

The Final Empire

CHAPTER 14

CULTURE AND ORGANISM

The Cultivated Life

Human culture is usually spoken of as the totality of ways of living of a people that are passed down the generations. Prior to the era of empires, human cultural knowledge was concerned in large part with the earth and its manifold life. Humans foraged upon the earth for their sustenance and the lore of the earth was their code of adaptation to that life. Their culture taught each generation how to live on the earth. Culture taught what to eat, how to eat it and when to eat it. Culture taught the ways to create shelter. Culture taught the meaning of the world, the explanation of what it is and how it came to be. Culture also taught how the tribe was to fit into that world. It taught the appropriate mating and the form of the extended family relationships. Importantly, it taught identity.

Human culture is an autonomous thought form, carried in the consciousness of the cultural members, which proceeds through time, more or less independently of any single individual. The culture is essentially held in the consciousness of individuals but those individuals do not create it. It is learned from the group. This flow of individuals through the cultural form is similar to the flow of individual cells through an organ. As individual cells are replaced in the body, the body maintains the integrity of its form and in a similar manner the cultural form maintains its integrity.

The meanings inherent in the English language indicate the ancient understanding of the process of culture. The words cult, culture, cultivar and cultivate all indicate a process of effort toward the continuance of the ideas and forms of life and knowledge. There is also the implication that the living things are learning and adapting. A cult is an assembling of people around some idea, especially a religious idea. It is a process in which the people learn certain ways of living and certain beliefs about the world. This body of knowledge is then passed on within the cult. When one cultivates a plant or crop, the living things are given attention and their lives are guided in certain ways. A variety of plant that has been cared for and whose optimum individuals have been selected over many generations is called a cultivar. "Domesticated" plants are cultivars.

This type of "cultivation" happens in the natural world. Of course there are no humans guiding the plant families and cultures, but families of plants do learn to modify their forms in order to adapt to the differing conditions of the earth. The willow-poplar-aspens tree family is a good example. This family is very important in semi-arid environments on the North American continent. They can propagate by seed transported by wind, water or animals. They can even propagate by pieces of

themselves. For example, if a branch is torn off in a flood and comes to rest in a pile of flood debris, the branch will often take root and create a new colony. Once established, their main means of increase is by the root system. They establish a dense web of roots in an area and an upright tree or bush may grow out of any particular root area.

This plant grows in stream courses or in areas where underground water is abundant and near the surface. Because flooding or fire, especially in the case of aspen, may clear off the above ground stems, the plant's continuance is based in the root system. If its above ground stems are cleared, it simply sends up new shoots. Its main body is the extensive root system underground. This important plant holds the soils of riparian habitats and also creates fertile micro-climates, adapting its shape and behavior to the amount of moisture it can get and to the elevation in which it grows, which relates then to the temperature that it must endure.

Some members of the willow family are large in moist, hot, low elevations. As elevation increases or moisture decreases, the form of the plant will modify but the essential characteristics of the family remain. The modifications, each that have separate scientific names, vary, but the essential characteristics of the family are unchanged. The modifications of the family are the indication of the families' learning to adapt to different conditions. It is the indication of the family's culture. Opuntia, the familiar elephant ear cactus that grows the savory prickly pear fruits, is another example of a family with a rich culture. Opuntia will grow in a desert near sea level and up elevation to 6,500 feet. In some modifications in its low elevation desert home it can grow to ten feet tall, with wide and succulent leaves. In higher and colder elevations it may only grow six inches tall with small, shriveled leaves. It has acculturated itself throughout the variety of the land and its conditions.

Animal culture shows this type of modification as their culture adapts to the differences of the land. In the past, some of the members of the bear family would be out on the Great Plains foraging on bison and elk carcasses. Others, especially the black and brown bears, would be high in the Rockies, concentrating on berries and insects. In the Pacific Northwest the bears would depend heavily on salmon runs. In the arctic the polar bears have a much different culture.

The salmon are an example of fish culture. They migrate from their birthplaces out to sea and then return after an extended period of time back to their exact place of birth to spawn. Individuals return to destinations, which are spread all over the watershed. Due to the differing of soils, moisture abundance and vegetation mix, the taste and smell of the water coming from their birthplace directs them home. Each of the different cultural groups such as coho, steelhead and sockeye have different times and styles in which they run to spawn in the upland streams, but each of their cultures show a similarity of adaptation to the earth.

Natural human culture has grown out of the earth as an adaptation to it. The earth, its life and metabolism has provided the pattern and ideas for human culture. Human cultures show a rich variety of adaptations to the differing conditions of the earth but the basic pattern of culture fits the basic life principles and pattern of the planetary life as a whole. The Natural cultures and their divisions were cultivated over eons of time.

In the far north, where there is less sunlight and the lighter skin-colored people are found such as Lapps and Inuit (or Eskimo), the complex of culture is adapted to the cold and the darkness. The Lapps of northern Scandinavia, like the former Inuit, inland from the Hudson's Bay of Canada, have adapted to the deer family, reindeer and caribou, as their main energy source. Most of the other Inuit live from the sea.

In terms of Natural human cultures, there were people who lived primarily from the fish in the sea, cultures that were dependent upon the salmon runs of northern Europe, the British Isles, and both coasts of North America. There were cultures dependent upon massive deer and bison herds. There were the cultures of the complex rainforest ecosystems. Each of these variations of human culture was highly adapted and very ancient, as are the adaptations of the willow family or the prickly pear family.

As the invasion of the world by the European Empire was ongoing, the Cossacks of Russia broke over the Ural Mountains into the Siberian region. At that time there were more than one hundred different cultural groups in the Siberian areas. Each of these groups was ecologically adapted to their local region and each had a different language or dialect and differing manners. This same condition obtained in California at the onset of the European invasion. Like the Siberian region, there were more than one hundred tribes in California differentiated into languages, dialects and ecological adaptations. It takes many thousands of years for languages and human social systems to differentiate into distinct groups.

This shows that natural human existence offered stability over long periods of time and that warfare and tumult were not characteristic. When one views the intricacies of adaptation of the San in the Kalahari or the Inuit of the far north, it is apparent that the huge body of knowledge that enables these human cultures to adapt to such extremes was cultured over immense lengths of time.

Most people knowledgeable in the subject consider the rainforest regions to be the womb of organic life. Here light, temperature and moisture conditions have produced dense and complex patterns of life. Catherine Caulfield in her book *In The Rainforest*, explains that:

"Between 40 and 50 percent of all types of living things - as many as five million species of plants, animals, and insects, - live in tropical rainforests, though they cover less than 2 percent of the globe.... Tropical forests contain from 20 to 86 species of trees per acre, whereas a temperate forest has only about 4 tree species per acre. The forests of the North American Temperate Zone have fewer than 400 species of trees.... Mount Makiliang, a forested volcano in the Philippines has more woody plant species than all of the United States. Tiny Panama has as many plant species as the whole continent of Europe." ¹

The rainforest is also considered to be the womb of the human species. Many of the last remaining examples of our ancient human family exist in rainforest environments. These cultural groups have worked out intricate balances with the life around them. Many of them combine planting, gathering and hunting in their way of life. These cultural forms are without doubt the oldest and the most sophisticated on the planet in terms of their biological survival value, the ultimate test.

Natural culture people live in a materially simple environment. Their food and shelter needs are simple and the tools that they need to accomplish this are few. This is especially true of nomadic people who would obviously keep any materials to a minimum because they would have to transport them. Transporting heavy loads of household goods, when the materials to create them existed everywhere would simply not make sense. This same functionalism applied to gaining food.

Natural cultures sought food in the simplest way they could. They were not ideologically wed to hunting, gathering or planting but would use whatever was most efficient in any ecosystem. The White Mountain Apaches of the present State of Arizona, for example, were basically gatherer/hunters but they would plant at times, and they could be keen planters. On occasion a clan or larger group would stay in one area for a whole season to raise a crop. Others would return on the migratory gathering cycle to combine both gains. At other times seeds would be planted in certain areas from which harvests could be obtained when the group cycled back on the gathering route.

In some seasons, in some ecosystems, planting would be more efficient than migrating. In some years of the climatic cycle, planting could be more efficient than hunting. Among the Jicarilla Apaches who formerly lived in the area of present northeastern New Mexico, there were band divisions who lived in two different ecosystems. The Olleros lived out on the edges of the Great Plains and were adapted to the herbivores there, the migratory herds. The Llaneros lived in the foothills and upper elevations of the Sangre de Cristo range. These groups would come together periodically, especially at fall harvest to share the gain of the seasons. In this way the bounty of a number of ecosystems circulated through the tribe.

We have some examples still remaining of highly complex rainforest acculturation that combined planting, gathering and hunting. Catherine Caulfield reports that:

"Ed Price, an agricultural economist who works for the International Rice Research Institute in the Philippines, spent three years with small farmers in a village called Cale, in Batangas Province. Cale was not in the really steep and difficult highlands; it was more rolling hills, but there was no irrigation. In three years he identified more than 160 different crops and crop combinations grown by those farmers. They performed more than one hundred different technical operations. Whereas if you talk to a year-round irrigated rice farmer, he grows probably only one or two varieties of rice. And you can certainly number on two hands every operation he does to those crops. It's very simple, cut and dried.

"But then, if you leap to tribal peoples in the hills, the agriculture is even more complex. They know the names of far more plants, and they grow far more plants. Their pest control strategies are more complex and their planting and harvesting timetables more finely tuned. They are more aware of wildlife in general. Forest species are one of their resources. In fact that is one of the distinguishing features of tribal people, that they depend partly on the forest itself for what they need. They forage, collect resin, gums, rattan, in addition to growing rice and other crops."

Caulfield gives an example of another tribal people who have the characteristic complex knowledge of their environment; "The Hanunoo people of the Philippines are hunter-gatherers who divide the plants in their territory into 1,600 categories, although botanists can only distinguish 1,200 species."²

One might say that natural human culture grew organically upon the life of the earth much like the culture of the willow family, opuntia or mountain lion. It fit into the energy pathways of the earth life much as an organ fits into a body. Human culture became part of the energy web of the living planet. The wisdom of Natural human culture is demonstrated by the endurance of the human family's adaptation over millions of years.

Culture is an Energy Code

All culture, even empire culture, contains an energy code. It informs the individual about what one eats, how one gains shelter and how one uses the materials of the earth for culturally important purposes. There is that part of the cultural knowledge that has to do with the practical everyday functions such as cooking, hunting and housekeeping. In a larger context there is the consideration of the environment and the culturally important stories, the myths and legends connected with it. This aspect of culture usually involves ceremonies and rituals having to do with such things as the seasons, the growth of life and the hunt. The encompassing cultural context is the cosmology. This framework of ideas is called by many names, myth, legend, story, religion and so forth. It gives an account of how material/immaterial creation came to be and what its purpose and meanings are- and the meanings of the human lives and destiny within it. This is the creation myth that sets the framework for that which has value and meaning. Human culture has an organic being of its own independent of any individual member of the cultural group. The culture and its teachings are the effective means by which the individual members maintain life. The culture sustains itself over time, though a succession of individuals is born and dies within it. Culture is a body of knowledge, a framework of ideas, and a thought form, held in the consciousness of individuals.

The ideational thought form of culture is reflected in the material world. This reflection is the knowledge of how to build an atlatl, bow and arrow or how to gather the acorns, leach out the acids and make them into a nutritious foodstuff. Culture teaches identity- one's place in the food chains, the biological energy pathways of the earth no less than the cultures of the willow varieties allow their adaptation to many environmental conditions.

The culture of humans and certain other mammals, we know without dispute, is held in conscious memory and we are suggesting that the culture of other biological forms result from morphic resonance. Life forms are a psychobiological phenomenon. Culture, whether it is plant, mammal or the culture of any biological form, is an organic and natural part of the life of the earth. Even in the case of the culture of empire it is organic, however pathological. Culture is part of the planetary life. It is not simply a human creation for humans. Many types of animals have an individually transmitted culture. That is, parents or older individuals of that family of beings transmit the culture to them.

Most are familiar with the story of the baby lions that are taken from their parents at birth. Growing up with humans, the lions adapt somewhat to human culture but they do not learn their own. Therefore they cannot simply be let loose in the wilds or they will die. Specifically, they do not know how to hunt or what to hunt, as this knowledge is taught to them by their parents in nature. This phenomenon can be seen in mountain lions, bears, primates and many other animals that humans capture for pets. In the natural world each species carries an immaterial, ideational, thought form. The thought form is the energy code of the species life, or tribal life, that "informs" by generational transmission, the individual of its energy code of adaptation and survival. From the rainforests, the womb of humans and their culture, people ventured out onto the grassy plains and beyond. As they moved, their adaptation became refined to areas as difficult as the arctic and the Kalahari.

The wisdom of adaptation allowed them to survive. Human cultural forms experienced diverse florescence. In many tribes, song, dance, ritual, and oral literature became so rich that specialists were needed to learn the many parts and many persons would be required in order to contain and transmit the whole tribal cultural form. In a world of living beauty, culture developed to the rich level of some Native American tribes who had specific songs for most daily activities and certainly for all important cycles of one's life. To the bird songs and the wolves' howl was added the richness of human culture.

In the remnants of Australian aboriginal culture or the existing Pueblo culture of the southwest U.S., as well as many other surviving tribal groups, we see beautiful and elaborate ceremony dramatizing the life of the earth in cultural form. The themes of ceremony relate directly to the living reality of the earth and cosmos. In Pueblo culture there is the buffalo dance, the green corn dance, the deer dance and so forth. In Australian aboriginal culture there are equally complex rituals related, as are the Pueblos, to participating with the creative force in the natural cycles of existence. Until the time of empire, human culture grew out of the living earth. *Cultural ceremony was the living earth in human dramatization.* The living earth was its habitat, its home. Culture was a holographic thought form held in the consciousness of individual humans. This form was a reflection and re-presentation of the life of the earth, which is itself a reflection of the effect of cosmic forces, i.e., all of the energy forces that have resulted in the planet earth being what it is and where it is and the solar, magnetic, atomic and other forces that sustain its being.

Human Culture is the Womb that Bears the Individual

Just as local conditions in the Solar body has created the environment for our type of life to be born on the planet earth; human culture creates what we are. But we are not products of human culture simply; we are the result of the efforts of life's adaptation since the first cell. In our being is contained the memory of an ancient past. Each of us in our embryonic development passes through stages that begin with the most ancient fish and end with our full development.

Each human embryo at the initial stages closely resembles that of a fish. A little later in development at the point where the fish embryo is developing gills, our embryo also develops folds which if not differentiated further would be gills. As all the vertebrate species embryos develop they recapitulate the line of origin. As their

embryos near maturity each continues on to form its individual species' differentiation but in the first few weeks of life the embryos of all vertebrates are nearly indistinguishable.

The habits of the first cell continue through space and time as transformations of form and substance until a human baby is born. At that point the baby is bonded to the mother and to the earth, as Joseph Chilton Pearce points out in his study, *Magical Child*. The phases of bonding that Pearce describes involve being secure and bonded with, for example, the mother, while exploring the world and then being secure and bonded with the mother and earth while exploring oneself. This is the way that the thought-form of culture functions also. The Solar body is the womb in which the earth grows as the cell grows within the conditions of the earth. The manifesting culture of organic life bears human culture and it finally bears the individual. In each step one is born within the other as if in a womb. From culture the individual learns identity and reality-view.

In tribal society there is a kind of individualism and paradoxically there is an understanding and acceptance of the interdependence of the human family and tribe. Jamake Highwater speaks of these unities of individual, tribe and cosmos. He explains:

"In tribal religions there is no salvation apart from the continuance of the tribe itself because the existence of the individual presupposes the existence of the community. Every element of tribal experience is necessarily understood as part of the largest meaning of life insofar as life...does not exist without the tribe, which gives animation to its members. Yet the deviations of the individual are taken for granted because each person is part of the whole.

"It is through relationships that Native Americans comprehend themselves. Such relationships are richly orchestrated, as we have already seen, by elaborations of languages and ritual activities. Underlying the identity of the tribe and the experience of personality in the individual is the sacred sense of place that provides the whole group with its centeredness. The Indian individual is spiritually interdependent upon the language, folk history, ritualism, and geographical sacredness of his or her whole people. Relationships between members of families, bands, clans and other tribal groups are defined and intensified through relational and generational language rather than through personal names, which are considered to be sacred and private to the individual. The relatedness of the individual and the tribe extends outward beyond the family, band or clan to include all things of the world. Thus nothing exists in isolation. Individualism does not presuppose autonomy, alienation, or isolation. And freedom is not the right to express yourself but the far more fundamental right to be yourself."³

The realism of tribal society is that individual humans do not simply fall out of the sky but that each individual exists and in fact becomes what they are because of relationships to larger bodies of life both human and non-human.

The Birthright of Identity

Every human child should have the right to be culturally informed of who, what and where it is. To know that they are a recent manifestation of an immensely long history of biological form and that biological form is a vast interrelated system of life. What the nature of biological form is and where it is in terms of location in a bioregion, continent and planet should be the beginnings of education. Children are entitled to know the true organic reality.

In Natural culture people were conditioned as children by the living world within which they existed. The elders took them out onto the earth and pointed out how the various species lived, because first, this was survival knowledge. This also meant that they were being conditioned with a reality view that was based in the truth of the cosmic pattern of life. Conditioning of consciousness is not a negative occurrence; this is how we learn. The argument is with civilized conditioning. It is that it is self-injuring and ultimately suicidal.

The spirit's task in the material world is the manipulation of energies. The adaptation of various forms of life to the interrelated system of organic reality leads to their success and maturity. Power is endurance, to be able to continue existence. This power is created by successful adaptation to the flows of energy of the cosmos. When human cultures offer the platform, information-identity, that enables them to endure for hundreds of thousands of years, then individual and group creativity can be sponsored beyond that firm basis.

The Morality of the Cell (Our Ancestor)

Adaptation and cooperation are the premier standards of behavior of the cells. The principles of life's functioning are a cooperative energy flow. Shared energies, transformation, diversity-unity, balance, creativity, adaptability and relationship are patterns of life and also can be called the morality of life. Life in all its forms stretching from the cell to the human tribe have followed this general functioning. *This is the value system of life.*

As the culture of empire has irrupted within the life system there has been a tension between the natural system of morality- this natural wisdom of life- and the diseased morality of empire. The various religions of empire represent, in a broad way, the resurgence of life habits (morality) into the imperial arena, opposing the dominant trends.

Through the history of empire there has existed a tension between the basic life perpetuating morality of the cells and the life defeating morality of empire. Though the pathology of empire has increased geometrically, the life morality continues to exert itself in the positive values imbedded in religion, charitable agencies, nature preservation groups, and some social ideologies. The tension exists also in each of us as the whisperings of the cells tell us the positive impulses such as kindness, helpfulness, cooperation while the structure of the social system of empire forces us toward self advancement, cynicism and cruelty at the expense of other Beings.

NOTES

1 Quoted in *Friends of the Trees 1988 International Green Front Report*. May, 1988. Friends of the Trees, P.O. Box 1466, Chelan, Washington 98816. p.32.

2 *In the Rainforest*. Catherine Caulfield. Alfred A. Knopf pub. New York. 1985. p. 130.

3 *The Primal Mind*. Jamake Highwater. Harper & Row. 1981. pp. 171,172.