Southern Illinois University Carbondale
OpenSIUC

Theses | Theses and Dissertations

5-1-2011

A COMPARISON OF NATIVE AND COLONIAL AMERICAN CONCEPTIONS OF SELF: IMPLICATIONS FOR COMPETING WORLD-VIEWS

Marjorie R. Cavey
Southern Illinois University Carbondale, marjorie@siu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/theses

Recommended Citation
Cavey, Marjorie R., "A COMPARISON OF NATIVE AND COLONIAL AMERICAN CONCEPTIONS OF SELF: IMPLICATIONS FOR COMPETING WORLD-VIEWS" (2011). *Theses.* Paper 601.

This Open Access Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Dissertations at OpenSIUC. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses by an authorized administrator of OpenSIUC. For more information, please contact opensiuc@lib.siu.edu.

A COMPARISON OF NATIVE AND COLONIAL AMERICAN CONCEPTIONS OF SELF: IMPLICATIONS FOR COMPETING WORLD-VIEWS

by

Marjorie R. Cavey

B.S., B.A., Southeast Missouri State University, 2007

A Thesis
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Master of Arts in Philosophy

Department of Philosophy
In the Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
May 2011

THESIS APPROVAL

A COMPARISON OF NATIVE AND COLONIAL AMERICAN CONCEPTIONS OF SELF:
IMPLICATIONS FOR COMPETING WORLD-VIEWS

By

Marjorie R. Cavey

A Thesis Submitted in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Arts

In the field of Philosophy

Approved by:

Thomas Alexander, Chair

Douglas Anderson

Kenneth Stikkers

Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
April 8, 2011

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Marjorie R. Cavey, for the Master of Arts degree in Philosophy, presented on April 8, 2011, at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

TITLE: A COMPARISON OF NATIVE AND COLONIAL AMERICAN CONCEPTIONS OF SELF: IMPLICATIONS FOR COMPETING WORLD-VIEWS

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. Thomas Alexander

Native and Colonial Americans had vastly different approaches to the world, and viewed nature and other people in quite dissimilar ways. The concept of self is central to this project because personal values and attitudes toward others are grounded in agency – actions that emerge from the self and define the way that one treats his or her surroundings and everyone or thing in it. The way that one's self is perceived is necessarily communicated within the context of social settings. Situation in a world of other people (and of nature) requires that actions be weighed in accordance with agency. The very concept of what it is to have self is a key way to understand a world-view, because the values that are central to cultural communities have their locus within self. As such, the importance of defining to what or to whom one is agent must be addressed.

The concepts of self that were fostered in members of tribes and early settlement communities contributed greatly to the world-views of their members, and consequently the treatment of their surroundings. One aim of Native American religions was to cultivate within tribal members the worthiness of respect harbored within beings of all sorts. Native American oral traditions established in members, from early on, the skill of actively listening to nature and the mindset that the earth and its inhabitants should be approached with care and respect. This was apparent in the treatment of nature, for personhood was extended to living creatures of all kinds, and even what we might regard

as inanimate objects. Native Americans viewed themselves as vitally related to all other living powers of the world. These approaches to interacting with nature, combined with a word-view that was willing to accept a wide array of entities as beings, instilled a broad concept of self within Native American peoples.

In contrast, based on traditional Western thought - foundationally that of Descartes and highly influenced by John Locke - Colonial Americans developed a very different concept of self from which members of this culture saw the world as hierarchical. As a result, selves turned inward and understood personal existence as other than, or separate from, nature. Persons were manifestly cognitive beings with moral agency, and only other beings with the same attributes should be afforded equal respect or regarded as having rights, as such. The thematic that developed as a result was, and still is today, founded upon the value of property ownership and the utilization of property and natural resources for production.

Why is it important to look at the individual Native American tribe member or Colonial American community member? Since the actions of each member contribute to the wellbeing of the whole group, and consequently of nature, it is important to grasp how self-conduct that is necessarily a product of the individual self, fits into the bigger picture and affects the attitudes and actions of the individual toward other people and the environment. This coincides with the purpose of this project to show how the concept of self for Native Americans can be illuminating in many ways, consequently casting light on how we might learn from their ways, rather than give the impression to readers that one concept of self is any better or worse than the other. It is my aim to illustrate the unique and intriguing way that Native Americans view the self as part of nature, and

investigate how these differing concepts of self, in relation to nature, affect how the these groups act toward nature. My hope is that readers will be encouraged to reflect on their own values and the roles that those values play in modern America, including some of the implications that these concepts of self have had in the past and continue to have for the future.

PREFACE

In 2002, November was declared Native American Heritage month. Throughout the month, celebrations of Native American cultures are held, and Native American contributions to the history of America as a nation are recognized. It must be difficult to live in the midst of a society that, overall, holds very different values than those taught by members of one's own heritage. Most people, of both European and Native heritages, understand the reasons that Native American cultures have been largely suppressed within the course of America's development, but do we really understand who the Native American, or even European American, truly is as a *self*? Why do Americans today hold property ownership in such high regard? Where has this value gotten us today, and might it have turned out much differently if Colonial Americans had learned from rather than rejected Native American values and traditions? In the midst of discussions about pollution, climate change, and sustainability, why has there been a trend to find answers about how to better our environment through studying Native American practices and values?

These questions, and many others, can be answered by taking an in-depth look at what constituted the self for both Native and Colonial Americans. In order to do so, it is important to understand the beliefs that fund the self as a product of a given culture. Thus, exploring the systems of beliefs and ideas that are couched in these differing cultures should help us better understand how they contributed to the ways that their members viewed the world. In Chapters One and Two, I will lay out the foundations for the Colonial and Native American selves, respectively. The purpose of developing the fullest possible concepts of self is to pave the way for a more in-depth discussion of the

differences between these views in Chapter Three. I am especially interested in why those differences resulted in difficulty for European Americans to understand the Native American world-view, as well as the disparity in the ways the two groups have subsequently approached and treated nature. Perhaps one reason that we face ecological crises stems from inherited assumptions, and these assumptions still frame the nature of the debate. By looking at Native American culture, perhaps some of those assumptions can be revealed, and alternatives to how Americans treat nature today might be explored.

There is an array of written work that may be referenced in regard to the Colonial American world–view, but as one might expect of any true oral tradition, there is no forthright account of Native American philosophy that was neatly laid out in a book by tribal elders. Furthermore, Native American cultures are many, and no two are exactly alike in every way. Most Native American books include historical facts, interviews with chiefs or medicine men, and myths and a wealth of stories that were passed on from generation to generation. The most direct way to approach a general Native American theory of self is by studying the lore and legends of the tribes, as well as ceremonies, rituals, and accounts of members in order to find a common thread throughout the various cultures. In doing so, one essentially develops what can be termed an "ethno-philosophy." Thus, by studying worldviews of several Native American cultures and determining what general similar features that their world-views consist of, one can further develop what a concept of self would be like for tribe members.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PAGE

ABSTRACT ………..………………………………………………………………….…...i

PREFACE …………………………………………………………………………….…..iv

CHAPTERS

CHAPTER 1 - The Colonial American Self ……………………………….……….....1

CHAPTER 2 - The Native American Self………………………………………….…..31

CHAPTER 3 – Practical Implications for Radically Different World-Views…………...56

BIBLIOGRAPHY…………………………………………………………………….…..71

VITA…………………………………………………..…………………………73

CHAPTER 1

THE COLONIAL AMERICAN SELF

"*The I of the primary word I-It makes its appearance as individuality and becomes conscious of itself as subject (of experiencing and using).*"

--Martin Buber, *I and Thou*

This chapter will examine the concept of the self that was dominant in Colonial America. Colonial Americans were influenced and shaped both by religious beliefs and the writings of prominent thinkers of the day. Among the reasons for taking on the danger and adventure of settling the new land was interest in the pursuit of freely practicing a chosen religion without the threat of persecution. But there was also influence generated from the ideals of the Enlightenment – the advancement of natural science and interest in political liberty – that were very different from the religious motivations that had been brewing in Europe. Both of these influences were primary features that contributed to the shaping of Colonial America. The Colonist self probably did not realize that many of his values would become tacitly engraved upon much of the American psyche today.

In order to elicit a better understanding of the Colonial American self as a private being, separate from nature, I will first briefly discuss some ways that religion was a factor in the shaping of the self, paying specific attention to the influence of Protestant, and especially Puritanical precepts. In the light of these religious influences, I will then center my focus upon the writings of John Locke, who was perhaps one of the most influential thinkers in promoting enlightened moral and political views of his time, and is especially well known in regard to his thoughts on natural law. In doing so, I hope to

construct a palpable concept of the Colonial American self as a private, intelligent being with rights and agency, concerned with freedom, in ownership of himself and his labor which may be mingled with nature for his own purposes. I will then use the idea of the Colonial American self to compare and contrast with the Native American self.

Part 1: Religious Influence

Many of the Colonial American settlers were fleeing from religious persecution from the Anglican Church; enmity between Protestants and Catholics, and also amongst Protestant sects ran quite heavily in both directions. Although the settlements themselves were often seen as commercial ventures, many colonists were also motivated by their desire to promote their religious beliefs and see the Church prosper, and the new land was viewed as a safe haven – a place to practice and reform the doctrines that Catholicism had diluted. Protestants and Puritans alike, the latter being derived from the former,[1] had a strong presence in Colonial America.

According to Perry Miller, "The character of Puritanism was determined as much by the questions which Luther and Calvin did not solve as by those which they did. Out of both church and theology they swept whatever seemed to them corruptions insinuated by the Papacy."[2] The disenchantment that these followers felt toward Catholicism, at least the way it was being represented by the Papacy, was a driving force behind the reformation. The strong spirit of Protestants and Catholics alike fueled their willingness

[1] Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (New York, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1939), 92. Henceforth referred to as *NEM:SC*. Miller states, "Obviously, the major part of Puritan thought was taken bodily from sixteenth-century Protestantism. From the great reformers came the whole system of theology, definitions of terms, orientation of interests, interpretations of Scripture, and evaluations of previous scholarship. In fact, Puritan thinking was fundamentally so much a repetition of Luther and Calvin, and Puritans were so far from contributing any new ideas, that there is reason to doubt whether a distinctly Puritan thought exists."
[2] *Ibid.,* 94.

to venture to the new world. According to Porter, "Max Weber argued in his *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904-5) that the Reformation spurred a new individuality, thanks to the reformers' doctrine of the priesthood of all believers: salvation must be a personal pilgrimage, a matter of faith alone (solifidianism); it could not be parceled out by priests in pardons and other papist bribes."[3] And so the Protestants had good reason to emerge from beneath the constraints and practices of the Catholic Church. They soon made the voyage to find a new place in the world where they could purify themselves and simplify their religious practices, freeing themselves of both Anglican persecution and the vestments and ceremonies of Catholicism that contributed to the formalism that Protestants had come to detest.[4]

It is important to emphasize that the Puritan-Protestant movement in the Colonies, and also the incoming of other left-wing religious groups, was tremendously influential in the realm of politics.[5] In fact, their influence on political thought was greater than that of the Lutherans: Calvinism was considered, "not only a creed but a system of government. Calvinism implied a partnership between religion and government, the State serving as the protecting arm of the Church," whereas Lutherans believed that the Church was obligated "to establish the kingdom of God on earth," with State considered a "separate sphere."[6] The number of Protestant settlers was much greater in comparison with Catholics, most of who were established in Maryland, which would prove to be the only

---

[3] Roy Porter, *Flesh in the Age of Reason* (New York, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003), 6. Henceforth referred to as *FAR*.

[4] William Warren Sweet, *Religion in Colonial America* (New York, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1942), 19. Henceforth referred to as *RCA*.

[5] Specifically, the Anabaptists and Mennonites of Europe, and Calvinists were fleeing, whereas the German Lutherans were more driven by economic advantage than freedom from religious persecution (*RCA,* 15).

[6] *Ibid.,* 14.

English Catholic refuge colony from the secular momentum that began carrying the English Reformation, with State beginning to emerge as the leader over the Church.[7]

Thus, the Puritans became dynamic in their influence in the new land. Their numbers grew into the tens of thousands within ten years from the 1630 sailing of seventeen Massachusetts Bay Company ships, chartered by King Charles I, carrying the first thousand Puritan passengers - including the wealthy and influential Puritan leader John Winthrop.[8] The religious ideas and beliefs that they carried with them, and their dedication to upholding the Puritan way of life permeated their communities. They weren't particularly driven to convert or save heathens, but even their influence in what are considered secular aspects of societal living, such as economic interests, inner and/or outer community and political relationships, and academic endeavors, was undeniable.

The Puritan's use of established knowledge to benefit them in their journey to salvation was rigorous. It seems odd at first blush that people so religiously inclined would wish to glean anything from works that could be considered secular; but according to Miller they did just that. He points out that, "Had Puritans merely recited in order the points of dogma and not also endeavored to grasp assertions of the creed, there would be no accounting for the intellectual history of the last three centuries…they did not therefore cast aside the traditions of their age, nor did they renounce all learning save theology or lose interest in other inquires besides religious."[9] In order to understand the Bible as well as possible, even though they could never actually grasp it, or God, in all of its true holiness, they sought to improve their minds. Puritans did not just accept everything; rather, they picked over and chose ideas from various works that would

[7] As James I took the throne, Catholicism had already been outlawed in England (*RCA,* 16-18).
[8] *Ibid.,* 21, 22.
[9] *NEM:SC*, 65.

support their convictions. Hence, although belief was first priority, rigorous studies of intellectual materials that aided in understanding the Bible and explaining the rationale behind their beliefs were also very important.[10]

Among philosophical works, John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* became known well by the Puritans. Among the "New England divines,"[11] were Puritan writers who wished to reconcile the problem of how there seemed to be a rational order to the universe when it is governed by a "super-rational absolutism."[12] They also received criticism on their views of the soul and regeneration that forced them to deal with problems in Cartesian philosophy.[13] The introduction of John Locke's work was a welcome solution to the problem of how the soul can be separated from the flesh when released from its worldly abode. Locke's theory picked up Descartes' dualism of mind and body but rejected his theory of innate ideas. Combined with Locke's non-commitment to attachment of soul (or mind) and substance, his is much more coalescent with the Puritan's idea of divine, regenerated soul dwelling in an inherently sinful body; the soul was destined for eternal life, the latter destined to return to ash according to the scriptures. The separation of body and soul played an integral role in the Puritans' understanding of self. Although necessarily embodied in earthly life, the soul is not of the world. The actions undertaken in the world are the soul's responsibility,

[10] Miller writes, "Divine wisdom overflows the limits of human reason, and the mind of man is terribly decayed; hence the universe does not always seem to conform to the principles of human rationality. Faith must keep reason at heel. But no matter how irrational the government of God may seem to His uncomprehending creatures, it is so only in appearance. Faith is called upon to believe, not merely in redemption, but in the reason behind all things. The regenerated intellect may not understand "abstract wisdome," but it can catch at least a glimmering. By the very fact of being regenerated the intellect is duty-bound to strive for such a glimpse" (*NEM:SC,* 69).
[11] *Ibid,* 239.
[12] *Ibid.*
[13] Although Miller does not say so explicitly, one can infer that the problem was with the Cartesian idea of a "pineal gland," where the soul and body somehow come together.

but ultimately it will dwell elsewhere eternally. It was thus the case that temporary earthly matters, including the use of nature as a means for life on earth, were of less consequence than the health of the soul.

In order to preserve the health of the soul it was necessary to find guidance through scripture. Proper interpretation and understanding of the Bible required reasoning abilities, and thus learning was of great importance for honing the mind. Philosophic works certainly exercised the reasoning skills of readers, and the Puritans were interested in using reason to their spiritual advantage. Thus, Puritans did not reject philosophy; rather, they used it as a tool to explain and validate their own doctrines. Without reason, their ability to live according to God's commands would be in vain for lack of ability to interpret His word on even the paltry level that man is capable of. Locke's writings offered some degree of respite from the criticisms that were raised against Puritan theories based on Cartesian thought. Locke's work, which was instrumental in justifying the Glorious Revolution of 1688, became influential in the new land also due to its political message, including attractive views on moral agency and property ownership.

Part 2: Lockean Influence

Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* and *Two Treatises Of Government* were published in 1690, just after the "Glorious Revolution" in which parliament ousted the king. His *Two Treatises Of Government* were widely popular as defenses of this action, and the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* was seen as the basis for what became the "Enlightenment." Locke was seen as a revolutionary thinker by anyone's standards, opening up a new way of thinking about selves and society. Peter

Laslett recognizes Locke's importance in the era, stating about John Locke's *Two Treatises of Government*, "The prime reason for the importance attached to this book of Locke's is its enormous historical influence."[14] The influence of liberalist thought was especially prominent in Colonial America - this new land truly served as the embodiment of these values. Daniel Walker Howe writes in his work, *The Making of the American Self,* "The liberal outlook is much newer [than the republican], originating in the Enlightenment, where it is particularly identified with the writings of John Locke and Adam Smith."[15] It is no wonder that Locke's epistemological and political thought can be traced through the writings of prominent authors such as Thomas Paine, Jonathan Edwards, and Benjamin Franklin, to name only a few.

Locke's epistemology is critical for understanding exactly what qualities and capabilities must be present in order to consider any given entity a self; namely, capabilities for consciousness and reasonable thinking. The picture of a Colonial American self as a being that had rights, and full ownership of himself and his labor, will then be more fully developed with the addition of Locke's views on natural law, and can be discussed more completely in the light of his political thought by placing the self, a private core of referential activity, in the midst of other selves (and non-selves), necessarily; looking at the self apart from all others would be a misrepresentation of the world in reality.

In the new land, concern about establishing positive law (i.e., governmental agency, rights, and autonomy) was a main priority. Because positive law is couched in

---

[14] John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (New York, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), II.ii.4: 3. Henceforth referred to as *TTG.*

[15] Daniel W. Howe, *Making the American Self* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 10. Henceforth referred to as *MAS.*

natural law, the latter was also, understandably, of great interest. There was strong awareness that the characters and moral mindsets of colonial settlers held crucial implications for both the type and the amount of governance required in order to allow for the greatest measure of freedom possible, yet maintain the necessary boundaries required for peaceful societal living. Certainly, many great thinkers influenced early Colonial America, and among the consummate was British philosopher John Locke. Although the ordinary Colonial man may not have read Locke, his ideas were present and discussed widely. Wherein it is true that the Colonial self in general was a product of English protestant culture, and especially the Puritans, it is also true that Locke's ideas were influential enough so as to be grafted upon this trunk. Furthermore, Locke offered ideas in the more intellectualized terms that educated people were inclined to embrace.

In fact, Locke's own writings, especially his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding,* are momentous. Although his *Essay* was written and is typically read as a completely separate work from his *Two Treatises*, it may also be seen as an integral part of the overall view and construction of his politics.[16] Laslett writes:

> The famous doctrine of the *tabula rasa*, for example, the blank sheet of the mind on which experience and experience alone can write, made men begin to feel that the whole world is new for everyone and we are all absolutely free of what has gone before. The political results of such an attitude have been enormous. It was, perhaps, the most effective solvent of the natural-law attitude. In a sense these

[16] Laslett writes, "Some such construction [between the *Essay* and *Two Treatises*] as this might be made by a modern scholar attempting to create a theory of politics out of Locke's *Essay*, if, as so nearly happened, it had never become certainly known that *Two Treatises* was also Locke's. Such an exercise might have illuminating results, though it cannot be our subject here, for the implications of Locke's theory of knowledge for politics and political thinking were very considerable and acted quite independently of the influence of *Two Treatises*," (*TTG,* 84).

> results were intended. For though Locke wrote the *Essay* about how men know things, his final object, the object he had in mind when he started, was to help men know what to do.[17]

Thus, it is not merely possible but essential to link the epistemic self to the political self, for the beliefs, values, desires, and activities of the former are those of the latter as well. The epistemic self and the concept of natural law are coalescent in Locke's political theory. As such, both Locke's *Essay* and his *Two Treatises* will serve as fundamental references for this discourse on the Colonial American self-concept.

Part 3: Epistemic Self

The most important premise upon which the Colonial concept of self was based is offered by Locke in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*: "[Self is] that conscious thinking thing, whatever substance made up of, (whether spiritual or material, simple or compounded, it matters not) – which is sensible or conscious of pleasure and pain, and capable of happiness or misery, and so is concerned for itself, as far as that consciousness extends."[18] Clearly, consciousness is at the forefront of Locke's proposition as the basis of the self. But consciousness alone is not enough according to his statement; rather, it is a conscious *thinking* thing that constitutes the self, regardless of the substance in which consciousness inheres. Locke states, "[This being premised], to find wherein personal identity consists we must consider what person stands for; which, I think, is a thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing, in different times and places; which it does only by that

[17] *Ibid*.

[18] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. A.C. Fraser (New York, New York: Barnes and Noble, 2004), II.xxvii.19: 270. Henceforth referred to as *ECHU*.

consciousness that is inseparable from thinking [and] essential to it."[19] Thus, at the root of the Colonial concept of self, we must determine what it meant to be not only a conscious and thinking thing existing in a spatial-temporal world, but also an intelligent being with the capacity for reason and reflection. Furthermore, the role of substance in regard to the self must be clarified based on the bold assertion that "it [substance] matters not," as Locke has put forth.

What is it to be conscious? By definition, it is an irrefutable assertion that consciousness is a state of awareness, or alertness. In Lockean terms, consciousness also espouses the condition for the possibility to have a personal identity. In other words, it is necessary to perceive that one perceives.[20] This continual perception, shot through with the constant (although perhaps subconscious) awareness of unfolding time, allows one the knowledge that *I* am the one perceiving, experiencing and undergoing sensations from this moment to the next, as an ongoing process, and so consciousness is thus inextricably bound with thinking. The union of consciousness and thinking permits identity, or as Locke states, "The sameness of a rational being," whereupon one realizes that he or she is an individual, set apart from other beings, and experiencing sensations uniquely his or her own.[21] Identity thus consists of present awareness that *I* am the one experiencing and perceiving in the here and now, but it also requires reflection upon the knowledge that I have also experienced sensations in the past. Hence, reflection on past experiences and continual consciousness that I perceived them, as the same self that I am now, delimits my self as an individual to my own experiences.

---

[19] *Ibid.,* II.xxvii.11: 265.
[20] *Ibid.*
[21] *Ibid.*

Locke took into consideration, with the theory of individual self put forth as above, the argument that consciousness is often interrupted by forgetfulness, sleep, and strict attention to the thoughts of the present.[22] Taking these possibilities into account, and also the potential for changes undergone by the physical substance in which the self resides, he stood on the notion that the self is preserved by the "unity of one continued life."[23] This implies that the self and the "man" are not necessarily the same thing. If one should lose all recollection of specific events one experienced in the past, the man will remain the same in identity, but the self would not be the same.[24] Here, it seems that Locke asserts that the self is immaterial; however, he did not go so far as to deny that the substance of a man is also part of the self, but perhaps only insofar as the self is concerned for it.[25] The concern Locke speaks of is that of pleasure and pain, such as he put forth in his initial definition of the self, that affects that body (or substance), material or immaterial, in which the consciousness resides. Thus, there is a disconnection between the self as "mind," and matter as "body." This separation points to the tendency of the Colonial American view of the self to be private and detached from nature, especially in light of religious views that contribute to the understanding that the soul is distinct from the body –because the mind can be considered other than matter, it also easily regarded as other than nature.

---

[22]*Ibid.,* II.xxvii.12: 266.
[23] *Ibid.*
[24] Critics argue that Locke's notion of the self as amalgamation of experiences that one takes to be one's own is merely an appropriation theory. But regardless, I agree with Winkler (who argues that, "for Locke, consciousness of a past act is merely a representation of it as one's own; it is not knowledge of the pre-existing fact that the act was one's own") that it is the case that if one admits ownership of experiences or actions, even if not the actual agent of the activities in question, they do essentially contribute to that self. *ECHU,* II.xxvii.20: 271. Also see *Locke* (Ed. Vere Chappell. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 152-153.
[25] Here Locke discusses that if the self resides within a body and the little finger is severed, if the consciousness goes with the severed finger, then the finger is the person. Should (some) consciousness enter into the body now separated from the (conscious) finger, it would be a different person, regardless of what self inhabited the body previously. The self is "inseparable." (*ECHU,* II.xxvii.18: 270).

Locke argues that the self, in its concern for pleasure and pain, is also responsible for the activities involved with actions in the pursuit of happiness, and is directly responsible for any outcomes attached to the activities of it – herein lies "personhood." By demarcating this attachment of self to responsibility, Locke was free to assert that the term "person," is used appropriately only in reference to an "intelligent agent, capable of a law, and happiness, and misery."[26] With this in mind, it is safe to say that Locke considered only human beings eligible for title of "persons." As individual entities they are solely accountable for their own volitions and chosen pursuits, which is to say *the soul* should be held accountable for its activities in light of these higher abilities. Although he did not deny the possibility that the immaterial soul (which as far as we know resides in the substance best suited for it - the human body), may take residence in other substances, Locke contended that it seems absurd to suppose that it would.[27]

Substance is indefinable, according to Locke, in that it is impossible to pinpoint a specific fundamental property in it that is not changeable and hence, from an epistemological view we are not directly connected with nature. He realized the necessity in owing the conscious self a substantial support, but he failed to give a clear and distinct account of what that might be. Locke attributed the self, perhaps as a result of the confusion brought forth in defining substance, to consciousness alone. Selective passages of the *Essay* subtly point at the soul as the substance in which the consciousness resides,

---

[26] *Ibid.,* II.xxvii.28: 275.

[27] Locke states regarding the consciousness/soul, "Did we know what it was; or how it was tied to a certain system of fleeting animal spirits; or whether it could or could not perform its operations of thinking and memory out of a body organized as our is; and whether it has pleased God that no one such spirit shall ever be united to any but one such body, upon the right constitution of whose organs its memory should depend; we might see the absurdity of some of those suppositions I have made. But taking, as we ordinarily now do (in the dark concerning these matters) the soul of a man for an immaterial substance, independent from matter…there can be no absurdity at all to suppose that the same soul may at different times be united to different bodies, and with them make up for that time one man," (*ECHU,* II.xxvii.29: 276).

but other passages suggest that the soul *is* the consciousness. Regardless of his meaning, the role of substance is superfluous. For this reason, he denied that the substance in which the self resides can be, or need be, conscious at all times;[28] rather, a stream of consciousness that affords continuous knowledge of unity - that one is the same individual he or she was yesterday, and for as far back as the individual can remember – is the key to Locke's conception of self-identity.

Individual accountability is also born of consciousness, and so Locke maintains, "All which is founded in a concern for happiness, the unavoidable concomitant of consciousness; that which is conscious of pleasure and pain, desiring that the self that is conscious should be happy. And therefore whatever past actions it cannot reconcile or appropriate to that present self by consciousness, it can be no more concerned in than if they had never been done,"[29] and so accountability is not overextended, but instead limited to personal action. Thus, any acts or motives that are unattached to one's conscious self are not the responsibility of that person, further promoting the idea that identity is individual and accountability is equally distributed[30] among the members of those considered persons.[31]

With progression of age and experience the mind is cultivated. Locke points out the correlation between magnitude of experience and the complexity of ideas an individual formulates.[32] Thus, we have a conception of the Lockean self developing by

---

[28] *Ibid.,* II.xxvii.12: 266.
[29] *Ibid*.
[30] This means that no one is more or less accountable for a given action on his part than another would be.
[31] This idea is of particular importance in regard to Locke's theory of the state of nature and equality as discussed in the *Second Treatise.*
[32] "Follow a child from its birth, and observe the alterations that time makes, and you shall find, as the mind by the senses comes more and more to be furnished with ideas, it comes to be more and more awake, thinks more, the more it has matter to think on." He further elucidates his resolve that exposure to external world "furnishes" the mind in his comparison of a fetus with a vegetable, (*ECHU*, II.i.21: 63).

degree and emerging over time, in accordance with (1) exposure to the external environment, and; (2) implementation of the operation of reflection; the latter remaining latent until triggered by the former.[33] As such, Locke refused to admit that ideas are extant before sensation and experience are present; rather, they are "coeval."[34]

Locke's recognized stance that the mind is a *tabula rasa*[35] was important for his concept of self, and so understanding that sensible experience is the necessary condition for reflection is imperative. As an empiricist, Locke formulates his concept of self based not upon the conviction that we are born with innate ideas, as Descartes might argue; rather, he asserts that we are filled, as one might fill an empty cup, with experiences from birth – it is a theory of containment.[36] As such, the self according to Locke is even *more* detached from nature than the self according to Descartes, who is at least aware that mathematics unites the mind with extension. His method, in the plain historical tradition,[37] takes inventory of the mind and its categories; it is essentially a genetic and psychological account of our epistemological origin, attributing our mental abilities as our means of having ideas. We do not know things themselves; rather, we know ideas of things in the external world. Ideas are, as such, direct and immediate objects of understanding. Thus, knowledge stems from direct exposure to sensible stimuli and connection of ideas (upon reflection) in reference to them. It is useful at this juncture to

[33] "If it shall be demanded then, when a man begins to have any ideas, I think the true answer is, when he first has any sensation. For, since there appear not to be any ideas in the mind before the senses have conveyed any in" This stands as further support, also, for his conclusion that no innate ideas exist in the mind. (*ECHU,* II.I.23: 64).
[34] *Ibid.*
[35] Locke says, "Let us then suppose the mind to be, as we say, white paper, void of all characters, without any Ideas: How comes it to be furnished?" (*ECHU*, I.i.2: 53.)
[36] Locke offers an answer to his own question of how the mind comes to be "furnished" with ideas in the following statement: "[From] experience. In that all our knowledge is founded; and from that it ultimately derives itself," (*ECHU*, I.i.2: 53).
[37] This is referring to accounting for the origin of ideas.

note that for Locke, ideas are considered modes of the mind; they are mental entities dependent on the mind itself. Thus, the only relationship they could have to physical objects is that of being a representation. Physical things can only be inferred. This notion is important to grasp in terms of the self, for it implies that the self cannot be inherently connected to the world. This reinforces the Cartesian dualism that Locke built upon, and also removes objects of religious belief from direct experience.

The three types, or perhaps more accurately degrees, of knowledge proposed by Locke are intuitive, demonstrative, and sensitive.[38] His notion of intuitive knowledge serves, in a sense, as a replacement for innate ideas or knowledge.[39] Intuitive knowledge allows one to compare and discern ideas in order to determine their agreement or disagreement.[40] Locke explains that no ideas outside those being compared need be involved in the comparison between the two being discerned; rather, "the mind is at no pains of proving or examining, but perceives the truth as the eye does light, only by being directed towards it. Thus the mind perceives that white is not black, that a circle is not a triangle, that three are more than two and equal to one and two. Such kinds of truths the mind perceives at the first sight of the ideas together, by bare intuition…this kind of knowledge is the clearest and most certain that human frailty is capable of."[41] Locke denies that this intuitive knowledge is divinely stamped into the mind, but that upon contemplating two competing ideas, one is endowed with the ability to discern agreement or disagreement between them. Hence, we know that black is not white due to experience and learning rather than through some preexisting innate knowledge.

---

[38] John Dunne, *Locke* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 77.
[39] Vere Chappell, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Locke*, ed. Vere Chappell (New York, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 153. Henceforth referred to as *CCL.*
[40] *ECHU*, IV.ii.1: 447.
[41] *Ibid.*

Whereas intuitive knowledge can be known as true or false prior to demonstration, Locke claims that demonstrative knowledge is less certain: "Thus it is with knowledge made out by a long train of proof."[42] Demonstrative knowledge employs intuitive knowledge insofar as agreement between simple ideas is discerned within the proof, but demonstrative knowledge allows for greater understanding in degree, such as in cases where immediate perception does not give way to clearness and distinctness. Locke considers intermediate ideas, or those that require fleshing out in order to determine their truth, the subject matter of demonstrative knowledge. It is knowledge that is acquired through the mediation of ideas that are not directly connected, as Locke points out are necessary in constructing proofs of geometry.[43]

The third degree of knowledge, sensitive, is described by Locke as the possibility for the perception, "of the existence of particular external objects, by that perception and consciousness we have of the actual entrance of ideas from them."[44] Perception is of much importance in Locke's theory, for since our knowledge of the world and our environment is derived from ideas based upon perceptions, so the extent of our knowledge necessarily depends upon the clarity of our perceptions about the world; our knowledge is neither clear nor obscure in itself, for obscure ideas do not produce knowledge.[45]

Based upon his threefold theory of knowledge, it is clear that Locke was true to his emphatically stated assertion at the beginning of his second essay that all knowledge is

---

[42] *Ibid.*, IV.ii.6: 449.
[43] "We cannot know the angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles. A proof is needed. Our mind has to "find out some other Angles, to which the three Angles of a Triangle have an Equality; and finding those equal to two right ones, comes to know their Equality to two right ones," (*CCL*, 153).
[44] *ECHU*, IV.ii.14: 453.
[45] Locke states, "For our knowledge consisting in the perception of the agreement or disagreement of any two ideas, its clearness or obscurity consists in the clearness or obscurity of that perception, and not in the clearness or obscurity of the ideas themselves," (*ECHU*, IV.ii.15: 453).

traceable back to original empirical experience as the source, and experience is *of ideas*. We may say without reservation that the operations of our minds are most fundamentally involved in true intelligence and knowledge, for the simple perceptions that we receive from the external world, without reflection, would be nothing more than confused images; for Locke stated, "Like floating visions they make not deep impressions enough to leave in their mind clear, distinct, lasting ideas, till the understanding turns inward upon itself, reflects on its own operations, and makes them the objects of its own contemplation."[46] This "inward turning" Locke describes initially points to an establishment of the private self as the core of referential activity.

The foundation of the Lockean self as a cognitive mind has been laid out, and we now have a vision of an accountable being capable of conscious, intelligent activity, perceiving and reflecting, and residing in a substance, concerned with that substance insofar as it is an operational constituent of the self-serving as a means for mobility, pleasure and avoidance of pain, and pursuit of needs, desires, and happiness. The mind is separate from the world, including the body. The implications of Locke's epistemology leave us unconnected with nature, and our ideas only represent the world. Thus, our primary relation to nature is as an epistemological object.

This concept of self, however, is adequate only *ceteris paribus*; the self is a necessarily social being, and must be further developed as such in order to acquire a firm understanding of how the cultivated dialogical self is actualized as the core of referential activity. The extent of the self's knowledge lies in the clarity of ideas based upon perceptions of one's environment, and consequently the culture in which one is immersed. One's environment certainly includes relationships to others, community,

[46] *Ibid.,* I.i.6: 56.

values, and societal norms. As such, although it isn't feasible to do a full analysis of Colonial life for the purposes of this paper, it is important to evaluate some cultural aspects of Colonial American mind to understand the self more completely. Because the shaping of the American minds of the time was greatly influenced by Lockean thought, this assessment will be closely based upon the second of his *Two Treatises of Government.*

Part 4: Political Self

The characteristics of the relationships between individual selves with others and their environment are expressions of a culture. The culture of Colonial America was strongly influenced not only by Locke's thought,[47] but also Christianity and the Enlightenment.[48] Colonists were drawn to America by the possibilities that awaited them, and were motivated by the opportunity to freely practice their religions, shape their lives in accordance with their desires to own and work their own land, and perhaps most importantly, achieve and maintain the status of prime benefactors of the fruits of their labor, which is still pertinent to what we consider the "American Dream" today. In short, they were drawn to the possibility of realizing their potentials for a better life. In the struggle for autonomy from English rule, the colonies saw philosophers especially concerned with virtue in governance (moral and political philosophy being closely interwoven),[49] but also in individual character in both public and private life;[50] thus, the

---

[47] This premise is based upon the fact that the constitution itself draws heavily upon the second of Locke's *Two Treatises.*
[48] *MAS,* 12.
[49] Howe states, "In his fine study of *Liberal Virtues*, Stephen Macedo has shown that Liberal political philosophy is in principle every bit as concerned with the virtuous character development of the citizen as is classical republicanism. Both philosophies require citizens who will take an interest in public affairs, and

goal was to create a culture where self-construction was possible,[51] yet bounded enough that government need not be overly limiting, allowing for the greatest possible individual autonomy.

Colonial Americans were concerned with the self (and the development thereof) not strictly in the sense of existence as a simple or solitary persona, but perhaps more accurately as a necessarily social being influenced by culture, not exclusive of the degree of governmental organization and control present within that culture. Yet, the self *was* inherently individual for the Colonial. As aforementioned, the strong Christian underpinnings that influence Colonial thought and action played a strong role in how the individual viewed himself, for Christianity provided a distinction between soul and body. This distinction is basically an internal/external dualism; deeply engrained in the Colonial concept of self, it involves paying attention to the development of the private, individual soul. Thus, one's internal nature was focused on the self as a subjective entity, and relationships outside of the self are external. Accordingly, one's freedom was an indispensable concern for the Colonial American.

Individual freedom was of supreme importance; this is a notion Locke attended to in his political work. It seems only natural that the beginning point of discourse in Locke's *Second Treatise* addressed the fundamental nature of man, which is essential to any theory of government or morality, and as such, to the conception of self. Locke was

---

liberalism requires in addition that citizens practice the virtues of tolerance and open-mindedness," (*MAS*, 11).

[50] *Ibid.,* 12.

[51] "[The American thinkers] endorsed, as good liberals would, individual rights and limited government. Yet they did not abandon the notion of a common good and continued to attach importance to it. They tended to define their common good in a way compatible with their liberalism, as that social state most conducive to individual self-development," (*MAS*, 11).

concerned with the state of nature of men according to the “Law of Nature,”[52] as equal with each other and not “depending on the Will of any other Man”[53] Man is autonomous, or should be autonomous, and the law that Locke speaks of is reason.[54]

For the Colonial American, ownership was highly motivating; the primary relationship of the individual to aspects of himself, things in nature – in the *world*, and other individuals, was understood in terms of ownership or non-ownership. Macpherson writes, “The individual was seen neither as a moral whole, nor as part of a larger social whole, but as an owner of himself,”[55] a notion true to Locke’s theory. This was made clear by his centered attention on the subject of rights to possession in his *Second Treatise*; ownership played a fundamental role in the legitimization of men’s rights as autonomous entities.

Locke described freedom, as the “Foundation of all the rest [of man’s rights];”[56] anyone who attempts to enslave another threatens the very core of what it is to be human. One is free if and only if one has complete self-ownership; a threat to the former is identical with a threat to the latter. Furthermore, Locke clarified that, “No man can, by agreement, pass over to another that which he hath not in himself, a Power over his own life.”[57] Here Locke appeals to Christianity; he points out that one is incapable of enslaving one’s self to another. This belief clearly stems from the conviction that only God has supreme power over mankind, but in His goodness He has granted men non-

---

[52] *TTG*, II.ii.4-5: 269.
[53] *Ibid.*
[54] *Ibid.,* II.ii.6: 271.
[55] C.B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), 3. Henceforth referred to as *PTPI.*
[56] *TTG,* II.iii.17: 279.
[57] *Ibid.,* II.iv.24: 285.

transferrable self-ownership in the sense that one is "bound (by God) to preserve himself."[58] Hence, suicide is also mentioned and discouraged by Locke.[59]

Locke's thought appealed to men of both religious and secular persuasions in his discussion of property,[60] though this was probably not his main goal.[61] He states at the beginning of Chapter V, "Whether we consider natural Reason, which tells us, that Men, being once born, have a right to their Preservation, and consequently to Meat and Drink, and such other things, as Nature affords for their Subsistence: Or *Revelation*, which gives us an account of those Grants God made of the World to *Adam,* [it is given] to Mankind in common."[62] Thus, whether one was won over by faith or reason mattered not, because Locke effectively covered all of his bases. He was free to proceed with discussion of how there might be rights to *personal* property in an environment that was deemed "common" to all alike.

The term self-ownership also includes any and all labor proffered by individuals, as well as the fruits of that labor. Locke summed up this idea in the following:

> Though the Earth, and all inferior Creatures be common to all Men, yet every Man has a *Property* in his own *Person.* The *Labour* of his Body, and the *Work* of his

---

[58] "For Men being all the Workmanship of one Omnipotent, and infinitely wise Maker; All the Servants of one Sovereign Master, sent into the World by his order and about his business, they are his Property, whose Workmanship they are, made to last during his, not one another's Pleasure." Hence, we are required to care for not only ourselves, but. "To preserve the rest of Mankind," respecting the rights of others also as members of God's creation, (*TTG,* II.ii.6: 271).

[59] "No body can give more Power than he has himself; and he that cannot take away his own Life, cannot give another power over it," (*TTG,* II.iv.23: 284).

[60] Macpherson writes, "Government by consent, majority rule, minority rights, moral supremacy of the individual, sanctity of individual property – all are there, and all are fetched from a first principle of individual natural rights and rationality, a principle both utilitarian and Christian. Admittedly, there was some confusion and even self-contradiction in the whole doctrine, but this could be viewed indulgently in one who, after all, stood nearly at the beginning of the liberal tradition: he could not be expected to have come up to the perfection of nineteenth and twentieth century thought," (*PTPI*, 194).

[61] Macpherson agrees that, "This was of course the traditional view, found alike in medieval and in seventeenth-century Puritan theory," (*PTPI,* 199-200).

[62] *TTG.* II.v.25: 286.

> Hands, we may say, are properly his. Whatsoever then he removes out of the State that Nature hath provided, and left it in, he hath mixed his *Labour* with, and joyned to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his *Property*. It being by him removed from the common state Nature placed it in, it hath by this *labour* something annexed to it, that excludes the common right of other Men. For this *Labour* being the unquestionable Property of the Labourer, no Man but he can have a right to what that is once joyned to, at least where there is enough, and as good left in common for others.[63]

Once labor is mingled with common property, it is no longer considered common, for it is not purely of Nature anymore. He justified this notion by explaining that labor is of greater value than uncultivated nature.[64]

Locke saw nature as abundant; nevertheless, there was a limit to what one may properly appropriate to self and family without violating the rights of other men. As such, he pointed out that there were plenty of resources and property to allow for each to take what he needed, but anything in excess of what is needed immediately would be considered an infringement upon others. This was not necessarily the case where storage was an option, and should the goods remain useful for personal needs; but, when keeping provisions or property beyond that which was required for subsistence or if spoiling

[63] *Ibid.,* II.v.27: 288.

[64] "For 'tis *Labour* indeed that *puts the difference* of value on every thing; and let any one consider, what the difference is between an Acre of Land planted with Tobacco, or Sugar, sown with Wheat or Barley; and an Acre of the same Land lying in common, without any Husbandry upon it, and he will find, that the improvement of *labour makes* the far greater part of *the value*," (*TTG,* II.v.40: 296).

occurred, one was guilty of taking in excess of what was rightfully his.[65] In fact, it was punishable to allow spoilage to occur.[66]

Of course, provisions obtained from common land or water, although not belonging directly to one (as a field that has been plowed and planted), were considered rightful possessions due to the labor that was involved in retrieving them, and this was the case for all mankind. For example Locke explains, "Thus this Law of reason makes the Deer, that Indian's who hath killed it; 'tis allowed to be his goods who hath bestowed his labour upon it, though before, it was the common right of every one…and by virtue thereof, what Fish any one catches in the Ocean, that great and still remaining Common of Mankind…[is] *made* his *Property* who takes that pains about it."[67] Hence, even if provisions were found in the "common" they were fair game for anyone that acquired it through his labor. Logically speaking, if one took more than he needed, it followed that the excess was rightfully someone else's.[68] Locke claimed that if these guidelines are respected, then there is enough for everyone's comfort, whether land, game, or other provisions.[69]

It is not the quantity of possessions that Locke was concerned with, but the destruction of provisions through the misappropriation of perishables.[70] Locke pointed out that the solution to the problem of owning more than can be used is money. Tully

---

[65] This is what Locke calls the "Rule of Propriety," (*TTG,* II.v.36: 293).

[66] Locke states, "But if they perished, in his Possession, without their due use; if the Fruits rotted, or the Venison putrified, before he could spend it, he offended against the common Law of Nature, and was liable to be punished; he invaded his Neighbour's share, for he had *no Right, farther than his* Use called for any of them, and they might serve to afford him the Conveniences of Life," (*TTG,* II.v.37: 295).

[67] *Ibid.,* II.v.27: 287-288.

[68] "It cannot be supposed [God] meant it should always remain common and uncultivated," *TTG,* II.v.31: 290.

[69] "No man's Labour could subdue, or appropriate all: nor could his Enjoyment consume more than a small part; so that it was impossible for any Man, this way, to intrench upon the right of another, or acquire, to himself, a Property, to the Prejudice of his Neighbour, who would still have room, for as good, and as large a Possession (after the other had taken out his) as before it was appropriated," (*TTG,* II.v.36: 292).

[70] *Ibid.,* II.v.46: 300.

points out that, "Locke contrasts usefulness with various kinds of conventional value. Useless things, such as gold, silver and diamonds receive their value from 'Fancy or Agreement', that is, 'from the consent of Men'."[71] Now, whereas previously men were required to find use[72] for the fruit of their labor lest it spoil, agreement upon the use of money negates the constraint for men to own more of the earth than their needs require, as formerly prescribed under the 'Rule of Propriety'. Thus, "Men have agreed to disproportionate and unequal Possession of the Earth."[73]

Hence, according to Locke there is justification for owning more than anyone actually needs for private use. The agreement of men to use money was and still remains the means to acquiring much more than what is necessary for mere sustainability of life. Money provides a convenience that bartering does not, and effectively lifts the burden of use before spoilage, such that if one cultivates or procures more provisions than can be properly made useful before spoiling, one is not required to relinquish the commodities but may retain the value of their labor by exchanging them for money, which is beneficial to both the laborer and the buyer.

Part 5: The Colonial American Self

The Colonial American self, based upon the foundation of Lockean thought, was one in which the epistemic self was private and separate from nature. It was aware of the passions that have the capability of overpowering reason, which is the difference between

[71] James Tully, *A Discourse on Property: John Locke and His Adversaries* (New York, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 144. Henceforth referred to as *DP*.
[72] Tully reminds us that, "Prior to its emergence, the commoners were permitted to do three things with the products of their labour: use these goods themselves for support and comfort, give them away, or barter with them," (*DP,* 147).
[73] *TTG.* II.v.50: 302.

man and beast.[74] The epistemic self also allows for the ability to perceive one's needs and understanding that allows for industrial use of the body in order to obtain what is required for sustaining the self overall. The self has reflective power, and as an intelligent agent, also possesses accountability. This accountability is employed in the State of Nature, which is one of equality, where the rights of one man are no greater or lesser than another's.

In order to carve out a place in a world of others striving to do the same, one must find a way to coexist with others seeking to fulfill the same needs. Looking for the most comfortable way of life possible in a culture where others must be respected in order to maintain peace required attention to individual rights of both the self and the other whom we share nature, and at base, survival, with. Nature *is* our sole means of survival, and Colonials clung to the possibility of indemnifying their own survival by means of procurement; ownership of property through the mingling of nature with labor was the most lucrative means for living comfortably.

Locke certainly dealt with the justification for private ownership of nature that is deemed "common" to all. The ideas he raised regarding land and provisions were elemental in America, which was considered uncivilized and untamed; it was viewed as "there for the taking," and an exciting opportunity, with hard work, to thrive. He was not, however, naïve to the fact that there are limits to the distribution of nature; in his native England he was certainly aware of vast estates and the role of capitalism in society. Macpherson explains that Locke's validation of the unequal distribution of land and

[74] Locke clarifies, "If it may be doubted whether beasts compound and enlarge their ideas that way to any degree; this, I think, I may be positive in, that the power of abstracting is not at all in them; and that the having of general ideas is that which puts a perfect distinction between man and brutes, and is an excellency which the faculties of brutes do by no means attain to." (*ECHU*. II.xi.10: 105).

resources is based on the fundamental rights of man,[75] although perhaps not an issue that emerged immediately in the early stages of new society in a new land. There is, as this is certainly true today, a point where land is distributed unequally, although *justly* so in accordance with the tacit agreement of men to use money, which was arguably established in the "state of nature."[76] Hence, capitalism is a necessary part of society that serves as a way to deal with land distribution and resources that are not infinitely unlimited. Profits, whether in the form of land, provisions, or money, are made possible through societal living, but according to the Christian belief of the time, they were best reinvested in the public arena.[77]

Again, we can see the externality of the Colonial American relationship with others - as having relation to other people by way of rights and obligations, and relation to nature as property. The private self, as a reasonable, intelligent creature, was concerned with development of the self. But best use of outward self should be taken up with labor and productivity in service to God as well as for subsistence of the self in order to continue this service. Furthermore, there was nothing immoral, Christian or not, in having unequal

[75] According to Macpherson, "The value of money, as capital, is created by the fact of its unequal distribution. Nothing is said about the source of the inequality; it is simply taken to be part of [according to Locke] 'the necessity of affairs and the constitution of human society'. But what is relevant here is that Locke saw money as not merely a medium of exchange but as capital…What Locke has done, then, is to show that money has made it possible, and just, for a man to accumulate more land than he can use the product of before it spoils. The original natural law limit is not denied…Locke has justified the specifically capitalist appropriation of land and money. And it is to be noticed that he has justified this as a natural right, as a right in the state of nature." Macpherson further explains how this consent to use money was "prior to that of consent to civil society" (*Second Treatise*, sec.50), which, "puts into the state of nature, money, the consequent inequality of possession of land, and the supersession of the initial spoilage limit on the amount of land a man can rightfully possess. And since he has just explained that the way money leads to this unequal possession of land beyond the spoilage limit is by its introducing markets and commerce beyond the level of barter, it must be presumed that Locke is ascribing such commerce to the state of nature." (*PTPI,* 208-209).
[76] See note 56.
[77] Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), 41. Henceforth referred to as *NEM.* Miller notes that this is taken from Cotton's *The Way of Life*, (1641). Cotton writes, "If though beest a man that lives without a calling, though thou has two thousands to spend, yet if though hast no calling, tending to publique good, thou art an uncleane beast."

distribution of property and provisions. Locke promoted this notion, and Macpherson writes:

> His doctrine of property appears in a new light…For on his view his insistence that a man's labour was his own – which was the essential novelty of Locke's doctrine of property – has almost the opposite significance from that more generally attributed to it in recent years; it provides a moral foundation for bourgeois appropriation…If it is labour, a man's absolute property, which justifies appropriation and creates value, the individual right of appropriation overrides any moral claims of the society. The traditional view that property and labour were social functions, and that ownership of property involved social obligations, is thereby undermined.[78]

Thus, with property and labor divorced from moral or social obligation, there was a sense of self much separated from the rest of society, as was the case with nature as well.

As with Lockean thought, the heavy influence of Puritanical ethics in Colonial life also promoted ownership, appealing to natural rights, although in a bit more obscure manner. According to Perry Miller, "Employing an estate so that it should become a larger estate was the inescapable injunction."[79] The Puritans believed that hard work was required of them – it is commanded by God. Miller indicates that, according to Samuel Willard, "'Man is made for Labour, and not for Idleness'", ergo, God has not given possessions to be held in common, 'but hath appointed that every Man should have his Share in them, wherein he holds a proper Right in them, and they are his own and not anothers.' This principle, Willard pointed out – as did all Puritans – has nothing to do with the spiritual condition; a right to property, exercised within civil propriety, is as

---

[78] *PTPI,* 220-221.
[79] *NEM, 41*.

valid for the pagan or idolater as for the saint."[80] Reward in the form of wealth or land was merely an incidental of performing one's duty to God, but should not be the focus of laboring. The temptation that comes with profit, according to John Cotton, is something to be resisted.[81]

In any case, the Colonial self was a private being, separate from others and nature. The self was the core of referential activity, relying on reason and reflection upon personal experience to formulate ideas about the world. Inner dialogue occurs between the private and public self, and as can be seen in Locke's writing, there was concern with negotiating the private self properly into the outside world. This outside world consists of others, of culture, nature, and is a necessarily social atmosphere; hence, the self must constantly be aware of boundaries – whether self-imposed, religiously imposed, or governmentally imposed.

Essentially, the Colonial American self took on what might be dubbed an "*I-It*" relationship to the rest of the non-human world, as described by Austrian born Jewish philosopher, Martin Buber .[82] The fundamentals of this attitude are described in the following words that he wrote in his book entitled, *I and Thou.* Buber explains:

> I perceive something. I am sensible of something. I imagine something. I will something. I feel something. I think something. The life of human beings does not consist of all this and the like alone. This and the like together establish the realm of *It*…The Man Who Experiences has not part in the world. For it is "in him" and not between him and the world that the experience arises. The world has no part in the

[80] *Ibid.*
[81] *Ibid.*
[82] Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (New York, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), 4 -5. Henceforth referred to as *IT*.

> experience. It permits itself to be experienced, but has no concern in the matter. For it does nothing to the experience, and the experience does nothing to it."[83]

Thus, Buber describes the relationship of the *"I-It"* oriented man to the rest of the nature as one that consists in a fundamental separation. Robert Wood, in his *Analysis of I and Thou,* adds, "He lives for himself…He constantly interposes his subjective designs between himself and reality and thus becomes incapable of listening and responding to whatever might meet him out of the situation. The world merely mirrors back to him his own desires. He takes his stand in his bodily difference from all others and defines all things in relation to himself."[84]

Of course, this type of relationship with the rest of the world takes on, although perhaps inadvertently, a stance of opposition. This certainly has implications for how the "*I-It"* man treats others, land, and nature. Thomas Paine pointed out, in fact, that the desires of the individual and civil society are conflicting, perhaps even contradictory.[85] Hence, the private self - the inner mind that is separated from matter - relating most closely to nature as "owner," must be cosseted; government is the means for this protection. Locke's message did not set the self free from authority, but it offered new hope for the highest possible level of autonomy that the private Colonial self could hope for. It has been written that, "[Locke's] influence in the history of thought, on the way we

---

[83] *Ibid.*

[84] Robert Wood, *An Analysis of I and Thou*, ed. John Wild, et al. (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1969), 81. Henceforth referred to as *AIT.*

[85] Paine states, "Society in every state is a blessing, but government even it its best state is but a necessary evil," (*CS*, 3).

think about ourselves and our relations to the world we live in, to God, nature and society, has been immense."[86]

[86] Aarsleff also discusses in depth the influence of Locke's thought not only in England and France, but also on the Continent, which was probably first exposed to the French versions (see p.253) of his work. (*CCL,* 252).

CHAPTER 2

THE NATIVE AMERICAN SELF

"*The I of the primary word I-Thou makes its appearance as person and becomes conscious of itself as subjectivity (without a dependent genitive).*"

--Martin Buber, *I and Thou*

Native American cultures have a very unique view of the self in contrast to the European one. In this chapter I will discuss the basic premises that I have found to underlie the constitution of the Native American self before comparing and contrasting it with the Colonial American self-concept in the following chapter. Since there are many Native American cultures, I will aim to describe a common feature of what sort of self can be found across many of them. I have chosen to focus on sources written by Muskogee Creek, Crow, and Seneca tribe members.[1] Most Native American knowledge is passed on through storytelling, or an oral tradition, so it is useful for the purposes of this paper to view the stories as a means for garnering information about their self-beliefs. A common and prominent thread that runs through many Native American stories is the importance that is placed on relationships. This interest in relationships is especially unique due to the meaning that underlies the term *others* in many Native American cultures, which is taken to include cognitive beings, but also animals, plants, and even inanimate things. It is my intent in this chapter to show that the Native

[1] Jr., Vine Deloria, *God is Red* (New York, New York: Putnam Publishing Group, 2003), xi. Henceforth referred to as *GIR.* According to George Tinker, "*God is Red* both systematized and gave voice to general American Indian thought." Although they belong to different tribes, Fixico and DeLoria have attempted to give general American Indian accounts of their heritage.

American self is, above all, relational, and that this self specifically attributes qualities to others from the standpoint of an equal.

The standpoint of relation is assumed by tribal members as a result of education in their own culture through listening to stories. Moreover, the relating of stories, myths, and values through words is not merely a one-sided event because it requires both the activity of speaking and, just as importantly, the activity of listening. The process of oral tradition is important for understanding a Native American concept of self in that it actually connects speakers and listeners to the land, animals, forefathers, and each other – to all of nature in general – by nurturing participants in a way that encourages an ongoing dialogue with others. I intend to show that the attitudes that have been passed on through generations by way of oral tradition are saturated with what I take to be fundamental Native American values of equality, reciprocity, community, and cooperation; all of these contributing to the taking of what shall be dubbed a "thou attitude" toward the rest of nature. Thus, in order to further develop the idea of a relational self, I will draw upon various stories, myths, and ceremonies that Native American cultures have accepted as their histories for thousands of years, as well as other sources about and by Native Americans.[2]

Part 1: The Influence of Oral Tradition on Self-Concept

The wisdom that passes in the oral tradition from generation to generation is rich with underlying meanings that promote the values of the culture in which they are treasured. They are, "told and retold, reshaped and refitted to meet their audience's changing

---

[2] Richard Erdoes and Alfonso Ortiz., *American Indian Myths and Legends*, eds. Richard Erdoes and Alfonso Ortiz (New York, New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), xi. Henceforth referred to as *AIML.*

needs,"[3] but these tales most often are of fictional status.[4] Yet there are sacred tales and ceremonies that are not altered, but the way many legends are related depend upon the tribe or group narrating.[5] In such cases, it is said that, "The legend is a thing, to the Indian mind, and it has a certain personality. In certain instances the legend is a personal or group possession and its form and content are religiously guarded from change."[6] The actual storytelling itself is a practice rich with customs, including those that the teller follows as well as listeners.[7] We will find that the Native American self is defined by the very relationships that are conveyed throughout their narrations, and that the feelings and memories evoked and shared as a result form the framework from which the self-concept arises.

Among those who have endeavored to retell Native American tales in written form is *Gáwasowaneh* (or, "Big Snowsnake")[8], otherwise known as Arthur Casewell Parker, who had Seneca ancestry by paternal blood ties was fascinated by and entertained a lifelong interest in Indian folk tales.[9] Although many tales are entertaining, the purpose of them is not to be understood solely as such; rather, they are a means of looking into the "life story" of Native Americans.[10] According to Native American scholar Donald Fixico,

---

[3] *Ibid.*
[4] Arthur C. Parker, *Seneca Myths and Folk Tales* (New York, New York: Bison Books, 1989), xxx. Henceforth referred to as *SMFT*.
[5] *Ibid.*
[6] *Ibid.*
[7] For example, the storyteller was forbidden to relate fables during the summer, listeners were required to speak the word, "he" when prompted in order to prove that he/she was listening, and sleeping or leaving during a story brought further consequences unless the narrator was asked to "tie" the story, otherwise the narrator would be unable to finish telling it without starting over from the beginning, (*SMFT,* xxxi-xxxiii).
[8] William Fenton, ed., *Parker on the Iroquois*, ed. William Fenton (New York, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1968), 2. Henceforth referred to as *PI.*
[9] Parker's great, great grandparents were of the Tonawanda Reservation and relatives of Seneca profit "Handsome Lake." It is explained that by matrilineal rule, he is not politically accepted as an "enrolled" member, (*SMFT*, xii).
[10] The author of the introduction, William Fenton, also warns against looking at the stories in "arrogant judgment," but claims they should be read as the "attempts of a race still in mental childhood to give play

who was raised in the Seminole and Muscogee Creek traditions,[11] the role of storytelling can be explained in the following way:

> Story is the basis of American Indian oral tradition. Story is the vehicle for sharing traditional knowledge and passing it from one generation to the next. Its purposes include sharing information, providing lessons in morality, confirming identity, and telling experiences of people. Stories sometimes tell us the future. Powerful and vivid, each account is an entity of power. When the story is told effectively, it transcends time, as traditional knowledge lives on with each new listener becoming a part of them and a part of the next generation.[12]

Fixico indicates that the importance of the oral tradition lies in the felt emotions as they are experienced by listeners and narrators, bringing the history and values closer to real experience.[13]

It can be quite difficult, however, for unfamiliar readers and listeners to pinpoint the main theme or gist of many stories; as such, difficulty for non-Native Americans lies in cross-cultural translation and interpretation.[14] But it is the case that, like most stories we *are* familiar with, Native American tales have a minimum of five aspects, according to Fixico: "Time, place, character(s), event, and purpose. Together, they are the sum of an experience. Each part connects the other parts for the storyteller to weave his or her story

---

to imagination and to explain by symbols what it otherwise could not express." I agree with the former portion of his request, but beg to differ on the latter, (*SMFT,* xxiii-xxiv).

[11] Donald L. Fixico, *The American Indian Mind in a Linear World* (New York, New York: Routledge, 2003), xi. Henceforth referred to as *AIM*.

[12] *Ibid.,* 21-22.

[13] Fixico states, "To the American Indian, history is better explained as the importance of "experience." People recall an experience in greater detail because of the emotions involved, vivid colors, familiar sounds described, and the people and/or beings involved. When retold, the experience comes alive again recreating the experience by evoking the emotions of the listeners, transcending past-present-future. Time does not imprison the story… [This different because oral history because] Oral tradition is the *process*; oral history is an event told orally. Orality is the way of the American Indian mind," (*AIM*, 22), my emphasis.

[14] Thomas W. Overholt and J. Baird Callicott, *Clothed in Fur and Other Tales: An Introduction to An Ojibwa World View* (London: University Press of America, Inc., 1982), 22. Henceforth referred to as *CIF.*

in the art of storytelling that is poetry and fine entertainment and knowledge sharing in Indian Communities."[15] These five aspects of the story draw the listener into the event that is being narrated, and he or she recognizes and/or assimilates the values and traditions of ancestors that are conveyed into his or her own set of personal beliefs. The stories essentially become part of the listeners' own experiences, at the same time serving as a means for teaching young listeners how to act and what attitudes to hold in regard to others, as well as one's self. Engaging with others during a narration, and experiencing the responses and attitudes of peers during a story, rather than reading written words in private, draws listeners and speakers together as they experience the unfolding of events together.

The stories conveyed in the oral tradition are very like those of everyday experiences,[16] often involving contexts of hunting and fishing, routine daily activities, and family situations. The Native American self identifies with not only ancestors and other community members as an integral part of the oral tradition, but also with the mythical beings that often star in many stories. Thus, these entities also relate the values and attitudes that listeners identify as tribal mores, and the feeling of community is strengthened with each narrative. Thus one's cultural, and furthermore world-view, is formed and situated through these oral interactions, as the listeners essentially relive historical and value-laden events with each telling. Hence, it can be said quite accurately that historical events are actually *experienced* alongside other tribe members, via narrative participation.

---

[15] *AIM,* 25.
[16] *Ibid.,* 28.

Fixico explains the importance of relating stories orally, rather than in written word, accordingly, “Narrative and oral tradition help to build an oral history for accounting for the past of a community. They tell us about the social, everyday life of people. Instead of writing about Indian people from the window of a library or archives using historical documents, oral tradition and listening to stories allows people to feel and become a part of the past and sharing a sense of time and place with the people.”[17] The oral tradition, employing the memories of all involved in the process, brings the group together as a community, and unifies them by allowing them to share a common experience through the narration. Children learn through seeing their elders’ reactions to actions that are taken by mythical characters in stories, and come to understand how they should approach and what they should feel under similar circumstances.

All emotions that are evoked are shared through the listening process, and a feeling of relatedness with the other listeners (as well as those spirits that emerge from within the story being told) creates what Fixico refers to as, “an energy.”[18] He writes, “The objects themselves emit an energy, as each possesses a spirit. Among Indian people, it is known that each item has a story about it such as how a bowl of pottery was made…and each event encapsulates a story and the object created, giving it life and energy as the source for spirituality. Within the object is soul which comes alive with each story that is told about the object and retold.” Familial (as well as relationships with the spirits that emerge

[17] Fixico contrasts the oral tradition with European views of the importance of the written word: “In the Western world, the printed word carries much weight and supersedes a verbal agreement and a confirmed handshake. People would rather have a contract in writing than believe what a person has said, such as a promise to do something. It has been said that the printed word is more reliable that the spoken word…For American Indians, oral tradition is imperative to holding communities together. A story unites us with a common understanding of kinship, giving us a common experience, and creates a group ethos. This is how native people think. Community is central to indigenous societies and holds more importance than individual status in the community. Community is the most important social unit among Native Americans,” (*AIM,* 88 – 89).
[18] *Ibid*., 28.

in stories), tribal, and perhaps most importantly the community bonds, are strengthened as a result of active listening.

The community bond is of great interest to Native American culture, because community health and strength are seen as having much greater importance than the status of the individual.[19] It did not escape their attention that quality of life is directly related to an optimally functional community, and a community is only as strong as the relationships that fund it. According to historian Stanley Worton:

> Because they relied on nature for their existence and because they could not regulate it, they [American Indians] formed a cooperative way of life in order to work in harmony with it. Traditions, as taught by the elders, who were considered wise and all knowing, were accepted and followed by the younger generation. Individual acts of bravery, courage, and endurance were admired, but cooperation, sharing, and strong family and tribal ties were the very lifeblood of the survival of society.[20]

The constant cooperation and communication with the whole of nature suggests that the Native American self is externally oriented, or situated within the context of its relationships and the role it plays in the web of community, rather than extant as merely a private and individual entity. Fixico points out that, "The Wintu Indians of California philosophized that a person belonged to the society rather than the person and society being two separate entities. The Wintu people preferred to be a part of a community…[A] cultural genesis is initiated, therefore, with the process of interrelationships of the

---

[19] *Ibid.,* 29.
[20] Stanley N. Worton, *The First Americans* (Rochelle Park, New Jersey: Hayden Book Company, Inc., 1974), 2. Henceforth referred to as *FA*.

elements of people, family, and community, thus producing a balance of the themes in the community with nature."[21]

Part 2: Extension of "Thouness"

The main characters in Native American lore may seem diverse, or perhaps even unexpected to non-Native readers. The reason for this is due to an elemental gap between European and Native American thought: many Native Americans understand that not only humans, but also plants, animals, and inanimates (all believed to be endowed with sacred energies), as well as supernaturals who visit in visions and dreams, are all not only extant, but active members of their communities.[22] On the contrary, in European thought it is held that in order to be a functioning part of community one must be no less than a reasonable, thinking human being. Thus, Native American communities (again, consisting not only of humans but of *all* natural entities) are viewed as parts of an interconnected web of energy, wherein there exist connections *between all* entities in nature thereby creating a harmony or balance in nature.[23]

But *how* do American Indians know that other selves, whether human or non-human in nature, exist in spiritual[24] form? The answer is in an ongoing communication with nature. Spirits' existences are often made apparent in dreams and visions, wherein they visit the dreamer and disclose information - often messages about the future. These visitors exist for them as reality; the dreamer, who has communicated with nature and

[21] *AIM,* 51.
[22] *Ibid.,* 2.
[23] Marilyn Holly, "The Persons of Nature Versus the Power Pyramid: Locke, Land, and American Indians," *International Studies in Philosophy* XXVI, no. 1, 16. Henceforth referred to as *PN.*
[24] I use the term "spiritual" loosely here…not necessarily limited to the more commonly accepted supernatural definition; rather, meaning that something is endowed with sacred energy, and having its own agenda and/or purpose within the whole of nature.

listened to their stories time and again, does not necessarily consider them strangers. Fools Crow, in conversation about visiting with the "Higher Powers," claims that "Wakan-Tanka has given me the power to travel in the spirit to where they are, and I go and talk with them,"[25] indicating that he is able to utilize the powers of the Higher Ones and his own power to actually communicate with spirits. Fixico also discusses this ability and its meaning for Native Americans, saying, "The causes of action are a part of the physical and metaphysical realities of native people. Furthermore, metaphysical beings can cause things to occur in the physical world, but not vice versa. For this reason, American Indians highly value the metaphysical world, and thus believe that it is more powerful than the physical dimension of their world."[26]

The role of what Iroquois call *orenda*, which has parallels to other tribes, plays a prodigious role in Native American culture. Its meaning helps us understand why the extension of "persons" to such an array of entities is completely necessary in accordance with their metaphysical beliefs. Thus, for a fuller discussion of what a Native American self-concept might be, it important to understand the term "*orenda*," which will be used from here forward. But it should also be noted that no matter the term, the concept attached is found throughout Native American culture.[27] According to Holly:

> An *orenda* is sacred, not entirely predictable to humans, and mysterious; hence it behooves humans to approach all *orendas* with respect and with reciprocal courtesies. Each creature or entity is conceived of and experienced as a Thou, in the terminology of Martin Buber, as having personhood albeit a non-human sort of personhood if a

---

[25] *FC,* 92.
[26] Fixico seems to use "metaphysical" and "supernatural" interchangeably (*AIM*, 73).
[27] Other terms include the Algonquin, "manito," the Sioux word, "wakan," and the Muscogee Creek word, "Ibofanga," which refers to "the existence of all things and energy within all things," wherein all things have "spiritual energy."

non-human, rather than being conceived and experienced as an It, or merely a tool for human purposes…every creature and entity is sacred and is seen as playing an essential role in nature, in its own right, regardless of human purposes.[28]

Thus, *orenda* may be conceived of as a sort of energy or spirit that inhabits whatever it so chooses. According to Parker, "Spirits pervade all nature and affect man for good or evil. Their desires and plans must be satisfied by man. There are both good and evil spirits. Spirits may inhabit anything in nature."[29] The possibility for spirits or sacred energy to inhabit any object in nature has vast implications for the definition of what it means to be a "person" for Native Americans.

The actual terms used in other languages that are basically equivalents of *orenda*, which in speech vary depending upon the tribe - but in definition remain fairly constant, are deeply embedded within the thoughts, activities, and perhaps most importantly in the daily language of tribe members. Linguist Benjamin Whorf's findings support the significance of the term's usage in everyday language as such: because the names and stories (of mythic and spiritual entities or energies) are present within the language, they are constantly at the forefront of thought and are thus active in shaping perceptions.[30]

The Lakota Indians use the word "*wakan*" to refer to the energy-power of beings in much the same way the Iroquois use "*orenda*".[31] Lakota holy man, Fools Crow, in dialogue with Thomas Mails discussed the importance of relationships with "others" in the sense that has been discussed. When asked if he believed that rocks or earth has feelings, he responded that, "If everything that has been created is essential to life and

[28] *PN,* 16.
[29] *SMFT,* 3.
[30] *PN.,* 17.
[31] *Ibid.,* 16.

balance and harmony, then they do. It depends on how you think and how you define life. If you believe something has life, it has life. Wakan-Tanka has taught us to think about creation this way, and when we do, the life all things have within them becomes apparent to us, and we treat them accordingly."[32] When asked if he thought the sun was a god, Fools Crow declared that the sun was most certainly a Person – more precisely, a holy being, for he asked, "Can life exist and continue without it?"[33] It is apparent throughout his dialogue with Mails that Fools Crow's people, like those in most other tribes, regard personhood or "Thouness" as something sacred – as something much more than a condition reserved solely for humanity. This extension (from a European view, at least) is woven into the fabric of Native American thought, especially through the oral tradition, and as such it magnifies the principle that Native American self-conception is best described as having its basis in relationships.

Relationships are potentially unlimited in Native American culture. The role of man within creation is just one of many, for each non-human entity is equally endowed with power to keep the balance of natural energies. The concept behind this harmony is cyclical; there is a reciprocity that exists between all things, and Native American "religion"[34] seeks to, "determine the proper relationship that the people of the tribe must have with other living things and to develop the self-discipline within the tribal

---

[32] Thomas E. Mails, *Fools Crow: Wisdom and Power* (Tulsa, Oklahoma: Council Oak Books, 2010), 52. Henceforth referred to as *FC.* Wakan-Tanka is described by Fools Crow as part of what may be termed, comparably to the Christian faith, the "Godhead." See also page 24 wherein Fools Crow states, "We have three Chief Gods like the Christians do. Wakan –Tanka is like the Father. Tunkashila is like the Son. The Powers and Grandmother Earth together are like the Holy Spirit, and I call the five of them 'Wakan-Tanka's Helpers." When I speak of all seven of the Beings together, I sometimes call them the 'Higher Powers.'"

[33] *Ibid.,* 158.

[34] The word "religion" is used loosely here, for it is not merely a set of beliefs that serve to guide actions or label them as good or bad, but rather more holistic approach to living that permeates and is the driving force of everyday thought and action (*GIR,* 87).

community so that man acts harmoniously with other creatures."[35] What does it mean for them to live harmoniously with nature? Nature essentially speaks to the Native American, keenly aware of the signs and signals that are conveyed throughout nature. Again, we see the importance of oral tradition; the skill of listening is sharpened, and the interest in listening to nature has already been fostered from little on.

Listen to nature…is the wooly worm especially wooly, or the tail of the squirrel particularly thick this fall? If so, a hard winter can be expected and certain preparations should be made. With special attention to their surroundings and keen awareness of the unity that exists with the rest of nature, Native Americans make listening to nature so much a part of their lives, it is difficult to imagine otherwise.[36] In order to survive, the self takes an approach to nature as such: she is speaking to me, and I must actively listen in order to hear her. Listening is not merely a one-sided form of communication; it is an *activity* that creates emotional ties to the surrounding environment that allows one to understand what actions are appropriate for the common welfare of all.

The need and ability to communicate, to have a real relationship with nature, is evidenced by the belief that all things have their own definite energy or "Thouness." Deloria notes a specific example in the words of Canadian Stoney Indian, Walking Buffalo, who asks, "Did you know that trees talk? Well they do. They talk to each other, and they'll talk to you if you listen. Trouble is, white people don't listen. They never learned to listen to the Indians, so I don't suppose they'll listen to other voices in nature.

---

[35] *Ibid.*

[36] "What Westerners miss is the rather logical implication of the unity of life. If all living things share a creator and a creation, is it not logical to suppose that all have the ability to relate to every part of the creation?" (*GIR,* 89).

But I have learned a lot from trees; sometimes about the weather, sometimes about animals, sometimes about the Great Spirit."[37] Walking Buffalo's words indicate a close fellowship with nature based on a fundamental holistic understanding of the surrounding environment, and demonstrates the Native American self as unified with the rest of creation.

And these relationships are not exclusive to inhabitants of the tangible world, for there is deep-seated spirituality and belief in non-physical entities that are not just potentially extant, but truly actual. Overholt and Callicott support this premise with the following:

> The impression of a broader than human social world is strengthened by the frequency with which the characters of the myths undergo metamorphosis, though the narratives are not terribly explicit about how all of this is possible…what is important for our purposes, however, is that the narratives simply assume that this is the way reality is, a fact that the attentive reader is likely to find both obvious and puzzling.[38]

Through excerpts of Ojibwa tales in *Clothed in Fur*, we read of ghosts, dreams, and even metamorphosis. In a particular tale involving beavers that are willing to become food for humans, it is made clear[39] that the willingness is due to the mutual respect that is reciprocal in the relationship between humans and animals.

Should humans disrespect the beaver's bodies through being wasteful or by breaking their stripped bones after consumption, the beaver will come back deformed as a result. [40]

---

[37] *Ibid*.
[38] *CIF*, 143-144.
[39] *Ibid.,* 146.
[40] "It is all right for him to kill and eat his beaver relatives, as long as he preserves the bones intact and gathers them up for deposit in a watercourse. If the bones are broken, the revived individual will be deformed." It is further indicated that those who disregard the proper respectful way of treating the remains of animals, they will no longer offer themselves up," (*C*IF, 147).

By desecrating the remains of the animal, the hunter is violating the relationship between himself and the animal entities, and the animals will refuse to allow men to catch them. This notion is intriguing in itself, but especially in the sense that humans are certainly not attributed with having control over the beavers or any other part of nature; rather, the actions of the human as an equal determine the success of his survival and subsistence. Furthermore, the life of the animal is not over, though it potentially can be, once it has relinquished itself. Hence, it is concerned with the way humans treat it.

Animals consider offerings from humans a sign of respect; the humans will remain in their graces and the animals will consider giving themselves up as food if "asked." If the remains have been properly respected, the animal will come back; if treated improperly, it will come back either deformed or perhaps not at all.[41] The possibility of complete death is detrimental not only to the animal, but the human who will eventually need replenishment of sustenance that comes in the form of returning animals; the consequence of non-return is born by both parties. And further, respect toward animal beings must also include "the proper attitude," which is essentially, "the prohibition against thinking disparaging thoughts about the one upon whom you depend."[42] This notion is important because it places the Native American self in a position that is certainly not one of complete power; rather, humans are seen as "pitiable" receivers of blessings, and this based upon his or her conduct and treatment of other non-human "persons" that are depended upon for survival.[43]

---

[41] The treatment of bones is what the authors refer to as a "mechanism" of rebirth, and as such the treatment of remains is of special importance, (*C*IF, 147).
[42] *Ibid.,* 146.
[43] *Ibid.,* 151.

We are afforded a glimpse of American Indian beliefs about life and death through the story about the beavers: life is not necessarily over when human or animal persons die, and hence the concern over how remains are treated. But the significance lies in this belief: there is no "otherworldly" realm in which spirits exist; they continue to live in this world and communicate with the inhabitants herein. The communication and involvement with deceased beings, in whatever form they assume, will continue to influence natural order. In another Ojibwa tale wherein snapping turtles go to war against caddice flies, death is merely a state from which the animals can be revived.[44] Upon being slain by the enemy, another member of the casualty's kind may "breathe upon" the victim, and that animal is restored "looking the same as before."[45] Overholt and Callicott denote this story as an example of, "the fluidity of the line between life and death" that is observed in the tradition.[46] In the story of Mary Jemison, who was a captive of the Senecas at a young age and then adopted into their society, we read of sisters who mourn for a brother slain in battle:[47]

> Our brother, our brother, alas! He is gone! But why do we grieve for his loss? In the strength of a warrior, undaunted he left us, to fight by the side of the Chiefs…with glory he fell, and his spirit went up to the land of his fathers in war! Then why do we mourn? With transports of joy they received him, and fed him, and clothed him, and welcomed him there! Oh friends, he is happy; then dry up your tears! His spirit has

[44] *Ibid.* See pages 97-98, #14.
[45] *Ibid.,* 97.
[46] *Ibid.,* 147.
[47] Colin G. Calloway, ed., *The World Turned Upside Down: Indian Voices from Early America*, ed. Colin G. Calloway (Boston, Massachusetts: Bedford Books, 1994). Henceforth referred to as *WTUD*. See pages 73-77 for a narrative of her story given in 1824. In 1758, Senecas captured Mary Jemison when she was approximately 15 years old. She was adopted into their society, and later refused to return to "white society," 71 -72.

seen our distress, and sent us a helper (Mary Jemison) whom with pleasure we greet…in the place of our brother she stands in our tribe.[48]

Mary's story illustrates the ongoing relationship that the grieving women maintain with their brother. While it is a shock that he will no longer be with them in physical form, they are keenly aware that his spirit continues, and continues to provide for them. This reinforces the idea that he will continue on within their world, and his relationships with others also continues as they "feed, clothe, and welcome" him into their midst. The deceased brother is by no means disconnected from others.

Hartley Burr Alexander, in his book *The World's Rim*, explains that, "Life and death are not separate but confluent in Indian lore."[49] It is important to note in the preceding narrative that the sisters do not even question the *reality* of their brother's life after death in spiritual form – including the need for their brother to have provisions such as food and clothing. This suggests that it is not merely speculation that perhaps he has moved on and lives in some other realm or dimension, but that there is still a distinct place for him in *their* society as a person, although perhaps not in the tangible sense. In their reality, their brother is still *actual*; they may be unable to touch or see him, but he still needs physical rudiments like clothing, food, and the companionship of relatives in order to be comfortable. He still provides for them (he sends Mary to fill the void created when he left).

It is thus no wonder that Deloria recognizes the "notable absence of the fear of death" in American Indian tribal religions;[50] relationships with deceased loved ones continue

[48] *Ibid.,* 74.
[49] Hartley Burr Alexander, *The World's Rim: Great Mysteries of the North American Indians* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1953). Henceforth referred to as *TWR*.
[50] *GIR,* 170.

throughout the unfolding of loved one's lives. For example, the burial mounds that hold the remains of individuals are also filled with articles of everyday living such as food, clothing, and tools, pointing to the belief that the life of the deceased is not only fully expected to continue, but no less than in the manner it was lived previously.[51] Deloria remembers a woman who placed an orange on the grave of a loved one at burial, and upon being asked by the officiating Episcopalian priest *when* she expected the deceased to eat the orange, she replied, "When the soul comes to smell the flowers!"[52] Hence, for the American Indian self, death is not something to be feared, rather revered as a natural part of the circle of life that continues. It is not a disconnection from loved ones, and the relationship is not *lost* but maintains a continuity.

The stages of life between birth and death; the changing of the seasons from winter to spring and summer to fall, and back again; the generation and decay of vegetation and eventual regeneration – all of these processes have continuity. This continuity and the cyclical way that nature operates did not escape the keen observation of Native Americans. Their logic and philosophy is founded upon the circle, and Fixico explains, "Nature repeated itself in a continuous series of cycles and seasons of circular patterns…Cherokee elder Dhyani Ywahoo observed that in Tsalagi (Cherokee) world view, life and death, manifestation and formlessness, are all within the circle, which spirals out through all dimensions."[53] Thus the self is ongoing no matter what its state, and constantly in communication with others and with nature as part of the whole of creation.

---

[51] *Ibid.*
[52] *Ibid.,* 171.
[53] *AIM*, 50.

This constant communication even occurs during sleep in the form of dreams, reinforcing the relationships that have been established over lifetimes, through experiences, and through oral tradition and ceremonies. Dreams' functions are of special importance to the Native American self in several ways: (1) as a means of contact with "other than human" persons, thereby validating these entities' existences; (2) as a means of obtaining power and knowledge about the future (they play a key role in young men's rites of passage),[54] and; (4) dreams reinforce the structure of inner control.[55] Upon considering any of the above points, it is understandable why dreams and visions have a much more significant role in Native American than in Western culture. Overholt and Callicott explain that Western culture holds dreams as "reflective" of waking life, and useful perhaps in uncovering what the subconscious may be up to in such a sense, but by Native American standards they are an actual "category" of experience.[56]

In other words, if an experience is remembered, regardless of whether the one experiencing is awake or asleep, it is still considered, "a part of actual past history."[57] The conversations and relationships that develop during dreams are considered very real, not merely figments of the psyche that emerge haphazardly. The exchanges that occur between the dreamer and the entities that appear in dreams are given great credence and regarded as invaluable for determining what types of decisions and paths should be

[54] This is in reference to the "boys' puberty dream," which is a special institution of the Ojibwa tribe; other tribes had much different types of ceremonies for different purposes: for example, the Shastas of California actually used hallucinogens to induce the dream or trance state in women (as shaman), and pubescent boys were sent on "dream quests" for purposes similar to the Ojibwas, (*CIF,* 144).

[55] Overholt and Callicott point out that in a society that is structured such that there are no outside institutions of "formal legal control" over behavior of tribe members, it is of utmost importance that the tribe members maintain inner control. They indicate that the dream experience, according to *The Role of Dreams in Ojibwa Culture* by Hallowell (1966/1967), "reinforced a type of personality structure that…was a necessary component in the operation of the Ojibwa sociocultural system," (*CIF,* 144).

[56] *Ibid.,* 148.

[57] *Ibid.*

chosen in waking life. Thus, dreams essentially validate relationships and activities performed while awake by functioning as additional channels of communication with guiding supernatural entities. The importance of dreams further augments the idea of a "relational" conception of the self, due to the reliance upon the venerated advice of those entities in order to keep the spiritual energy in harmony with the rest of nature.

Part 3: Significance of Land

As discussed previously, there are five aspects to every Native American story; however, there is one aspect of lore that is particularly outstanding within American Indian culture: place. Over and above all else "place" is prominent, serving a referential purpose in that specific landmarks, trees, rivers, paths, and any other type of geological formations that can be found in the environment serve as, Fixico asserts, reminders of sacred places and true lived experiences that have become interwoven in the fabric of that community through oral narratives; accordingly, "In this way, *every place* has a story relating to human experience."[58] In fact, a tribe's history is directly related to its location rather than being referenced by any chronological sequence of events, although pre-discovery chronology can be roughly established if desired.[59] But time is not so relevant to their stories, rather, "What appears to have survived as a tribal conception of history almost everywhere was the description of conditions under which the people lived and the *location* in which they lived."[60]

---

[58] *Ibid.,* 25, my emphasis.
[59] "The scholars have had a difficult time piecing together the maps of pre-Discovery America because of the vague nature of tribal rememberances. The Iroquois, for example, relate that they once lived on the plains but then migrated eastward. *When* is not important to them, but their relative hardship on the plains and eventual prosperity in the East are important," (*GIR,* 101), my emphasis.
[60] *Ibid.,* my emphasis.

It would be improper to imply that there exists a disconnection between relationships with tribal "lands" and relationships with "persons." Holly indicates that, "Tribal lands were occupied collectively on the basis of human kinship groupings as well as spiritual contract with the orendas on that land."[61] She is essentially pointing to the blurred line that exists between persons and places in Native American thought – this due to the extension of personhood to non-living and non-human entities in nature. Like the *orenda* of other animal and non-animal persons, during physical life the human spirit is tied to the locations it hunts, lives on, explores and travels, and generally experiences life. Just the same, it is understood that the spirits of humans continue to dwell in native lands even after physical life is over. Deloria indicates that this is one reason for the reluctance to give up land to the whites; their relatives and community members were still very much present on the lands, and they feared dishonor would be suffered by their loved ones through improper treatment by the whites.[62]

Rather than merely a place to inhabit, land is revered in the sense that it nurtures. The relationship is not simply one that is born from agent to location; rather, it is reciprocal. It would be absurd to assume that land is something that can or should be privately owned, or any other natural resources for that matter. Often referred to as Mother (or Grandmother) Earth, she is the condition for the possibility of survival itself. She also comforts as a mother, and provides the means for renewal of spirit when the self becomes imbalanced. In order to renew the spirit, one returns to familiar surroundings to revitalize the soul. It is said that, "During this return to renewal of spiritual energy, a person asks deep questions of his or her being. One's natural surroundings become like nature's

[61] *PN*, 18.
[62] *GIR,* 171-172.

womb for security as the struggle for balance is analyzed by the individual."[63] Holly affirms the special relationship that Native Americans have with their lands, relating that, "As Sioux medicine man Lame Deer and others have pointed out, it seemed to traditional Indians quite crazy and impious to buy and sell and personally own land, just as it would be crazy and impious to buy and sell pieces of one's mother."[64]

The land is sacred because of its ability to nurture, and all the persons of nature are related because land is the possibility for their existence: it is what they have in common. The land is, as such, understood as an integral part of Native American religion because it is the tie that binds. The religious life of Native Americans is also permeated with reverence for land, for not only does it speak on behalf of all inhabitants, but it also affords a sense of purpose in the greater scheme of things. Religious experiences and visions are provided by nature, and the locations where they occur are considered sacred as points of communication with nature and the High Spirits. Deloria says, "Sacred places are the foundation of all other beliefs and practices because they represent the presence of the sacred in our lives. They properly inform us that we are not larger than nature and that we have responsibilities to the rest of the natural world that transcend our own personal desires and wishes."[65] Deloria seems to be saying that these places reinforce one's understanding of his human role in nature.

In addition, the indigenous natural surroundings of an individual, especially those proximal lands that support the lives of communities, tribes, and families for generations, are seen as places of restoration because of familial ties with the land. Crow Indian chief "Curley" speaks of his homeland in the following way, "The soil you see is not ordinary

---

[63] *AIM*, 50.
[64] *PN*, 19.
[65] *GIR,* 285.

soil – it is the dust of the blood, the flesh, and the bones of our ancestors…You will have to dig down through the surface before you can find nature's earth, as the upper portion is Crow. The land as it is, is my blood and my dead; it is consecrated; and I do not want to give up any portion of it."[66] The land is infused with the *orenda* of its inhabitants and the spirits of his ancestors, and as such he is unwilling to part with it. As "consecrated," land, it is sacred to him and all of his people. The Native American does not view the dead as "away" up in heaven. They are still close by and much loved. The earth is *home*, and the earth is also loved. As such, a spiritual family member could not find happiness in some other place – to dwell somewhere away from home would not be considered a positive way to spend one's spiritual life, by any means.

Deloria relates with the depth of attachment that is felt by those who have such an intimate relationship with their lands, explaining that, "[This sentiment] speaks of an identity so strong as to be virtually indistinguishable from the earth itself, the human being as it were, completely in harmony with the Mother Earth and inseparable in every way."[67] Hence, if unity with the rest of one's environment (and thus "others") is a foundational aspect of the Native American self, it follows that separation from indigenous lands, and as such the *orendas* that exist on that land, will cause to potential imbalance of the self.

This view of the self as closely related to indigenous land is fundamental in many tribal religions. Deloria indicates that, "The vast majority of Indian tribal religions…This center enables the people to look out along the four dimensions and locate their lands, to relate all historical events within the confines of this particular land, and to accept

---

[66] *GIR,* 146.
[67] *Ibid.*

responsibility for it…The nature of revelation at sacred places is often of such a personal nature as to preclude turning it into a subject of missionary activities."[68] Furthermore, the religious ceremonies of the tribes are "fine-tuned" in accordance with the land in order to harmonize activity with nature.[69] For example if the tribe lives on land that is dry and in need of rain for farming, the rain dance will be at the forefront of religious importance. This example illustrates the need for keeping the human spirit, as part of nature, in balance with the whole of nature and the reciprocal relationship between human action and nature: the unity of the human spirit with the land yields fruitful results and benefits all "energies" involved – the people are sustained and the land continues to be respected and cared for by the people. The land is treated as a "*Thou.*"

Their approach to the land is not one that can easily be linked to terms like, "usage" and "waste," for their ways are conservationist, and balance in nature is maintained by not just taking but giving back; reciprocity is certainly fundamental for maintaining balance. Replenishment is at the forefront of thought rather than "improvement." Native Americans would probably argue that tilling and cultivating the soil, which are activities that can seriously exhaust soil and resources, especially if done until it is rendered infertile, is equivalent to inflicting harm on Mother Earth. It is an infringement against another "Thou" that can only lead to disastrous consequences. In fact it is disrespectful to all persons related to that land, for they too will experience the consequences of inappropriate actions toward nature on the part of another; cooperation and respect for community are necessary to maintain harmony, and ensure the survival and happiness of

---

[68] Deloria further explains that even if the people are removed or the land is taken from them they continue to hold that area in their "religious understanding," (*GIR*, 66).
[69] *Ibid.,* 69.

all members. So, relationships are always at the crux of decision-making. Rather than nature belonging to the American Indian, he belongs to nature.

Part 4: Native American Self

The Native American self is clearly anchored in relationships with others. It is the definition of others that makes theirs a unique concept. Reverence for not only people, but also animals, locations and "non-living" entities, as well as metaphysical beings, creates a diverse and all-inclusive fundamental system of relationships, and situates the self in constant external rather than internal dialogue. This unity of self with environment is reflective of a circular and essentially spatial way of organizing the world, placing tribal history in the context of locations and connections with others based upon respect and continual awareness of the affects on others of actions taken by the self, and the need for maintaining balance with nature in order to ensure preservation of all rather than just some independent or individual ego.

This holistic approach to the world is founded on a perception of reality through experiencing the self as interconnected with the world through relationships; thus, approaching it with an attitude of "Thouness" is appropriate. The possibility for *orenda* to exist in any animate or inanimate object of either nature, or that is a product of man's creation is not overlooked, and so everything is approached with respect and caution. Fixico explains, "In circular philosophy, all things are related and involved in the broad scope of Indian life…A circular approach toward life is inherent in Indian cultures since time immemorial."[70] And in light of this, Deloria insists that for the Native American, "There is not, therefore, that determined cause…to subdue the Earth and its living things.

[70] *AIM,* 42.

Instead the awareness of the meaning of life comes from observing how the various living things appear to mesh to provide a whole tapestry."[71] There is no bright line of separation between land and "persons," because of the underlying unity of all things.

Native American self *belongs to nature*, and since there exists a keen awareness that balance is required in nature – that harmony is necessary for healthy continuance of *all* things - we can appreciate just why having an "*I-Thou"* attitude toward others is of such value. Reciprocity, community, equality, and cooperation are all terms that reflect this attitude and Native American cultural ways of life. The circular nature of each term cannot be denied – they all inherently suggest shared contact with and for the benefit of all involved, rather than imply any sort of unilateral relationship. This type of relationship with the world is certainly reflective of balanced existence. It is evident, as such, that the Sacred Hoop is unqualified as the symbolic representation of Native American cultural beliefs.

[71] *GIR,* 87.

CHAPTER 3

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR RADICALLY DIFFERENT WORLD VIEWS

"We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect."
--Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*

Certainly, as human beings, members of both Colonial American and Native American cultures had definite needs and wants; for instance, the need for survival in the forms of food, water, and shelter is mutual. Both cultures, like any, flourished in community with others in order to make life easier and happier. Both cultures had traditions, rituals, and religious beliefs that drive their understandings of what types of activities were required of them, or were desirable in which to engage, in order to live right. How, then, did it come to pass that the Colonial American culture exercised dominion over Native American cultures, especially in light of the Christian heritage that Colonials brought with them to the new land? With known sacred ties to their lands, why were Native Americans forced from their indigenous areas, in many cases, and sent to live on reservations? Why are many Americans - whether scientists, housewives, academics, or blue-collar workers - engaged in discussion of the state of the environment and sustainability? Cogent answers to all of these questions, and probably many more, can be found quite easily by tracing how the self-concepts of these two cultures' members, upon meeting and interacting, eventually generated the state of affairs in which America finds itself today.

In my first two chapters I laid out the fundamentals of both Colonial American and Native American self-concepts as the groundwork for the third. It was shown that the Colonial American self is inwardly oriented, and is fundamentally founded upon the basis of ownership; whereas, the Native American self is relational – it is rooted in nature, and set on operating in its role as part of a unified, balanced web of others that is not limited in scope to just human beings and human activities. In this chapter, I intend to compare and contrast these two views, shedding light on their differences and parallels. In doing so, I hope to show that the concept of Native American self is illuminating, and can serve as a resource for learning how to adjust the role of traditional American self in relation to others and nature. I will spell out some of the implications that these differing self-concepts have had for both groups of people and their shared environment. In doing so, I hope my reader will formulate their own answers to the questions posed above.

Part 1: The Problem with Conflicting Definitions of Person

Locke's position (and the position that most traditional Western views hold, based on Cartesian philosophy) on that which constitutes personhood comes down to whether or not the entity in question is both conscious and thinking. The ability to reason and reflect sets man apart from beast, but according to Locke, technically need not. This is based upon his somewhat indiscriminate view of substance's role, if any beast or object in the world with this ability aside from man should be made known. Now, given that man is equipped with the ability to voice, or at least show in some sense, that he is truly conscious and reasonable, while other entities cannot do so in the same capacity that humans can, he has put the possibility of personhood beyond the reach of any non-

humans altogether (and perhaps some humans, too). The definition of person, as such, has formal boundaries for the Colonial American: if you are a human, then you are a person; if you are not human, then you cannot be a person.

Native American views of personhood are much more tolerant, or willing to give the benefit of the doubt to the possibility that anything can be a person. This is especially true based upon the belief that sacred energy or spirits do, and/or potentially can, pervade any given object in nature whether human, animal, or even inanimate. This premise extends the definition of person well beyond the Colonial American scope As Locke has indicated, he does not deny the possibility that "soul" can take up residence in any other type of entity, but as far as his human intellect and sensory experiences can gather, he thinks that it would be absurd for this to occur. After all, inanimate objects show no telltale signs of even consciousness, much less reasoning skills.

The Colonial American could really only *experience* nature as it is presented to him through his senses, leaving it open to his personal interpretation, and however far his own reasoning may take him. Native Americans are oriented toward reciprocity – of being open to the possible experience of otherness. Their extension of personhood is accepted, although not necessarily unquestioned. Alexander notes a specific sweatbath chant of the Omaha, which are spoken by a priest after addressing the "seven places":[1]

Where is his mouth, by which there may be utterance of speech?

Where is his heart, to which there may come knowledge and understanding?

Where are his feet, whereby he may move from place to place?

We question in wonder,

---

[1] The "seven places" represent the four cardinal points (N, S, E, and W) and the above, the below, and the here, which are held in reverence as a constant throughout NA cultures, (*TWR,* 47).

Yet verily it is said you alone have power to receive supplications,

Aged One, eçka.[2]

In this chant, the priest is addressing "the rock," which is also known as "Grandsire" or "The Aged One." The rock represents steadfastness, or strength, and is considered the shared and immovable "dwelling-place" of all.[3] The chanter adds that the questions are asked in "wonder," meaning that he is awe-stricken by the powers of the rock that bears virtually no physical resemblance to human beings.

Alexander discusses the reasons behind this acceptance that is born by Native American self. He explains in the following segment:

> [But] the seven places are not merely places, they are also powers or persons, imbued with that life and meaning which is the cement and bond of creation, giving it sense and bearing…The physical world, in brief, is only a body, it is a thought-structure, and a living being somehow in the end curative of man's ills and a solace to his soul – as we poetically conceive nature today…The wonder is certainly aroused by a *conviction* of an animism, an inner life in all things for which there is no outward and responsive sign in the dumb object. It is a conviction that reaches very deep into the heart of a human instinct which natively compels mankind to ascribe spirit to nature. Socially we attribute life-impulses to bodies analogous to our own and to conduct which may be interpreted in the language of our own needs and appetites; but metaphysically we are not content with such a limitation of life, but expand its realm out and beyond the range of forms such as animate bodies show. This is that animism,

---

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] *Ibid.,* 46.

> apart from which little in human lore can be understood, yet which of itself is one of the least obvious modes of understanding.[4]

Thus the animism that is ascribed to non-human entities is instinctual, according to Alexander. Native Americans are "compelled" to attribute objects of nature with having souls, or spiritual energy, in order to find comfort and solace as people as part of (rather than separate from) nature.

This animism serves as the condition for the possibility of communicating with the rest of nature. It allows birds, trees, land, and spirits to speak - and be heard by those open and willing enough to listen. It funds stories that are passed down by Native Americans to their young with the possibility of having a meaningful discussion, for example, of a pipe or calumet entering the lodge of an animal as a request to it allow itself to be taken for human use. It also allows the animal to understand and respond with its own decision, which the Native American will actively listen for – his skill of having a receptive attitude toward all of nature having been honed from early on in life. Here we see the taking of an *"I-Thou"* attitude; a Native American approach to the grand scale of "others." Accordingly, the dialogical self is engaged in inner and outer communication that is founded on the vast array of relationships that one necessarily finds one's self in.

But it was much different indeed for the Colonial American self. Communication with "other-than-persons" was largely illogical and certainly impossible; there was no need for it in any case because it would have been (especially in the case of inanimates) completely one-sided. The ascendancy of human over the other developed neither the need nor the desire within the individual Colonial self to attempt any type of communication in the first place, and thus the role of internal dialogue took center stage

[4] *Ibid*., 47-48.

as a result. It is really best described as a closed circuit – the self-concept develops through internal dialogue, playing a powerful role in shaping self as one constantly assesses and reassesses what it means to be a self according to the standards of the culture that one is part of. One is situated within roles, for sure, according to relationships such as, “son of, mother of, brother of, sister of, and so forth, but this is the fundamental difference in comparison with Native Americans - extension of the dialogical self is limited in possibility, reaching only as far as relationships with “others” that is consistent with the limited definition of “persons” within the Colonial American culture.

Part 2: Ownership v. Relationship

Because of their differing opinions of what persons are, the Colonial American approaches nature quite differently than the Native American. The Colonial is interested in nature only insofar as it is useful to him. The *“I-It”* connection does not entail reciprocity, cooperation, or any of the qualities that are requisite of an *“I-Thou”* relationship; rather, ownership is the basis. Ownership of one’s self is at the core of the *“I”* term of the former type. Support for this claim is found in the work of Buber, who indicates that the *“I”* in the *“I-It”* scenario is subjective, and focuses on using and experiencing; subjectivity is primary.[5]

In owning one’s self, it follows that any labor and fruits that are the product thereof belong to that self as well. It is easily justifiable for the Colonial American to enclose and use land in any way deemed desirable, for we learned that the mingling of labor with nature endows that self with the nature that the self has turned its attention to. Hunting,

[5] *IT,* 62.

trapping, and the like are also means for survival, and as long as no waste is produced, there is no harm in owning whatever is necessary for life. The introduction of money, of course, opens doors even wider, because possibilities are endless when goods that might spoil can be exchanged for nonperishable goods and currency. Money is the means by which he can justify ownership of far more land than is needed for personal cultivation, and gathering and hunting are completely acceptable at any level insofar as spoilage is prevented through sales of goods.

This means of justification for unrestrained usage of natural resources cannot be seen within the Native American self-concept. Full awareness of the intricate balance of nature through understanding of relational ties with all creatures, plants, and even objects does not permit the "*I*" of the "*I-Thou*" affiliation to underestimate the importance of conservation and replenishment. Permission must be part of the bargain, and there must be proper compensation for all parties involved in any exchange. This attitude is certainly more beneficial for all persons in the long run, in that it ensures the balance and health of nature as a whole, rather than just the well being of one side. The Native American is *in*, not simply *of* nature. The state of equality is uncompromised.

But, was there not similarity between the Colonial American and the Native American? Were members of both cultures not persons? It is certainly the case that both parties were persons in a biological sense, and the same means for survival are required in order to sustain either. Why is it, then, that the Colonial American could take land and resources from the indigenous people of the new land? This dilemma, in part, also rests upon the definition of person as legitimated by Descartes and endorsed by Locke. First, because the Colonial American did not see the land as being used industriously; where no

labor is mingled with the land, it is being wasted, and as such it is considered fair game for interested parties willing to "improve" it. The Native American did not see the land as lying in waste, but as imbued with a personhood unto itself, and home to other orenda at the same time.

Second, although the Colonial American was compelled to respect the inalienable rights of other selves, it seemed that Native Americans were not necessarily given the benefit of the doubt regarding the authenticity of their personhood. Although Locke's discussion of the "permission of the Law of Nature" articulates that, "he and all the rest of *Mankind are one Community*, make up one Society distinct from all other Creatures,"[6] Native Americans were considered savages, without laws and true religion. Calloway notes that despite the major upheaval to their way of living, Native Americans dealt with the newcomers peacefully when possible,[7] trading with them and listening to them, as well as trying to communicate their own ways of life. He writes,

> However, as Americans in the new nation looked back across the long span of colonial history, they rarely saw anything but instances of Indian hostility. All Indians came to be regarded as warlike "savages" who had fought against the pioneers and had resisted "civilization" every step of the way. The struggles of Indian peoples to defend their lands and cultures provided their conquerors with further justification to take what was left of their land and destroy what remained of their traditional ways of

[6] *TTG,* II.ix.5: 352.

[7] For example, the Iroquois worked on treaties with Dutch and English called the "Covenant Chain" in order to help maintain peaceful relations between not only these parties, but also other Indian tribes. Nancy Shoemaker, ed., *American Indians*, ed. Nancy Shoemaker (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 26.

> life. Indian people had been virtually everywhere in colonial America, but there could be no place for “savages” in the new society Americans hoped to create.[8]

The way that Native Americans reasoned and saw their world was disparate with the European way of thinking, and so it was easy for them to label Native Americans as “savages.” Holly writes, “Given the Anglo-European tendency in Locke’s time and for some time thereafter to think of Indians as brutish and unreasoning, we can see Locke’s argument as opening the door to Anglo Europeans to hunt down and punish indigenous peoples such as American Indians when such peoples’ reasoning did not come to conclusions similar to that of educated Englishmen.”[9] Furthermore, because of Native American resistance to Colonial Americans, indigenous peoples were looked down upon as a nuisance. Eventually Congress passed the Indian Removal Act in 1830, which served to corral Native American peoples perhaps, but thankfully not crush them from existence. Hence, it can be ascertained that the traditional Western definition of “person” did not extend to all humans; rather, it extended only to those to whom it was convenient to afford the status.

Thus, in this discussion of personhood, it becomes clear that the implications for each view are quite different. Because Native American self extended the definition to include all entities in nature, he had a fundamentally different approach to others as “Thou(s).” Certainly newcomers were approached with caution, but there was very often a willingness to trade and negotiate peaceably despite the intrusion and upheaval of life, as one knew it. On the other hand, the Colonial American’s approach to others in terms of authenticity of personhood led to the consequences we see today, with Native Americans

---

[8] *WTUD,* 184.
[9] *PON,* 20.

driven from their lands and sent to reservations. The forced Trail of Tears journey, for example, speaks to the horrors that so very many endured along the way. Native Americans were compartmentalized into the *"It"* term of the *"I-It"* attitude espoused by Colonial Americans. An *"It"* can be manipulated and used, and whether the object of the term is land, some particular natural resource, or a "savage," is of no consequence. In fact, it may have even been considered one's duty as a Colonial American.

Part 3: Religion and Accountability: Implications for Our Shared Environment

The Colonial American self was accountable – it is contained within the very meaning of being a self, and is a precept of personal moral activity. Having graduated from the State of

Nature at some point, men are accountable to each other in accordance with written (and even unwritten) laws of their land. Bearing in mind that the Colonials were highly influenced by Christianity, especially in the form of Puritanism, personal accountability in the new land takes on particular meanings and duties according to the Scriptures. It is in fact the *duty* of the Christian to use the land as it was intended. God gave it to men, and through industriousness they are expected to improve and cultivate in order to survive and reproduce – for populating the earth is also required by God according to the Scriptures. The Puritan way of life is well known for promoting labor, as a means to happiness and fulfilling one's duty on earth – and laziness, as a sin, is completely unacceptable.

Accordingly, it was both a moral duty and right to take "unused" land from Native Americans and improve upon it. Miller notes that Clergyman John Bulkley, whom he

describes as an ominous and neglected "prophet of rationalism" that served in a frontier town called Colchester, Connecticut, wrote on the instruction of the use of reason. He was interested in defending the appropriation of land by New Englanders. Bulkley used Locke as his authority when he wrote that the title to property is rightfully the New Englander's who works the land, and the "lazy Indian" never had any right to it in the first place.[10] As such, compensation for the land was unnecessary – and it was sinful to let it lie in waste, after all. Since Native Americans never removed land from the "common," it was open to the new settler to use and enclose however he saw fit such that he could benefit from it. Thus, ownership meant that one is fulfilling one's moral duty in accordance with Divine command, and it was his right to keep whatsoever he mingled his labor with. Accountability for the actions of Colonials, in their taking of land and resources from Native Americans, was essentially a non-issue when put in the terms laid forth by their religious beliefs.

But Native American religion sought to maintain balance, which means that intrinsically it did not support ownership as a means to living properly.[11] Even the pipe ceremony symbolizes the equality that existed within Native American metaphysical beliefs. Holly explains, "Each smoker of the sacred pipe symbolically inhales the *orendas* (the wakan powers) of all the creatures and entities of nature and mingles his or her own *orenda* with these in exhaling. In so doing, the participant organismically experiences the whole of the ecosystem inwardly and externally…the sacred pipe ceremony is felt as an actual uniting of self with the whole ecosystem or great energy network."[12] Unity in no

---

[10] *NEM,* 432.
[11] Here harmonious living might be compared to the Western idea of moral living.
[12] *PON,* 17.

way implies ownership, or vice versa for that matter. Wherever ownership is present, there is an assumed hierarchy: a power pyramid.

Accountability is not equivalent for both strains of self. In Native American philosophy every action is understood in terms of possible consequences that can occur for rest of nature - as inseparable from nature, one's self is affected in the same instant. Therefore, real consequences for the Native American self are automatically built into all actions. The Colonial American self could take actions that resulted in consequences that may not directly, or even indirectly, affect him. The Native American self was involved with respecting nature, in his unified role as part of nature and equal to all others. The Colonial American self was involved in maintaining his proper role in the hierarchical system wherein he was a servant of God - and blessed with reason, he was also charged with power over the lesser creatures of nature, with nature as a mere platform, created as a gift from God and placed there for his fulfillment of life's duties in accordance with the Scriptures. He was first and foremost accountable to God, and accountable to other reasonable men as far as they see fit to hold him so. The Native American was accountable to all of nature.

The Native American self-concept is, in fact, consistent with the type of attitude that advocates of ecocentrism hold toward the environment. This view, says Holly, "holds that priority should be given legally and ethically to the protection of the well being and balance of the whole ecosystem, of which plants, animals, soil, air, waterways, etc. are all seen as fellow citizens alongside humans."[13] The Native American self is the original advocate of ecocentrism, having understood and practiced this attitude for many, many years – long before Aldo Leopold coined the term and many of today's Americans

[13] *PON,* 13-14.

became concerned about the health of the environment. The developmental process of the self within Native American Cultures deserves credit for responsibly nurturing a holistic view of nature within young members of tribes, and instilling within them the proper skills and values necessary to truly live and conduct actions as people who deeply understand the importance of balance in nature.

The concept of self, situated in a world full of sacred energy, or *orendas*, has import for modern environmentalism in two ways. First, it encompasses conservation. The utilitarian approach to nature and her resources has proven to be damaging for our environment, but approaching nature with an attitude of reciprocity and courtesy – allowing species and resources to replenish before overusing – is unquestionably a more sustainable practice than not. If this idea had been adopted before modern man engaged in so many destructive activities in the name of progress and industry, perhaps there would be less reason for many of our environmental concerns today.

Second, the idea that *orenda* may be present in any object or place in nature, and as such one should approach all of nature with respect and caution, strikingly evokes thoughts of what is referred to today as The Precautionary Principle." This principle, developed in 1982 and expanded in 1998, is of great significance in studies of environmental ethics and law, has been adopted or referred to by many countries,[14] and was made law by the European Union. It is a basic statement of precaution against engaging in any activity that poses a potential threat to the environment or its inhabitants should not be undertaken (even if not scientifically verifiable), and that the burden of

[14] Australia, the United States, and Japan have all acknowledged the precautionary principle in environmental acts and court cases.

proof falls on the action taker as opposed to those who would potentially be affected by the action.

Whereas, the Native American self was thought to be savage and unreasonable, it is difficult to find qualities in the Colonial American concept of self that come close to typifying the sort of attitude that is as accepting and open – or conducive to a healthy environment. Now that property owners have established themselves throughout the entire country, we have seen them become increasingly worried about the health of their property, and very often their families also, with stories of contamination leeching into drinking water and food sources increasing steadily in the news. In a country that has become modernized and developed, built principally by founders with a concept of self as "owner," it is ironically apparent that accountability is difficult to own -and it is rarely embraced wholeheartedly.

Concluding Remarks

Jane Goodall writes that, "Among humans, members of one group may see themselves as quite distinct from members of another, and may then treat group and non-group individuals differently. Indeed, non-group members may even be 'dehumanized' and regarded almost as creatures of a different species. Once this happens people are freed from the inhibitions and social sanctions that operate within their own group, and can behave to non-group members in ways that would not be tolerated amongst their own."[15] Groups are made of "selves," and one's self-concept, while shaped by culture, can only be reflected upon individually and privately. Indeed, when Jane Goodall speaks

[15] Jane Goodall, *Through a Window* (Boston, Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1990), 210-211.

of freedom from sanctions and treating non-group members in ways that are intolerable within native groups, one should keep in mind that the treatment she refers to can just as easily be thought to move in a positive direction – with attitudinal changes, we can "humanize" rather than reduce the rest of nature to something to be owned and manipulated, and find out if it is possible to lose the inhibitions that reinforce beliefs and actions that have not necessarily contributed to the health of our world. Had the Colonial American embraced the teachings of Native Americans, what might this corner of the world be like today?

The concepts of Native American and Colonial American self are not only valuable in a historical sense, but offer all thinkers who are well versed in Western tradition the opportunity to compare these competing self-concepts that essentially clashed and eventually emerged to constitute the culture of America today. I think there is a lesson to be learned in how expanding traditional boundaries of knowledge and personhood can be beneficial for modern humanity - and perhaps all of nature. It is also quite interesting to imagine an environment where the more efficient practice of conservation has eliminated the need for mitigation of damages, or fumbling around with the reliability of calculating the carrying capacity of Earth. The concept of Native American "self," in this sense, I have found especially illuminating. I sincerely hope that my reader is also intrigued, and is inspired to find additional ways to observe the world through Native American eyes.

Bibliography

Alexander, Hartley Burr. *The World's Rim: Great Mysteries of the North American Indians.* Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1953.

Buber, Martin. *I and Thou.* New York, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958.

Calloway, Colin G., ed. *The World Turned Upside Down: Indian Voices from Early America.* Boston, Massachusetts: Bedford Books, 1994.

Chappell, Vere, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Locke.* New York, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Dunne, John. *Locke.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984.

Erdoes, Richard, and Alfonso Ortiz, . *American Indian Myths and Legends.* New York, New York: Pantheon Books, 1984.

Fenton, William, ed. *Parker on the Iroquois.* New York, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1968.

Fixico, Donald L. *The American Indian Mind in a Linear World.* New York, New York: Routledge, 2003.

Goodall, Jane. *Through a Window.* Boston, Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1990.

Holly, Marilyn. "The Persons of Nature Versus the Power Pyramid: Locke, Land, and American Indians." *International Studies in Philosophy* XXVI, no. 1.

Howe, Daniel W. *Making the American Self.* New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Jr., Vine Deloria. *God is Red.* New York, New York: Putnam Publishing Group, 2003.

Locke, John. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding.* Edited by A.C. Fraser. New York, New York: Barnes and Noble, 2004.

—. *Two Treatises of Government.* Edited by Peter Laslett. New York, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

Macpherson, C.B. *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke.* New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1962.

Mails, Thomas E. *Fools Crow: Wisdom and Power.* Tulsa, Oklahoma: Council Oak Books, 2010.

Miller, Perry. *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province.* London: Oxford University Press, 1953.

—. *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century.* New York: The Macmillan Company, 1939.

Overholt, Thomas W., and J. Baird Callicott. *Clothed in Fur and Other Tales: An Introduction to An Ojibwa World View.* London: University Press of America, Inc., 1982.

Parker, Arthur C. *Seneca Myths and Folk Tales.* New York, New York: Bison Books, 1989.

Porter, Roy. *Flesh in the Age of Reason.* New York, New York: W.W. Norton & Company,
2003.

Shoemaker, Nancy, ed. *American Indians.* Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001.

Sweet, William Warren. *Religion in Colonial America.* New York: Charles Scribner's Sons,
1942.

Tully, James. *A Discourse on Property: John Locke and His Adversaries.* New York, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980.

Wood, Robert. *An Analysis of I and Thou.* Edited by John Wild, et al. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1969.

Worton, Stanley N. *The First Americans.* Rochelle Park, New Jersey: Hayden Book Company, Inc., 1974.

VITA

Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale

Marjorie R. Cavey Date of Birth: July 24, 1974

1128 Union Station Rd, Jackson, MO 63755

Cavey.Marjorie@gmail.com

Southeast Missouri State University
Bachelor of Science, Psychology, December 2007

Southeast Missouri State University
Bachelor of Arts, Philosophy, December 2007

Southern Illinois University Carbondale
Master of Arts in Philosophy, May 2011

Special Honors and Awards:
McNair Scholar

Thesis Title:
A Comparison of Native and Colonial American Conceptions of Self:
Implications for Competing World-Views

Major Professor: Dr. Thomas Alexander

Publications:
"A Deweyan Approach to Environmental Law", *Southwest Philosophical Studies*, Spring 2011.