, 79-80, 93, 118; Coulthard 2014, 32). Coulthard writes, "countless studies, novels, and autobiographical narratives have outlined, in painful detail, how [racist recognition] have saddled [Indigenous] individuals with low self-esteem, depression, alcohol and drug abuse, and violent behaviors directed both inward against the self and outward toward others" (41-42). In this process, the settler (mis)perceives the colonized as subhuman, and over time the latter can come to accept those perceptions and correlated modes of governance. In such ways, colonial rule can entice Indigenous peoples to "*identify*, either implicitly or explicitly, with the profoundly *asymmetrical* and *nonreciprocal* forms of recognition either imposed on or

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Indigenous land claims and assertions of political-economic autonomy (through, say, the return of lands or various gestures by the state acknowledging Indigenous political sovereignty), such concessions are recurrently curtailed in the interest of the settler state. For example, the Canadian court system has consistently retained the right for the state to infringe upon Indigenous sovereignty when any of a capacious host of conditions are met (Coulthard 2014, 14).54 Such examples show how the terms of recognition and accommodation tend to be set by the settler state, and tend, therefore, to benefit settlers (26). Coulthard calls this avoidance of or superficial response to objective colonial formations the "structural problem of colonial recognition" (17).

granted to them by the settler state and society" (25). Settler-colonial governance depends, in the long-term, on the creation of such "colonized subjects," subjects who, in some sense, accept the terms and rationale of settler-colonialism (Fanon 2008, 2; Coulthard 2014, 16). Coulthard calls this the psycho-affective problem of colonial recognition.[55]

Overcoming the structural and psycho-affective problems of settler colonialism[56] requires transformations in both dimensions. To address only one aspect is to achieve partial liberation, leaving untouched the effects of the other. In addition, insofar as each dimension creates conditions for the other, to only address one is to maintain the possibility of a return to the full system. To overcome the structural aspect requires the strategic transformation of the settler-colonial socioeconomic structure (2014, 33). The subjective dimension, in turn, the complexes (e.g., senses of racialized and Eurocentric inferiority) produced in the colonized, is overcome through "struggle and conflict" that reveals the subaltern's power, value, and freedom to and for themselves (38-39).[57] For Coulthard, following Fanon, both processes require a "turn away" from the socioeconomic systems and recognition practices of the settler (48). What is required is "a quasi-Nietzschean form of personal and collective *self*-affirmation" (Coulthard 2014, 43; Fanon 2008, 195-97).[58] This process of

55. Coulthard suggests that the contemporary discourses of recognition only superficially address the subjective side of colonization. The terms according to which Indigenous peoples are recognized tend to be set by settler institutions and norms of political discourse, such as recognizing Indigenous peoples as *rights-bearing individuals*, *land owners*, *cultural and religious proprietors*, *political sovereigns*, or *citizens of liberal democratic states* (see, e.g., 2014, 42, 159). Following Taiaiake Alfred (2015), Coulthard explains that these putatively liberationist and conciliatory categories adjudicate the shapes that recognition can take and "can come to shape the self-understandings of the Indigenous claimants involved" (42); simultaneously eroding traditional Indigenous understandings, hastening the erasure of distinctive Indigenous perspectives, and shoring up colonized subjectivities (ibid.).55 Coulthard suggests that this exacerbation of the settler-colonial situation follows from the fact that in actual settler-colonial contexts the settler often does not desire recognition from the colonized, but rather wants their land and labor (see Coulthard 2014, 40; Fanon 2008, 195ft10). While the discourse of political recognition posits that freedom follows from the mutual recognition of subjectivities, Coulthard explains, "in relations of domination that exist between nation-states and the sub-state national groups that they 'incorporate' into their territorial and jurisdictional boundaries, there is no mutual dependency in terms of a need or desire for recognition" (2014, 40).
56. And, by Coulthard's lights, the neocolonial limitations of the politics of recognition.
57. Coulthard notes, later on Fanon came to see violent struggle as necessary to this process (Coulthard 2014; 38; see Fanon 2004). Coulthard does not seem to endorse this turn.
58. A Nietzschean "revaluation" of Indigenous culture, history, socioeconomic institutions, and political formations.

self-affirmative "desubjectification" involves the critical retrieval and modification of Indigenous ideas, practices, institutions, and values, "in ways that seek to prefigure, alongside those with similar ethical commitments, radical alternatives to the structural and psycho-affective facets of colonial domination discussed above" (48-49). Coulthard calls this a resurgent politics of recognition.

Notably for my discussion of refusal, this process of resurgence is suspicious of and "directed *away* from assimilative lure of" settler reconciliation processes (48). Cultural and political resurgence should not take its cue from the settler society and its institutions, but rather be critically conscious of and attempt to "prefigure" or preemptively obviate the structural and psycho-affective elements of settler-colonial domination (24, 48-49). What is being sought is "a *totally new set of social, cultural and economic relations*," arising from a critical revitalization of traditional Indigenous forms of practice, understanding, etc. (148, 157, 171). Such resurgence is to avoid slipping into "*ressentiment*-infected nostalgia," serving to restrict Indigenous praxis to backward-looking reaction and distracting from the needs of the present and future (147).[59]

To illustrate such resurgence, Coulthard examines the Idle No More movement, an Indigenous led decolonial movement that formed in 2012/2013 in opposition to a Canadian budget plan, Bill C-45, that threatened to erode a range of treaty rights. Idle No More's activities included direct actions such as,

> temporarily blocking access to Indigenous territories with the aim of impeding the exploitation of Indigenous peoples' land and resources, or in rarer cases still, the more-or-less permanent reoccupation of a portion of Native land through the establishment of a reclamation site which also serves to disrupt, if not entirely block, access to Indigenous peoples' territories by state and capital for sustained periods of time. (166)

59. Fanon saw such self-recognition as instrumental to achieving decolonial liberation (see 2008, 205); Coulthard moves beyond Fanon's thought on this point to argue that cultural and political resurgence can generate intrinsically valuable and genuine "*alternatives* to the oppressive social relations that produce colonized subjects in the first place" (2014, 132).

Note here that the disruption of settler aims is a foreseeable but secondary consequence of self-affirming, culturally resurgent "reclamation" practices.[60] The direct actions Coulthard describes are not only reactive and nay-saying (to settler-colonial practices); they are also yes-saying:

> they are the affirmative *enactment* of another modality of being, a different way of relating to and with the world. In the case of blockades like the one erected by the Anishinaabe people of Grassy Narrows in northwest Ontario, which has been in existence since 2002, they become a *way of life*, another form of *community*. They embody through praxis our ancestral obligations to protect the lands that are core to who we are as Indigenous peoples. (169)

The practices of Idle No More illustrate the complicated mixture of decolonial activities that interest Coulthard, which he sees as necessary for genuinely overcoming the structural and psycho-affective aspects of settler colonialism: on the one hand, opposing and turning away from settler society and political formations, refusing to participate in settler modes of purported decolonization, while on the other critically revitalizing Indigenous modes of existence. We see a similar set of ideas in Whyte, Caldwell, and Schaefer's study of Indigenous planning as both recuperative and Indigenous-oriented, on the one hand, and oppositional to the acquisitive interest of non-Natives. Similarly, @decolonialmatriachs's seventh and eighth "intentions" read, "We will continue to raise our children, families, communities, and nations with our original practices. Because that is where the real power and change is," and "We will continue to heal our intergenerational trauma and colonial pain in order for our families to revitalize and become immersed in indigenous love. Always." Such calls for cultural and political resurgence, in tandem with opposition to and turns away from settler society and modes of governance, echo increasingly common projects in language preservation and cultural recuperation among Indigenous scholars, activists, and organizations.

Six cases: Deloria's call for Indigenous Americans to be left alone; Marroquin Norby's interview; the posts by @decolonialmatriachs and @native.mutt.spirit; the Indigenous-planning essay by Whyte, Caldwell, and Schaefer and the work of the Sustainable Development Institute; and

60. This complex dynamic resonates with hooks's description of "loving blackness" as resistance (see 1992, 19-20).

Coulthard's resurgent politics of recognition. I want these illustrations to help us imagine, concretely, another possibility connected to the picture of the other as opaque and potentially nontrivial, a possibility that is also related to, though distinct from, the possibility of apprenticeship: namely, that others, in this case, Indigenous others, can and might refuse to take us on as apprentices. Doubtless, we could further multiply such cases of refusal, and we have considered other related cases before, such as Tuck and Yang's insistence that literal decolonization starts with the return of Native lands no questions asked and Simpson's study of Mohawk refusals and her own practice of ethnographic refusal.[61] The examples above illustrate not just the logical possibility of such refusal, but also its historical plausibility vis-à-vis Indigenous ecological others.[62] These cases also suggest that the possibility of the Indigenous ecological other's refusal may be intelligibly connected to both a justified wariness of non-Indigenous interest in Indigeneity, in light of the insidious neocolonial machinations of the settler state and its citizens, and an understandable preoccupation with cultural resurgence in contexts that perpetually threaten cultural erasure. Refusal, in short, might be read as both a mode of resistance and opposition to the non-Indigenous and a matter of practicality in light of the difficult labor required for resurgence.[63]

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61. See Chapter 2.
62. Indeed, these cases partake in the potentially infinite task, given the obstinance of settler colonialism, of the destroying the image of the passive and compliant Indigenous other.
63. The ignorance cultivated among dominant classes by such refusal and resurgence, what Alison Bailey calls "strategic ignorance," is a topic of discussion among decolonial and critical race theorists (Bailey 2007; see also Mills 2007, 17-18). The labor demanded by resurgence comes out in Coulthard's discussion of how Indigenous peoples might scale up the Idle No More actions. As part of a resurgent politics of recognition, Indigenous peoples could, he explains,

> reconnect with their lands and land-based practices on either an individual or small-scale collective basis. This could take the form of "walking the land" in an effort to refamiliarize ourselves with the landscapes and places that give our histories, languages, and cultures shape and content; to revitalizing and engaging in land-based harvesting practices like hunting, fishing, and gathering, and/or cultural production activities like hide-tanning and carving, all of which also serve to assert our sovereign presence on our territories in ways that can be profoundly educational and empowering; to the reoccupation of sacred places for the purposes of relearning and practicing our ceremonial activities. (171)

Note that the resurgence that Coulthard is suggesting and that he and I see in play in Indigenous activities involves *re-learning*. Recovering such things is a process of "mentorship and education" that "reconnect Indigenous people to land-based practices and forms of knowledge" (172). What Coulthard describes as cultural resurgence and education might itself be described as apprenticeship, cases of Indigenous peoples apprenticing themselves to their traditions in the historical and ongoing circumstances of having those traditions attacked (171). When one is in the midst of an apprenticeship, it is perfectly intelligible that one might not wish to take on apprentices—and not only because one is

The possibility of refusal in the case of the Indigenous ecological other is noteworthy since Indigenous peoples have recurrently been objects of desire and admiration within the Western ecological imagination (as much as objects of anxiety that need converting). As we saw above and in previous chapters, it is not uncommon for settler environmentalists to express complicated desires vis-à-vis Indigenous peoples, sometimes desiring the absorption of so-called antiquated cultures and systems of thought to "contemporary" paradigms, on other occasions desiring Indigeneity itself, wishing to acquire Indigenous knowledge and ways of living, to become Indigenous. In relation to these complex desires, it may be difficult to know what to do with the idea of Indigenous refusal to mentor. Indeed, as I have discussed this idea of refusal-to-mentor with white settler colleagues, friends, and family, I have been repeatedly surprised by those who express frustration or impatience at the idea that Indigenous people may have insights that could help other people, say, navigate ecological responsibility, and yet refuse to share them.[64] In light of this impatience and the complicated desires environmentalists can have toward Indigenous peoples, I have examined multiple distinct illustrations of this possibility to convey its sense and recalcitrance, to enunciate it as a visceral reality with which settlers should reckon.

§4 Accepting Opacity

What would it look like to accept Deloria's "cultural leave-us-alone agreement, in spirit and in fact" (27)? What ethico-imaginative possibilities come into relief when settler environmentalists

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still learning oneself, but because learning can be hard, almost certainly is in circumstances bent on, say, trivializing and displacing the traditions one seeks to understand. In such a situation, it seems eminently reasonable to refuse an apprentice, indeed to refuse almost any commitment—to say nothing of a commitment to initiate non-Indigenous peoples—that would work against the resurgence of one's culture.

64. That one might be entitled to know what others know, especially *these* others, strikes me as a peculiar and complex mode of entitlement, one that merits inquiry into the historical formation of such expectations. I have no doubt that a sense of entitlement to Indigenous knowledge and practices is part and parcel of a Western imperial mode of thinking and feeling. For a rigorous analysis of how entitlement to Indigenous knowledge has (a) been justified, say, through the claim that knowledge and spiritual goods belong to no one in particular but rather to all humanity, and (b) enacted the neocolonial extraction of Indigenous inheritances, see Laurelyn Whitt's *Science, Colonialism, and Indigenous Peoples: The Cultural Politics of Law and Knowledge* (2009).

take seriously the refusals and resurgence discussed by Coulthard and Whyte, Caldwell, and Schaefer, or the epistemic protectionism advocated by Marroquin Norby and online activists? The idea that the other might refuse to take us on as apprentices, crystalized by the specific case of Indigenous refusals, along with the idea that we might, in any event, fail to achieve the understanding we seek through apprenticeship, leads us from the image of the other as opaque and potentially nontrivial on questions regarding the nonhuman, through the idea of trying to dissolve that opacity, and on to an appreciation of the possibility that the other might have insights, might be, say, the Quickener or Metamorphic, and one would not find that out, or at least not know for sure *now*, and have to live with that void. I call this the practical possibility of *accepting opacity*. It refers to a way of holding one of the more or less ubiquitous facts of being minded among other minded beings, namely, that one can be ignorant of the specific perspectives and experiences of others, even ignorant of fact that they have such things.[65] That we do not understand our others, or all of them all of the time, is perhaps among the most familiar and easily overlooked facts of life with difference.[66] (How different would life with other people be if this were not the case, if everyone always or nearly always understood everyone else in whole?) There are many ways of relating to this fact, including deflecting from it (cf. Cavell 1976b, 247).[67] I am now suggesting that the picture of the other as opaque and potentially nontrivial combined with the idea that there may be limitations in the project of dissolving their opacity forces this ubiquitous feature of opacity and ignorance back upon us and enables the articulation of a further possibility of living with others, one that is crowded out by some environmentalists' preoccupation with conversion and the image of the other as transparent and

65. This might characterize, say, how certain people live alongside various nonhuman entities or children.
66. The skeptical response to the problem of other minds cannot move past this fact.
67. Cf. Cavell on the idea of living our skepticism toward others, of our ignorance of others as a way of inhabiting the human existence (1979, 432-438). As critical race theorists have taught us, the sort of ignorance I am thinking of can also be non-accidental and indeed manufactured, as in the case of the ignorance dominant social classes, such as white cis-men, can have of the experiences and lives of nondominant classes (see Mills 2007). From this angle, another response to ignorance of the other's life is to embrace it and continue to profit from the social status quo, while a further is to try to overcome that ignorance and sort out the meaning of solidarity with the nondominant other (see hooks 1992, 14).

trivial. In this possibility, not understanding the other, the meaning of their talk and other behavior, is keenly felt and dwelled in. Part of this conscious holding of *nonunderstanding*, emphasized by the opaque and nontrivial picture, is that the other might be, in theory could be, say, a mentor, friend, confidant, ally, and so on, but that possibility is not determinable because its conditions are not actualized, perhaps because we encounter one of the limitations discussed above. Instead, we have only the pregnant presence of alterity, with no promise of delivery (or do we want deliverance?)—a conscious sense that *there are strangers here*.[68] Here the other-as-thunderhead passes and leaves only stillness and quiet. Invoking John Keats's famous phrase, to accept another's opacity is a kind of negative capability, a general capacity *to go without*, "of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason," or "of remaining content with half knowledge" (60). Such capacities invert the *in*capacity to go without, to inhabit the void of another's silence.[69]

With this consciousness of the other's opacity, comes again the raw awareness, like the scrape of a dull razor, of what Cavell describes as our twofold exposure to others, again, as we saw Chapter 3, of being "exposed to the other," reliant *on them* for (some of) our knowledge of them, and exposed to our "concept of the other" (1979, 432-33). Accepting this exposure for Cavell, once more, "seems to imply an acceptance of the possibility that my knowledge of others may be overthrown, even that it ought to be" (439). To accept another's opacity includes such an appreciation of these exposures, of the precarious limitations of our position in relationship to and

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68. I cannot avoid the impression that my articulation of the possibility of accepting opacity bears striking similarities to how the alterity of God or the divine might be described by some religious traditions. That similarity harmonizes with Cavell's suggestion that "the philosophical problem of the other [be understood as] the trace or scar of the departure of God" (1979, 470). I do not wish to say more on this similarity than to observe that one condition of the intelligibility of the ordinary possibility of accepting opacity may be found, for some readers and the author, in the histories of certain manners of speaking of divinity.
69. This is an interesting situation. Feminist epistemologists and scholars of race and ignorance have discussed ignorance as a problem. Overcoming it and its causes is then the solution (Bailey 2007, 90-91; Mills 2007, 35). But the possibility of refusal, especially in the Indigenous case, suggests that turning away from the ignorant, refusing to overcome ignorance can be part and parcel of the liberationist or survival movements of the oppressed. This does not contradict calls for the overcoming of gendered and racialized ignorance, but rather qualifies them with the idea that not every lacuna should be filled. There are cases in which the unknown other *does not wish to be known*.

conceptions of the other and the persistent possibility and even fittingness of having our sense of them overthrown. To accept that you are strange to me, opaque, is to accept that, so long as I am still interested in understanding you, I wait in the hall for your admittance and in the meantime, and even after, may be subject to revolutions in my understanding of you.

When I say that accepting opacity and these exposures involves holding our knowledge of another's opacity and potential nontriviality a certain way, I am thinking, for instance, of Cavell's reflections on Wittgenstein's remark in the fourth fragment of his *Philosophy of Psychology: A Fragment* (2009b): "My attitude towards him is an attitude towards a soul. I am not of the *opinion* that he has a soul." Here is Cavell's exegesis:

> If my attitude towards him expresses my knowledge that he has a soul, my attitude may nevertheless not be very definitely expressed, nor very readily. It may take ages; it may be expressed now in the way I live. You may have to bear such an attitude towards me in order to credit that I bear it towards him, or towards you…The word "attitude" can be misleading here. It is not, in matters at hand, a disposition I can adopt at will. It is helpful to take the English word in its physical sense, as an inflection of myself toward others, an orientation which affects everything and which I may or may not be interested in discovering about myself. (1979, 360)

To hold our ignorance knowingly, to accept it, to have *this* negative capacity, is I think something that might only show itself in such indirect fashions, in the mode of an attitude as Cavell and Wittgenstein use that term. That we know we are ignorant of the significance of some other's behavior, *that* knowledge might be shown or expressed in all sorts of ways. There is more to take from the Wittgenstein and Cavell passages, for the possibility of accepting opacity involves the singling out of the human other, the acknowledgment of a soul or mind, but in such a way that it signals no more than that *there may be more*, there almost certainly is,[70] to the other than I can appreciate at present, thus leaving us with the image of *the outline* of a soul. The appreciation that *this* is a mere outline, then, might shape parts or the whole of one's life in various ways, as a kind of

70. Here I mean to imitate Simone Weil ([1947] 2002, 134-35). I turn to Weil on the other in Chapter 6.

attitude or an "inflection of [oneself] toward others." Following Cavell in "Knowing and Acknowledging" (1976b), we might say that acknowledgment, as not a "description of a given response but a category in terms of which a given response is evaluated," comes into view along with the possibility of accepting opacity, namely, as a measure of the latter. For whether one accepts another's opacity is shown not through this act or that, but insofar as all relevant acts tacitly or explicitly express that acceptance, whether the fact that one trades on a mere outline of a soul is acknowledged in relevant moments (ibid.).[71]

Some of the cases discussed above give us a glimpse of what the subtle and indirect expressions of this possibility might look like. Consider how Wittgenstein refuses to contradict the person who believes in the Last Judgment, indeed refuses to say whether he understands this person or not. To accept opacity, that we do not or may not understand, should I think lead us to make such refusals ourselves, to *forgo*, *restrain* ourselves from speaking and acting *as if we knew more*. That is, accepting our ignorance may in some instances require us to explicitly acknowledge that ignorance and the other's opacity, to express our appreciation of our nonunderstanding (see Cavell 1976b, 264). The particular shapes such acknowledgment takes, again, forgoing, restraining, refusing, we might call specific negative capabilities, powers that express the acceptance of another's opacity (here cast then as a general negative power).

That one might exercise such capacities as a result of accepting another's opacity hardly rules out other modes of engaging others, say, in the arena of politics. Such acceptance merely conditions

71. Cavell is interested in whether particular responses to someone's pain express a failure to acknowledge that pain or not, both possibilities of which imply knowledge of that pain but are evaluated according to how they record that pain's fact. Importantly for his discussion, we evaluate failures to acknowledge differently than failures to know. Likewise, I am suggesting that the recollection of the others' opacity, made visceral by the idea that we may fail to dissolve it, turns our ignorance or nonunderstanding of them into something more demanding than what might otherwise be the bare fact of not knowing what is going on with them (an epistemic gap or, following Cavell, "an absence of something, a blank"), namely, into a fact, "a presence," to which we can be responsible, or in our failure to being responsible to it show a certain "confusion, an indifference, a callousness, an exhaustion, a coldness" (1976b, 264). As Cavell observes, "Spiritual emptiness is not a blank" (ibid.).

those other engagements. Why should acknowledging your ignorance of another's perspective impede, for instance, criticizing or organizing against their favored political candidate or policies? To undertake such actions in awareness of one's ignorance is merely to do so without pretending to understand the sense of their reasons or behavior. While some of us may pretend to understand our political opponents and their reasons for supporting obviously outrageous leaders and ideas (imagining, them, for instance, as people who hate queer or trans children or people of other races for stupid and perverse but nevertheless intelligible reasons), many of us are familiar with politically opposing people the sense of whose lives and behavior we cannot fathom and do not pretend to.

Likewise, accepting opacity need not rule out collaborations with strangers. Think here of Audre Lorde almost half a century ago saying, "You do not have to be me in order for us to fight alongside each other" (Lorde [1982] 2012).[72] In that spirit, the idea of accepting opacity invites us to imagine ourselves along the lines of Lauren Olamina, protagonist of Octavia Butler's afro-futurist novel *Parable of the Sower* (1993), trying to survive a perilous journey through a ragged and explosive post-apocalyptic world with a loosely-knit group of strangers, strangers whose perspectives, knowledge, thoughts, and trust we very much desire, but alas cannot discover for numerous reasons including that we might alienate them (see, e.g., 1993, 163, 171-73, 213-14). A failure to accept opacity in Butler's tale equals death, for survival hinges in part on cooperation among strangers in a brutal environment.[73] Likewise, our own acceptance of opacity may be a condition for the possibility of forming contingent enterprises with ecological others, in which we do not pretend to be fully transparent to each other, but nevertheless undertake the tedious labors of organization, legislation, protest, and criticism together.[74] These themes return in the next chapter.

72. Glissant makes a similar point (2009, 193).
73. Perhaps this is a picture of Tuck and Yang's ethic of incommensurability.
74. These last cases again echo Lorde's lecture.

§5 Conclusion

If my description of the other as opaque and potentially nontrivial attempts to expand the ecological imagination with respect to how the other is figured in our practical schemes, then this chapter seeks to expand our imaginations with respect to how the other, newly imagined, might be approached and related to. The opaque and nontrivial picture of the other helps with this latter task, generating the possibilities I have described: the possibility of trying to dissolve the other's opacity, of experiencing limitations on such apprenticeship—including the possibility of the other refusing to mentor us, and of living in ignorance in a way that acknowledges it and the other's opacity. These are possibilities for relating to others that seem to disappear from view for some of us environmentalists when we are in the grips of eco-conversion. I suspect a number of further possibilities come into view as we continue to reimagine our others. In the final chapter, I will describe and report on an experiment performing one last relational possibility that the opaque and nontrivial picture suggests, a practice I call *re-reading* the other.

Chapter 6: Re-reading the Repugnant Ecological Other

The very idea of wanting to explain a practice—for example, the killing of the priest-king—seems wrong to me. All that Frazer does is to make them plausible to people who think as he does. It is very remarkable that in the final analysis all these practices are presented as, so to speak, pieces of stupidity. But it will never be plausible to say that mankind does all that out of sheer stupidity….

When Frazer begins by telling us the story of the King of the Wood of Nemi, he does this in a tone which shows that he feels, and wants us to feel, that something strange and dreadful is happening. But the question "why does this happen?" is properly answered by saying: Because it is dreadful. That is, precisely that which makes this incident strike us as dreadful, magnificent, horrible, tragic, etc., as anything but trivial and insignificant, is also that which has called this incident to life.

Here one can only describe and say: this is what human life is like.

Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough*

§1 Introduction: The Possibility of Re-reading the Other

If the opaque and nontrivial picture of the other developed in Chapters 3 and 4 augments the eco-conversionist imagination with respect to how ecological others are conceived, the possibilities described in the last chapter seek to augment that imagination's repertoire for approaching its others, to expand the range of relational modalities available to it. In keeping with my commitment to the tenets and methodologies of therapeutic ordinary language philosophy, that is, in light of my devotion to the realistic spirit, I have cast these exercises in imagination expansion as the recollective assembly of familiar, quotidian possibilities for getting on with others that disappear from view when environmentalists remain in the grips of a picture of their others as transparent and trivial on ethico-political matters regarding the nonhuman. This last picture invites a preoccupation with remaking the other in one's own image, with converting them to an ecological perspective. I suggested in the Introduction and Chapter 1 that this preoccupation with eco-conversion and the picture that licenses it may be indexed to some environmentalists' anxiety over the difficult twin realities of ecological crises and the existence of other people, people who do not understand and react to those crises as many environmentalists feel most everyone should.

In this final chapter, I continue the second arm of this recollective, imaginary-expansion endeavor by describing one final modality of other relation that the opaque and nontrivial picture of

the other illumines, a possibility I call *re-reading* the other. To re-read the other is to embark from an initial evaluative conception of another to a mode of granularly attending to some aspect of their life, with an eye to how that initial conception might be distorting.[1] The picture of the other as opaque, and ever-possibly so, and nontrivial inspires this possibility insofar as it invites us to question whether we understand our others, suggests that we might only think we understand them, when in fact they remain opaque to us. Insofar as the perennial possibility of our others' opacity remains, this picture suggests, for their transparency is never finally secured, so too remains the possibility of learning something new of them, including how our current understandings of their lives, perspectives, behavior may be distorted, may require overturning or revision. I am particularly interested in re-reading others who are initially evaluated in negative terms. I think of such re-reading as a kind of demonology: a re-examination of the demonized or repugnant other.[2]

I not only wish to describe this possibility and suggest that my alternative picture of the other brings it into view; I also want to illustrate what re-reading a repugnant ecological other might look like and what it can reveal. The vast majority of my discussion will therefore consist of claims I develop on the basis of my own experimentation with such re-reading, which I undertook by engaging a small collection of Anglophone Christian hunting and fishing devotionals (see Figure 1). These texts, I propose, authored by white, male, conservative Protestant hunters and anglers and marketed to a sympathetic audience, belong to the material-cultural world of one of Western

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1. Re-reading the other might be cast as a variety of apprenticeship as I developed that idea in Chapter 5. If apprenticeship involves striving to dissolve another's opacity and achieve some understanding of them (whether successful or not), re-reading the other involves a similar attempt to achieve an understanding of the other while also acknowledging that one already thinks one understands them. Not all forms of apprenticeship involve this last part, since we can start out from a position in which we judge that we do not understand someone or only partly do. Thus, Carlile's apprenticeship to Joni's activity in Chapter 5, which she undertakes after and in the light of an initial negative evaluation of the latter, might be described as a re-reading variety of apprenticeship whereas Govindrajan's efforts to understand her others do not obvious begin from a putative position of already understanding.
2. I take the language of "repugnant other" from Susan Harding's influential examination of fundamentalism (1991).

environmentalism's repugnant others: the conservative Christian anti-environmentalist.[3] In section 2, I will consider some ways in which some environmentalists construct this figure as repugnant. The devotionals in question, however, not only speak back to many environmentalists' conceptions of conservative Christians, but also to a more ambiguous figure in the ecological imagination: contemporary hunters. I will therefore also consider in section 2 some of the ways this second figure is lauded and condemned in environmental thought, paying special attention, given my interest in re-reading the repugnant other, to how hunters are sometimes cast as repulsive by ecofeminists in particular.

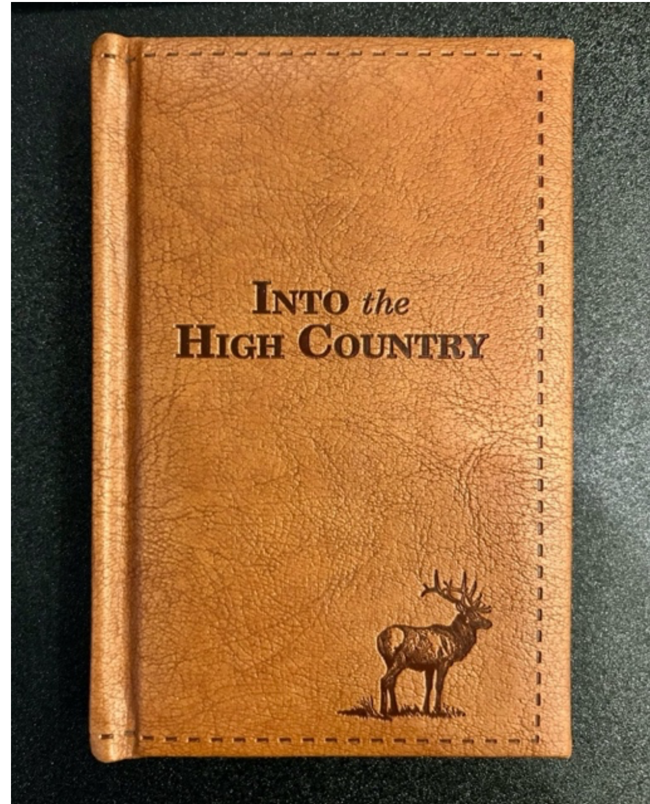

Figure 1: The faux-leather cover of Jason Cruise and Jimmy Sites's devotional *Into the High Country: Spiritual Outdoor Adventures* (2006). Photograph by the author. Used with permission of the publisher.

Re-reading the conservative Christian other through these artifacts, I will claim in section 3, unsettles and parochializes[4] the image of this other as repugnantly anti-ecological, as a mere impediment or opponent to moral matters concerning the nonhuman, as a straightforward enemy to

3. To say that conservative Christian anti-environmentalists are one of the Western environmentalism's repugnant others is not to assert, say, an empirical statement about what some real number of environmentalists think is the case. It is rather to say that thinking as such for the vast majority of the environmentalists in question relies on a range of constitutive distinctions and tropes, including constitutive opponents, and that the imagined figure of "conservative Christian" is such an opponent. I shall take it for granted that this figure constitutes one of the vile opponents that organizes the environmental imagination. Indeed, it is precisely against this backdrop that environmental scholarship that thinks critically about that constitutive role, such as the present work, makes sense at all.

4. I want my use of this term to call to mind Mahmood's use in the context of deflating Western, secular conceptions of power and agency (see 2001, 224). Re-reading might also be set alongside Paul Feyerabend's anarchistic methodology (see Chapter 4, ft21).

those things environmentalists love.[5] Numerous aspects of the devotionals subvert this repugnant image, but I will emphasize three. First, these texts reveal their authors' and readers' extensive, subtle, and reliable knowledge of places, climates, and animal behavior, including their familiarity with and subtle conceptions of animal minds; this feature preliminarily renders strange the notion that these religious hunters might be morally unconcerned for nonhuman existents. Such unconcern is explicitly challenged by the second feature I foreground, namely, that these texts are works of practical ethics, which express their authors' and readers' distinctive moral concerns for nonhuman reality in numerous ways. These texts, for instance, participate in the conceptualization of hunting and fishing as morally-constituted practices, the norms of which correspond to the perceived natures and complex value of nonhuman entities. As we will see, the values and maxims of hunting profoundly structure these authors' understandings of themselves, hunting, animals, and the land, priming them for anguish or profound pleasure and leading them to risk human relations and to submit their own bodies to brutal elements. Likewise, these devotionals are devices of moral formation that precisely aim to inculcate specific moral orientations to hunting and fishing. Additionally, I will suggest that the devotionals construct nature and animals as complexly valuable, objects of multivalent ethical concern. The final aspect of the devotionals I will discuss is how they sustain the ambiguity of killing creatures which the authors appear to keenly appreciate and admire. Through peculiar arts of associating the signs of their kills—pools of blood, warm corpses, savory flesh—with signs of religious gravity, especially the crucified Christ, these texts inject their hunting practices with remorse and significance in a fashion that cuts across the flat image of them as anti-

5. These claims build on and contribute to a growing literature that seeks to understand conservative Evangelicals' views on nature, climate change, and environmentalism on their own terms, thereby challenging, among other things, the same caricature I confront here. Noteworthy examples include Robin Veldman's *The Gospel of Climate Skepticism: Why Evangelical Christians Oppose Action on Climate Change* (2019) and Katherine Wilkinson's *Between God and Green: How Evangelicals Are Cultivating a Middle Ground on Climate Change* (2012). These qualitative studies are complimented by reams of quantitative surveys examining American perspectives on environmental issues including climate change, which disaggregate respondents according to religious and political affiliation among other things. I engaged some of that literature in Chapter 2 and consider another example below.

environmental.[6] Vis-à-vis the image of the repugnant and brutish contemporary hunter, I will suggest throughout section 3 that these devotionals variously shift the burden of proof back onto their critics as to what genuine knowledge of and concern for the nonhuman looks like.[7]

I take up the urgent question of why one would ever entertain such potentially unsettling practices in section 4, where I argue that one might embark upon re-reading for numerous reasons. Following Simone Weil ([1947] 2002) from whom I derive the term re-reading, I suggest that such practices may be acts of justice, something we owe others. Inversely, insofar as re-reading helps rid us of fantasies of others, helps us appreciate the fullness of their complex, recalcitrant reality, it may be something we owe ourselves. Thirdly, following Diamond, I suggest that re-reading should be understood as a species of what she thinks of as non-moralistic ethical thought. Such thought does not allow the fiery spirit of moralism to rule out of court attentive encounters with morally dubious subject matter. Rather, without apologizing for nor overlooking that dubiousness, the non-moralist allows her attention to go where it will, allowing potentially surprising goods to reveal themselves through such attention. From this angle, justifications for re-reading might be found in the indefinite sense that such goods might exist and be worth engaging, without losing sight of the ethical failings of the re-read other. Since it would be a mistake to take non-moralistic practices such as re-reading to entail moral or political quietism, I will also suggest, in dialogue with Susan Harding's work on fundamentalist Baptists and Bryan Norton's pragmatism, that re-reading can enhance our political strategies as we vie with our repugnant others in political action.

A word on terms: I referred to the repugnant other engaged here as the conservative Christian anti-environmentalist. In environmental discourse, the term "conservative Christian"

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6. Recall from the Introduction my definition of a sign as that which is perceived of a concept, which repurposes Wittgenstein's definition of a sign as that which is perceived of a symbol.
7. Russell Johnson once described Wittgenstein's practice to me as one of "shifting the burden of proof" back onto philosophers, say, that we in fact need their theories. I employ this felicitous phrase throughout this chapter to describe one of the effects of re-reading the devotionals vis-à-vis the critics of hunting.

predominantly and vaguely refers to theologically, politically, and culturally conservative American Protestants, though it sometimes also refers to some Catholics. In particular, this term tends to refer to American Evangelicals. Evangelicalism, following Robin Veldman, can be defined for my purposes as, "Protestants who affirm a belief that lives need to be transformed through a 'born-again' experience and lifelong process of following Jesus; who believe they must express and demonstrate the gospel in missionary and social reform efforts; who have a high regard for and obedience to the Bible as the ultimate authority; and who stress the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross as making possible the redemption of humanity" (2019, 3). As we will see, the devotionals I engage consistently express such commitments. These affirmations position such Protestants as theologically conservative; their liberal counterparts disagree on most of these points, including the question of baptism/rebirth, the place of mission in Christian life, and how the Bible should be regarded as a divinely-inspired artifact. However, the conservatism in question refers also to this figure's political allegiances and cultural norms and values, which as we will see the devotionals also echo. Politically, this figure skews right by, say, supporting limited government, especially limited federal government (and correspondingly liberal economic policies) while simultaneously advocating for massive national defense and local police funding, the legal codification of so-called family and Christian values, extensive government intervention in education, and stringent limitations on queer and transgender rights, abortion access, and euthanasia. Through the lens of culture, this figure, for example, uncritically inherits and even advocates for familiar, binary conceptions of gender, which it conflates with biological discourses on sex; reifies heteronormative relations; tacitly reiterates racist tropes, such as opposing urban and rural dwelling and casting the former as a lesser ring of hellish depravity (when not explicitly supporting racist institutions, narratives, and stereotypes); emphasizes the value of the individual, nuclear family, and cultural, political, and religious tradition; and tends toward moral absolutism. Obviously, these three senses of conservatism are largely inextricable, all

mixed up together: the political shaping the theological and vice versa, both relaxing upon and twisting in new directions the conceptual and axiological dimensions of the cultural.[8] Nevertheless, these distinctions start to elucidate the sense of "conservatism" in both the ecological imagination and the worlds of the devotionals considered below.

§2 The Construction of Conservative Christians and Hunters as Ecologically Repugnant

Although numerous demons torment the ecological imagination—variously inflecting the arc of eco-politics and other environmental activities, there is little doubt that, within this imaginative horizon, the figure of the conservative Christian, especially the Evangelical or otherwise conservative Protestant, persists as one of the most repugnant.[9] Before illustrating the possibility of re-reading this other, in this section I consider examples of environmentalists building up the image of this other as a repulsive opponent, quintessentially anti-environmental in the sense of being morally unconcerned for and even opposed to nonhuman flourishing. The material I have selected to read against this image, however, is produced by and for individuals who are not only conservative Christians but also modern day hunters, who often occupy their own niche in the ecological imagination. I will therefore also consider the construal of contemporary hunters as

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8. For a glimpse into this inextricability, consider the SBC's Faith and Message statement (SBC 2000). The first principle in the statement, on "The Scriptures," explains that the Holy Bible though written "by men" is "without any mixture of error," indeed "all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy." The eleventh explains the Great Commission, namely, that every follower of Christ and every church has the "duty and privilege…to endeavor to make disciples of all nations." These paradigmatically conservative theological stances are then followed by the eighteenth principle on "The Family," which defines the family as the "foundational institution of human society," an institution made up of "persons related to one another by marriage, blood, or adoption." Marriage, in turn, is described as God's unique, revelatory gift humankind and defined as the lifelong covenantal union of one man and one woman. Marriage should be "the channel of sexual expression according to biblical standards," which is code for, among other things, heterosexuality, and should aim at procreation. Men are to love their wives as Christ loved the Church; women are to submit to the "servant leadership" of their husbands. Children, in turn, "from the moment of conception, are a blessing and heritage." Such characteristically conservative social stances on gender, marriage, sexuality, and conception purport to Biblical warrant and undoubtedly underwrite Evangelical political activism that seeks codification of, say, anti-abortion and queer marriage rights (and this despite the SBC statement's seventeenth principle on what should supposedly be the inviolable separation of Church and State).
9. I suspect that this figure is also white and male, though the racial obtuseness that marks much environmental writing and thinking often leaves such specifics merely implied.

repugnant by some environmentalists. Since the other I examine here inhabits multiple roles in the environmental imagination, the effects of my practice of re-reading will run in multiple directions, speaking back to both negative renderings.

2.1 The Ecologically Unconcerned Conservative Christian

In the Introduction and Chapter 1, we consistently saw environmentalists cast conservative Christians as particularly problematic with respect to ecological concerns—as paradigmatic anti-environmentalists—and therefore as either especially in need of worldview transformation or political defeat through the formation of an overwhelming ecological consensus. Recall that for Callicott the so-called Abrahamic worldview is at the root of our ecological crises. But the most troublesome representatives of that worldview are those with supposedly closed, dogmatic, and intractable perspectives, which is code for theologically and politically conservative Jews, Christians, and Muslims (Callicott 2015, 160). Callicott makes this identification plain and signals his repulsion with this group when he offers as illustrations, "the pulpits of the Southern Baptist Church and the *madrassas* of the hoped-for Caliphate" and "almost daily videos of beheadings in the name of Islam and settlement-building in the name of God-given Judea and Samaria" (ibid.). Such perspectives, in his view, not only fuel ecological crises but indelibly breed violent conflict and should therefore be displaced through the "religionization of science" (ibid.; 2016, 2).

Likewise, although *Vibrant Matter* reads as a kind of religious devotional text, replete with a confession of faith in vibrant materiality, Bennett reserves the term "theological" to refer to the perspectives of her most abhorrent ideological opponents: the "culture of life," including in particular American Evangelical Christians and members of George Bush Jr.'s administration, including the President himself. The culture of life, Bennett claims, sees human life as qualitatively different from and more valuable than all other earthly existents. For this perspective, "humans are not only organic, unique, and ensouled," she explains, "but they also occupy the top of the

ontological hierarchy, in a position superior to everything else on earth" (Bennett 2010, 86-87). Bennett finds this kind of thinking not only profoundly erroneous in how it conceptualizes more-than-human reality, but also loathsomely dangerous for how we relate to that reality; indeed it reminds Bennett of various Nazi vitalisms (88-89).[10]

Bennett's association of the culture of life with Nazism and Callicott's pairing of Southern Baptists with images of beheading and settler expansion suggest that for some environmentalists the designation of conservative Christians as anti-environmental is not narrowly political, but also significantly moral and conceptual. Classifying this group as ecologically problematic, as anti-environmental, indexes not only disagreements over, say, particular policies, but also drastic differences in values and ideas, in the meaning and weight of human and nonhuman reality. Conservative Christians are not only opponents in the field of politics, over say, climate policy or species management, but also morally repulsive opponents when it comes to understanding and relating to nature (and other people) in an acceptable way.

While authors such as Callicott and Bennett are explicit in rejecting conservative Christians' worldviews, many environmentalists' construct these Christians as morally unconcerned with the nonhuman or even opposed to nonhuman flourishing in more indirect fashions, such as by citing their opposition to the environmental movement. We can tease out the series of equivocations upon which this construal depends by differentiating between (1) environmentalism as a social and political movement; (2) environmentalists' conceptions of nonhuman moral concern; and (3) moral concern for the nonhuman as such. In principle, an individual or group might oppose/conflict-with or support/align-with any of these three sets of objects regardless to their stance on the others and

10. Similarly, Crist suggests that the Biblical traditions help to codify humanity's alienation from our primordial connections to the natural world through the dissemination of the human supremacist worldview (Crist 2019, 53-54). Her global ecological civilization and worldview of abundance seek to overcome this alienation and to "transcend" conservative iterations of the supremacist worldview in particular, which she codes as "every stripe of nationalistic delusion, religious fundamentalism, and cultural or ethnic zealotry" (234-35).

be classed accordingly as, say, pro-environmentalism or anti-environmentalism (qua social movement), consistent- or inconsistent-with environmentalists' conceptions of ecological concern, or morally concerned, unconcerned, or against the nonhuman as such. Environmental writers often equate these three categories by suggesting that to oppose environmentalism as a social and political movement, which many conservative Christians do (see Chapter 2), or to oppose environmentalists' conceptions of nonhuman concern, is to oppose or lack concern for the nonhuman as such. These identifications often occur tacitly and allow analysts and other writers to classify as anti-nature or morally-indifferent to the nonhuman anyone who resists environmentalism as a social and political movement or environmentalists' particular conceptions of nonhuman flourishing.[11]

For instance, in September 2019, popular blogger Steven Ma posted a story in *Medium* titled, "Why Do Christians Hate the Environment?" The first sentence of the piece offers exegesis on the title: "That may sound like a harsh or exaggerated statement, but it really isn't. Christians don't just ignore environmental action, they put effort into vehemently opposing it" (Ma 2019). "Hatred of the environment" is here identified with opposition to "environmental action," which primarily refers, as Ma proceeds to explains, to the policy objectives of left-liberal environmentalism. The "Christians" in question, Ma clarifies, are "more specifically…American, conservative, Republican Evangelical Christians" (ibid.). Ma repeatedly shifts between discussions of conservative Christians' opposition to social and political liberals, with which they associate environmentalism, and those same Christians' supposed hatred of the planet. He writes, "While most will say they care about the

11. My claims this section support Robin Veldman's argument that "the environmental movement's own definition of environmental concern" has been taken as "the yardstick" of environmental concern as such, and, moreover, that definition has made it "difficult for evangelicals to be counted as environmentally concerned" (2019, 6). As an example, Veldman considers the New Ecological Paradigm scale (NEP), which I discussed in the Introduction. As she observes, one of the NEP measures asks if respondents think that "humans were meant to rule over the rest of nature," and codes agreement with this proposition as anti-environmental (ibid.). But, as Veldman notes, the idea of humans ruling over nature comes almost directly from the Bible, to which Evangelicals accord immense authority. Accordingly, Veldman concludes, this measure "verges on coding evangelicalism itself as anti-environmental. At best this particular item leaves little room for evangelicals (especially those outside of erudite circles) to be considered environmentally concerned while still expressing traditional attitudes toward the Bible" (ibid.).

earth, conservative Christians seem to act as if they hate the planet they live on. Of course this position isn't representative of all conservative Christians, but it is the dominant view within that demographic." He then shifts to explaining the political origins of this view: "the environment became a liberal campaign, and Christians, being tied to Republicans, opposed all things liberal, regardless of whether or not those things were in opposition to faith." The piece ends on the question of whether or not Christians can and should "care about the environment." The equivocation between environmentalism, on the one hand, and ecological or nonhuman concern, on the other, organizes the whole story. This chain of identifications allows Ma to construct conservative Christians as opposed to nonhuman flourishing by identifying anti-environmentalism with anti-nature and then emphasizing such Christian's opposition to the former.

The same system of equivalences allows scholars to construct conservative Christians as either morally unconcerned with or somehow opposed to the flourishing of nature as such. For example, recall the 2016 paper published by religion scholars Bron Taylor, Gretel Van Wieren, and Bernard Zaleha that sought to test the hypothesis that the world's religions were "greening." The authors undertook an extensive review of existing literature related to the question, "Do religions and religion-resembling social phenomena hinder or promote environmental understanding and pro-environmental practices?" (2016, 308). In light of their systematic study of over 700 articles, they conclude that "the world's religions often hinder but sometimes promote pro-environmental values and behaviors" (348). They write,

> Despite the examples of religious environmentalism that are cited as evidence for the greening of religion, the majority of religious individuals and groups remain mostly indifferent to environmental concerns, or such concerns, although professed, remain such a low priority that they do not produce politically effective environmental action. And moreover, no small number of religionists, for both religious and ideological reasons, are adamantly opposed to environmentalism and [offer] spiritual justifications for it." (Taylor, Van Wieren, and Zaleha 2016, 348)

Observe the productive ambiguity of the sign "environmental" in these passages. Already in the organizing research question we have both "environmental understanding" and "pro-environmental practices." The first use seemingly refers to knowledge of ecosystems and their functions and perhaps contemporary problems. The second use is more ambiguous because, on the one hand, its conjunction with the first invites the idea of practices aligned with that first knowledge, the general idea of practices oriented to, say, ecosystemic flourishing or recovery, or least informed by environmental sciences. But, on the other, the attachment of the binary-affirmative "pro-" to the adjectival formulation of environment and of both then to "practices" also rings of the popular idiom of environmentalism as a social movement. This ambiguity surrounds the next quotation, in which religions are distinguished from and set in conceptual opposition to (so as to be evaluated according to) "pro-environmental values and behaviors" (348). Do the authors mean by this last set of terms *values and behaviors that reflect concern with the natural environment*, with the nonhuman, or do they mean *values and behaviors that cohere with environmentalists' conceptions* of what it means to value and relate well to ecological objects? In the introduction to the paper, they plausibly suggest the former reading when they initially overview their findings: a given religion, they explain, sometimes "promotes environmental understandings and/or concerns," while other times it "works against such understandings and concern" (309). But then again, perhaps by "environmental concern" they mean concern with the things environmentalists are concerned with rather than concern or moral investment in the nonhuman as such.

The same ambiguity marks the block passage cited above. Notice how the authors conclude that the majority of religions are "indifferent to environmental concerns," or only nominally concerned, since their concern does not meet the authors' threshold for legitimate concern, namely, undertaking "politically effective environmental action." The initial use of "environmental" here is again ambiguous enough that the phrase "environmental concerns" might mean either ethico-

political matters concerning the nonhuman or those matters as understood by the environmental movement (i.e., religions could be morally indifferent to the natural environment or indifferent to the preoccupations of the environmental movement). In their subsequent use of "environmental," however, it is difficult to imagine that the authors have in mind anything other than the policy goals and actions of the environmental movement. That reading is underscored in their next use of the term in "environmentalism," which they employ to describe the object which "no small number of religionists" sternly oppose. As the rest of the paper makes plain, what is opposed in this last case is not obviously nonhuman flourishing or ecological concern so much as the social and political environmental movement (see, e.g., 329). So which is it? Are religions opposed to environmentalists or to environmental concern as such?

I call this ambiguity productive. Here is how: The indeterminacy of the term "environmental" allows the authors to make a series of criteriological shifts, from first asking about religions' environmental concern, to evaluating the consistency of that concern with the authors' own sense of what counts as meaningful concern, and then to considering how some religions relate to the environmental movement. These shifts tacitly identify three concepts:

Environmentalists' conceptions of nonhuman concern
=
Environmentalism (qua movement)
=
Nonhuman concern as such

Once sealed, this identification empowers the analysts to evaluate the religions in question in terms of their satisfaction of environmentalists' criteria for what counts as genuine ecological concern, including whether they actively support the environmental movement. Those religions that do not satisfy these criteria, because they oppose the environmental movement, say, or are indifferent to it, can then be ascribed a lack of concern with nonhuman flourishing—lack of moral attachment to or investment in the natural environment. In short, the equivocation in question, and the ambiguity

upon which it relies, allows the authors to index opposition to environmentalism to opposing or lacking concern for the nonhuman as such.

Among those whom they mark as anti-environmental in this fashion, Taylor, Van Wieren, and Zaleha foreground Christians and especially conservative Christians (316-30).[12] The authors find that "theological doctrines of dominion, imminent apocalyptic end times, and the all-controlling sovereignty of the Christian deity appear to have decisively shaped Christian attitudes and behaviors toward nature, especially among conservative Christians" (329); belief in these doctrines, they suggest, regularly underwrites Christian and particularly conservative Christian opposition to environmentalism (324-30). Here again we see a slippage between "attitudes and behaviors toward nature" and attitudes and behaviors toward "environmentalism." Impressively, the authors engage literature that suggests conservative Christian, particularly Evangelical, opposition to environmentalism is significantly tied to political and cultural opposition to "liberal and secular values" and the perception that environmentalists are "spiritually dangerous pagans or immoral agents promoting abortion and homosexuality," a topic I discussed in Chapter 2 (329). This discovery might invite some readers to differentiate between conservative Christians' concerns for the nonhuman as such and their views on a particular social movement. The authors, however, situate this important rationale for some conservatives' opposition to *environmentalism*, as one of a number reasons for "the lack of environmental concern," which they find "most robustly concentrated among evangelicals" (328). The authors, that is, cast opposition to liberal and secular values as one factor supporting opposition to environmentalism and along the way identify opposition to environmentalism with an absence of environmental concern as such. This useful conflation enables the creation of a morally outrageous image: the conservative Christian who does

12. Christian views on environmental matters make up the vast majority of the section dedicated to "Abrahamic Traditions" (ibid.).

not care about, does not value the natural world. This construction occurs even as the authors cite material focused on conservative resistance to a particular political movement and perhaps a particular conception of environmental care while hardly referencing how conservative Christians might distinctively conceive of and value nonhuman nature and nonhuman flourishing.

Of course, environmental writers cite real examples of U.S. conservatives, including conservative Christians, expressing opposition to the environmental movement and environmentalists' conceptions of nonhuman flourishing. We saw multiple examples of such opposition in Chapter 2, when I examined U.S. conservatives' perception of environmentalists as secular missionaries. We might indefinitely multiply such cases, for it is not purely fantastical that many conservative Christians are in some sense "anti-environmental." For instance, in 2006 the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) famously approved the resolution "On Environmentalism and Evangelicals." The penultimate conclusion to the document reads: "therefore, be it…resolved, that we resist alliances with extreme environmental groups whose positions contradict biblical principles (2 Chronicles 19:2) and that we oppose solutions based on questionable science, which bar access to natural resources and unnecessarily restrict economic development, resulting in less economic opportunity for our poorest citizens" (SBC 2006). In this and similar ways, conservative Christians might thus be said to self-style themselves as anti-environmental, co-constructing their image as an opponent to environmentalist perspectives.

A similar effect is achieved by social scientific surveys of Americans' views of climate change and other environmental issues. For example, the 2022 Pew study "How Religion Intersects with Americans' Views on the Environment," reports the following:

> There is a consistent pattern by religious groups on these and other questions about climate change. In general, evangelical Protestants tend to be the most likely of all major U.S. religious groups to express skeptical views. For instance, about a third of evangelical Protestants say the Earth is getting warmer mostly due to human activity (32%), while similar shares say the Earth is getting warmer mostly due to natural patterns (36%) or that they are unsure or not convinced the Earth is getting warmer (32%). Meanwhile, members

> of non-Christian religions and people who do not identify with any religion – particularly self-described atheists and agnostics – consistently express the highest levels of concern about climate change. Other Christian subgroups, such as Catholics, generally fall somewhere in between. (2022, 82).

When conservative Christians express doubt over the reality of anthropogenic climate change in such surveys, they cast themselves as in some sense anti-environmental; it is tempting to read such polls as indicating resistance to not only environmentalism but ecological care as such.

Although such inferential haste makes this other easy to demean, easy to cast as vile vis-à-vis the nonhuman, it is blatantly misleadingly to take expressions of opposition to environmentalists and their worldviews and to environmental topics and policies as signaling a lack of moral concern for the nonhuman. The Pew report avoids such an inference, rather carefully noting instead the inextricable ties between conservative survey responses and respondents' political affiliations (ibid.). That connection returns us to a matter discussed in Chapter 2, namely, that opposing political enemies' stances on politicized topics and policies in a politically-fractured context may have as much to do individuals self-sorting along party lines as with the subject matter in question. That is to say, the Pew survey may tell us very little about how conservative respondents, in their own terms, understand and are concerned for the nonhuman. Indeed, the same resolution passed by the SBC includes the call, "That we urge all Southern Baptists toward the conservation and preservation of our natural resources for future generations while respecting ownership and property rights," and a call to reaffirm "our God-given responsibility of caring for the creation" (2006). Without taking such resolutions as made in bad faith, it is difficult to hold such insistence on caring for nonhuman reality or, here, "creation," with an image of conservative Christians as anti-environmental in the sense of morally uninterested in or even opposed to the well-being of the nonhuman—unless we are willing to identify the latter with environmentalists' conceptions of nonhuman goods and within the exclusive purview of the political objectives set by parts of the environmental movement.

Setting aside the equivocations environmentalists occasionally employ to construct the conservative Christians as ecologically repugnant, these examples help specify that image for us, emphasizing in particular the idea of conservative Christians as not only political opponents but moral opponents, adversaries unconcerned with or set against the nonhuman good. In the next section, I will try to make this other rather more difficult for us environmentalists to cast as abominable.[13] The specific texts I have chosen to read against this imagine, however, are unavoidably connected not only to conservative strands of U.S. Christianity, but also to another, more ambiguous figure in the environmental imagination: modern day hunters and anglers. I therefore turn now to considering some of the roles this figure plays in the ecological imagination.[14] I am particularly interested in how hunters are demonized by some environmentalists, which will produce a further foil for my encounter with the devotionals.

2.2 The Alienation and Ethical Masquerade of Contemporary Hunters

Hunters and anglers are more complex for environmentalists than the politics and worldviews of conservative Christians; the devotionals in question bear this complexity. On the one hand, for decades environmentalists have acknowledged not only the role of modern hunters and hunting organizations in supporting environmental goals, such as politically and financially supporting land conservation, but have also argued that hunting itself is morally laudable from the perspectives of ecosystemic health and individual animal suffering. Culling populations in habitats significantly shaped by human activity, the argument goes, is sometimes the best way to protect a species in the long run and its environment, upon which other organisms also depend (Rolston

13. The foregoing equivocations might be grounds for critique, and my analysis of them may begin to cast doubt on the veracity of the products of this discourse, but at present I am merely interested in describing it as a process so to specify the nature of this other's repugnance and thereby set the stage for my illustration of re-reading.
14. Modern day hunting has been a topic among those concerned with the nonhuman since before the birth of the modern environmental movement. My discussion does not pretend to address that entire history, but to offer a glimpse at how hunters in particular are sometimes demonized by environmentalists. For an in depth, critical analysis of hunting and 20th century environmental thought, see the works of Marti Kheel (1995, 2008), which I engage below. For a discussion of 20th century disagreements among environmentalists on hunting, see Norton (1991, 204-6, 225-26).

1988, 87; Sideris 2003, 254).[15] At the same time, swift deaths by bullets are more merciful to the individual animals involved than slow death by starvation in, say, overgrazed woodlands (see, e.g., Rolston 1988, 87). Sometimes the prompt killing (potentially) achieved by hunting is even contrasted with the prolonged suffering from other forms of "natural" death, such as, the torturous death or live consumption of deer by cougars and other predators (ibid., 88). Additionally, popular and academic environmentalists and proto-environmental writers have long celebrated hunting as an effective way in which contemporary humans can overcome alienation from the natural world through not only immersion in various wild places but also the re-inhabitation of a predatory perspective, which brings with it an intimate appreciation for the interplay of life and death in natural systems (see, e.g., Leopold 1949, 177-78; Ortega Y Gasset 1972; Rolston 1988, 90-93).[16]

On the other hand, it is not uncommon for environmentalists to echo the criticisms that animal rights advocates level against modern hunting.[17] Indeed, some ecofeminists, for example, extend their critiques of hunting far beyond those of certain animal rights advocates, such as Peter Singer who criticizes hunting as an expression of species-based prejudice.[18] The writings of Marti

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15. These perspectives are backed up by studies on the historical role of hunters and hunting practices in ecosystem management. See, e.g., (Heffelfinger, Geist, and Wishart 2013; Williams et al. 2012). See also Bryan Norton's discussion of hunters and conservation and disagreements among environmentalists on hunting in *Toward Unity Among Environmentalists* (1991, e.g., 201).
16. Marti Kheel, who's work I discuss momentarily, has extensively analyzed rhetoric of this sort.
17. See, e.g., Paul Taylor's *The Rights of Nature* on a biocentric worldview leading to vegetarianism (1986, 295-96).
18. In *Animal Liberation* (2009) Peter Singer sees his central problematic, speciesism or an arbitrary prejudice against other species, obviously manifested in "the slaughter of wild animals by hunters" (230). He is unpersuaded by conservationists' and hunters' claims that hunting is required to harvest overpopulated species for the sake of those species and their habitats. The very use of such terms as "harvest," he argues, undermines "the claim that this slaughter is motivated by concern for the animals" (234). Rather, such terms construe animals "as if they were corn or coal, objects of value only in so far as they serve human interests. This attitude, which is shared to a large extent by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, overlooks the vital fact that deer and other hunted animals are capable of feeling pleasure and pain. They are therefore not means to our ends, but beings with interests of their own" (ibid.). Even if it is necessary to manage species populations in some instances, he persists, genuine consideration of animals' interests should lead us to measures like reducing their fertility rather than "[allowing] hunters to kill some animals, inevitably wounding others in the process" (234). Progress on moral alternatives to culling, he suggests, is only hamstrung by wildlife manager's prejudiced mentality (ibid.). An unprejudiced commitment to "the principle of equal consideration [of the interests of all animals]," to which Singer thinks his readers are committed, requires citizens of industrialized societies to not only go vegetarian, but to seek non-pain-inducing means of managing the land (231). Despite such conflicts over conservation techniques, environmentalists and animal rights defenders also sometimes align in their criticisms of contemporary hunting, as my discussion of Marti Kheel's work shows.

Kheel vividly illustrate such criticisms.[19] Kheel, founder of the organization Feminists for Animal Rights (defunct), consistently casts contemporary hunting as loathsome—a "violent manhood ritual" (2008, 250), a practice set alongside animal experimentation and sexual violence, stemming from "men's feelings of alienation and their unconscious attempt to (violently) forge connections" (2008, 211; see also 1995).[20] It must therefore be challenged just as violence against women is challenged. Kheel recommends that we understand hunting as a sublimated expression of the libido:

> Although sport hunters often downplay the final kill, none are willing to relinquish this as their ultimate goal. The narrative structure must entail the climax of the kill. The buildup of tension and excitement found in the "fore-play" of the chase only attains meaning when directed toward the final release attained in death. If the animal is at too great a disadvantage, the hunter is not able to demonstrate his prowess, and hunting loses its erotic appeal. Thus individual animals function as psychological instruments or props that facilitate a larger psycho-sexual experience. (90)
>
> Just as many men assume that the act of sex must culminate in intercourse and male orgasm, so too the narrative structure of hunting necessarily culminates in the attempt to kill another animal. The "fore-play" of the chase only has meaning if directed toward the final death. (215; see also 1995, 89-91)

While she finds the sexual analogy illuminating, Kheel suggests that hunting involves unconscious pursuit not of sexual satisfaction so much as reunion with primordial nature. "Modern Western culture has achieved an unprecedented alienation from nature," she explains, so "for many, the urge to reconnect is experienced as a deep spiritual or psychological need" (2008, 216). Yet the hunter's attempt at reconnection is perverted, so perverted, that hunters themselves do not realize that hunting, whatever else they may say about it, is not really about connection at all, but essentially about disconnection, about killing animal others. She writes, "Although hunters often depict their activity as a 'coming together' with nature, or immersion in the natural world, clearly it is a

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19. Which is not to say that all ecofeminists represent hunters this way. For more examples of ecofeminists criticizing contemporary hunting, see Crist (2019, 47; 2023) and Norlock's discussion of ecofeminist criticisms of Leopold (2011). For an ecofeminist defense of hunting, see Belmont (2023).
20. Littlefield cites Kheel's "License to Kill: An Ecofeminist Critique of Hunters' Discourse" (1995) as a foil for his analysis of southern hunting traditions (Littlefield 2006, 10).

‘communion’ with a difference. The ‘game’ of hunting involves the conquest and death of an ‘other.’ When the animal is killed, the competition is complete” (215).[21] The hunt thus always misfires as a genuine effort to reconnect with nature.[22]

In an earlier essay, “License to Kill: An Ecofeminist Critique of Hunters’ Discourse” (1995), Kheel develops an illuminating taxonomy of contemporary hunters; I want to consider one class of this system which strongly resonates with the devotionals I will consider in the next section, namely, what she calls the holy hunter. In contrast to the happy hunter, who “claims to hunt for recreation and sheer pleasure,” and the holist hunter, who says he[23] hunts “for the sake of the environment or the ‘biotic whole,’” the holy hunter hunts “for the purpose of spiritual communion” (87). Kheel dedicates most of her analysis to the holy hunter’s “particularly insidious” spiritualization of violence (88). Of special interest to the present study, this figure holds her attention because of its uncanny familiarity to her, for “the language and ideology that surround the ‘holy hunt’ bear a disturbing resemblance to that of ecofeminist thought” (ibid.).[24] “Holy hunters,” Kheel explains, “are fond of contrasting their spiritual orientation with the crass and superficial mentality of the typical

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21. Among her other goals, Kheel seeks to replace the image of the hunter with that of the gatherer. She writes, “Gathering, by contrast [to hunting], pertains to the realm of cyclical, non-violent, repetitive activities, typically devalued in the Western world” (215).
22. Kheel develops many of these views in her book *Nature Ethics: An Ecofeminist Perspective* (2008), in which she analyzes the holist nature philosophy she thinks dominates environmental thought. Representatives of this philosophy in her study include Theodore Roosevelt, Aldo Leopold, Holmes Rolston III, and philosopher Warwick Fox. (Much of Kheel’s criticisms of Rolston aims at the 1988 essay I cite above.) The philosophy in question eschews the atomism of modern philosophies of nature in favor of abstract postulates such as “species,” “land,” or “ecosystem,” which it conceives as supreme objects of value. Other values, such as the good of individual organisms, are subordinate to the good of these wholes. Kheel argues that this shift to attending to natural wholes reflects “a masculinist orientation that fails to incorporate care and empathy for individual other-than-human animals” (2). She compares this sort of environmental holism to the household holism espoused by those who would subordinate the rights of women to the good of the family, reliably resulting in domestic violence against women (231). Doubtless, Kheel is right to rehearse how a preoccupation with abstract communal wholes can obscure and even justify violations to constituent individual parts. What interests me, however, is the imaginative achievement for how we picture hunting effected by Kheel’s association of hunters and environmental holists with those who commit domestic violence. What we have here are repulsive brutes masquerading as moral savants; savants who do not realize how their inborn erotic energy expresses itself through putatively justifiable practices that attempt to secure connection and subjective integration while in fact resulting in moral abomination.
23. I merely echo Kheel: “By all accounts, hunting always has been a predominantly male activity” (1995, 88).
24. Ultimately, this unnerving nearness drives Kheel to articulate how ecofeminism in fact sits in diametric opposition to this perspective. My re-reading will question this distance.

sportsman or happy hunter… The only appropriate attitude for the holy hunter is the religious one of reverence and respect" (99). Hunting for this class is "akin to a religious rite" (100). Holy hunters derive the spiritual dimensions of the hunt by citing both the supposed practices of Indigenous peoples and the principles of ecology, "in particular, the necessity and reality of death" (101). They describe themselves as participants in the natural exchange of energy within ecosystems and cast slain quarry not as killed but as having given their lives to the hunter and this process (104). Kheel is unimpressed by this spiritualization of hunting; she compares it to spiritualizing sexual violence.[25]

Notably, the holy hunter is distinguished by his claim to "identify with the animal that he kills" (100). Kheel finds this claim particularly troublesome. Like the happy and holist hunters, the holy hunter emphasizes the keen attention involved in his practice, but none of them seem to notice "the true state of the animal he is about to kill" (108). "If holy hunters were truly attending to nature," she argues, "it would not be possible to rationalize the death of an animal as freely 'given' out of 'compassion' for the hunter. They would see in the hunted animal's eyes not 'compassion' for the hunter, but rather terror and fright. They would see, in short, that nonhuman animals value their lives no less than do the holy hunters themselves" (108-9). The three categories of hunters are all in fact characterized by an "inability to attend to the actual experience of individual animals" (109). The putatively ethical discourses surrounding hunting for each kind of hunter function as distractions from the immorality at hand. These hunters are in fact alienated from the animals and places where they hunt. Their talk of spirituality and other goods won by hunting is a kind of delusion that makes their brutality swallowable.[26]

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25. "Saying a prayer before you kill an animal," she writes, "is no more acceptable than saying a prayer before a rape" (111).
26. If the devotional authors I consider are any indication, hunters are familiar with these images of them as blood-thirsty brutes. Many of the authors refer to experiences with "radical environmental verbiage," "animal rights activists," and "anti-hunters," and occasionally offer strategies to readers for how to discursively best their critics (see, e.g., Jeffries 2010, 79). One author, Steve Chapman, explicitly frames his case for hunting as integral to conservation, and therefore "green," as "a sincere defense of a segment of our population that is often accused of not caring about the planet" (2009, 221). "Some extremists," he continues, "argue that no one should ever be allowed to hunt. But the reality is that

Contemporary hunters apparently occupy a contentious and indeterminate place in the ecological imagination.[27] As we will see, the devotionals I examine express many, if not all, of the characteristics that trouble Kheel and animal rights advocates like Singer. These features of the devotionals, which might make them ambiguous at best for environmentalists, however, merely compound the fact that they are conceptually and morally oriented to, marketed to, and written by theologically and politically conservative Protestants. The authors of these texts and their intended audiences are unapologetic in their adherence to and desire to disseminate a distinctively conservative Protestant sensibility. For instance, as often as they appeal to conservation science to justify the hunt, they appeal more often to humankind's stewarding dominion over creation (see, e.g., Jeffries 2010, 79). As this section has shown, such a sensibility belongs to a figure often conceived as a repugnant other in the ecological imagination. This figure's offense derives precisely from its difference from, conflict with environmentalists' understanding of nonhuman flourishing, its apparent lack of genuine ecological concern.

The devotionals not only express and represent repugnant perspectives along the above lines, but also in other senses. For instance, they are kitschy objects, often unironically sporting grainy photographs of whitetail bucks on their glossy covers (Chapman 2009; Duncan 2016, 2018; Jeffries 2010) or perhaps covered with faux leather and bold stitching (Chapman 2016; Cruise and Sites 2006). They often have clunky metaphorical titles like *In God's Crosshairs* (Green 2006) or

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hunters are an incredibly important and active part of animal and earth conservation" (ibid.). The reality is, Chapman suggests, that "caring about the planet," in fact requires his sort of hunting.

27. The American public tends to side with pro-hunting environmentalists. Drawing on an online survey of 825 participants, a 2017 study of U.S. residents' perceptions of hunting found that 87% of respondents approved of hunting to obtain food, 72% agreed hunting to manage wildlife was acceptable, and 37% approved of hunting for the sake of a trophy (Byrd, Lee, and Widmar 2017). A 2019 study by Responsive Management and the National Shooting Sports Foundation on behalf of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies found similar results, reporting that over 80% of Americans "approve of legal hunting" (Responsive Management 2019, i). Approval is very high when hunting is done for "utilitarian reasons" such as wildlife management or procuring food while it drastically drops when done for sport. In addition to variations in approval indexed to the aims of the hunt, both studies found variations according to respondents' regional locations, race, gender, rural or urban residence; the quarry hunted; and whether the respondents knew hunters. A more recent report by Responsive Management in 2023 found a decline in Americans' approval of legal hunting, with 78% of respondents holding this view.

Following His Tracks (Futrell 2021). Such reactions indicate distances between my own sensibility and those of the authors and their audiences.

More importantly, the devotional authors make no efforts to hide their political and cultural conservatism, which their political and moral opponents, such as myself, may find distinctly repellent. For example, the authors all consistently presume a gender binary and heterosexual, monogamous relationships in their devotional relationship advice (see, e.g., Pipher 2014, 56-57). In other projects, some of them explicitly combat what they see as an attack on traditional and uncontestable conceptions of gender (see Cruise 2024; Jeffries 2010, 21).[28] As we will see, many of them are associated with efforts or institutions that are actively seeking to limit abortion access and queer and transgender rights. These authors also blatantly set themselves in opposition to stereotypically liberal, leftist, or modern movements, such as animal rights activists, environmentalists, gun-control advocates, "big-government" partisans, and a vaguely encroaching secularism (Jeffries 2010, 79; Pipher 2014, 74-75, 140-41; Chapman 2009, 221). The authors are all men and all more or less speaking to other men; I found no comparable conservative Christian hunting devotionals authored for or by women, nonbinary, or transgender individuals. The authors are racially unmarked, though they all present as white; they regularly and casually reiterate

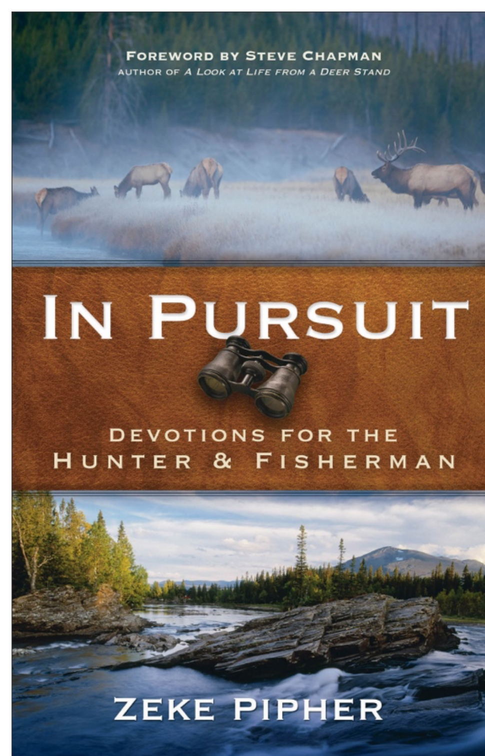

Figure 2: The cover of Zeke Pipher's *In Pursuit: Devotions for the Hunter & Fisherman* (2014), featuring images of elk in a field and a mountain lake or river. Used under fair use.

28. Zeke Pipher has written a self-help book, *Man on the Run: Helping Hyper-Hobbied Men Recognize The Best Things* (2012), a children's book *The Wild Man* (2016), and a 14-week guidebook *Wild Mountain Tribe* (2016), all oriented toward clarifying and bequeathing to future generations a clear picture of masculinity "in a culture that is confused about manhood" (Pipher 2024a). He published much of this material together in the 2024 volume *The Wild Man*.

racist tropes, such as invoking the terrifying moral wickedness of cities (Jeffries 2010, 20), imagining themselves as pre-colonial "Indians" (Chapman 2014, 12), or joking about "Geronimo crawls" (Cruise and Sites 2006, 85). These qualities may make these texts repulsive to some readers; my own blood boiled frequently as I read them. Since I am particularly interested in re-reading the repugnant ecological other, I will not foreground these other repelling features. But they should not disappear from view. I will propose that the unsettling effects of examining these books do not redeem, in the sense of cancelling, these off-putting qualities, but rather, remarkably and precisely among my interests, sit alongside them. In section 4, I will address the question of my privileges relative to these particular artifacts, which will shed light on some of the possible limitations of re-reading.

§3 Re-reading the Repugnant Ecological Other through Hunting and Fishing Devotionals

3.1 Introducing the Devotionals

Before examining the aspects of the hunting devotionals that disturb the image of the repugnant ecological other outlined above, a preliminary introduction to the texts, their authors, and their shared context is in order. I am interested in considering not only how these texts are marketed to and written by individuals in the social locations that correspond to that of the repugnant ecological other, namely, conservative American Protestants, but also in providing a glimpse into the broader cultural and political landscape to which these texts belong.

My discussion is organized around ten devotionals: Steve Chapman's *A Look at Life from the Deer Stand* (2009) and *The Hunter's Devotional* (2016); Jason Cruise and Jimmy Sites's *Into the High Country: Spiritual Outdoor Adventures* (2006); Brad Duncan's *Deer Hunter's Devotional*, volumes 1 (2016) and 2 (2018); Aaron B. Futrell's *The Deer Stand Devotional: A Walk with the Creator Through Hunting Season* (2020) and *Following His Tracks: A Hunter's Guide to Christ* (2021); Bob Green's *In God's Crosshairs: A Daily Devotional for Hunters* (2006); Sean Jeffries's *Deer Hunter's Devotional: Hunting for the*

Heart of God (2010); and Zeke Pipher's *In Pursuit: Devotions for the Hunter and Fishman* (2014). All of these works were published in past two decades, suggesting their potential contemporary salience to environmentalists' moral and political opponents. Some, like Chapman's or Cruise and Sites's, are published by major Christian book houses like B&H Publishing. Others are self-published, including the volumes by Duncan, Futrell, and Jeffries. Few cost more than nine dollars new; many are available used for much less.

I selected these devotionals because they are nominally concerned with matters of interest to environmentalists, authored by conservative Protestants, and marketed to sympathetic readers. They consistently presume a hunting and fishing audience made up of either committed Christians or readers who are open to such commitments. For the former, the devotionals aim to support fellow followers of Christ to stay the narrow path—to support perpetual re-conversion to the way of the cross (see, e.g., Pipher 2014); for the latter, the devotionals seek to effect a sea-change in how would-be Christian outdoorsmen understand themselves and the world (see Duncan 2016; Jeffries 2010). I will return to the function and genre of these devotionals below.

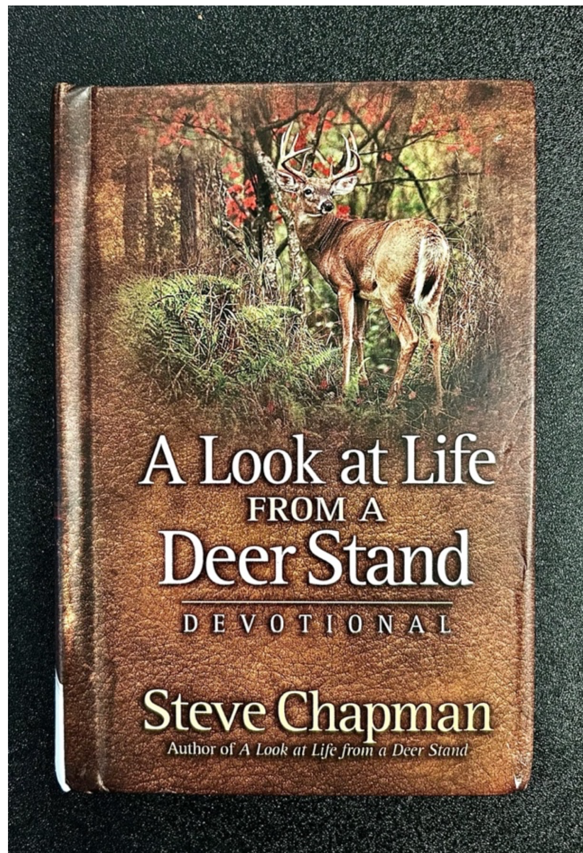

Figure 3: The cover of Steve Chapman's *A Look at Life from a Deer Stand* (2012) featuring a grainy photograph of a whitetail deer. Photograph by author. Used with permission of the publisher.

I refer to the devotional authors as generally conservative Protestants because their specific ties to, say, a specific strand of Evangelicalism, are not always clear, while their Protestantism and various conservative commitments come out in the texts themselves. Above, I mentioned some of their

potentially off-putting political and cultural conservative attachments. Regarding their religious affiliations, all of the devotionals express a certain conservative Protestant sensibility in how they relate to scriptural material and the reader. The Bible presents no exegetical barrier to any of the authors; it is self-interpreting and its potential errancy never arises or is explicitly denied (see, e.g., Chapman 2009, 218; Duncan 2016, 7; Futrell 2020, xvi). Vis-à-vis the reader, all of the texts emphasize the missionary commission of true believers, what the SBC calls the Great Commission, and sinners' need for rebirth (see, e.g., Chapman 2009, 163, 172, 249; Duncan 2016, 70). The authors also acknowledge no other religious authorities as they offer spiritual guidance, as, say, Roman Catholic authors might. Rather, the priesthood of all believers is more or less taken for granted in how these authors take up the devotional genre. Even those without ministerial training minister to the reader and seem to think no special training necessary to give such ministry. These are distinct, if broad, characteristics that tend to mark these authors off from, say, their American Catholic political allies and theologically and politically liberal Protestant and Catholic opponents.

I relied on such differentiating characteristics in selecting devotionals whose authors' religious affiliations were vague.[29] For selecting many of the devotionals, however, I required no such additional criteria because the authors' ties with Evangelical traditions were explicit or easily discovered. Cruise, for instance, is the pastor at the ClearView Church, an Evangelical Baptist parish in Franklin, TN; he received his Master of Divinity at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

29. Chapman, for instance, almost seems to conceal his religious allegiance. In none of his written works have I found explicit mention of this detail, although there are clues. His wife, Annie, for example, with whom he manages multiple publication projects, writes and performs country western music, and occasionally writes attended the Evangelical Moody Bible Institute. Chapman also authored the foreword to the vocally Evangelical Pipher's *In Pursuit* (2014). But blatant ties remain obscure. I therefore infer his religio-political position from the expression of the above characteristics in his devotionals, along with other external details, such as the mission statement on the Chapmans' former website, which includes a modified draft of the Apostles' Creed followed by the affirmation that they "believe that marriage is the union only between one man and one woman, that life begins at conception and ends at God's appointed time. These beliefs compel us to use music, books and motivational speaking to encourage individuals and families to let Christ be the center of their lives and their homes" (Chapman and Chapman, n.d.). The Chapmans' interest in evangelizing characteristically conservative religious and political stances helps license my study of his devotionals. This vagueness itself may signal Evangelical affiliations insofar as denominational autonomy is a recurrent theological concern for this group. My thanks to Sarah Fredericks for this observation.

and his Doctor of Ministry from Fuller Theological Seminary, a famously Evangelical seminary. He is also the founder of a nation-wide outreach organization called Outdoor Ministry Network that supports churches to minister to hunters and has written a handbook to the same end titled, "Being a Pastor to a Hunter" (Cruise, n.d.). Sites has a Master of Divinity from Harding Graduate School of Religion and a Doctor of Ministry from Abilene Christian University, both of which are associated with the Churches of Christ strand of Evangelicalism. He was co-pastor at the Evangelical New River Fellowship at the writing of *Into the High Country*. In addition to writing commercially successful books on fishing, Sites is also creator, producer, and host of the international television series *Spiritual Outdoor Adventures with Jimmy Sites*, entering its twenty-second season in 2024 (SOA, n.d.). Bob Green also received his Master of Divinity from an Evangelical school, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, and served as a pastor until 2004. Lastly, Pipher is the senior pastor at Heartland Evangelical Free Church in Central City, Nebraska. He has a Master of Divinity from Talbot School of Theology and a Doctor of Ministry from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, both Evangelical institutions. In addition to the fact that all of the devotionals express the conservative Protestant sensibility described above, these express affiliations confirm many of the authors' location in one of environmentalism's repugnant niches.

As this initial discussion suggests, these authors and their devotionals exist in a world of artifacts in which outdoorsmanship (an emic term), American Protestantism, and conservative values and politics are closely connected. They emerge from a cultural landscape that includes, for example, not only youth summer camps or Bible camps, but Christian hunting, trapping, and wilderness survival camps (see, e.g., COA 2024).[30] The devotionals themselves are often advertised online alongside devotionals explicitly geared toward the cultivation of particular forms of

30. For some scholars of religion and ecology in the U.S., the existence of these devotionals and their world will be unsurprising (see, e.g., Berry 2015; Veldman 2019).

masculinity, with titles like *The Men We Need: God's Purpose for the Manly Man* (2022) and *Hold Fast: 365 Devotions for Men by Men* (2023), as well as texts by contemporary hunting apologists, such as *On Hunting: A Definitive Study of the Mind, Body, and Ecology of the Hunter in the Modern World* (2023), *Whitetail Widow: A Guide to Understanding the Heart and Soul of a Deer Hunter Paperback* (2020), and *Turning Feral: A Modern Journey of Hunting, Trapping, and Living Intentionally in the Wilderness* (2022).[31] Many of the authors of the works I will consider actively participate in this largely white, religious, outdoors, and masculine milieu. Indeed, some, like the touring musician Chapman and the television show host Sites, are minor celebrities in this Christian outdoors world. Many of them engage in projects of advocating for hunting itself against various forces of modernity, indelibly associated with political liberals and leftists (Jeffries 2010, 77-79; Futrell 2019). As I mentioned above, others are intensively invested in defending particular conceptions of masculinity.

The devotionals themselves are also commodities in a very specific market, itself undergoing particular shifts. Devotionals in general regularly top religious bestsellers lists and remain a mainstay for many publishing houses, especially the religiously-affiliated such as the broadly Christian Fortress Press and the Catholic Loyola Press (Wenner 2019, 18). Such publishers report growing interest in devotionals in recent years. They credit this growth to such things as readers' need for spiritually centering practices in overwhelming times as well as the genre's general "giftability" (ibid.). But surely this growth is also tied to the fact that publishers are increasingly expanding their markets by tailoring devotionals to different demographics, such as devotionals geared toward parenthood, womanhood or manhood, childhood, aging, grief, stress, depression, athletics, and marriage (Koonse and Garrett 2016, 22). The genre also benefits from its resilience against e-books, since their appeal for many readers resides precisely the tactile, non-electronic dimension of reading devotionals. From

31. Such juxtapositions can be found by searching Amazon for one of the devotionals or viewing the websites of the publishing houses that sell them.

the perspective of publishers, hunting devotionals reach a particularly specialized market, occasionally with significant success. Publishing journalists Emma Koonse and Lynn Garrett single out Steve Chapman's *The Hunter's Devotional* and *A Look at Life from a Deer Stand*, both considered below, as illustrative of this success; in 2016, the latter had sold nearly 300,000 copies according to its publisher (see ibid., 19). Devotionals are also a way for authors to access new markets by transforming previous content into easily digestible excerpts, an apparently increasingly common phenomenon (ibid.; Wenner 2019, 18). I imagine some of the hunting and fishing devotionals fit this last trend, such as, those by Chapman, Sites, Cruise, and Pipher. These authors never frame their publications in this fashion, but they are all involved in multi-media enterprises to disseminate a very particular set of perspectives and values to wide audiences. Other examples, however, such as the self-published texts by Duncan or Jeffries are perhaps more so tied to brand development and establishment than expansion if they are interested in market cultivation at all (and not, as they insist, merely spreading the good news).

3.2 Feature 1: Epistemological Dimensions of the Devotionals

I wish to amplify three features of the devotionals that by my lights—and in my experience as a reader—unsettle the image of the conservative Protestant Christian as repugnant along the lines sketched above: their epistemic qualities, their characteristics as works of practical ethics, and their sustained interest in problematizing the practice of killing animals.

I want to emphasize two elements of the first, epistemic dimension of these texts: they express significant pragmatic knowledge of various places and animals as well as an energetic appreciation of animal minds. These qualities destabilize the demonic image of this other in multiple respects. For instance, with an eye to these text's origination in conservative Christian cultures, the epistemic aspects of the devotionals, I propose, deflate the notion that these repugnant others are morally unconcerned with nonhuman reality in any straightforward fashion. Vis-à-vis hunting critics

such as Kheel, these texts shift the burden onto their opponents to show that these hunters' attention to animal experiences and minds is somehow disingenuous.

Consider, firstly, that each text brims with the author's pragmatic knowledge of the lands where he hunts and the behavior of his animal quarry.[32] I call this knowledge pragmatic because although it is occasionally supplemented by contemporary biological knowledge, by and large it derives from the author's individual experiences in the field, the experiences of friends and family, or an inherited body of knowledge sustained by an ever-shifting society of hunters and their families (rather than, say, the institutions and discourses of the contemporary natural sciences). Reliability blends into veracity here: this knowledge *works*, it is *useful* vis-à-vis the specific projects hunters and their collectives undertake.[33]

Sometimes, this knowledge is taken up as an object of discourse. How it is attained, and its essential place in successful hunting is made explicit, such as when Futrell writes,

> The more time we spend in nature, the more we learn. We learn how everything in an ecosystem works together, and by observing these relationships, we become better hunters.
>
> In hunting, we are continually gaining knowledge and are always adjusting how we approach our craft, and by doing so, we improve our success in the field. Experience is the best teacher; the more time spent out in nature, the more we will learn.
>
> By spending time in a deer's habitat we will come to understand things like what food sources they prefer, what paths they usually take, and how other animals influence their behavior. (2020, 7)

As Futrell indicates, the knowledge in question is often centrally borne of individuals' experience "in the field" and then only potentially supplemented by other information sources. This knowledge consists of such things as understanding deer behavior and how the various constituents of the habitat in which the hunter is immersed collaborate, cohere, and affect each other; it is evaluated according to its usefulness to the craft, or becoming a "better hunter."

32. Recall that all the authors are men, hence my use of the masculine pronouns in such instances.
33. Utility being a central criterion of truth for some strands of pragmatism (see, e.g., James 1987a, 583).

In most cases, authors imply their knowledge and assume that of their ideal readers, namely, other hunters and anglers. For instance, the authors often set the stage for their devotional reflections with descriptions of practical contexts that reflect their own and their presumed readers' familiarity with animal behavior, geography, and hunting situations. Consider how Cruise sets the scene for a dramatic story involving a wounded buck, to which I will return: "I have access to a farm that reminds of the terrain out west. The lush acreage has it all when it comes to favorable spot and stalk conditions. High grassy ridges with fence rows. Tree lines that crisscross the property. Hollows with timber. Fields with sage grass to hide in" (2006, 79). The significance of these geographical features—grassy ridges, fences and tree lines, timber hollows, and sage fields—for hunting and animal behavior is only briefly indicated by Cruise's mention of "spot and stalk conditions" and "sage grass to hide in;" no further connections are made explicit, such as pointing out that fence rows and tree lines can signal patterns in deer paths and potentially indicate shooting lanes or that timber hollows can hide both predator and prey. Explicit explanations are superfluous for Cruise and his audience, for they are already in hand.

Occasionally, an author's knowledge comes out when he makes the natural world an object of reflection, such as when Futrell writes,

> For most hunters, hunting is a year-round endeavor. Even when deer are not in season, there is still work to be done. Food plots get planted, mineral sites get refreshed, shooting lanes get recut, and stands get checked to ensure they are safe.
>
> We do this because things change from year to year. Trees grow, weeds spring up, and things fall apart. It is a natural part of life; nothing stays the same….
>
> Even the deer's patterns change. In the early season, they can be found in hayfields and meadows, but as the acorns begin to drop, they change food sources. In late season their food source changes again. They start to hammer high protein sources like standing soybeans and corn.
>
> Nothing stays the same. Nature is always in a state of flux, and if we do not adapt to these changes, we fall behind and are not as successful as we could be. (2020, 47-48)

Futrell is not informing his readers about nature's flux and shifts in deer grazing patterns. Rather, his use of the first-person plural "we" and functionally related terms like "most hunters," suggests that

he is rehearsing familiar facts for his ideal reader with an eye to other matters. In this case, Futrell steps off from conjuring a shared familiarity with the shifting dynamics of the natural work to reflecting on human life as something that is continually in a comparable state of change. This flux requires "growing in Christ," we are told, so that one might "keep ahead of the changes" (48). Invoking his knowledge of natural changes, Futrell accrues authority vis-à-vis his imagined hunting audience and, on the basis of a shared understanding, tries to enlist that reader into a particular perspective on human life. The same dynamics and associated risks that hunters know from the field arise in all of life, he tells us, and the vigilance accorded the hunt has an ethico-spiritual corollary in broader human life. Here, however, I am not particularly interested in this analogy, nor Futrell's rhetorical techniques, to which I will return, so much as how this devotion indexes Futrell's knowledge of hunting practices, deer behavior, and nature's flux as well as that of his readers.

Jimmy Sites's expectation that his readers will share a working knowledge of geography and animal habits comes out distinctively in the devotion, "Sanctuary," in which he invites readers to reflect on wildlife and spiritual sanctuaries. A section for readers' creative reflection includes this prompt: "This chapter emphasized the importance of developing sanctuary for wildlife. Imagine that you were put in charge of developing a 100-acre tract for hunting. Where would you place your sanctuary and how would you develop it? (Draw an aerial map below, design the tract according to how you would want it to be.)" (Sites 2006, 34). Below the prompt sits a pale square where readers can add their designs. Sites provides no further guidance; none is expected, for the readers will already know what might be involved in creating such a refuge.

The knowledge expressed in the devotionals comes out in numerous additional respects, such as the specialized vocabulary the authors use without explanation to discuss hunting gear and

situations.[34] Yet I am particularly struck by their attention to and working knowledge of animal behavior, especially deer, which results in ascribing to their quarry significant mental and emotional lives. This substantial conception of animal minds comes out regularly in small and straightforward ways, such as when Jeffries writes, "When born, fawns tend to stay in one place for the first couple of weeks, as they are extremely small and vulnerable to predation at this time. They don't really begin moving around until they reach the end of their first month of life, at which time they'll begin following their mother around and learning about what it means to be a deer" (2010, 81). I am not only interested in Jeffries's overview of early-fawn behavior, but also in how he positions young deer as members of a familiar family unit—replete with *mothers* and all that sign brings with it—and as subjects of a life in which one eventually learns such things as the meaning of deerhood. Jeffries, that is, seamlessly narrates the facts of deer behavior in a fashion that subjectivizes (for, say, Jeffries and his audience) deer themselves, casually granting them first-person perspectives.

Many of the devotionals not only hint at a sense of animal mindedness, but also express a keen appreciation of it. For example, Futrell reflects on the possibility of encountering deer as one embarks for the hunting stand to begin the hunt and the associated risk of giving any proximate deer "the knowledge of human presence" (63). He writes,

> I do my best to avoid making this mistake. I carefully map out access routes to my stands, resulting in the least amount of intrusion into the deer's habitat. By doing this, I stand a better chance of keeping the deer comfortable and relaxed. The more I educate the deer about human presence, the more they will steer clear of that area and avoid my stand. This is especially true with an old buck or a mature doe; they seem to have amazing memories when it comes to remembering danger. In other words, deer remember your trespasses and indiscretions. (2020, 63)

Deer, for Futrell and many of the other devotional authors, are the sorts of entities that can be "comfortable and relaxed" or on-edge. They can be "educated"—alerted to the presence of potential

34. It is common for authors to employ, without explanation, a specialized vocabulary to discuss animal sign and behavior; they expect their readers to already understand the matters at hand. Discussions of the "rut," or deer breeding seasons, are one of the most common instances of this, along with "scrapes," a deer sign.

threats in such a way as to be on the lookout for those threats for prolonged periods of time. To avoid such alerts, hunters must form elaborate plans. There are also differences among these nonhuman creatures: mature specimens are particularly keen, with "amazing memories." In another chapter, Futrell describes deer as "curious creatures," inexorably drawn to the sound of rattling antlers (81). "They want to know what is going on. They want to see what that entire ruckus is all about" (ibid.). We have in Futrell's writings on deer, then, not mere things, but keenly minded, nonhuman animal others. We also find here not just abstract theoretical or narrowly empirical knowledge about these beings' mental and emotional habits, but practical knowledge about navigating and relating to *these* kinds of embodied, situated minds. Particular forms of care, undertaken particular ways, are apparently required to engage these beings certain ways, say, as quarry or anything else one might wish to get physically close to; Futrell and his readers, it seems, are familiar with and even skilled in such care (see Futrell 2020, 49).

The devotional authors sometimes imply their attention to animal minds when they encourage readers to imagine animals' perspective as part of hunting well. In the first devotion of *Into the High Country* (2006), Cruise comments on the pitfall of "gear obsession" among hunters and anglers, or the temptation to endlessly accumulate hunting and fishing equipment. The problem with this obsession, he explains, "is that it won't make you a better hunter or angler" (2). Indeed, most gear on the market is "faddish and often unnecessary;" designed to sell more gear than truly improve the expedition (3). Cruise illustrates this problem by recounting how as a kid he and his father would fish for smallmouth bass. He would be "loaded down with gear," while his father "would hover close to only a handful of lures" and regularly have more success. Cruise explains the difference like this, "Dad *knew* smallmouth bass. He knew their habits, their personalities, their tendencies, their hangouts, their deepest desires. It wasn't about his gear; it was about his knowledge" (4). Cruise sees similar errors in how many new hunters approach turkey hunting. He writes,

> I'm absolutely convinced, however, that if a new turkey hunter would spend 75 percent of his time actually getting inside the mind and heart of a turkey, and 25 percent of his time learning how to sound like one, he'd fill his tag every spring….The bottom line: Know your animal. Know why they do what they do. Learn what makes them gravitate to certain environments and what works in a given situation. You've got to ask the deeper questions to find the real answers. And gear won't do that for you. (5)

Cruise does not argue the case for animal's embodied mindedness, but rather recommends, based on his own experience, that would-be hunters and anglers take those minds seriously. He sets up an opposition between hunting and fishing with loads of gear and an inattention to animal minds, on the one hand, and hunting and fishing as practices of engaging creatures with feelings, habits, personalities, and desires, albeit with the shared aim of ultimately killing these creatures, on the other. I will take up the topics of killing and ethics in the next two subsections. For now, I want us to appreciate Cruise's rather robust sense of animal life. It appears that we have here not, say, a supposedly rational brute slaying mindless automata, but rather one embodied animal mind among others, each with their own urges, tendencies, and identities.[35]

This appreciation for animal minds often lends itself to devotional reflection. Futrell's devotion on the sharp memories of deer, for example, shifts from describing animal minds to remarking on how, unlike deer, "our Heavenly Father does not remember our sins when we confess them to him" (2020, 63-64). Similarly, Steve Chapman (2009) begins a devotion titled "When God Goes Hunting," by imagining "what a deer feels when it suddenly realizes that someone or something is pursuing it. The way its tail flares up and its body crouches in readiness to spring into an escape makes me wonder if it is not only responding to an instinct to survive, but if there is a humanlike fear that grips its mind. Whatever the case may be, deer obviously react to being hunted" (41). He then analogizes to what it is like to unrepentantly sin. Positioning God as the hunter in pursuit of the sinner, he calls the remorseless to "submit in repentance" or feel deer-like fear lest

35. Cf. Kohn's discussion of the Ávila Runa's "ecology of selves" (2013, 16).

"God ever nocks an arrow or uses His whetstone to sharpen His sword" (41-42).[36] In this fashion, the devotional authors sometimes invite readers to narratively figure themselves in the role of their prey, even to the point of imagining the perspectives of the animals in question, and fill the position of the hunter vis-à-vis the quarry with God.[37] Other roles emerge as well, such as when Futrell compares the relentless tactics of coyotes with how the devil ensnares unscrupulous mortals (40).

These narrative and imaginative exercises seek to shed light on and turn the reader toward a particular conception of virtue, one that emphasizes such practices as remorse and stringent moral vigilance. But I wish to draw attention to how these exercises also take for granted a capacious and pragmatic conception of animal minds. The devotional authors and their ideal audiences are neither zoologists nor modern metaphysicians. We do not find in these texts empirical studies of animal behavior or neurology. Nor do we find philosophical disputes on whether an immaterial mind animates the material bodies of otherwise merely instinctual nonhuman animals. The cash-value of the concept "animal mind" as it organizes these texts and becomes an object of reflection comes out in the authors' and their imagined readers' practical experiences with entities that remember, seem afraid, gravitate to different areas and sounds, and show differences from their fellows in terms of tendencies and desires. The authors do not argue or conclude that their quarry have minds; *they try to hunt them*, and what *that's* like requires a working sense of the agential subjectivities with which they vie. This conception of animal minds might thus be thought of as part of the broader practice of hunting, tacitly depended upon and sometimes explicitly engaged. In light of this conception, the authors see no problem inviting readers to imagine an animals' perspective, either for the sake of hunting well or for devotional edification. Importantly, the knowledge in question is not pure

36. Chapman is vague about what such arrows and swords amount to; the text suggests that they either refer to divine punishment or to forceful efforts by God to elicit repentance (see Chapman 2009, 42).
37. See also, e.g., Cruise and Sites 2006, 31; Duncan 2016, 36; Futrell 2020, 13; Green 2006, 5. In other cases, God and game are analogies, each eluding the pursuing hunter until an ecstatic glimpse is won (Chapman 2016, 7).

fantasy precisely because, in numerous senses, *it works*. The authors are able, for example, to improve their ability to get into proximity with whitetail deer. This success is borne of smaller successes, such as rattling antlers to peak a buck's curiosity, attuning one's perceptual capacities to plausible bedding-down sites, or using features of the land to camouflage an approach. Certain features of animal and geographical reality lend themselves to being taken up in these fashions.

What would it be like to know what these hunters know and yet be unconcerned for the corresponding objects of knowledge, the places and creatures in question? What would it be like to appreciate the logic of the land and the intricacies of the whitetail mind to such a degree that one can develop elaborate strategies through the woods to approach the latter, can when prompted imagine features of the land that might be havens for such creatures, and yet lack concern for this land and such minds? Of course, the shape of concern here departs from the form advocated by some environmentalists and hunting critics. But imagine returning to the woods over and over, refining your knowledge of the surrounding ecosystem and deer behavior in the fashion described by Futrell and yet feeling no concern for or even feeling animosity toward these things. Perhaps the reader will feel that there may be concern here, but that it is not moral concern, not concern with the goods of these things, with their flourishing; it is, rather, concern for the means of accomplishing the end of hunting: killing animals. But how persuasively does that capture the sensibility expressed in, say, Cruise's call for real hunters and anglers to imagine the perspectives of their quarry? What would it be like to imagine the proclivities, fears, and preferences of a smallmouth bass or wild turkey without an interest in, an appreciation for these creatures' goods? Could it be that we are talking not so much about concern for the nonhuman here as different ways of living in the light of that concern? I will return to the notion of different forms of moral concern below. For now, I merely suggest that the pragmatic wilderness knowledge and acknowledgment of animal minds at work in the devotionals do not falsify nor contradict, in the strict sense of those

terms, so much as start to deflate and destabilize the anti-environmental (qua morally unconcerned for the nonhuman) construal of at least these conservative Christians. For it is not clear where assertions such as "these 'religious individuals… remain mostly indifferent to environmental concerns'" (Taylor, Van Wieren, and Zaleha 2016, 348), or "these authors represent Evangelicals' 'lack of environmental concern'" (ibid., 328), or "conservative Christians 'hate the environment'" (Ma 2019) would even make contact with the practices and ethico-conceptual world revealed in the epistemic dimension of these texts. This dimension suggests there is not only serious interest in nonhuman reality at work for this other, but a reliable body of in-hand, pragmatic knowledge won through intimate experiences negotiating nonhuman minds in prairies, forests, and mountains.

The epistemic features of these texts also speak back to hunting critics such as Kheel. As we will continue to see, the devotional authors resemble Kheel's holy hunter, who spiritualizes the hunt and especially the kill. Recall that part of this spiritualization involves the hunter claiming to attend carefully to their animal quarry, even to the point of identifying with pursued animals. As it turns out, however, Kheel reports that such hunters never notice "the true state" of their quarry (1995, 108). If the holy hunter "truly attend[ed] to nature," then they would see such things as "terror and fright" in the eyes of their prey; again, they would see "that nonhuman animals value their lives no less than do the holy hunters" their own (108-9). In fact, none of the contemporary hunters Kheel considers "attend to the actual experience of individual animals" (109). But how should we reconcile this description with Cruise's call for genuine hunters and anglers to realistically imagine their ways into the perspectives of their quarry, creatures with, to use Cruise's term for individualization, "personalities"? In addition, does not the knowledge of animal minds expressed in these texts facilitate various successes in the practice of hunting, indicating that that knowledge is not merely fantastical but may capture something of the minds in question? What more appreciation does Kheel want beyond Chapman's careful account of how a deer's body changes when it begins to feel

fear? Seemingly one of her criteria for genuine valuing, authentic attention, and real interspecies empathy is that such experiences do not result in killing the animals in question. But how reliable is this principle? The devotionals, through their attention to and knowledge of animal minds as well as practices of imagining animal perspectives and encouraging such practices in readers, push the burden of proof back onto critics such as Kheel to clarify the criteria for determining genuine attention and sympathy for nonhuman creatures. Such a challenge, which cites its own examples of attention to animal lives, should disturb the image of the crudely repulsive hunter for these critics. These texts do not try to fit within but rather press against Kheel's entire evaluative schema.[38]

3.3 Feature 2: Hunting and Fishing Devotionals as works of Practical Ethics

The second feature of the devotionals I want to foreground more directly confronts the image of the conservative Christian as morally unconcerned for or opposed to the flourishing of nonhuman reality, namely, these texts understand themselves as, in part, works of practical ethics, oriented to particular networks of readers. Whatever else we say about the devotionals—that they are artifacts of brand and market expansion, say, and so implicated in insidious political-economic projects that transcend the content of their pages—it would distort them to neglect this dimension. I want to highlight three aspects of these texts' practical-ethical labor in particular: (1) how their authors construe hunting as an embodied normative practice, a practice with ethical systems and virtues; (2) how the texts *qua* devotionals aim to function as technologies of conversion, to inculcate particular perspectives on hunting, fishing, and hunters' lives; and (3) how these texts construct nonhuman reality as complexly valuable. These features of the texts again unsettle the image of the

38. Kheel's principle would also rule out, for instance, the practices of Govindrajan's interlocutors, discussed in Chapter 5, who sacrifice and insist that they love their goats (see, e.g., 2018, 35, 40-41, 49-50). Those cases likewise invoke their own evidence of care—years, blood, sweat, and tears spent nurturing these animals—as they shift the burden of proof onto critics. To quote one of Govindrajan's subjects, "Is this not love?" (61).

callous Protestant anti-environmentalist and again push critics of hunting to defend their principles for adjudicating genuine moral discourses and merely putative moral discourses.

3.3.1 Hunting as a Normative Practice

To begin with, the devotionals all make the case that hunting is a distinctively norm-governed, indeed norm-constituted, activity. This vision of hunting, for the devotional authors, opposes a competing conception that casts hunting as minimally or un-governed by norms, a practice that aims at merely killing animals—the most or the greatest—in which anything goes. Contra those who merely, chauvinistically kill animals, these authors suggest, right and wrong, excellence and clumsiness, good and evil, and far more specific terms of approbation and condemnation apply within this activity. I say that for some authors hunting is a norm-constituted activity and not an activity merely governed by and yet distinct from some set of principles and virtues because many of the authors appeal to the norms of hunting to conceptually differentiate this activity from mere killing. Hunting is what it is, and is marked off from other activities, precisely because of the norms that organize it.

We have already glimpsed authors differentiating between laudable and condemnable or at least undesirable approaches to the hunt. For instance, in his remarks on gear-oriented versus animal-mind-oriented hunters, Cruise differentiates between a sort of consumeristic, thing-focused approached in which the lives of animals hardly figure and a more approbative approach that centers attention to animal feelings, desires, and proclivities. Using the case of hunting turkey, Cruise explains that to approach the hunt in the first fashion is to be among "guys who hunt for turkey"; to take the latter is to be among "turkey hunters" (Cruise 2006, 4-5). In another case that marks a different contrast, Duncan writes "I grew up hunting and fishing in southern Arkansas thanks to my dad, Ronnie Duncan. I learned early on from him that hunting and fishing was about a lot more than killing and catching" (Duncan 2016, 4). If the rest of his devotional is a reliable indication,

Duncan thinks *hunting* involves reflection on God, on values, on one's life, creating memories with family, cultivating friendships, and reveling in the smell, sounds, and sights of woods (ibid., 44-46, 48, 58, 68). This practice for Duncan is contrasted with mere killing and catching insofar as it involves and is shaped by these other matters.[39]

Hunting tactics are central among the norms taken up by the authors. There are numerous ways in which animals might be caught or killed and many of these are forbidden for the authors. To employ forbidden tactics is to set oneself outside of the circle of true and certainly virtuous hunters. Consider, for example, when Jeffries recounts scouting a field with a neighbor the night before they planned to hunt. As their truck turns into the field, its headlights accidentally spotlight a herd of deer.[40] His neighbor automatically responds by grabbing his gun and trying to shoot at the animals; Jeffries energetically intervenes, turning off the pickup's lights and chastising his neighbor. They exchange words and as a result of the event never hunt together again (Jeffries 2010, 90). Reflecting on the conflict, Jeffries remarks on how hunting takes you alone into the wilderness where "you yourself are the only witness to the choices that you make" (90). There are numerous opportunities to violate game laws, such as shooting animals off season or using illegal tactics such as spotlighting (ibid.). But following these laws, he insists, is a sign of good character. While God makes humans stewards of nature, he explains, He does not offer specific management guidance. Therefore, hunters "must follow the laws that our fish and game departments have set for us" insofar as they do not conflict with God's law, that is, insofar as they do not prohibit hunting and fishing altogether (91). Jeffries's reasoning here is interesting in its own right, but I want to focus our attention on his keen sense of the norms organizing the hunt. He holds these norms in such a way that he is spurred

39. Cf. Littlefield's discussion of how the hunter's understanding of the practice and goods internal to it shift from the pre-hunter conception (hunt = killing animals) to the mature conception (hunting = pursuit of excellence).
40. Spotlighting, spotting, or lamping game refers to the use of bright lights to hunt in darkness. This technique, often done from the top or back of a vehicle, takes advantage of animals' eyeshine to locate them in darkness, sometimes temporarily blinding the animals (since their eyes dilate in the dark of night) and "freezing" them in their tracks.

to immediately react to a fellow hunter—or mere killer—about to violate them, with the consequence of irrevocably damaging the relationship; hardly a trifling mode of relating to norms.

Jeffries's reaction suggests that the norms of hunting are not only abstract principles, partially codified in game laws, but rather embodied understandings that affectively and conceptually order hunters' subjectivities, such that they can hardly help but express pleasure and joy when a virtuous hunt results in success, or pain and outrage when the norms of the practice are violated or the effects of this violation witnessed. These features come out boldly in Cruise's devotion, "Wounded" (2006, 79-89). In this chapter, Cruise recalls attempting to "put a stalk on a whitetail" with his bow one December in Tennessee. A winter stormfront loomed, the wind was already "howling a cold bite," and it was starting to snow. From atop a canyon ridge, Cruise soon spotted a deer at the boundary of a field and oak copse. A double-take through frosty binoculars revealed a small buck, but something was wrong. The animal's coat was too brown—a bright cinnamon rather than the gray of the season—and it stood motionless for too long. As Cruise observed the deer, taking in the environmental circumstances ("potential sneak routes," the wind, etc.), and began concluding he should keep looking for a doe, "everything changed." The deer, he reports, "tried to take a step, and I saw at an instant that he had no use of his back left leg. None at all. He'd been shot in probably the worst of all non-lethal regions on his body…He was just storying up energy to move the next five feet" (81). Cruise recalls his reaction like this: "My heart literally sank. Honest it did. Right into my gut. I felt real pain in my soul for this fella. *Of all the days to leave my rifle at home,* I thought. *I could end this right now!* Instantly I decided—for his sake alone—to attempt to get close enough for a shot, to end his misery. I'd never seen a deer hurt this badly" (81; emphasis original).

From here, Cruise indulges an extensive explanation as to why he is so frustrated by this particular wound. First, "I cannot for the life of me understand why veteran hunters insist on continually shooting small bucks" (83). Such a practice prevents the male population from maturing

and there is little sport in it. Secondly, "it's just plain bad management" since doe populations, he claims, are in greater need of thinning (ibid.). "Here I was," he writes, "staring down this nice six-pointer who probably wasn't going to make it through the winter, and I was angry. *Why couldn't the guy just let him walk*" (84). Confronted with the wounded animal, the lamentable consequences of poor practice, Cruise had to decide what to do about the deer. The wounded animal was a problem, his problem, something for which he was now responsible.

Note the energy and drama of what ensued: "Keeping the wind in my face," he recounts, "I banked hard left to get into the tree line. I had to walk 200 yards down a steep wooded hollow, up the other side, and then cross a small meadow just to get on his level. I estimated it would take me an hour just to get within fifty yards of him. Sunset would be in an hour and a half. I had no time to lose" (ibid.). He had progressed 75 yards over 45 minutes without "blowing his cover," when he realized he had lost sight of the animal. "*Had he moved?*" he asked himself. Suddenly, the buck raised his head, revealing that he had achieved a mere thirty yards of staggered movement. "Oh, how I wanted this to come together—for his sake, sure, but also because it would still be a super hunt with a bow" (84-85). So close now, Cruise descended to his hands and knees, crawling through brush to put a barrier of sage grass between himself and the deer. A small knoll now separated the two. As he approached the tree line, he judged that the frozen ground would give away his position: "the frozen leaves were going to make too much noise" (85). So Cruise took off his boots and proceeded in his socks. "Adrenaline is a funny thing," he writes, "I never even noticed my freezing toes! Taking a step every thirty seconds, I finally made my way to where I could barely see over the wooded rise" (ibid.). What does his glimpse reveal? "He wasn't there." "But six steps and sixty seconds later, I saw him. And he saw me. He hobbled away at an incredibly slow pace, and I knew it was over. I wasn't going to push him…I couldn't dare force him to expend whatever bit of energy he had just because I was taking a risky shot with a bow" (ibid.). Cruise finally released his arrow and slayed the buck.

He reflects, “I’ve never been flooded with that many conflicting emotions. My heart sank, because I wanted to offer him mercy from a slow death. Yet every hunter would understand when I say that my face bore a smile fresh from an extraordinary memory of a hunt on a snowy December day” (86).

After concluding his story, Cruise shifts into spiritual reflection, writing, “I think you and I have a common connection with that wounded buck….If you live more than a minute on this earth, you’ll receive your wounds” (86). Unlike the buck, however, we need not wait to be put out of our misery. “You and I have a different option than that of a wounded animal,” Cruise explains, “We have a way out. A wounded animal must accept his fate. Fate, however, doesn’t apply to the believer, for we live in Christ. We can look to Him and be healed” (87). Make what you will of Cruise’s analogy between the sinner and the buck; my interest lies in how he has so habituated himself to the norms of his practice, is subject to them in such a way, that to see the results of those norms having been violated,[41] namely, an unduly mutilated creature, inspires in him a reaction of sorrow and fury. He cannot help but enumerate the facets of his outrage to the reader. His understanding of the norms in question reposes on his understanding of the deer: this is the kind of existent that should not be treated so carelessly, so cruelly; it is also a particular “fella” owed more than it was dealt. The site of the suffering buck viscerally wounds not Cruise’s body, but his soul. Cruise finds himself thrust, then, into a situation of needing to do something about the animal’s suffering. We can debate whether Cruise is right to entitle himself to adjudicating this question, but it is harder to question his conviction that what is owed the deer must be given it. For he ultimately finishes the animal having first crawled bodily over frozen ground, eventually bootless, face to face with the buck in question. The electricity of his mission is conveyed in his outrage and conflicting sympathy for the buck and enjoyment of an adventurous hunt as well as in the cadence of his prose (e.g., shifting between

41. Or, inversely, to brush against the rationale for those norms, namely, the mitigation of unduly harming animals.

short, punchy sentences, and longer rhythmic descriptions), with the repeated disappearance of the deer from his view, and finally by submitting his feet to the elements in the final leg.

The outrage that these conservative Protestant hunters express at the mistreatment of deer flies in the face of their image as morally unconcerned with nonhuman entities, especially animals.[42] Yes, they hunt and that means trying to kill animals. But they cultivate embodied understandings of their practices and their quarry that entail that these creatures ought only to be treated certain ways. This concern is expressed in Jeffries's reaction to his neighbor and Cruise's to spotting his wounded buck. Reflecting on that December hunt, Cruise writes, "We've all wounded our share of animals. I've done it. It's a sickening feeling that only hunters know" (86). This pain strikes him when he sees the deer and remains as he gets near it. The wrong done the animal conditions his act of mercy which he performs in a conflicted state—it is wrong for the animal to have to die like this, and yet the feat is such an adventure; the normal pleasures of the moral hunt seem amplified by a successful hunt that corrects a moral blunder. This is not a concern for the nonhuman that strives above all else to, say, avoid the latter's destruction. Should we therefore classify this concern as something below moral concern? Is it truly unthinkable that one might conceive of some entity or system as good, owed this or that, while also pursuing the destruction of that thing, and even enjoying the pursuit? Does a concern with, say, mitigating a creature's suffering even as you undertake to kill it suggest nothing of the significance of that creature to the killer? Here again I suggest that the devotionals make the picture of the rabidly anti-environmental, or delusional and brutish contemporary hunter, rather too easy for the social and political opponents of these authors.

3.3.2 Devotionals as Devices of Moral Formation

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42. It does not concern me that Jeffries and Cruise may have embellished or invented their stories. What interests me is what their embellishments and inventions imply about the ethical world they inhabit. They offer us pictures of what, by their lights, morally genuine hunters understand, feel, and do. To complain against them that they are inventors would be similar to criticizing hagiographies for historical errors, as if narratives of the lives of saints aimed to fill in our empirical knowledge of an individual's biography and not at, say, edification, and as if, in any event, they did not offer a glimpse of the conceptual, moral, and political worlds of their authors and audiences (cf. Diamond 1991g, 51-54).

A similar parochializing effect results from the second practical-ethical dimension of these texts, a generic or formal dimension, namely, their moral function as devotionals. These are works of practical ethics in that they not only avow that hunting is a normative practice, but also conceive of hunting and fishing as practices oriented toward higher goods. Moreover, they seek to inculcate that orientation in the reader through the peculiar techniques of devotional practice. These objects are concerned with ethico-religious formation. We will misapprehend their material content if we overlook the devotional form, which gives that content its point. While the authors are concerned with encouraging an understanding of hunting as part of the higher or additional goods of, say, hunting as a practice, conservation, family tradition, and friendship, in their function as devotionals they are emphatically geared toward encouraging hunters and anglers to understand their practices as oriented toward God, as occasions to encounter and reflect on the divine, as situated in relationship to God. In these senses, hunting and angling, for these writers, can and should be broadly theocentric: related not to hunters' and anglers' purposes, but to the ultimate reality of God, on whom they should "set their hearts" (Augustine 2003, 12.8, 14.13, 19.14, 19.17); ordered not to the satisfaction of human desire and need, but rather undertaken "in a manner appropriate to their relations to God" (Gustafson 1981, 327).

Nearly all of the authors expressly offer this intention for their how texts might function on the reader. Pipher, for instance, orients readers to his devotional like this: "I wrote *In Pursuit* to help sportsmen listen to Wisdom's voice through God's Word. It's meant to be a companion book to the Bible, not a replacement of the Scriptures….My hope for you is that as you read *In Pursuit*, you will sense the nearness of God, the friendship of the author, and the exhilaration of creation" (Pipher 2014, 18). Similarly, Jeffries writes, "I'd like to see a movement towards Christ among sportsmen…This book is designed to cause you to think about God when you step into the woods" (Jeffries 2010, 13). Chapman, in turn, writes,

> My hope is that this book will be carried by hunters to the deer woods, turkey fields, elk mountains, pronghorn prairies, water's-edge duck blinds, and any other place they go to engage in the exhilarating challenge of the fair chase. While they're waiting for the thrill of seeing game, they can take a moment, read a page, and hopefully catch sight of a trophy of truth.
>
> If this happens, the time I've invested in connecting the hunt for animals to the hunt for biblical insight will have been worth it. (2016, 8)

These texts, then, are supposed to fit with and yet change the practice of hunting. They are literally to be taken into the field, and the shifts in understanding they effect are to condition how the hunter understands the field. It is hoped, in particular, that how the hunter experiences nature will be divinely enriched through a sense of God's nearness or a glimpse of divine truth.

Occasionally, the authors reflect on their own shifting understandings of hunting in relationship to God, speaking both to how the devotions are intended to function and inviting the reader to start shifting their conception of the hunt. For instance, Chapman re-tells his own hunting-conversion experience in his foreword to Pipher's *In Pursuit* as follows,

> Several years ago I realized that the only thing better than going out into creation and enjoying all that it has to offer is letting the Creator come into me and enjoying all he has to offer. This change in my frame of mind as an outdoorsman completely altered the way I entered the fields and woods.
>
> Before this discovery my only focus as I hunted was the challenge of outsmarting the amazingly well-developed defensive skills of animals like deer and elk, as well as birds like the wild turkey. After I understood that God, my Maker, wanted to use my love his creation as an entry door into my soul, I began actively and deliberately looking for the ways he would do it. (11)

Chapman here offers a description of the kind of change many of the devotionals seek to effect. This transformation turns in part on the axis of Chapman's love of creation. We also find here another differentiation between approaches to the hunt: hunting as a telos in and of itself and hunting as part of a larger orientation and set of practices, including encounters with the divine.

Chapman then shifts to retelling the specific event of his own conversion to hunting as what we might call a theocentric practice, a practice that turns individuals from their own preoccupations to attending to the presence and purposes of God (cf. Augustine 2003, 12.8, 14.13):

> The first time I saw how God could use the outdoors to change my inner man took place just after dawn one frosty morning while I was sitting on a deer stand.
>
> As I sat hoping for the appearance of a whitetail, the sun began to send its bright streams of light through the timber…That's when I noticed that as I exhaled, a thick white mist was boing out of my mouth forming a floating cloud in front of my face. The wind was calm that morning so the puff just hung there for a few seconds, then drifted slowly away. (11)

Fearing deer might spot his breath, Chapman attempts to minimize it by controlling and varying his breathing. His mind soon begins to wander, until he suddenly recalls a verse from James: "You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away" (4:14 NASB). "I began to see myself," he recalls, "in the temporary clouds I was making. As each one appeared then disappeared, I quietly thought, *That's me, that's Annie (my wife), that's my children, that's life!*" He explains this is "encounter with such a profound and undeniable truth while on the deer stand" surprised him. The "rawness of a hunt" was overwhelmed by "mushy and reflective" emotions. Yet, "it felt good … and it felt right" (12). "I left the woods that day a different man," he continues, "Understanding that the 'hang time' of my own vapor of life was not all that long, the changes that came were real and lasting." "After that unforgettable epiphany, I started looking for other eternal truths that God wanted me to 'harvest' while enjoying his great outdoors. There have been many, and most of those insights have been written into several books to help other outdoorsmen see them as well" (ibid.). The story here is one of ordinary elements of the hunt being injected with new energy, a shift in a sensibility and experience of the world. Being out on the hunt, he comes to see, immerses him in various media of divine communication, where even his own breath might be newly understood as offering a profoundly-felt lesson about how to hold life, namely, as a fleeting thing. This relationship to nature differentiates Chapman from his prior self and other hunters, who simply try to outsmart animals. After his conversion, he sees wilderness, nature, creation as a way for God to enter his soul.

In short, the devotions seek conversion in the sense of that term that I have employed throughout this project, namely, as a conceptual-affective-ethical shift in how one understands the

world and its constituents. I will return to this resonance with some environmentalists' interest in eco-conversionism below. I now want to consider the specific structural and rhetorical manner in which the texts aim to effect their transformations: through the temporally extended use of reading and reflection exercises that invite hunters to interpret their world and practice as oriented to God and as proffering numerous occasions for reflection and edification, or continued reorientation to God. This method resembles the conversion techniques of some fundamentalist Baptists as isolated by Susan F. Harding (1987). In her study of fundamentalists' language practices, Harding finds that fundamentalists sometimes seek to effect others' conversion through re-narrations of their own personal conversions, oral narrations which tacitly and explicitly enlist the listener in the trajectory of the conversion story (173-74). Employing various arts of oral performance, the speaker "catches the listener up" in the narrative display, or tries to, enjoining a subtle relationship of dependence upon the speaker (179). The stories in question are of the speaker's own spiritual lostness, personal problems, and encounters with salvation and God's voice. These stories and their delivery invite the listener into the speaker's position, enlisting the former into the narrative arc, which culminates in the speaker's conversion and, ideally, with the listener starting to interpret moments of life through the idiom of fundamentalist Baptists (169). This performance is punctuated with second-person exhortations from the speaker to the listener and with terse descriptions of personal loss and sorrow (177). In this manner, Harding suggests, fundamental Baptists describe themselves while dialogically refashioning the listener along the way (167). The hunting and fishing devotionals, I submit, hope to function in a similar fashion as they work to reorient the hunter, with the notable difference that each individual devotion is a written rhetorical attempt to refashion the reader. One consequence of this difference is that each devotional volume contains numerous attempts to remake the reader, which we might imagine as having a cumulative effect on a given reader.

In keeping with their genre, each hunting devotional contains a series of short reading and reflection exercises, to be read periodically across days, weeks, months, or even a year. Some of the texts offer brief devotions—a page or two—for each day of the calendar year (e.g., Green 2006), while others consist of fewer but longer chapters spread across a dozen or more pages (e.g., Cruise and Sites 2006). The vast majority of individual devotions begin with a tale or set of observations from either hunting and fishing expeditions told in the first person. Very often, these either recount idyllic moments in nature, common difficulties in hunting, or exciting adventures, such as Cruise's "Wounded." These stories trade in a common hunting idiom and seemingly aim to catch the reader up in the narrative in question. The texts then pivot to third-person discussions of biblical stories, specific scriptural passages, or theological and personal problematics such as temptation, marital conflict, or grief. Occasionally, readers are asked to read from the Bible alongside each devotion (see, e.g., Pipher 2014, 17-18); usually a passage of scripture is printed on the page. Most authors next shift into the second person, addressing the reader directly, such as when Cruise begins concluding one devotion by writing, "You need Sabbath…and you know it" (2006, 43). Often, this second-person phase includes an invitation for readers to set actionable goals for the coming day, week, or month thematically connected to the devotional topic (see, e.g., Duncan 2016). Each devotion concludes with a prayer in the first person that the reader is expected to utter silently or aloud, along these lines, "Father, thank you for this earth you created. Help me appreciate you every time I see your creation. Help me know that you sovereignly and mysteriously govern all the things you have made. Give me a deep trust in you and a knowledge that nothing in life is random. Amen." (Pipher 2014, 137). These shifts in voice—from first, third, second, and then back to first person—strive to pull the reader into author's perspective and the perspective the author wants the reader to have, occupied with specific corresponding theological idioms, problematics, and resolutions.

In addition to the rhetorical characteristics of the devotions, such exercises ask the readers to do specific things with their bodies and attention, which through repetition may reshape how readers understand themselves, their practices, and the natural world. Occasionally, these exercises require relatively extended self-examination and reflection. Sites and Cruise, for instance, offer fewer but longer and more demanding devotions. Each consists first of extended hunting stories followed by a section that invites readers to reflect in writing on the theme of the devotion in their own lives, say, how much the ethics of wounding immature deer weighs on the reader (2006, 87). A third section offers exegesis on a Biblical passage that purportedly sheds light on that same theme, such as how we all have wounds like unethically harmed deer and how Jesus offers salvation from those wounds. Next the reader is asked to "dig deeper," drawing together the prior themes, such as how the reader has been wounded or wounded others. The devotions then conclude with a section that asks readers to set one actionable goal related to the themes in question, for instance, "What is one action step you can take this week to move on as a new creature in Christ?" (89). The proposed devotional practice here is more demanding than in most of the other examples I have considered, but its form reiterates across cases with various abridgements. In all instances, readers are asked to bring the topics and issues from the devotion into their own lives and to project futures that step off from the devotion's suggested orientation.

As these features of the devotions suggest, their authors posit a particular moral anthropology. The human soul here is malleable and can, through repeated, attentive actions, be reshaped in various directions. The texts regularly address the problem of temptation, of humans finding themselves morally lost and invested in the wrong goods; these features of their genre correspondingly strive to combat the pitfalls that attend shapeable souls through moral rehabituation. If the reader approaches these texts rightly, engages them with the appropriate

attitude and on the prescribed schedule, the authors suggest that a new relationship to hunting and the divine might be won.

It is difficult for me to reconcile these authors' concern with changing how readers' engage the woods, fields, animals, etc. with the idea that they and their readers are morally unconcerned with the nonhuman as such. Of course, nonhuman goods may not be the primary concern of this aspect of the texts; various confessional aims organize them instead. Nevertheless, they take for granted and work with, strive to channel and qualitatively enhance a certain affection for wooded valleys, rivers, and the rest.

3.3.3 Devotional Conceptions of Nonhuman Reality

We have already glimpsed the third practical-ethical dimension of the devotionals I wish to draw out, namely, the texts individually and collectively, directly and indirectly develop complex conceptions of nonhuman reality as valuable in numerable, specific senses, none of which are easily reduced to a crude and human-centered instrumentalization of natural things nor an abstract intrinsic valuation of those things. For instance, the foregoing discussions of animal minds and hunting ethics indicate various morally-charged understandings of animal lives. Those norms correspond to perceived animal natures and what is owed them, as we saw with Cruise's wounded deer and Jeffries's refusal to spotlight. Similarly, consider how Futrell invokes the problem of animal suffering to justify the importance of honing one's shooting abilities. True aim is necessary to avoid sloppy shots, he explains, which in turn lead to long tracking jobs, risk losing the quarry, and cause "*the worst part*, which is undue suffering for the animal" (2020, 96; my emphasis). There is a concern with doing right by one's quarry here, with the idea of the fair chase and inflicting minimal suffering, which conjures an object that can be done right and wrong by, treated well or poorly; this notion may be inextricable from the authors' sense of the fullness of animals' mental and emotional lives.

Expressing a discrete modality of valuation, we have also seen how animal perspectives are recurrently taken up as narrative devices in spiritual reflections, such as when Chapman compares the experience of being a frightened deer, pursued by the hunter with the experience of being an unrepentant sinner, pursued by God. Chapman signals a kind of sympathy or appreciation for deer as he references the signs of their fear: the flare of the tale, the body's crouch. It would be crass to cast this as mere instrumentalization, as if imaginative inhabitation were not a distinct mode of value itself, as if none of us ever loved a character save for their service to the plot or the moral of a story. Something more interesting occurs here in how animal perspectives are understood and valued, in how the imaginative occupation of their points of view signals a certain care and helps shed light on this or that aspect of moral and pious life—a mode of value irreducible to crude instrumentalism.

In a similar fashion, "nature" and related concepts are injected with multiple, morally-relevant senses in the devotionals as they lend themselves to the retelling of energetic hunting stories and experiences of divinity. These narratives valence the notions of nature, the woods, field, wild, etc. in multiple directions: the morning woods or frozen plains become the lively scene of moral failure and potential heroism or sites for divine encounters. But these are not uses of nature as mere backdrop, furniture, stage setting, for natural objects and systems recurrently emerge as affectionately savored entities in their own right, existents in the presence of which the authors revel. Chapman writes, "The incredible sights of nature often leave me speechless. From incredible sunrises and brilliant white stars that dance in the night skies to uniquely colored patterns on butterfly wings and shades of gray fog over quiet ponds, I have had many opportunities to feel the sensation of wonder. I love those moments" (2009, 127). Or consider this passage from Pipher:

> I've seen some wonderful, awe-inspiring things in the woods. I've watched a doe stand on her back legs in order to nibble the tip of a small elm tree. I've seen two young bucks fight like street brawlers. And I've witness a doe bathe her fawn, licking every inch and every spot, before the two lay down together for a midmorning nap….It can all seem so random, so left to chance. One deer turns left, walks fifty paces, and presents a shot. Another goes right,

> stops, and hides behind a tree. Some will run into the sides of semitrucks traveling the highways. (2014, 136)

This particular devotion proceeds to challenge the idea of randomness in nature, of happenstance, by asserting that despite appearances God in fact directs all things. That move is plausibly coded as broadly opposing a secular and perhaps specifically Darwinian interpretation of nature as lacking purpose. But what I want us to focus on for now is the affection Pipher expresses in this passage, how he savors his memories of sights of deer and the woods.

The complex relationship between the woods and other hunting contexts and encounters with the divine at work in many of the devotionals comes out evocatively in Futrell's reflections on a favored hunting spot. He writes,

> One of my favorite times of year is late October when the leaves are at their peak of color. The reds, yellows, and oranges are breathtaking. In my opinion, there is nothing more beautiful. Those leaves are God's masterpiece that displays His thoughtfulness and glory.
>
> One of my best tree stands is in a patch of woods that is filled with maple trees, and every year they are the first to start changing color. They all turn the brightest and most vibrant shade of gold. It is the most amazing place in the world to sit. All of the colors make me feel like I am in His temple, in His holiest of holies....It is at times like these that I feel a direct connection with God. Even though I know He is with me at all times, there is something about being in the woods during that time of year that amplifies the feeling. (Futrell 2020, 11)

It would express a metaphysical prejudice of a high order to presume that all modes of valuing can be reduced to either intrinsic or instrumental types and then on that basis classify the modality of valuing nature found in Futrell's passage to the latter, classifying it as a mere means to encounter with God or to recalling God's presence. *That* would be a deflection from the messy, ordinary rags of what Futrell writes. There is a love for the trees at play here, for being near them through time; a love expressed in Futrell's caring description of their leaves and his organization of his relationship to them in seasonal changes. There may even be a sense in which Futrell's relationship to the woods and his relationship to his God shape each other in such a way that his vocabulary for speaking of the latter allows him to say something about the former that he could not otherwise say, or would

not want to try to say otherwise. If it sufficed to say the woods and the changing leaves were intrinsically valuable or wonderous etc., then perhaps Futrell would have said *that.* Instead, *he speaks of God.* I am not suggesting that Futrell would approve an interpretation of his experience as one of talking about God because he loves the woods—as if God talk amounted to mere flourish to a love of nature. Nor am I claiming that, whatever Futrell thinks, *that* is the correct description of what occurs here. I am suggesting, rather, that considering how Futrell speaks of God while speaking of the woods, how he ineluctably connects these matters by speaking lovingly of them together, by expressing a vivid affection for both, chafes against the idea that there is a merely instrumental relation to the woods here but rather something far finer: a blending together of affectionate languages that, by Futrell's lights, belong together, should be spoken together.

Nonhuman reality, I am proposing, is construed as valuable in numerous senses in the devotionals, the range of which I have only touched on here. Without a doubt, the authors consistently invoke the hierarchy of stewardship in their discussions of hunting, to the likely chagrin of many secular environmentalists, and their resolute theocentrism necessarily decenters nonhuman entities, conflicting with the tenets of, say, ecocentrism. Pipher offers a representative prayer indicating the latter: "Almighty God, I pray that you would place within my heart a reverence and respect for you that is greater than my reverence and respect for all other things. You are the one true God who is worthy of my fear, and I long to be with you. Amen" (2014, 39). Such a perspective may conflict with how many environmentalists wish their political opponents and cultural others valued the nonhuman, but the various ways in which nonhuman reality *matters to*, is made *significant within* the devotionals parochializes the notion that such perspectives lack concern for the nonhuman. Indeed, reading such stories as Cruise's about the wounded deer against the image of Christians of his sort suggested by the environmentalists above might lead us to ask how many individual deer or other animals the average environmentalist has agonized over, taken with conflict

and soul strife? How many yards of frozen ground have most of us crawled to do right by one of them?[43] That some of us might so crawl for a deer, but not for the sake of killing it is precisely what makes Cruise's case and similar examples interesting. It is also of no concern to my interest here that environmentalists' convictions might reach similar decibels while taking different forms from such crawling and killing. The point is his conviction not only gives the lie in our caricature of him and his but confronts us to reflect on own commitments. There is not lack of concern here, but an urgent form of concern that may disturb us in its simultaneous distance and closeness to our own forms of living, its capacity to hold together a telos of death and a sense of creature care.

Kheel and her allies will be unsurprised by the practical-ethical dimension of the devotionals as I have foregrounded it. Such skeptics critically scrutinize not only hunting as such, but hunters' supposedly ethical discourses, which they see as thinly veiled attempts to rationalize the abhorrent slaughter of intrinsically valuable creatures. As with the epistemic aspect of these texts, I believe the ethics of hunting expressed in the devotionals once again invite Kheel to elucidate her principles for differentiating genuine traditions of moral reflection from mere mimicries of such discourse. Rather than belabor that challenge, however, I want to move onto the third dimension of the devotionals that unsettle the repugnant images of the conservative Christian and contemporary hunter.

3.4 Feature 3: Resignifications of Animal Blood as Sustaining the Ambiguity of Killing

The final aspect of the devotionals I want to discuss unfurls with the first two: the texts express an intimate familiarity with and understanding of killing and encourage various norms around death and killing including, besides what we've already considered, an unwillingness to turn away from what death and killing can be like and how they might be undertaken well. I am

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43. This line of questioning should resemble the reaction of one of Govindrajan's interlocutors when asked about critics of animal sacrifice: "Have those people ever brought *pathiyas* (kids) into their home because they were worried that the leopard who came every night would eat the goats? Have they ever pounded *haldi* (turmeric) and applied it to a festering wound every day for a month?" (2018, 61). See Chapter 5, §2.

particularly interested in how the texts try to reconcile an intimate knowledge and affectionate love of something, namely, wild animals, with the disciplined, intentional acts of not only killing such things, but also field dressing them with one's hands and dragging them from deep woods or frigid plains. I am not so much interested in whether the authors succeed in this reconciliation, so much as in how they sustain relating to death and killing as problematics with which one should struggle. These authors consistently make their relations with the land and with animals into problems, into questions; such relations are precisely not given for them. This problematization occurs through numerous techniques, including how the authors will describe, often with poignant detail, what it is to kill and dress animals and then connect these experiences with theological reflection, especially with the image and logic of the crucifixion.

The resonances between these practices and many environmentalists' concerns should be plain, for as we have witnessed throughout this project many environmentalists are concerned with how unconcerned many other people seem to be about human beings' relationships with more-than-human nature. Such resonances continue to show the lie, the flatness to the picture of this demonized ethico-religious other as unconcerned with nonhuman flourishing. This concern with making the killing of animals into a problem even as one undertakes to kill those animals, I suggest, reveals a certain inattention by anti-hunters such as Kheel to the distressing reality that humans cannot avoid directly and indirectly killing nonhuman entities in the present and foreseeable future. Despite this reality, Kheel indefinitely defers the problem of killing whereas, although we may disagree with the details of how they take it up, the devotionals sustain practices of engaging it.

Pipher's devotion, "Bloodshed," exemplifies the practice that interests me. He writes,

> I'll never forget the first time I field-dressed a deer. It was a small, basket-racked buck from the Nebraska Sandhills. I was by myself, and I had never hunted, shot, or cleaned an animal that large before. As I knelt beside the deer's body, I slowly made an incision from the groin to the sternum. The bullet had penetrated both lungs and had emptied bright red blood into the chest cavity. When I finished my cut and rolled the deer onto its side, blood rushed out of the body and over my boots. I could feel the warmth through the rubber covering the top

> of my foot. I sat down on the hill and spent several moments contemplating the loss of life represented in the growing pool of blood on that green hill in Garfield County. The moment was surreal, and I felt somber. (2014, 52)

We should briefly linger over Pipher's evocative description of this event, for he proceeds to make a series of quick semiotic correlations. Note his economical use of specific terms to precisely and vividly describe what he does to this animal's corpse and where, namely, cut it groin to sternum; this act precedes his perception of a blood-filled chest cavity and his inference that the lungs have been punctured. He next paints a visceral image of warm blood pouring from the body, rolling over his boots. He takes pause then to look upon the scarlet stain blooming on the hillside, casting this death, which has literally stained the killer, as a "loss of life" that shakes him. In addition to keeping Pipher's intimate familiarity and attention to what it is to kill and dress this creature before us, I will also return this move to construe an intentional kill as a loss.

After this initial recounting, Pipher shifts to imagining if what he felt on this bloody hill resembled what "the Israelite families felt when they had to slaughter a sheep on that dreadful Passover night" (52). This deer, slain and dressed by Pipher, clumsily by his own account, as part of his early hunting practice, is now analogized with the lambs killed by Israelite households and the blood painted on their doorways, so that the Lord might pass them by while delivering the final plague to Egypt (Exodus 12:1-31). From here, Pipher quickly shifts again, now to writing on Jesus's substitution for the just punishment of human sin, allowing the bloody corpse of the buck to blur into the image of the crucified Lamb of God (53). The devotion concludes with a prayer that seeks to elicit gratitude for this last substitution. Unresolved is the question of that for which the slain deer might be substituted. The vicarious atonement framework does not obviously orient this initial act,[44]

44. Nor the second, though Pipher imposes such a framework, describing the lambs killed by the Israelites as atoning for their own inattention to the Lord. In the Exodus text the lambs' blood acts as a mere sign to Lord, differentiating Israeli and Egyptian households (see, e.g., Exodus 11:4-7, 12:13). I do not know why Pipher selects the Passover case instead of, say, Isaac's binding in Genesis 22 and the sacrificial substitution with a ram.

but enters the phenomenological field after the killing, as Pipher invites reflection on his shimmering pool of deer blood. The deer's blood is unmoored from its historical context, freed to play in a new field of signs where it is taken up in a kind of Christian hematomancy—the use of blood as a divine conduit. Whomever killed the deer, its blood is now an occasion for theological reflection and practice. But, to echo a prior point, the deer is not merely instrumentalized to these practices, but simultaneously undergoes shifts in significance. The effects of Pipher's almost free-associating leaps do not run one way, but also back onto the slain animal. The deer, whose death—a loss—is already bemoaned in the initial description of the field dressing, signaling its value by the author's lights, is recast as a sacrifice, even associated with Christ. It is internal to the concept sacrifice here that that which is sacrificed is of grave value; only that fact makes a given act *this* sort of act.[45] Pipher, in short, injects this deer and his killing and dressing of it with various new valences. He not only expresses the gravity he felt at the scene of the killing, but associates this scene with the acute solemnity of Passover and the crucifixion. Through these expressions and associations he keeps a certain ambiguity alive. There is a genuine loss here, the loss of life he mentions, and the various elements of the devotion refuse to allow the disappearance of this void.

Pipher is not the only devotionalist to practice and encourage this kind of reflection and conceptual transfiguration in relationship to killing animals. In the devotion "Follow the Blood," for instance, Chapman describes the feeling of first spotting wound blood after shooting a deer. "A mysteriously unique and spirit-deep rush washes over me," he writes. It is, "one of the most profoundly emotional moments for me as a deer hunter" (2009, 250). His pulse and breathing "noticeably quicken;" excitement builds as he finds each new "drop or pool of blood" (251). This experience never tires, he explains. When he most recently underwent it, he found he could not quite account for the sensation in plain talk, describing it as "for lack of a better word, a revelation,"

45. Cf. Govindrajan's interlocutors who compare the sacrifice of their goats to "watching a child die" (2018, 35).

and opting instead to express the moment, the "epiphany," in song. The refrain of that song reads, "So I follow the blood, that crimson sign, follow that trail, I know I'll find, the death that gives life, a gift from above, sadness and joy, follow the blood" (ibid.). Resembling Pipher, Chapman here draws a parallel between what it is like to find and follow blood sign from an attempted kill and what it is to follow the blood of Christ. Human sin, for which Christ bleeds, finds its parallel in the arrow loosed by the hunter that wounds an unspecified animal. This analogy again indexes an ambiguity in the hunter's act, which is also reflected in the dual-valence of the phrase "death that gives life." In addition to Christ's redemption of humankind from the penalty owed for sin, this phrase refers to the idea that death, specifically the killing of animals, is necessary for life, namely, the flourishing of other, human animals. Like Pipher, Chapman uses multiple techniques to encourage the reader to feel the somberness of Christ's sacrifice; once more he attaches regret and melancholy to the hunt.

Futrell's reflections on the costs and blessings of venison make some of these connections more explicit. He writes,

> One of my favorite things about deer hunting is the meat it provides. In my humble opinion, there is not a better meat to be found, and I cherish every single piece I get….Having a full freezer after a hunting season is a blessing. It means my family has the most wonderful, delicious, and nutritious meat known to man. It also saves us from having to buy red meat for most of the year. But the blessing comes at a cost. Meat requires the taking of a life; something must die so we can live. We should never take a killed animal for granted and always be thankful for its sacrifice. (2020, 131)

He then shifts into a theological register: "In a way, it mirrors Christ's sacrifice. He died and gave His life for us so we can have life eternal. Just like the deer gave its life for us to have food" (132). As in the cases of Pipher and Chapman, it is difficult to overlook the spurious reasoning here, for it is plain that a wild deer is in most ways very much unlike the Christ figure. Notably, the deer does not elect to die, does not "sacrifice" itself, but is rather killed by individuals who, by my lights, do not need, as a matter of strict necessity or survival, to hunt at all. Nevertheless, I am interested in the effects of these shifting associations, which Futrell starts to reveal when he writes, "Through Christ's

death, we received life, and it is a sacrifice we also should not take lightly" (132). Futrell is interested in how the killing of animals might catch the reader up in the significance of Christ's sacrifice. *That* suggests a reader who already has sense of the significance of killing animals, perhaps also lives with the notion of deer giving their lives in the hunt. But again I am also interested in how this might work the other way, how the significance of Christ's sacrifice for Futrell simultaneously shapes how he conceives of the killing of deer. The sobriety of both come together in his writing.

I do not want to fixate upon the specific devices these authors employ to retain a sense of the severity and ambiguity of killing animals, such as Christ's vicarious atonement. I have already hinted at some of the angles from which these devices might be attacked. I am instead interested in the activity these writers are engaged in and encourage for their readers, namely, practices of vividly saturating the problems of how one will live in relation to the killing of animals, of making these matters significant, surrounded with difficulty. They repeatedly cast animal lives and bodies as gifts or blessings, that is, as things to which one is not entitled, but receives nonetheless, or as sacrifices, objects of value exchanged for other goods or higher reasons. They sustain regret around the killings they commit, even as they savor the excitement of tracking a wounded deer or taste of venison. Such practices seemingly offer a fleeting and bitter reconciliation of the hunter's interest in and sympathy with the animals in question with acts of killing them and handling their dead bodies. These devotions reflect and buoy a concern for the slain animals as they simultaneously condone the killing itself. The significance these authors inject into the lives and bodies of the animals they kill does not sit squarely alongside the imagine of them as disinterested in or set against those creatures.

There is a subtle moral psychology at work here. Through their resignifications of animal flesh and bodies, these authors suggest a conception of virtue in which the good hunter is one who does not take killing lightly, but in fact takes it so seriously as to feel a degree of psychic pain in its performance while nevertheless pursuing it. I have described this pain with such words as

melancholy and regret. This pain is not unmitigated, but rather itself mitigates and qualitatively inflects the practice and pleasures of hunting. Insofar as such regret is internal to this conception of virtue, its presence in individuals is one criterion of their character as hunters: melancholy implies a good understanding of and orientation to hunting.[46] To fail to feel remorse in the hunt, which is simultaneously to fail to accord one's quarry its axiological due, is to fail as a hunter, to be misoriented to this practice and its constitutive objects (cf. Rolston 1988, 92-93).[47]

Critics such as Kheel see a kind of contradiction or lie, even a delusion in the kind of spiritual talk and behavior these texts offer us. Again, the devotionals seemingly express a distinctively Christian iteration of Kheel's holy hunter, who spiritualizes the hunt and sets himself above less spiritualized approaches. She sees this figure's talk of ethics and spirituality as a kind of mask, distraction, or cheap rationalization of the contradiction at the heart of the practice: killing the animals with which one supposedly identifies, about which one supposedly cares. This contradiction expresses a deeper truth, namely, that these hunters are in fact alienated from genuine relations with nonhuman others and ill-equipped to overcome that separation.

Kheel's analysis sounds a chord in me, but I wonder if the texts I have just considered are not rather more difficult for her (and me) than meets the eye. Of course, Pipher, Chapman, and Futrell do variously spiritualize hunting, tracking, and eating deer. But I have also suggested that a

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46. I am suggesting a parallel between the moral psychology implied in the devotionals and Augustine's conception in *City of God*. In the ninth chapter of Book XIV, Augustine writes, "Citizens of the Holy City of God, as they live by God's standards in the pilgrimage of this present life, *feel fear and desire, pain and gladness* in conformity with the holy Scriptures and sound doctrine; *and because their love is right, all these feelings are right in them*" (my emphasis; see also 14.6). For Augustine, the proper organization of attachments will entail suffering for the virtuous within history ("the pilgrimage of this present life") since human sin is ultimately insurmountable prior to the end of history. That latter premise entails that citizens of the City of God will consistently find themselves set upon by wretched circumstances, including their own proclivities to sin. That they do not endorse, but in fact oppose their embroilment in sinfulness is expressed by their experiences of fear, pain, sorrow, etc. as they persevere. This parallel may point to the place of other important concepts in making sense of the devotionals' moral psychology, namely, that for the devotional authors something like the fallenness of the world or at least of human nature entails that impossible situations such as killing creatures you value will consistently arise and that virtue in this life consists, in part, in relating rightly to those inevitabilities.
47. Which might amount to failing *to be a hunter* insofar as hunting is differentiated from mere killing precisely by the right understanding of the practice. This interest in avoiding a certain callousness while killing arises in a similar fashion in Kohn's analysis of the problem of *soul blindness* among the Runa, which I discussed in Chapter 4, §4.

central effect of their writings on killing and eat these animals is precisely to keep the problem, the bloody mess and regret of killing animals, alive. One effect and even, perhaps, aim of these writings is to resist the temptation to allow such killing to become a nonproblem, a naturalized occurrence. Yes, they continue to hunt, to kill, but they precisely do not want the hunter, themselves or their readers, to be distracted from what this killing is like, hence the granularity of their tales, nor from its significance, hence the complex sobriety of their reactions to blood and their theological semiotic play, their attempts to live with difficulties, impossibilities.

Would Kheel have us imagine and prepare for a world in which such arts of taking killing seriously are without use? A world in which humans are not the direct and indirect agents of death in nature? For her part, she is rather vague in her critique of the holy hunter as to what genuine connection with animals and natural places might look like. She writes,

> An emphasis on a spiritual sense of connection is, indeed, a praiseworthy goal. But a spiritual sense of connection must translate into genuine caring behavior for other living beings. Caring for other living beings…must take into account a genuine recognition of the response of the one we are caring for…Moral actions must flow not only from the capacity to perceive our interconnection with others, but also from our ability to acknowledge—to morally attend to—the plight of other living beings as separate and distinct from our own needs and desires. (1995, 111)

I have no complaint against this conception of moral recognition and attention, but what if as we try to attend to the plight of other creatures or to genuinely recognize their responses, we find we must still kill, must choose who lives or dies? A global biological diversity crisis is already underway. The effects of anthropogenic climate change are increasingly familiar and will continue to be felt; industrialized civilizations are desperately far from meaningfully curbing their current and future contributions to that crisis. Contemporary energy policy and supposed needs continue to push extractive industries into wild places and Indigenous lands. Mass migration from climate change and conflicts are already pushing polities to develop new places for people to live. Every day, the most mundane practices of peoples in industrialized and industrializing societies are implicated in various

scales of human and nonhuman disfigurement and destruction. Meanwhile, the global human population climbs past eight billion. As we try to respond to these crises, is it possible to envision an honest picture of life on the planet now or in the foreseeable future that does not involve humans killing, intentionally and not, directly and indirectly, numerous nonhuman entities and maiming or devastating nonhuman systems? Is it possible to imagine reactions to the present onslaughts that would not cause others? Responding to any of these crises unavoidably stains our hands. It seems eminently possible that many of us do not and will not notice those stains, will not feel the weight of the human and nonhuman deaths in which we are implicated every day. If we imagine we must live in *this* bloody world, to which we might easily become numb, can we not see the value of arts of that charge the killing of animals with gravity? We might disagree with how these authors practice such arts—which killings they choose to live with, what sources they cite to lend killing its consequence, but I find it more difficult to dispute the value of projects that try to make such acts problematic while nevertheless undertaking them, surrounded as we are by impossible paths into an uncertain ecological future. Penalizing her holy hunters for spiritualizing death and killing, Kheel, by contrast, indefinitely defers these problems as problems. Doubtless, spiritualized talk of killing can enable permissive behavior, but not talking about such things hardly prepares us to face them.

§4 Conclusion: Re-reading Consequences and Justifications

4.1 Consequences of Re-reading the Repugnant Christian Anti-Environmentalist

The hunting devotionals I have examined here suggest an image of the conservative Christian, to whom those texts belong, that is significantly distinct from the easily demonized image described in section 2. This new figure, and the Christian hunters it represents, has extensive pragmatic knowledge of various geographies, animal behaviors, and climates as well as a keen, reliable, and sympathetic conception of animal minds, a conception cast as central to the practices of hunting and fishing. This figure is intimately familiar with certain animal minds and develops various

plans and skills, such as navigation strategies and shooting precision, indexed to this familiarity. Animals, their personalities, and emotional perspectives become narrative devices for this figure's own moral and religious reflection. This figure insists that others who wish to interact with animals well, to succeed in hunting them, should cultivate a comparable appreciation for animal minds. Indeed, this figure understands the practice of hunting to involve networks of principles and virtues, which correspond to what is owed to quarry. According to this figure, these values differentiate this practice from more callous forms of "killing and catching," and conceptually and affectively organize this figure's self- and world-understanding. In light of these values and how this figure carries them, he is willing to sacrifice some human relationships and to undertake demanding physical feats, such as crawling without boots over a freezing plain. This figure is interested in how hunting and other outdoor activities can be oriented toward higher goods, most importantly right relation to the Christian God; he develops or submits to devotional practices to achieve this reorientation. This figure entertains a complex understanding of nonhuman reality, which is valued in numerous ways. Beyond a concern with conserving wild places and animal species, with mitigating the suffering of hunted creatures, with experiencing adventures and beauty in the woods, this figure weaves together languages for speaking affectionately of both nature and his God. Although he is invested in hunting, he is likewise concerned with sustaining the ambiguity and sorrow that can and should attend killing animals. Through strange arts of reading the blood and death of slain animals alongside the sacrifice of Christ, he keeps this regret alive and perhaps finds some way to live with his attachments to both wild animals and the hunt.

Juxtaposed with the figure that emerges from the devotionals, what becomes of the that specter of the ecological imagination, the barbaric Christian anti-environmentalist? I have suggested that these devotionals and their authors do not falsify so much as unsettle that picture, revealing it for the thin caricature it is. Although their authors sometimes set themselves against

environmentalism and animal rights activists, these texts elucidate that unconcern or bare animosity toward the nonhuman cannot easily be ascribed to this other, though the form of its concern differs in various and significant ways. Moreover, these texts reveal multiple concerns vis-à-vis the nonhuman that their authors and readers share with some environmentalists, including a concern with managing ecosystems and species dynamics well, suspicion of consumerist culture, and worries over the normalization of certain forms of violence against nonhuman entities. In addition, the concerns of the devotional authors bear a formal similarity with those the environmentalists singled out in this study, namely, an interest in transforming the worldviews of their readers in such a way as to qualitatively shift how the latter understand reality. I will return to the stakes of such resonances.

The Christian hunter at work in the devotionals also chafes against some ecofeminists' and animal advocates' image of the contemporary hunter as a kind of ethical charlatan, ignorant as to how his erotic energy seeks but fails to achieve the consolidation of his subjectivity through the hunt, indeed ignorant of how hunting exacerbates his self and world alienation and expresses a failure to truly understand and value nonhuman animals. The devotionals push the burden of proof back onto such critics along at least three lines. Invoking careful descriptions of animals' emotional states, developing practices that depend on reliable understandings of animal minds, and encouraging would-be hunters to realistically imagine their ways into the perspectives of their quarry, these texts demand explication from anti-hunters as to what genuine attention to and understanding of nonhuman animals might look like. Likewise, the pervasive moral reflections, interests in moral formation, and complex valuation of nonhuman entities throughout these texts invite anti-hunters to clarify their criteria for differentiating genuine moral discourse and modes of ethical talk that merely obscure it. Lastly, these texts put the question to their critics as to how the latter would have us face the increasingly unavoidable reality of being implicated in killing various nonhuman entities.

In brief, the conservative Protestant hunters authoring and plausibly reading these devotionals are more difficult, because more complex, than the demonic stereotypes that constitute the ecological imagination let on. This difficulty does not necessarily lessen the repugnance of these others so much as restructure it. Part of that rearranging follows from the fact that these others seem to not only care about nonhuman entities and systems, but are in fact seriously concerned for such things. Yet these others' systems of nonhuman concern do not align with environmentalists' as two identical overlain geometric grids, but rather as two overlapping fishing nets, hung out to dry on a pier, invariably form various momentary nodes and nexuses as the wind shifts and depending on your vantage. For enormous gulfs remain between environmentalists' and these others. The latter may not be unconcerned or set-against nonhuman reality, but the form their concern entails all sorts of behaviors that many of us may vehemently oppose, such as the unnecessary slaying of wild animals, supporting political parties and policy platforms that threaten human and nonhuman life, uncritical participation in religious traditions inextricable from numerous social injustices and political corruption, uncritical participation in U.S. gun cultures, and tacitly condoning or explicitly defending intolerable conceptions of gender, race, family, and society. In light of both of these unavoidable differences and similarities, perhaps the repugnance of these others might now hinge not so much on their resolute alienness but rather on the disturbing simultaneity of their obvious distance and eerie familiarity.[48] Recall how Kheel remarked on the strange similarities between her holy hunter and the sometimes spiritualized talk of ecofeminists (1995, 88). Her work seeks to dispel this apparent rapport; I propose that the devotionals considered here refuse to allow the sensibility of their iteration of the holy hunter to be too easily distanced from her own.

4.2 Why Re-read?

48. Cf. Andrew Atwell's dissertation, "National-Religious Activism and Moral Imagination in Israel's Social Periphery: An Ethnography of 'Social Settlement'" (forthcoming), especially Chapters 2 and 4.

The unsettling, denaturalizing effect potentially achieved for environmentalists' conception of this repugnant other is the result of a particular practical possibility for engaging others which I have call re-reading. Re-reading, once more, steps off from a pre-formed conception of an other, in this case a negative preconception, and seeks to consider that other in a new light, to see what might be missed in that initial reading. This modality of other relation, I suggest, comes into relief when the alternative possibility of conversion and its associated picture of the other as transparent and morally trivial are decentered through an appreciation of how our others can be opaque to us and may live significant lives with the nonhuman. This latter picture seeks to persistently remind us that our understandings of our conceptual others is perpetually subject to revolution, that our others may remain opaque to us despite what we may otherwise think. In light of this enduring potentiality for opacity, the modality of re-reading likewise remains perpetually before us as one possibility for encountering the other; for there are no *a priori* criteria that will secure that transparency for us once and for all, secure that a particular reading is immutable.[49] We remain, to echo Cavell, exposed to our others, to possibility of the unreliability of our conceptions of them (1979, 432-33).

Yet why should one ever undertake the practice of re-reading the other? Numerous possible justifications present themselves, any of which might animate one or another of us. For instance, following Weil, we might feel that re-reading is something we owe others, even our repugnant others. Recall that I derive the term re-reading from Weil's writings, specifically a section of her *Gravity and Grace* ([1947] 2002) titled, "Readings." Gustave Thibon explains in a note to that chapter that "With Simone Weil [reading] means: emotional interpretation, the concrete judgment of value. For instance, I see a man climbing over a wall: instinctively, and perhaps wrongly; I 'read' in him a robber" (134ft1). A "reading" here, then, is an evaluative understanding of a person, a value-laden conception of them. A premise of this project, one it shares with Weil, is that we live with a range of

49. A rehearsal of arguments developed in Chapter 3.

such evaluative images. An attendant risk of this premise is that our images can be false or unreliable images. There is no final protection against such distortions. Indeed, without a "a certain quality of attention," Weil thinks, our interpretations of others will tend to obey "the law of gravity," her phrase for the forces of anxiety, fear, and self-preference that underwrite social conformity (135-136; see also 1-4). In particular, "public opinion," or widely distributed stereotypes about kinds of people, support wrong readings (ibid.). To overcome such prejudices, a higher quality of attention is needed, which Weil associates with justice. She writes, "Justice. To be ever ready to admit that another person is something quite different from what we read when he is there (when we think about him). Or rather, to read in him that he is certainly something different, perhaps something completely different, from what we read in him. Every being cries out silently to be read differently" (134-135). Justice here is an ongoing willingness to re-read the other, to try to understand them again, since they are almost certainly other-than, more-than our initial readings, and even our subsequent re-readings. Injustice, in turn, can of course involve familiar violations of what we owe each other, but also misreading the other (135). A *love of justice*, Weil notes, is no guarantee against this kind of injustice (135). Here, re-reading is something owed others because their reality exceeds our conceptions of them and because our conceptions tend toward prejudice and distortion (Weil 2002, 135-136). Our concepts of justice and veracity fade into each other in this justification for re-reading, a possibility reflected in the idea of *doing justice to something* or someone, doing right by them by giving them a fair shake. We might re-read the other, then, in order to do right by them, to their perspective and modes of being. In the case of the devotionals consider here, then, examining the nature of the concern the authors and their readers hold for nonhuman entities might be thought of as kind of good done them by correcting the distortion of environmentalists' prejudices.

Of if we are unmoved by the idea of doing justice to the other through re-reading, perhaps we are persuaded by Zadie Smith's assertion in the epigraph to this dissertation that doing justice to

other people, or accepting the full reality of other people, is "the hardest thing."[50] We may, then, value and find a rationale for re-reading in how it helps us with this difficulty and curbs our are attempts to use others "as tools… as examples or things to make yourself feel better or things to get over or under" (Smith 2019), what Weil would describe as the pull of gravity (Weil 2002, 1-4, 135-136) or Diamond and Cavell as deflection from our exposure to others. Here re-reading would be esteemed not as a good owed the other, but something we owe ourselves, namely, that our fantasies about and habits of demonizing others not be indulged, which is simultaneously a commitment to be honest with ourselves about others. Re-reading might be thought of, then, as a device for combatting our own proclivities for fantasy and demonization. It may help us be more realistic, in Diamond's sense, as we conceptualize and relate to our others, supporting us to shoulder our exposure to others in Cavell's sense. Insofar as we value such honesty and realism, we might value this practice. Regarding the hunting devotionals, I have suggested precisely that they confront environmentalists with how much more difficult and complicated our repugnant others are than we sometimes admit. This practice pushes us to engage *these* others and a world in which they too live, in all their strange reality, rather than a fantasy about them or a world in which they do not exist or exist only as our demons. It also pushes us to sharpen the nature of our commitments and our disagreements with or criticisms of our opponents. We saw this above when I suggested the devotionals push the burden of proof back onto their critics to spell out and defend rather more what genuine concern and valuable practices involving the nonhuman amount to.

Diamond's discussion of non-moralistic ethical thought in her essay "Moral Differences and Distances" (1997) also provides rationales for why one might wish to re-read another. She develops

50. From the epigraph: "I think the hardest thing for anyone is accepting that other people are real as you are. That's it. Not using them as tools not using them as examples or things to make yourself feel better or things to get over or under. Just accepting that they are absolutely as real as you are and have all the same expectations and demands. And it's so difficult that basically the only person that ever did it was Christ. The rest of us are very, very far behind" (2019).

this notion by way of contrast with moralistic thought.[51] The subject who inclines toward this latter form of thought, the moralist, trades on a distinction between a moral point of view—the point of view of morality, often cast a system of rules or virtues—and other points of view, say, aesthetic or passional. From the perspective of moralistic thought, all other areas of life are to be subject to the moral point of view. This conviction often expresses itself in an insistence on morally judging others, even in circumstances where not everyone would be so inclined to offer judgments, or else in casting suspicion on anything "that is not brought under the authority of morality" (214).[52] Such moralism is characterized by a certain closedness when compared to non-moralistic thought, which seeks to carefully attend to its object—an event, life, story, etc.—precisely to discover what might be morally interesting in it, whatever cold moralism might have to say ahead of time. Non-moralistic thought, Diamond explains, holds that "the value of any subject cannot be seen in advance of its treatment, of what that treatment may have in it of responsiveness to life" (222).[53] Even moralism itself can be taken up with such care to see how it expresses a responsiveness or unresponsiveness to life, how it is "morally alive, or dead, or obtuse, or shallow, or whatever it may be" (223).

Non-moralistic engagement, then, involves seeking understanding, an appreciation of the sense, perhaps the humanness or aliveness, of the strange, even the repugnant, without apologizing for nor overlooking the morally problematic aspects of its objects. Rather, it merely refuses to allow those problems to preclude further engagement. Insofar as re-reading does not overlook initially apparent moral failings but rather refuses to cease engagement with another solely on that basis it might be described as a mode of non-moralistic practice. By Diamond's lights, some of us simply value such practices in their own right, perhaps in part because we do not delimit modalities of

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51. Diamond's interest in moralism and nonmoralism is distinct from my own. She develops the contrast to illustrate one way two people can be distant from each other. She wants the possibility of this distance as part of her therapeutic deflation of an entrenched model of moral disagreement in which disputes primarily arises over the application of moral concepts (see Diamond 1997, 197).
52. Nietzsche's image of the soul that squints comes to mind (1967, 38).
53. Of course, these different modes of response "can be found within the mind of a single person" (220ft27).

valuation to a finite, a priori list and do not know ahead of time what might be of value in some non-moralistic endeavor—how it might teach us to value newly or provide a novel encounter with something we already value. To approach others and the world in this open fashion is itself something that some of us value. Some of what comes about thanks to such an approach may include how a particular life, artifact, or perspective expresses a responsiveness or unresponsiveness to life (223). Or perhaps a particular treatment of some individual's life reveals "a sense of the infinitude of character," and we will be glad for that treatment *post facto*, insofar as we are, if we care for such things (222). Or a particular manifestation of nonmoralistic engagement with an individual life might show us "the unexpected intensity of life" or how strongly the "currents of life" might run through someone (210). Nothing else *need* be demanded of these showings if we value them. Some of us do. And they are unavailable to us if, say, we worry that an attentive engagement with them is corrupting (222). Hence our appreciation for non-moralistic practices such as re-reading.

With Diamond's reflections in mind, I confess that I perceive and appreciate "the current of life" that runs through Cruise's tale of pursuing the wounded buck or Pipher's experience of his bloody deer on the hillside, which he associates with the corpse of Christ. Why do I appreciate the electricity of these tales? How can I? Well, it belongs to my conception of life that, as one tries to get on, such vibrancy, though caked in mud and blood, is generally preferrable to, say, a certain dullness or dry and clean moralism. If others share such a conception, perhaps they will find grounds for considering re-reading as well. But if we retain the moralistic disposition, we forfeit the goods won through non-moralistic re-reading. Indeed, I suspect we remain within a set of ready-made tools for attacking our opponents and set ourselves against learning much new about them at all.

As the discussion so far should suggest, it would be a mistake to take the possibility of re-reading the repugnant other as somehow entailing one must give up one's genuine criticisms of that

other or cease contending with them politically.[54] That sort of necessity may be projected, but it does not reside here *a priori*. One can re-read the other and yet retain or even re-affirm far-reaching criticisms of them. I have suggested that re-reading can lead us precisely to holding a fuller picture of the other as both surprisingly familiar, even laudable, and resolutely offensive.

We may, furthermore, re-read for explicitly political reasons. That is part of how Susan Harding explains her careful study of fundamental Baptists. She writes, "Social scientists through a variety of means generally do not let themselves get close enough to 'belief' to understand it, or, for that matter, even to see what it is" (1987, 168). Such careful analysis is deemed unnecessary in part by scholars' sedimented judgment that fundamentalists' perspectives are, in the former's view, so obviously unhinged (ibid.). So why does Harding allow herself to get close enough? One of her most explicit articulations comes from another essay, in which she offers a critical rennarration of the Scopes trial, one of the founding myths of fundamentalism for both fundamentalists and their opponents. She undertakes this effort to investigate and problematize "the modern apparatus of thought," which dialogically generates fundamentalism as its antiquated, perversely "backwards," and intractable other precisely through various retellings of such events (1991, 392). Harding explains that attending to the specific rhetorics and historical myths about and by this repugnant other can loosen the strictures of the abstract categories of modern political discourse, enabling the opponents of fundamentalism to "then come up with more nuanced, complicated, partial, and local readings of who they are and what they are doing and therefore design more effective political

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54. Both Weil and Diamond are alert to the possibility of misunderstandings in which their respective openness to ever-read-the-other-again and non-moralistic reflection are construed as ruling out moral judgments and political resistance to those one re-reads or otherwise engages. Weil explicitly observes that justice as a willingness and practice of re-reading the other does not entail indifference or, say, political abstention. It is, rather, a way of doing right by the other whatever else one might be committed to. Diamond, for her part, signals her opposition to this inference by critiquing the conflation of non-moralistic thought with the forms of irresponsibility associated with more aestheticized modes of reflection. What such morally-obtuse aestheticism misses is that *there are such things as moral frivolousness* as well as occasions for social critique, political action, etc. Again, non-moralistic engagement does not overlook its objects moral failings; it simply does not cease engagement on that basis.

strategies to oppose directly the specific positions and policies they advocate. This seems to me better politics than one grounded in a totalizing or uncritical opposition between fundamentalist and modern" (1991, 393). Dovetailing my suggestion that we may owe ourselves honest pictures of our others, Harding insists: know your enemy. Caricatures are unreliable guides for competing with our opponents in the political field and may, indeed, play into their strategies. I considered how eco-conversionism makes this latter error in Chapter 2 by confirming narratives generated by think-tanks and politicians on the right which precisely cast environmentalists as secular missionaries.

Following Harding, we too might undertake re-reading projects to better understand how our preconceptions distort our political opponents, thereby blinkering us to their genuine concerns and patterns of thought or even playing into the plans of their political leaders. For example, the analysis in this chapter suggests that environmentalists' insistence upon referring to traditions such as Evangelical Protestantism as irredeemably anthropocentric grinds against the devotional authors' insistent theocentrism. This difference criticizes environmentalists' conceptions for potentially misconstruing some of the organizing values for this other, including God—not human—centeredness. Correcting this mistake might shape environmental politics in numerous ways, such as discouraging the uncritical use of this term. In contexts where calling another an anthropocentrist amounts to a refusal to acknowledge their self-professed position, using this word might unnecessarily amplify the stakes of a political encounter (working, say, as a kind of insult). Likewise, these texts echo a theme discussed in Chapter 2, namely, conservatives' perception of themselves as embattled against secular culture and conservatives' and hunters' (accurate) perceptions of many left-liberal environmentalists' white-hot animosity for them. An appreciation of these features of the other's perspective might condition our rhetoric as we engage them and inspire us to think at institutional levels about the mitigation of political fracturing as an important component in gaining diverse support for ecological policies. The familiarity won through re-reading might also draw our

attention to how contemporary private religious institutions, such as the conservative Christian book houses that publish some of the devotionals considered here or the churches and schools with which the authors are associated, are trying to access new markets of financial and political support, such as hunters. What non- or half-hearted partisans might be in play here, how are these texts pulling them toward one political group or another, and how might environmentalists intervene? How can environmentalists interrupt the insistent institutional strategies of their opponents to increase their numbers and consolidate their political block? These examples graze the surface of how re-reading our others might reshape our strategies for vying against political opponents.

Re-reading might also inform our politics by furnishing unexpected points of congruence between our concerns and those of our opponents. Such shared concerns might then be imagined as promising tenets of contingent political coalitions that include some of us and some of them. As I discussed in Chapter 1, this is one of the central interests of some environmental pragmatists, who encourage us to focus on the shared policy objectives of environmentalists and their opponents rather than on that which divides these groups (namely, worldviews). One of the central figures in this pragmatic school, Bryan Norton, has consistency criticized the fracturing effects of some environmentalists' fixation on establishing shared worldviews or common abstract values as a precondition to working toward concrete policy goals. In an early articulation of this view, Norton describes "the environmentalists' dilemma" as "primarily a dilemma in values, conceptualizations, and worldviews more than a dilemma regarding actions and policies. It affects mainly how environmentalists explain and justify their policies, and only occasionally and tangentially does it affect those policies themselves" (1991, 5). Norton breaks environmentalists into two general camps: preservationists in the tradition of John Muir, who insist on the intrinsic value of nature and seek to curb intrusions into wild places at all costs, and conservationists in the tradition of Gifford Pinchot, who are interested in the long-term sustainable use of natural resources (9). These two groups speak

the incommensurable languages of moralism and economic cost-benefit analysis respectively. Their inability to communicate effectively with each other hamstrings the articulation of a "single, coherent consensus regarding positive values, [a] widely shared vision of a future and better world in which human populations live in harmony with the natural world they inhabit" (6). This lack of consensus, in turn, costs the environmental movement in wider political competitions. To overcome these internal and external challenges, Norton seeks to establish that these two camps in fact share common ground by considering concrete cases of their repeated historical convergence around policy objectives and despite grounding their agreement in disparate values (189).[55]

Norton's examination of different environmentalists' policy commitments might be fruitfully construed as an experiment in re-reading different environmental positions, say, re-reading supposedly crass conservationists, with the aim of discovering the grounds for political coalitions. I do not want to rule out that re-reading might reveal such resonances. My own examination of the devotionals might give us a sense of some points of policy contact between environmentalists and these conservative Protestant hunters, such as a shared interested in responsible ecosystemic management and the cultivation of concern over how animals are killed.

Still, I am wary of this sort of pragmatic coalitionist approach to re-reading for at least two related reasons. First, as I discussed in Chapter 1, I think this sort of coalitionism underestimates the anxiety the parties in question feel over the mere existence of their political and moral opponents. Environmental politics has become progressively more fractured since Norton's study, and even as he and his allies have continued to refine and develop their pragmatic approaches, the lines that divide environmentalists and their opponents have multiplied and deepened in such a way that a

55. Norton sees this policy consensus relaxing on a shared ecological worldview among all environmentalists: a sort of latent, scientific world picture that is differently inflected by seven demi-worldviews: Judaeo-Christian stewardship, deep ecology and related systems, transformationalism/ transcendentalism, constrained economics, scientific naturalism, ecofeminism, and pluralistic pragmatism (1991, 197).

preoccupation with finding environmental common ground through re-reading risks missing the forest (broad structures and tenets of divisions among the parties) for the trees (e.g., a shared interest in conserving wild places). If the devotionals in question might suggest common ground between their authors and environmentalists, they suggest as much or more distance between these groups. This distance is signaled in multiple ways, such as how the hunting devotionals largely position their authors and readers as outside of environmentalism. Though Norton would perhaps call these authors environmentalists because of their interest in conservation, the authors, in general, would not so identify, and that is significant. Environmentalism for these authors is associated with a wide range of political positions and social values, which these authors reject or are skeptical of, such as views on gender, race, gun and hunting regulation, and the nature of nature. There is profound skepticism and animosity on both sides here. The failure by pragmatists such as Norton to appreciate this anxiety may be reflected in their failure to dissuade eco-conversionists from seeking moral and worldview consensus and the continued escalation of environmental topics as devices of sorting and bolstering diametrically-opposed political blocks. By contrast, I have sought to extract the nerve of that anxiety by critically examining and productively deflating eco-conversionists' conceptions of their others, conceptions that render conversion commonsensical.

Secondly, and related to the matters that divide many environmentalists from the authors of these devotionals and the worlds to which they belong, I am wary of uncritically emphasizing shared ecological sympathies across political divides if that entails the obfuscation of other crucial antagonisms, over such matters as racial, sexual, and gender justice. The anxiety that many of environmentalists feel over the existences of our repugnant others is hardly contained to their opponents' views on nonhuman reality, but also includes the implications of their views on, say, family structure and sexuality, for they are proudly patriarchal and heteronormative, or the

relationship between their tradition and the history and future of the United States, for their traditions and commitments are indelibly tied to Christian nationalism (see Pipher 2014, 74).

My reservations along these lines, paired with the genuine resonances between some environmentalist perspectives and these devotionals explain my suggestion that re-reading might lead to *contingent* coalitions, which we might further qualify by marking such coalitions as consciously finite in scope and duration.[56] Rather that obfuscating other points of disagreement, or naively minimizing the gravity of polarization between involved parties, I am proposing that practices of re-reading that are conscious of these pitfalls might be, to quote Nicole Seymour, "contrarian modes" that enables us "to create new modes of resistance, new forms of community, and new opportunities for inquiry into environmental crisis" (2018, 24), not by generating static or thoroughgoing consensus, but by destabilizing our presumptions about others and opening concrete sites of dialogue and momentary solidarity in particular places between specific, real people confronting shared issues, say, whether a new round of mining contracts that might threaten a wilderness area should be approved. New forms of community might emerge here precisely thanks to practices that resist and run contrary to how environmental discourse and popular American political discourse encourage us to conceptualize and approach our others; such practices might loosen the preconceptions that undermine our bare ability to speak with someone without defaulting to our familiar political stances. Following Tuck and Yang (2012, 35-36), the connections that might come about here may be guided by an ethic of incommensurability—an appreciation that the parties involved differ in innumerable ways including their ultimate concerns—but in the meantime, they might sustain tentative relations that achieve various valuable practical goals.

56. Norton sees this contingent coalitionism as the common understanding of multi-party environmentalism, insists that environmentalists are in fact more unified than that conception, and wishes to bolster that unity by articulating diverse environmentalists' shared policy goals and underlying super-worldview (Norton 1991, 193). I am suggesting other ethical and moral commitments tell against that unity and seeking to bolster it.

This inventory of potential rationales for re-reading is not exhaustive, but it starts to sketch the range of reasons we might have to take up this practice. These potential rationales do not require us to re-read, but in certain circumstances they might outweigh other considerations and spur us to this course of action. I also do not wish to minimize the difficulty, even impossibility for some of us to re-read certain others. My own capacity to approach the white, masculine, heteronormative, conservative Protestant hunter almost certainly depends on the various privileges of my social location (e.g., my whiteness). I have not been the object of such figures' racial, sexual, gender, and religious prejudice and ire, and so certain experiences and wounds that might make re-reading this other distinctly difficult or even harmful for some do not directly condition my own experiment. For those who have been made such objects, it seems eminently reasonable that in some cases re-reading this other may not outweigh the need for other tactics nor the risk of further harm or discomfort. I suspect that my privileges vis-à-vis these others generate distinctive responsibilities to consider re-reading them; others may have good reasons to refuse re-reading here, whereas I do not, or may have their own responsibilities vis-à-vis discreet others.

Re-reading is merely one more relational possibility or mode of engaging the ecological other brought into view by a picture that construes this figure as always-possibly conceptually opaque and variously nontrivial. Along with the relational possibilities described in Chapter 5, my discussion of re-reading aims to augment eco-conversionists' repertoire for relating in thought and action to the ecological other, to their many ecological others. We might indefinitely multiply relational modalities inspired by the picture of the opaque and nontrivial picture of the ecological other, as well as continuously enumerating other conceptions of this figure and the distinct practical possibilities *those* invite. But on the unlikely hope that the present and preceding chapters have started to loosen the hold of conversion and the transparent and trivial picture on the eco-conversionist imagination, with my discussion of re-reading in place, I draw this experiment in ethical therapeutics to a close.

Postscript

§1 Recollections

Referring to technically demanding musical phrases, one of my teachers used to say, "If you can't play it slow, you can't play it fast." Or, to give the point the sort of precision than ruins maxims, but should be expected here: "if you cannot play it well slowly, then odds are you won't play it well at tempo." There are worse metaphors for the foregoing explorations in moral imagination. Those chapters and the examples they collect ask some environmentalists to play it slow when it comes to picturing and imagining relating-to the ecological other, to linger over the possibilities here, to chew a manner of cud and so cultivate that skill Nietzsche thought we moderns had forgotten: rumination (see 1967, 23). But as the maxim implies, the point of slow practice is not necessarily to play slowly, but rather to develop the capacity to play at tempo, or in the present case, the various tempos of life in the Anthropocene, beset as we are by innumerable ecological crises and social conflicts and surrounded by human multiplicity. The wager of the present work is that sometimes we'll need to play at 120 BPM, others at 220, but odds are we won't do either well, given the difficulties involved, if we never practice at 40.

I have undertaken this exercise of slowing down, which takes inspiration from the techniques of Wittgenstein and his readers, in a context in which a number of individuals concerned with ecological crises seem stuck in a loop when it comes to interacting with other people, people with other concepts, people who do not seem to understand those crises as the first group thinks they should.[1] A certain preoccupation with the relational modality of worldview change within a strand of Western environmentalism forms the backdrop of this experiment in patience, which has sought to understand that preoccupation and to expand the imaginations of these would-be

1. On how the sorts of moral imaginative problematics I have considered here can be modeled as a kind of feedback loop that consistently disappears others in their specificity from subjects' imaginations, see Andrew Atwell's ethnographic study of Torah Seed Groups in Palestine/Israel (forthcoming).

worldview changers, or eco-conversionists, beyond a fixation on this sole relational mode. Positioning myself as an inhabitant of the non-static category of eco-conversionist, I have cast this work as a kind of internal moral-imaginative therapeutics, in which those external to that category might take interest but who are not explicitly addressed. Indeed, much of the foregoing should appear pedantic to some, perhaps many, readers, namely, those who do not find themselves in the grips of the problematics they aim at. Of course, nothing ensures the success of my therapeutic exercises among those whom I address, but here is a review of what I hope to have accomplished:

In the Introduction and first chapter, I suggested that, in their responses to ecological crises, some Anglophone environmentalists seem preoccupied with a particular mode of relating to other people, their conceptual others, namely, the possibility of changing the worldviews of the latter, a preoccupation I have called eco-conversionism. I illustrated this engrossment with a collection of examples and, in Chapter 1, undertook to excavate its organizing and animating structure, which I found to have three general parts. First, I suggested that the eco-conversionists in question seem anxious, impatient, and unsettled over the reality of the conceptually different ecological other, the other who seems not to understand nature and ecological crises along the same lines as eco-conversionists. Following Diamond, I suggested that this difference is a kind of difficult reality for eco-conversionists, something that unseats their reason and to which they feel exposed. Secondly, these eco-conversionists take for granted, in their conversion response to the ecological other, that their others' perspectives are transparent to them, or understood easily from a vantage outside of those perspectives, and, moreover, trivial on moral matters concerning the nonhuman. Accordingly, I suggested that a particular picture of the ecological other as transparent and trivial seems to help make conversionism commonsensical. For if one assumes this picture, then the idea of changing the other's worldview might naturally arise, especially if it seems such change will spur action on ecological crises. Thirdly, I suggested that specific subject positions recur to eco-conversionists as

ecologically-other; I emphasized in particular the recurrence of Indigenous peoples and U.S. conservative Christians as candidates for conversion.

Since the mere observation that these environmentalists are thus preoccupied might not inspire investment in expanding their practical repertoire, in Chapter 2 I sought to problematize the default status of the transformational mode in their approaches to the ecological other. Besides the recalcitrance of human conceptual difference, something I mentioned in the Introduction, I delineated four limitations to eco-conversion as an active "-ism." First, this preoccupation among settler environmentalists suggests an inattention to Indigenous anti-colonial and cultural resurgence efforts, which, among other things, precisely seek to actualize specifically Indigenous forms of thought and life over and against the historical imposition, through settler colonialism, of Euro-American forms. That inattention, I said, has not only strategic limitations insofar as it positions settler environmentalists among the forces resisted by many Indigenous activists, academics, and groups, but also moral limits insofar as it actively conceals Indigenous resistance to the colonial status quo and/or advocates for the displacement of Indigenous perspectives. Secondly, the rhetoric of environmental worldview change expresses political obtuseness in another direction, namely, by uncritically confirming narratives circulating on the U.S. political right that represent environmentalists *exactly* as secular, leftwing missionaries seeking to displace so-called traditional American perspectives and Christian values. That confirmation again has strategic and moral stakes since the narratives in question not only fuel conservative opposition to environmental goals and the environmental movement at numerous scales (a strategic problem), but are also part of a process of political fracturing, spurred by the political and economic elite, which threatens the viability of liberal democratic rule (a moral problem). Thirdly, the very aim of conceptual homogenization through worldview change seems to run against the current of what we know from the discourse of biocultural diversity conservation, namely, that cultural, and with it conceptual, diversity often goes

hand in hand with biodiversity, and so we should not be too hasty to seek widespread assimilation to a single outlook. Moreover, I suggest that the desire to melt the extant diversity of human perspectives into a single general perspective seems to attack human difference as such, something that some us simply value. Finally, in dialogue with Cavell, I suggested that allowing conversion a default position in our relations with the ecological other bespeaks an absence of moral relation to this other at all; treats this other as a mere barrier, a kind of negative means that works against our pregiven ends. Without committing to a specific, thick conception of the value of persons, I suggested that many of us should find this non-moral-relation unacceptable.

Given these limitations, I set out in Chapters 3 and 4 to conjure, through argumentation and perspicuous representation, another picture of the ecological other, one that might illumine additional modes of relating to this figure and thereby help expand the eco-conversionist imagination beyond its fixation on worldview change. Turning to overlooked quotidian possibilities for how conceptual others can be opaque to us, in Chapter 3 I invited eco-conversionists to envision the ecological other as conceptually opaque, and as always containing the possibility of becoming opaque to us, when it turns out that we do not in fact understand them. I developed these ideas in dialogue with Ryle and Wittgenstein and tied the figure of the stranger or shifting mist and shroud to the conception of the opaque other their writings inspired.

Chapter 4 then sought to charge this image with a polymorphous potentiality to matter by multiplying possible ways in which conceptual others can factor into eco-conversionists' lives, vis-à-vis the nonhuman, in important ways. The ecological other, I said, can show herself to be the Device, who in her difference intentionally or inadvertently supports environmental goals; the Informant, who adds to environmentalists' knowledge; the Epistemic Revolutionary, who effects paradigm shifts in our understandings of the nonhuman; the Quickener, who qualitatively enlivens our conceptions of the nonhuman; or the Metamorphic, who causes indelibly moral structural

changes in how we conceptualize the nonhuman, proffering us with new descriptions under which to act and feel. Following Diamond's insight that there is no single grammar of value, I then claimed that there is no limit to be drawn, say, around these five evaluative modes, in how the other might come to matter to us, nor in how they might teach us to value.

With the picture of the ecological other as opaque, and ever possibly so, and potentially nontrivial in place, Chapters 5 and 6 describe a range of relational modes that start to make sense when the other is imagined this way. In Chapter 5, I claimed that the other's imagined opacity suggests the idea of trying to understand them, what I called apprenticeship, and their potential nontriviality offers a motivation for such labors. I illustrated the forms such apprenticeship can take before observing how another possibility in our dealings with opaque others is to discover limitations in our attempts to understand them. These again I illustrated with examples, culminating in the possibility that a would-be mentor might refuse to help us dissolve their opacity. I took expressions of Indigenous American refusal as exemplary of this possibility and instructive for settler environmentalists who sometimes covet Indigenous points of view. Finally, I suggested that the foregoing possibilities, held with the image of the opaque and nontrivial other, inspire the further relational mode of having to accept the other's opacity, to knowingly live without that which one might very much wish to understand. I called this last possibility a kind of negative capacity.

In Chapter 6, I described and experimented with a final relational possibility inspired by picturing the other as opaque and potentially nontrivial, what I called re-reading the other, a mode of relating to others in which we begin from a place of thinking we understand them and then proceed to examine parts of their life or perspective to see how we are wrong. I was particularly interested in developing this notion with respect to the figure of the repugnant other and took the trope of the conservative Christian anti-environmentalist as exemplary. By examining a collection of devotionals authored by white, male, Evangelical hunters and anglers and marketed to a like-minded audience, I

tried to show what such re-reading can look like and what it can yield. I concluded that chapter by describing some of the reasons one might in some contexts undertake such labors, ranging from how re-reading might refine strategies against one's opponents to how such practices might parochialize stereotypes just enough to set the stage for strange and contingent alliances. Re-reading hardly finishes the list of relational modalities that might come into relief when we imagine the ecological other as not or never securely understood and potentially significant regarding nonhuman ethics and politics, but with that modality in place I paused my therapeutic enterprise.

The principal criterion for evaluating the success of the preceding arguments is whether they render eco-conversion one possibility within a repertoire for the conversion-preoccupied—whether eco-conversionists or would-be conversionists now find themselves, momentarily, with a variety of ordinary possible modes of picturing and encountering or negotiating with the recalcitrance of conceptual others. As I mentioned in the Introduction, this is the goal of helping a group of people approach a particular moral task: facing well a range of non-ideal, demanding, and overwhelming ethical realities, realities to which they feel exposed, which unseat their reason (Diamond 2008, 45-46). That task, as I said, positions this work in a growing body of literature that tries to take seriously, and without deflection, the difficult realities of life on a damaged planet. That there are numerous valuable approaches to this sort of work, to practicing ethics in the muck, is something I assume; my meager hope is to have provided a small contribution to it.

§2 Further Work

Yet this work may also be generative in other respects. To close, I want to preliminarily sketch two noteworthy lines of inquiry this project indirectly but not inadvertently invites: continued analysis of settler environmental and Indigenous ethical and political conflicts as well as the sorts of agonistic institutions theorized by radical democrats.

2.1 The Indigenous/Settler-Environmental Interface

My study of the interface of settler environmentalism, in its eco-conversionist form, and Indigenous American cultural resurgence and refusal suggests the need for further analysis of the conflicts and collaborative limitations and possibilities between these and related groups. There is a burgeoning literature on Indigenous and especially Indigenous American ecological perspectives, especially so-called Traditional Ecological Knowledge, as well as on the disproportionate distribution of environmental harms to Indigenous individuals and communities, particularly within the discourses of environmental and climate change justice. But less work has been done on what it might mean for environmental analysts, activists, and institutions to take seriously some of the stringent implications of Indigenous American sovereignty claims and anti-colonialism, that is, to take seriously that Indigenous political aims may be fundamentally at odds, or with Tuck and Yang, incommensurable with, settler environmental goals and concerns. My discussion in the Chapter 5 started to sketch a small part of what it might mean to take this challenge seriously, casting Indigenous refusal-to-mentor as a possible anti-colonial stance indelibly tied to Indigenous cultural resurgence and self-determination and setting Indigenous and settler environmental values at cross purposes. I said there that such refusal, and the other limitations that can attend attempts to apprentice, invite the negative relational possibility of accepting the other's opacity. Now I want to suggest that such acceptance, in the case of Indigenous refusal, might be part and parcel of receiving anti-colonial gestures well, and folded into a repertoire of anti-colonial praxis. But these potential cross-purposes constitute a problematic that merits further articulation as such and ethical analysis of navigating it well, in its undoubtably numerous particular iterations.

Likewise, there remains insufficient appreciation for the subtle cunning of neocolonial patterns of thought in some parts of the environmental humanities, patterns of thought, that is, that indirectly sustain settler national power as a complement to explicit governmental control. I touched on this problematic in Chapter 2, when I said that eco-conversionism at best risks committing setter

moves to innocence when some eco-conversionists, such as Crist and sometimes Bauman, cast themselves as Indigenous allies while obfuscating the settler colonial status quo; at worst eco-conversionism tacitly aligns eco-conversionists with the aims of settler colonialism when they seek to transform Indigenous worldviews or merely presume the transparency of Indigenous perspectives and concerns. Indexing a certain obtuseness to Indigenous decolonial activity—which indefinitely defers an appreciation of Indigenous concerns—eco-conversionist rhetoric conceals and protects the structures that directly and indirectly effect the elimination of Indigenous peoples from the land.

But neocolonialism works through environmental thought in other fashions as well, such as in the continued circulation of various questionable categories. Notably, for instance, much environmental writing acknowledges the problems with the figure of the Ecological Indian—again, a variation of the "noble-savage" side of the conquest-era colonialist conception of the native other—only to, often in the same breath, variously and uncritically reiterate this trope. Consider, for instance, this passage from Crist's *Abundant Earth*, in which she criticizes the reconceptualization of Indigenous peoples as resource managers instead of pre-colonial "environmentalists":

> Newfangled ideas about indigenous people have not corrected erstwhile erring, idealized views of them. The swing from noble savage to resource manager has substituted one ideology-laden view with another. What's more, when we consider the words and ceremonies of Native Americans themselves, historically recorded as well as preserved in contemporary expressions, the noble-savage stereotype arguably hews closer to the truth. "Indigenous people of [the Northwest] forests, and all over the world," writes indigenous author Robin Kimmerer, "offer traditional prayers of thanksgiving which acknowledge the roles of fish and trees, sun and rain, in the well-being of the world. Each being with whom our lives are intertwined is named and thanked." The Navajo song cited at the start of this chapter is not exactly what one would affiliate with a "natural resource management culture." Native American scholars and activists have noted that the relationship between their ancestors and the more-than-human world was one of love (not management), one of respect (not resourcism), and one of communion and solidarity (not dominion). Indigenous literature on human-nonhuman relations emphasizes kinship, reciprocity, limits, and gratitude. (2019, 127)

Observe how Crist first acknowledges the unreliability of the "noble savage" trope, but then finds herself drawn to it again as she recoils from the managerial conceptualization. The obvious

intolerability of that latter representation, since Crist attaches management irrevocably to anthropocentrism, forces her to the first side of the binary. Crist then supports this second move with a citation practice that subtly assimilates Indigenous perspectives and forms of living to a conceptual framework constituted by a series of particular, starkly-oppositional conceptual distinctions (love/management, respect/resourcism, communion/dominion). We ought not ecologically romanticize Indigenous peoples, she tells us, but we also should not conceive of them as resource managers; indeed, far better to go with the first image.

The problems with the Ecological Indian trope, however, are not confined merely to how it cultivates a fetishized, romantic fantasy about the Indigenous other, but include also how it accomplishes that construal by first fitting this figure into a particular model of nature and corresponding conception of human/nature relations. This fantasy repeats to us: the Ecological Indian lives harmoniously with Nature, precisely in contrast to modern Euro-Americans. That model of nature and human-nature relations is particular, has a specific history, historically belongs to specific people (cf. Krech 1999). The absorption of all other peoples to it in thought secrets their distinctive fashions of living and sense-making, hides their potentially radical heterogeneity. Crist's uncritical reception and reiteration of the Ecological/Managerial Indian dichotomy does nothing to resist this obfuscation; instead she marshals evidence to help place Indigenous peoples on the Ecological side. Crist seems to find herself virtually unable or unwilling to conceptualize Indigenous peoples and their lives with the nonhuman in a fashion that might do justice to either their pre-colonial particularity or post-colonial-encounter conceptual and existential hybridity, that is, the ways in which they fail to fit easily into any of Crist's inherited distinctions, how they might in fact turn her typologies sideways.[2] Such particularity, the conceptual challenges it might present to Crist, and the potentially incommensurable Indigenous political and ethical visions of the future indelibly tied

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2. We might say, she does not allow them to be potential Epistemic Revolutionaries nor Metamorphics.

up with it are all matters her albeit reluctant construal of Indigenous peoples as "noble savages" indefinitely conceals. That Indigenous particularly and ends can be thusly hidden and risked by academic discourse falls exactly among the rationales for Indigenous refusal discussed above.

What it might look like to think with and about Indigenous perspectives vis-à-vis the nonhuman in a fashion that has metabolized the kinds of problems attending the figure of the Ecological Indian is a practical and conceptual possibility that, by my lights, remains generally unavailable to settler environmental thought, and therefore merits further critical and constructive analysis. A particularly useful approach into the foregoing quagmires would be for analysts to undertake critical, comparative analyzes of the current tide of Indigenous land returns in North America and recent experiments in settler-Indigenous co-management of bioregions. Such case studies might describe the strengths and limitations of specific return or management projects from the perspectives of involved parties—local Indigenous peoples, local and national environmental organizations and activists, local and federal governments, local settler citizens, as well as the perspectives of relevant Indigenous and settler environmental and wildlife agencies and institutions. As a result, such studies might concretize what efforts at decolonization can look like, though doubtless these will only be somewhat successful, and continue sharpening our perception of Indigenous resistance and hybridity as well as the permutations of settler anxiety and control, in turn, generating corresponding conceptualizations of counter-action and resistance.

2.2 Institutional Responses to Political Fracture

One last line of inquiry suggested indirectly by the discussions of this dissertation concerns political fracture in liberal democracies. The mobilization of the idiom of "political polarization" by the conservative elite should not deter analysts from examining the reality of political fracturing nor its very real stakes. I suggested in Chapter 2 that environmentalists might be part of that story. As far right political parties continue to gain traction in democratic nations, and as governments and

multinational corporations around the world continue strategizing around the reality of ecological crises, it is incumbent upon the citizens of democratic governments, including environmentalists, to attend to the necessary conditions for sustaining democratic forms of rule into the uncertain precarity of the Anthropocene (see Forchtner 2020). In particular, the present study suggests the import of institutions that can function to curb citizens' mutual animosity, or with Chantal Mouffe, that work to transform would-be political enemies into adversaries or legitimate opponents (2005, 102). We need not sign onto the entire agonistic metaphysics to see the proximal value of this peculiar task. A radical democratic focus on the institutional level of this problematic, again, a citizenry of enemies rather than adversaries, is particularly relevant.[3]

On the one hand, the cultivation of political division around the environment (and other issues) occurs at the institutional and market levels, through, say, the widespread dissemination of misinformation and misleading representations of different political groups. To intervene at a scale mismatched to these drive forces, as we see with, say, anti-polarization workshops hosted by municipalities or neighborhoods, is to mistake the nature of the problem. Grassroots and other localized attempts to mitigate political fracture are absolutely essential to thriving multiparty systems, but I doubt they can compete with, say, the scale of corporate and conservative political elite investment in the manufacture of climate doubt and opposition to environmentalism as such. Likewise, rigorous examinations of who it is that cultivates political fracture around the environment, invests in and stands to benefit from polarization, such as fossil-fuel funded conservative think tanks (see Jacques and Dunlap 2008), examinations that might aspire to conjure a shared foe across political divides, are invaluable. But their utility presupposes a state of affairs other-than one of fracture. For all such critiques are easily enlisted in narratives about the rabidly

3. On the role of agonism in institutional design, see Westphal (2019). On the application of radical democratic theory to climate change politics, see Machin (2013).

anti-right left coming for jobs, Jesus, and the rest. Without amputating, or at least tying down, the hand the feeds the mouth such narratives, again through institutions and mechanisms that correspond to the register of manipulation on the right, even the best criticism risks appearing as empty rhetoric aimed at manipulation (and would such appearances mislead in all cases?).

On the other hand, political fragmentation has articulated itself in such a way so as to leave us at present with factions that consistently give each other warrant for mutual antipathy, which is to say reasons in the now and at individual and group levels to *not* reconceive the other as mere adversary. For example, when it isn't explicitly enacted or dismissed, anti-Black racism genuinely goes missing in discourses of the U.S. political right. To say to individuals on the left, then, that they need to work to overcome fragmentation is to ask them to work with those whom they may quite rightly, *accurately*, see as racists. Because these antagonisms have genuine grounds, then, I am not only doubtful that one could persuade specific individuals and groups—including, say, those who are subject to the right's racism (and transphobia, misogyny, etc.)—that they need to see their enemies as genuine, legitimate opponents, but, moreover, I would find such efforts intolerable precisely because they conflict with genuine perceptions of, say, legitimately harmful racism. I touched on these matters in Chapter 6 when I expressed my skepticism and criticisms of the sort of politically naïve and morally obtuse coalitionism recommended by some environmental pragmatists. There are real and grounded limitations to how political fracture can be mitigated at the scale of modifying individuals' and discrete groups' mutual perceptions. This is, I think, a relatively intractable problematic in the present. Setting aside the current political investment in cultivating a bifurcated political scene (again, among the political elite, think tanks, and private groups), the current state of mutual animosity, and the various grounds that help moor it—from, for example, the left's true perception of racism on the right, to the right's true perception of the left's hatred of the right—is not, in my judgment, on a flexible trajectory in the short term.

But the effects of institutional change occur at another temporal scale. By investing in institutions that explicitly function to mitigate the sorts of outright antagonisms that might, say, culminate in violent conflict, a shift from the perception of a citizen-opponent as an enemy to an adversary may be a downstream effect that individuals and groups are not asked to endorse as such—again, in conflict with their genuine perceptions. In addition to mitigating the sort of political fracture that can set the stage for popular support of violent factions—factions that promise to deliver for at least one's own party by nearly any means—institutions that encourage a citizenry to perceive itself as a collection of adversaries rather than enemies supports the sort of multiparty, non-static coalitional decision-making that is necessary for contemporary political structures to adapt nimbly to current and future ecological crises. Environmentalists thus have multiple reasons to analyze and advocate for the sorts of institutions that can curb fracture. Such courses of research might again unfold through critical and constructive case studies of current experimentations in such mitigation, as we see with, say, U.C. Berkeley's Othering and Belonging Institute.[4]

I should like to think that my interest in cultivating an imagination that can improvise in the face of shifting moral demands lends this work a certain—if vague—affinity to Aristotle's vision of ethics; perhaps it is not, then, unfitting to close as I have by gesturing to a need for further political analysis (see Aristotle 2014, 1181b 10-20). Yet I continue to conceive of such analysis as subordinate to a broader moral task, namely, a kind of fidelity to our numerous, conflictual ties and concerns in the face of intractable problems and the recalcitrance of the other. As I noted in Chapter 2 in particular, one way to characterize the preoccupation I have called eco-conversionism is as a kind of refusal to encounter and negotiate with the other, an attempted end-run around politics and moral reasoning—or with Diamond and Cavell, a kind of deflection from others. One path to start

4. OBI's Democracy and Belonging Forum is an example. The Forum seeks to connect, educate, and resource civic leaders in Europe and the US "who are committed to crossing lines of difference to strengthen a multi-identity coalition for democracy while continuing to advance belonging for marginalized groups" (OBI 2024).

correcting that refusal and evasion, the path taken in this project, is to try to cultivate a repertoire that can help facilitate such encounters and negotiations, in which we draw on a range of conceptions of and approaches to the other. Such a repertoire, paired with the sorts of deflationary practices employed in this work, as well as the kind of analysis just sketched, might help curb the temptation to moral and political obtuseness, to simplifications and deflections that cast our many social and environmental problematics as easier than they are—to live better with our exposure to not only those ecological realities that unseat our reason, but also the stubborn fact of other people.

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