

# The Naturalness of Morality in Locality

Relationships, Reciprocity, and Respect

As described in chapter 5, the concept of sacredness is a kind of limit: it does not tell us how we actually ought to act. The claim that “everything is sacred” only tells us how we cannot understand morality in locality, that is, with different levels of abstract value. Universal sacrality does give us a starting point for ethical reflection in a positive sense as well. It requires that we take each thing we relate to with the seriousness that sacredness requires. There are none of our relations that we can take for granted in the search for our moral path. In this chapter, I take another step away from the choice to walk the path of delocality and another toward the path of epistemic locality. I try to express some ideas in the context of locality about the relationship between human beings and the land through a detailed look at actual moral claims that Native people make about human moral relations to the nonhuman world. Here the metaphor-filled and multilayered story

of morality in locality extends from talk of life and sacredness to kinship, respect, relationships, person, and naturalness.

I begin with a general moral claim espoused by Native and non-Native thinkers alike, a claim that might have a different meaning in locality than in delocality: there is a connection between what is moral and what is natural. Assiniboine elder Walking Buffalo once said that in nature and the connection with nature, one will find the book of the Great Spirit. “If you take all of your (Western people’s) books, lay them out under the sun, and let the snow and rain and insects work on them for a while, there will be nothing left” (McLuhan 1972, 23). The import is that in nature and in a connection to nature, and not in abstracted or delocalized text, one will find the instructions for a proper path to follow as human beings. It is implicit in these words that there is an unnaturalness to the Western way of knowledge and a naturalness to the Native approach. Oglala Lakota writer Luther Standing Bear expresses something similar about nature and being moral. He claims that the Lakota were “true naturalist[s]” and that they “loved the earth and all things of the earth.” This love was something that grew with age to the point that the old ones “literally loved the soil and sat or reclined on the ground with a feeling of being close to a mother power.” This “natural” relationship imparts moral understanding so that “kinship with all creatures of the earth, sky, and water,” he claims, “was a real and active principle” derived from actually being in nature and having this “natural” contact (McLuhan 1972, 6). Apart from nature, this love and kinship are lost. As he writes, “the old Lakota was wise. He knew that man’s heart away from nature becomes hard.” In another place, Standing Bear claims the elder who sat on the ground and came to accept the kinship of all things “was infusing into his being the true essence of civilization” (McLuhan 1972, 6).

## Western Moral Naturalism and the Binary between Natural and Unnatural

Western people have made similar claims and are often thought to be inspired to make these claims from these old Indians, whom they consider the first Western ecologists in the context of the narrative of colonial difference. In this context, saying that what is right is natural means living in accordance with the earth in some manner. Specific reference is often made to the words of the Native sages as quoted above. In this context of what is natural, Western people recommend eating organic foods, using earthly-produced products, and using what is called “natural medicine” (nonsynthetic medicine made from plants, animals, or minerals). In this context, there are several possible meanings to the Western claim that something is good or right because it is natural. Most reasonably, the claim is simply that using products made from organic materials or engaging in certain “natural” activities eases the human impact on the earth: such products are more likely recyclable, cause less pollution, and the like. Some of these “natural” activities are recycling, growing one’s own food organically, bike riding, riding the train instead of driving, and the like. These “natural” activities are meant to have a similar result as the “natural” products. The idea is that these products and activities lead to a greater good: the mitigation of negative impacts on the environment and its ecosystems, particularly in the face of an environmental crisis.

There is more behind the claim that what is natural is good than the simple sense of being “good to do,” but it is difficult to articulate just what is supposed to be natural about these “good to do” activities or what exactly is the good in what is natural in these activities. Simply because such

activities lessen the human impact on the earth does not seem enough to define an activity as natural. There are plenty of natural acts, albeit not always acts by human beings, that have a devastating impact on the earth: floods, earthquakes, lightning fires, glaciations, and so on. Imagine a certain animal (a keystone species) was to die out in a certain ecosystem because of lack of rain. The result might be the natural devastation of much of the other animal and plant life in this ecosystem. Imagine a new predator naturally wandering into an ecosystem unaccustomed to such a hunter. This animal might wipe out entire species of creatures who are unable to defend against this new hunter.

When pressed, the point seems to be that the idea of naturalness expressed in these slogans only applies to human beings. In the narrative of colonial difference there is supposition that humans through a civilizing process have literally come out of nature. These “unnatural” human colonizers operate through a process of separating the European locality from nature, land, and Indigenous people. Human beings in the context of coloniality, unlike animals or Indians as noble savages in the narrative of colonial difference, can be “in” nature or “out.” This is the conversation with naturalness that this book is trying to initiate, to subvert the delocalized power of European coloniality that operates on Indigenous people and land. Perhaps there is some sense of locality in these general proclamations about the need for more naturalness in human activity, but there is little epistemic locality in these proclamations. In other words, there is little understanding of what might be the force of locality that underlies these proclamations, even on the part of those Western people who are making them.

There is also clearly more to the common use of the term “naturalness” than lessening the negative human impact upon the earth, and

some of the deeper sense of naturalness here arises from delocality and coloniality rather than from an attempted move away from these. A friend of mine has been taking lithium for many years to ease the most severe symptoms of a bipolar disorder. She made the claim that it was fine to be taking lithium because it was natural. Her argument was not that it was good to ingest lithium because it was better for the earth. Her argument for naturalness as goodness was constructed in terms of a human good rather than an environmental good. Her argument that lithium was good because it was natural was a function of the idea that natural products and perhaps natural activities are better for the functioning of human organisms. Ingesting some manufactured product, some humanly created product meant to alleviate the symptoms of some illness, is not as good for the long-term and perhaps even immediate functioning of the human organism. However, even the impact of the interruption of natural function alone does not account for the full force of the claim that naturalness is good. Again, it is difficult to characterize the exact idea of what more is involved in the claim that naturalness is good though. Perhaps what is best for me as a human defines what is natural, but this seems to be so contingently. If some unnatural product were shown to be better in the long run for humans than some natural product, then the unnatural product would have to be better, leaving us again looking for the force of the claim that a product is good because it is natural. To say that the natural product is nevertheless better is to simply equate goodness and naturalness by definition, which undercuts the idea of natural in the contingent sense of being better for humans. In other words, if it turns out that some unnatural product is much better for humans than lithium, in the long and short term, then to keep saying that lithium is better because it is natural cannot be understood

as supporting the view of naturalness where “natural” means better for human beings.

These lines of support for the claim that what is good is natural are indirect. Engaging in certain activities that are natural or using products that are natural brings about a greater good: the good in this case is a decrease in possible harm to the environment, a betterment of human beings, or perhaps some combination of the two. Whatever the case, there seems to be no particular good that emanates directly from what is natural. Put another way, naturalness as a concept need not play a constitutive role in the goodness of the activity. It just so happens that certain activities result in a lighter human impact on the earth or are better for human beings and that these activities or products are called “natural.” The questions remain: what is it about these activities that make them natural, and what is it about this naturalness that leads to a lightened impact or make products or activities better for human beings, or is there something about naturalness that makes it good in itself? Attempting answers to these questions leads us to a more direct form of moral naturalism that is more deeply entrenched in the conflict between locality and delocality. The gist of the more direct form of moral naturalism seems to be that there is some way that the earth can be called natural or in its natural state or natural processes. It is thought to be a good to be in accord rather than in discord with this natural state of things. As it regards the amount of harm one causes things, in this case the environment or the world itself, the idea seems to be that it is better for a thing to be in accord with its natural functioning than not. Imagine that I attempted to use my car not for driving but as a giant wrecking ball. The result, insofar as it affects the functioning of my car as a driving machine, would be disastrous. It is highly likely that my car

would no longer be able to perform its intended function. This idea of natural function is only one of the ways in which direct moral naturalism is defined. I attempt to articulate some of the different ways one might define direct moral naturalism below.

Direct moral naturalism is simply put: any unnatural action or object is bad or wrong. Depakote (as opposed to lithium) is an unnatural object. Therefore, Depakote is bad. Unnatural actions can include, it seems, the consuming of unnatural objects. Taking Depakote is then wrong because it implies an unnatural act. The various forms that the unnatural/natural dichotomy might take include:

1. What is natural is what conforms to the laws of nature, while what is unnatural is what defies these laws.
2. What is natural is not human made or nonartificial, while what is unnatural is human made or artificial.
3. What is natural is what is common or normal, while what is unnatural is uncommon or abnormal.
4. What is natural is what is in accordance with the function of a thing, while what is unnatural is what is contrary to that function.

The first form is relatively useless, as least for the purposes of articulating moral naturalism. The only kinds of actions or objects that could be unnatural in this sense would be of the supernatural sort. Only supernatural beings can perform supernatural acts, and so there would be no sense in which human action would be unnatural and so morally bad. All human actions are then not wrong by definition under this view, since humans are incapable of supernatural acts. Further, supernatural acts are thought to be performed by the most perfect of

moral agents: God. Miracles too are supernatural events by definition and also not thought to have any particular moral turpitude. Miracles are not something we are obligated not to do, but on this view, they might well be morally condemned.

The second form seems the most likely basis for the claim that Depakote is bad while lithium is not. Depakote is bad because it is artificial or humanly created, while lithium is not because it occurs in the world without human action or is nonartificial. The second form is no better off for articulating a sense of moral naturalism. While the first form implied that no human actions were morally wrong, this form implies the opposite: that all human actions are wrong. This is the case at least if we understand human actions as producing themselves. The thought is that one of the things that humans produce are their actions. Human actions are then human products and so artificial and therefore wrong. Even if we don't suppose that human actions are human products, everything that humans do produce is morally bad. It is hard, then, to imagine what a human could do that was not morally bad. One could perhaps attempt to be a passive observer of the world, trying hard not to produce anything. Even this seems absurd, however, since even something like eating and defecating—which are required to live at all—seem to leave a human product.

The third form does not have the flaw of the first two: it does not make all human action impervious to wrong or make nearly all human action, in effect, wrong. It makes little sense, though, to speak plainly of what is uncommon. In terms of things in the universe, blonde hair and blue eyes are relatively uncommon. The commonness or uncommonness of something is always relative to a set of objects. From the perspective of the history of the universe, human products such as Depakote are



uncommon, but lithium does not seem to be much more common. Further, highly common organisms, like harmful bacteria, seem to carry no particular goodness, but a relatively uncommon product like efavirenz, used to treat AIDS in Africa, seems to carry particular goodness. It seems quite a mistake to say that something is wrong just because it is uncommon. After all, many acts that are thought to elevate one to sainthood are certainly uncommon. Take the example of taking a bullet to save another person: this is certainly a highly uncommon act but also certainly morally praiseworthy. There seems to be nothing wrong in particular with an uncommon act, and in some cases the uncommonness of an act is exactly what recommends that act for goodness. It also seems wrong that a thing be called good just for being common. Murder is becoming increasingly common in many parts of the world. It does not follow that murder is good where it is common.

## The Western Thinker and the Forked Road of Natural and the Unnatural Functions

—from the philosophy of Iktomi

The Western Thinker thinks that all things have a natural function and that this function indicates what we ought to do or what is good. According to Aristotle, nature is an inner principle of change and being at rest (*Physics* 2.1, 192b20–23). The nature of a thing is sufficient to account for its change or being at rest. The final cause always resides within a thing and does not come from anything outside. Everything has a natural end or telos that is in its nature. Aristotle thinks there is an ergon (function) of everything that is directed toward this natural end

or telos that each thing has in its nature. For human beings, this ergon is the rational activity of the soul in accordance with virtue (*Physics* 1097b22–1098a20). Aristotle, unsurprisingly, thinks that rational activity is unique to humans, which is why it can be seen as the function of human beings. Since what is good for a thing is to strive for its own ultimate end and that ultimate end is derived from the unique natural function of a thing, it follows that if the unique natural function of a human being is rational activity, then doing this is a human being's ultimate end and what is good for him.

Iktomi can't help but think about that time that he farted himself into space when he hears the Western Thinker talk about "natural functions." His stomach has never recovered, but he will never forget the lesson his relative timsila (wild turnip) taught him on that day (<http://nagualli.blogspot.com/2012/02/iktomi-farts-himself-into-space-rosebud.html>).

The Christian Western Thinker adds to Aristotle by claiming that nature as a whole is also teleological and created by God, and so when one is pursuing one's natural end, individual interests and overall order are in harmony. Christianity adds to the idea that rationality is the distinctive human function by defining rationality as a capacity to follow God's orders, a capacity that is given to us for our own good. This is the "Divine Corporation" model of ethics, where individuals are part of a cooperative endeavor that is aimed at a supremely valuable good (Schneewind 1984). Each kind of creature has a role to play in realizing this good. Some creatures simply strive in their functioning toward their ends and this goal unaware through divine instinct or whatever, but human beings,

who are the rational ones, are aware of their function by directives from on high, where God infallibly allocates tasks that rational beings can understand as coming from God and as being infallible.

Iktomi thinks his natural functions are infallible, or was it inflatable? Iktomi also thinks is pretty rude to say that spiders only do what they do because of divine instinct. Iktomi says he has always been as capable as anyone of making bad choices of his own accord without the help of anything divine or natural. Well, except that one time that he farted himself into space. But maybe that was not his fault at all and totally something natural.

The Western Thinker created modern mechanistic science, which denied the notion of natural function. From the perspective of mechanistic science, the idea of natural function is seen as a vestige of primitive and prescientific thinking (<http://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Scie/ScieSpas.htm>). The Western Thinker thinks that the teleological biology of Aristotelian ethics makes little sense in the contemporary Western scientific context (Hull and Ruse 1998). Discovering natural facts about human biology that could indicate what is good for humans seems hopeless from the perspective of post-Darwinian biology, which has no capacity, as a feature of its construction, to say anything positive about morality whatsoever. Some Western Thinkers have defended a neo-Aristotelian naturalism in support of modern versions of virtue ethics. One Western Thinker sees moral evaluation as continuous with the evaluation of the excellence of a thing as a thing of its kind. To evaluate something like a plant, this Western Thinker evaluates how it functions toward the ends of survival and reproduction. To evaluate certain types of animals, she

adds freedom from pain and the enjoyment of certain pleasure indicative of the species. In evaluating social animals, like humans, the function of the group is also considered (Hursthouse 1999). All of these evaluations of excellence are thought to be based on facts about how well a thing is functioning toward its own end.

Iktomi thinks the idea that evaluation of the excellence of a thing as a thing rather than the evaluation of how things are going for me from my perspective was rejected as carrying no moral weight by the Western Thinker in the debate on the possibility of nonhuman intrinsic value. Iktomi thinks the Western Thinker is back in the same spot of trying to defend nonanthropocentric value in a context where all value is foundationally and self-congratulatorily human.

A dancing bee who finds nectar and does not dance to alert the other bees can be seen as defective (Foot 1995), but the Western Thinker does not see this defect as a moral one.

Iktomi wonders why human beings don't evaluate themselves as morally defective in the same way they evaluate bees and spiders.

One Western Thinker uses the example of male cheetahs and male polar bears who do not help their pregnant and vulnerable mates hunt for food. If these male animals did help their mates in these circumstances, they would be seen as defective.

Iktomi wonders whether the Western Thinker will stop calling human males who leave their pregnant mates "deadbeat dads" since

most would think this action is just as natural as the action of the male cheetah or polar bear. Or given that animals naturally engage in same-sex mating, will the Western Thinker stop saying that homosexuality is wrong because it is unnatural. Iktomi thinks that the Western Thinker does not really view the evaluation of natural function on a continuum with human moral evaluation. The Western Thinker's moral evaluation has more impact on the evaluation of natural function than the other way around, Iktomi thinks. The Western Thinker seems to make special consideration for human evaluation that he doesn't extend to nonhumans. Slipping between different kinds of value in the nonhuman to human realms indicates, Iktomi thinks, a continuation of the trickster logic that transforms the individual Western Thinker into the entire world.

## Indigenous Moral Naturalism through Locality

The second sense of naturalness (the artificial/inartificial form) has had the clearest role in the coloniality of power as it operates through delocality over Indigenous people and Indigenous land. Western ecologists use this form of the natural/unnatural dichotomy in determining the stability and functioning of a particular ecosystem. The idea is that if I am trying to understand human impact on ecosystems, then it might benefit me to attempt a separation between human impact as artificial and other nonhuman impacts as inartificial. If this is meant to be a distinction in the nature of things rather than a more pragmatic distinction, it is much more problematic. Unless it is shown that human impact on the environment is somehow unnatural or that humans are somehow

unnatural and not part of their environment, it will not do to simply rename human actions and products as unnatural. But to conceptualize humans as separate from their environments is a function of delocality, and to see Native people as embedded in their environment as savages or animals and so not fully human is a function of coloniality and the narrative of colonial difference. The manner in which the labels of natural and unnatural can be arbitrarily applied to Native people depending on the particular wishes of the colonial powers reveals the delocality and coloniality of this framework from the start. Before the creation of national parks in the United States, for example, the land upon which Native people lived was seen as wilderness because of the fact that Native people inhabited it, but when the United States decided it wanted to set aside these areas for the undisturbed enjoyment of American tourists, a new concept of wilderness was born where Native people were no longer a natural part of these places, and so must be removed (Spence 2000). This is why Black Elk in 1929 laments that in creating the Badlands National Park, the United States is making separate “little islands” for Native people far removed from the “other little islands for the four-leggeds” (Neihardt 1932, 9). When the land of Black Elk’s people was put into protective status so as to preserve its natural state, the Native people who had until recently been seen as part of what made these lands savage and wild were banished from the land in order to protect its wilderness state. The arbitrary assignment of natural and then unnatural to Native people as a function of the process of coloniality reveals a remainder of locality that is always left over no matter how hard the colonizer tried to inject the abstracted European delocality onto the Indigenous land. In this case, the anomaly is humans are both natural animals from the delocalized science of biology and unnatural from the delocalized science

of ecology. This attempted contradiction through delocality reveals the fact of colonial difference in the land, which is merely the ill-fittedness of coloniality through delocality onto the Indigenous locality, land. The fact of colonial difference is marked through the absorption of this seeming contradiction (being both natural and unnatural) in the context of locality. From Black Elk's perspective of his people and their land (his locality), the people and the land are both natural and unnatural: His people "were happy . . . and seldom hungry" when "the two-leggeds and the four-leggeds lived together like relatives, and there was plenty for them and for us" (Neihardt 1932, 9).

The fact of colonial difference articulates the difference in locality between the nature of Native moral naturalism and the Western concepts discussed above. An interesting place to start to clarify the nature of Native moral naturalism is with uranium. Uranium, like lithium, is a natural substance in the sense that it is not produced by humans. It is well known, of course, that uranium is dangerous to human beings and the environment and has had a sordid and tragic and toxic legacy in the settler colonial history of the United States (Eichstaedt 1994). It is also interesting that the poignant descriptions of the problems of mining uranium from the perspective of Native people focus on ideas of moral naturalness. In the Southwest, Native people have known for a very long time that mountains in the area had special rocks that were part of what imparted them with their power. Western people discovered that these rocks were uranium and decided to mine the mountains. Native elders say that they warned the Westerners not to remove the rocks from the sacred mountains, that doing so was wrong and dangerous. Westerners mined the mountains on Indian land anyway, and even still do to this day. The result has, of course, been devastating. There are water sources in the

Southwest that are toxically contaminated by uranium (water I spent the better part of my childhood drinking). Thomas Banyacya Sr., Hopi elder and interpreter for the Kikmongwis (Hopi spiritual leaders), reports that the Hopi prophecy warns of this future from time immemorial. The Hopi prophecy warns that people will come and take these rocks and build a gourd full of ash, which he interprets as the atomic bomb (Hopi Tribe 2014). In the Native discussions of such, it is seen that doing wrong things will of course bring harm. But the focus of the discussion is always on the manner in which the action is performed that determines if it is a good thing. Native people often talk about doing things “in a good way” or not doing things “in a good way.” As we shall soon see, this is where naturalness and right action connect in Native thought.

It is clearly not wrong to mine and use uranium because it is artificial like Depokate is. Uranium is more like lithium in this regard. It might be thought that the problem with uranium is the unnatural removal of it from the sacred mountains where it belongs: its being there is a part of its natural function. This too does not quite account for the Native moral approach to uranium. What Banyacya and other Native elders stress is the treatment of the mountains and the rocks (uranium) that are in them. They say removing the rock is not treating the mountain or the rock respectfully, not respecting the relationship between humans and the mountains. This manner of speaking is the norm regarding many natural objects that are thought to be quite harmful. Tobacco, for instance, is believed to be quite harmful to humans. Tobacco is of course quite natural in the sense of being inartificial and so ought to be a good in that sense. One might say that smoking or ingesting tobacco is not in line with natural human functioning and so bad in that sense. Native elders do not speak in any of these ways. The sense is that smoking or ingesting



tobacco is not harmful. What is bad is not respecting tobacco. Not acting with respect can of course bring harm as not respecting tobacco can cause harm, but it is not the harm that causes these actions to be bad. Relating to tobacco improperly is wrong because it is improper. In the context of locality, the question is not what makes such action wrong in general—in delocality—but what are the conditions of my proper relationship to tobacco in particular.

From a Native perspective, the business of actually figuring out what path I ought to walk through life is wrapped up in talk of relationships, respect, reciprocity, kinship, and the like. An understanding of who you are and who I am in the broadest sense of story and metaphor helps determine the context of our relationship. An understanding of who I am in the context of my particular place helps determine what sorts of actions are respectful and what sorts are not, which makes it difficult to create universal statements of moral relationship and leads to many of the ridiculous interpretations of Native moral claims. It is the locality of morality. Reciprocity is the nature of relationality in the context of locality. Relationality is always between an I and a Thou in locality. The dual agency of reciprocity is the very context, then, of relationality itself. Relationships are never one-sided. You are a Thou to me, and I am a Thou to you. I have my place (my extended relationships in the ecosystem or community that we share), and you have your place. The agency required by relationships is not determined by the kind of facilities a thing has—in particular, the delocalized facilities that only humans seem to possess. Agency is something much more basic.

Morality, just like subjectivity in Buber's Thou, cannot be brought under a universal in locality. Morality is then not theoretical, at least in the Western sense of that term. Creating abstract moral theories

that conceal concrete relationships is a primary function of morality in delocality. From the layers of the fact of colonial difference, moral theorizing in the Western sense also conflicts with always already being in motion of relationality itself. One cannot speak of what is right to do through delocality since relationships, respect, and reciprocity are only manifested through locality. Trying to make rules for all human relations and then stretching these same rules, or even making new ones to cover all animal or environmental relations, is only possible under the philosophy of delocality. This sort of morality cannot account for morality in locality since in that sense morality is in the land—it is an originary and continual manifestation in the land. The argument often lodged against morality in locality—that the development of massive and complex societies necessitated the creation of laws and related delocalized concepts of morality—is a function of coloniality in the sense that, at root, it is simply a defense of the delocality necessary to create and maintain the power and structure necessary for the coloniality of power that shapes this very world system that the argument defends. Also, the argument defends an abstraction of locality—a delocalized locality—of the Euro-Christian perspective that rationality is the capacity to follow laws issued by God and then the state as the form of natural law. The “Divine Corporation” model of ethics delocalizes itself in the assumption that rule-following is a necessary feature of all human moral psychology. Within Indigenous locality, this is not an inherent feature of morality itself or of moral relations. The fractionalization of societies, arising from coloniality and delocality, to the point that moral relations between individuals appear more like relations between warring states so that delocalized following of rules through human rationality is necessary to maintain order, is not seen as a necessary outcome of morality in locality. From a perspective of

Native locality, the social unit is structurally unified through bottom-up unity. Even beyond the problems with massive societies with complex internal social relations, the original sin myth that paints humans as inherently evil and not to be trusted, so that laws that tell them what to do are necessary in order to maintain order and control this inherent evil of the state of nature, is a function of coloniality and the narrative of colonial difference. It is not simply a different morality in locality because the ideas are abstracted into delocality as a power necessary for coloniality itself. Within Indigenous locality, there is no reason to suspect that my relations are malicious. This perspective of trust within locality is one of the reasons why Native people kept talking peace and making treaties with the United States even though the United States broke every treaty it made with them. Native morality had no context for the kind of continual and willful maliciousness that is created and maintained by coloniality because such continual and willful maliciousness requires a delocalized view of relationality that is self-defeating and so irrational. Morality that is delocalized and based in abstracted laws must necessarily deny trust in my relations because relationality has been delocalized, which means that relationality as such is destroyed and in its place a manufactured and illusional concept of mere relationality is imagined. Relationality that is based in Thou-based agency and reciprocity cannot and need not function under abstract and universalized moral laws. Human morality that is based in mere relationality, alternatively, becomes focused on capitulating to laws—rules to follow that determine my moral choices for me in advance.

Law, in the Indigenous locality, is about values. In Cherokee, the word for law is ᎠᎵᏍᎠᎵᏍᎠᎵ (*dikanowadvsdi*), but this word has little to do with rule-following and the determinations of moral choices in advance.

*Dikanowadvsdi* are values or teachings, and one of these teachings, *duyugtv iditlv datsadesehesdesdi*, ᏍᏎᏎᏎ ᏎᏎᏎ ᏎᏎᏎᏎᏎᏎᏎᏎᏎ, instructs the Cherokee locality to direct one another in the right way, which is without confinement or coercion. This teaching specifically guides me to not push people in one direction or another—that the choice of understanding, doing right, and so on, must be up to you. There is no coercion, then, in Cherokee law and morality, and the people are taught ᏎᏎᏎᏎᏎᏎᏎᏎᏎ, *detsadatliyvsedi*, “to struggle to hold on to one another or cling to one another” and ᏎᏎᏎᏎᏎᏎ ᏎᏎᏎᏎᏎᏎᏎᏎᏎ, *ulisgedi detsadayelvsedi*, “to treat each other’s existence as being sacred.”

In Navajo, the phrase “it’s up to her” is also fundamental to the legal and moral fabric of Navajo locality and is violated by the “punishment or correction of a person” (Yazzie 2005, 2743 of 8358). Navajo morality is expressed by the form “Do things in a good way,” but this is not an abstraction into delocality but a reference to morality in locality itself. Chief Justice Robert Yazzie writes, “as Indians, we know what it means to do things in a good way.” It is “the people’s shared values” in Navajo locality “that fill in the broad term of law” (2623 of 8358). In the Navajo locality, these values are centered around *k’e* (solidarity, respect, reciprocity, and more). This centers morality in relationships, relatives, and relationality. In Navajo locality, as Yazzie points out, I introduce myself by clan, which is an extended family network of relationships, which contextualizes my current relationality within the traditional Navajo legal system. This extends to the Navajo teaching to “treat strangers like they were a relative” (2638) and the notion of an offender, which is what is said of a person who “acts as if he has no relatives.” The example of the operations that Yazzie gives of Navajo morality in locality subverts morality in delocality in the strongest way: “a [Navajo] man stole a woman’s blanket and jewelry

at a dance so he could sell them and buy wine. The woman suspected the man and confronted him the next day. He immediately admitted what he had done and gave the woman enough sheep to make up for the loss.” This exemplifies morality in locality where what is right is to “act in a good way,” without any instructions on how this would necessarily function across localities or in broad circumstances.

Part of this trust in locality is the result of the sense of “it’s up to her” as it appears in locality. The point is that only from the perspective of delocality can simply following some rules that are laid down for me be considered being moral. If there is nothing particularly moral about my actual choosing, then there is nothing particularly moral about my actions. Only from a delocalized perspective can one view the operations of acting according to moral rules within a locality as having any moral import. From within locality, it is through the morality of my choosing and action that creates the context of being moral. Just like the sort of radical empiricism that permeates Native languages and epistemology, what is right to do really is best specified in the very particular context wherein the relationships that determine such are actualized, and not through a delocalized general formula that both limits my understanding of relationships in locality but also limits the actual morality of my choosing and acting.

As claimed in the previous chapter, from a Native perspective value is only such in relation so that in the abstract everything has all the value there is (everything is sacred). But things, human or otherwise, are not abstract and so are always in a deep I/Thou relation from the start. I can never be out of relation with that to which I am related. (This is why I have argued elsewhere that Native science and philosophy are internal: there can be no separation between simply coming to know and then doing

something good or bad with that knowledge. I am always in relation, and so everything I do, even my search for knowledge and the manner in which it is carried out, holds moral weight [see Burkhart 2004].) Figuring out what to do is based on understanding one's relations, which is also what and who one is, since, like value, individuals are not what they are in isolation. Native science is the tool for understanding this deep relationality, which is the connectedness and relatedness of and between things. Native science is very different than Western science, however, in large part because of the sense that one can never be out of relation—that knowledge is always kept in locality. The manner in which one goes about finding knowledge is in relation. Knowledge is then always internal in locality. I figure out what to do while I am doing it. Just like a jazz musician playing a solo who cannot stop the song to figure out what the right note is to play next, I cannot stop my life, my relations, to figure out what the right act is to do next. Knowledge is always knowledge-in-relation, and so attempting to abstract it out of relation, to delocalize knowledge, is an attempt to obscure the actual foundation of knowledge in locality. Native natural science, then, as the science of deep relationality, founds morality in locality. This creates a kind of moral naturalism for Indigenous morality since part of the definition of moral naturalism was the founding of morality in natural science.

Another way to look at this is through the perspective that all my relations are sacred; they all carry the same weight, and none can be ignored. But an understanding of how I am related to things gives a shape to the web. Things have a place on the web, as my relations. I cannot forget the metaphor of the web of life and its power to imbue all things with a sacredness, and so I must make my reflections of how to act properly with my relatives against this background. I must see myself as

an agent, but not an active agent in relation to passive things but an agent among agents. This is part of coming to terms with what I am in concrete locality. What I am is a thing-in-relation and not an isolated thing that can come into relations or not. Part of the point of Native elders using the concepts of the “natural” is to point to this relational agency as the basic, “natural” context of all things. Just as I do not think of myself as an agent among passive things when I attempt to understand my relations with the humans around me, I ought to understand all of my relations as agent-relations. Think about the context of my relationships with other humans: I understand my friend is having a bad day and that when I am around her I cheer her up. I do not simply grab her and drag her by my side even though it might in some sense be thought to be in her best interest. I talk to her, and perhaps I find out that today it might be better for her to simply lie down and take a nap. Suppose she knew that my being around would cheer her up, she could not on pains of destroying the very relational context that provided the cheering grab me and drag me to her side to cheer her up. I have to choose to come to her freely in order for the benefit of my coming to be realized. I ought to think of and operate in in terms of all my moral relations in locality with this same framework in mind and practice.

Two basic ideas of Native moral naturalism, then, are these: (1) Native science founds Native morality, and (2) all relations are relations between agents. Let us first examine premise (2). The idea that all relations are relations between agents is founded on the metaphysics of chapter 5. Our experiential relations to things are as agents. This is not based on a theory about what people are or even what agents are in delocality but arises from an experiential relationship with the things around us. Charles Eastman relates an experience from his boyhood among

his Lakota people in the late nineteenth century. He and his uncle were hunting a deer when they encountered a coyote. After his uncle had killed the deer and hung it on a tree, there came all manner of yelps and yips from the forest, as if an entire pack of coyotes had surrounded them. With a bit of investigation, they found it to be a lone coyote who had been running in circles around them kicking up dirt and making the various noises to imitate an entire pack (Eastman 1971). Eastman's experience and his retelling of this experience to us give us the context for understanding coyote. These intelligent actions must not be denied to coyote because we do not have a place for them to fit into an already existing theory of animals or the coyote species. Deloria comments on this story in comparison to Western models of thought:

We are taught to believe from the very beginning that animals have no feelings, emotions, or intellect. We assume that they function by "instinct," but this word only covers up our ignorance of the capabilities of animals. This incident is very rare, it could possibly be observed only once in a lifetime by a very small percentage of people. . . . Empirically, it is possible as reported by an observer meeting all the requirements of the coyote world. (2004, 7)

There are many stories and continual experience of relational agency to nonhumans in Indigenous locality. In the *inipi*, the Lakota sweat ceremony, the rocks are the first people in Lakota stories and the first items brought into the lodge. The hot rocks are then doused with water, which are the second people in these stories of distant time. The sweat then pores from the people's bodies back down to *Unci Maka* (Grandmother Earth), the third being in creation. The humans, rocks, *Unci Maka*,



and water come into, once again, a very ancient relationship—not as a reenactment but as a coming together again of the exact same thing from earliest times. The humans are sitting pitifully before the oldest beings on the planet, offering their water back to these most basic of life-giving and healing beings. These relationships and the power or agency of these beings are not something that comes through Western-style scientific investigation but are experienced in the relationships one has with these beings, here, in the locality of ceremony but also in the stories of all these beings since time immemorial. This is all the evidence one needs to come to know these beings as agents, as people.

The context for understanding moral relationships, of any kind, is, then, kinship. All beings around us are our relatives, not simply in some metaphorical sense where we understand inanimate, lifeless objects as somehow related to us, but in the fullest sense of moral relationships between agents, between people. Kinship is, I would argue, the primary mode for understanding all behavior, concepts, powers (even to heal), and the like in a Native philosophical worldview. For example, concepts like virginity or two-spirited when used by Native people express issues of relationality and kinship. Virginity, it would seem, has very little to do with sexual relations but more to do with kinship relations. When the young girls are shamed for losing their virginity in Ella Deloria's novel about nineteenth-century life among the Dakota, *Waterlily*, the shame is not from a sexual act but from the entering into a frivolous kinship relation. Being a two-spirit, in the same manner, has little to do with sexuality but to do with the gender roles one takes on in relation to one's kin. Two-spirits in traditional Navajo culture were considered very rich because they had the ability to enter into a variety of kinship relations. Healing is also always about kinship. In Navajo medicine ways,

the person being prayed for or, more literally, “sung over” is instructed to sit directly on a sand painting that is made of one or some of the holy people or healing powers of the universe. The idea is that by doing so and in the right way, with the right songs, prayers, and so forth, one will reestablish a kinship relation with these healing powers and so create the possibility for healing. It should not come as a surprise that morality would be understood also in terms of kinship.

The founding of Native morality in Native science connects Native naturalism to current trends in Western naturalism. Western philosophical moral naturalism is rather different from any of the popular concepts of moral naturalism I have attempted to describe. It is a metaethical view meant to cohere with current trends of naturalism in metaphysics and epistemology more generally. Naturalism in philosophy as a current trend takes Western science as a foundation. Daniel Dennett, for example, argues that natural selection is a universal acid that can eat through any dogma. He points out that the idea of natural selection had been born as an answer to questions in biology, but it leaked out to questions in cosmology and psychology (1996, 63).

Native moral naturalism has little connection to these Western technical issues. It is true, however, that Native moral naturalism is deeply connected to Native science. Native science, as was clear in the case of coyote’s attempt to steal the deer and with rocks in the ceremony, does not limit the kinds of things that can be justifiably used in reflecting about morality in the way that Western moral naturalism does. Native science is in part a first-personal and ongoing reflection with deference to the past and all that has been experienced (by oneself, shared by others, or passed down in story) while leaving the future open (there is no future experience that is ruled out) regarding the right path to walk through

life. Native science is a part, then, of Native morality. One of the things that I come to understand when reflecting in this way is that I am related to all the beings (including rocks and trees) around me, and that they are alive in this relation. The question regarding what is alive or what is an agency in isolation, a question that is often raised by philosophers, does not arise since the metaphor under the metaphor of life and agency is relationship or kinship. When Luther Standing Bear describes the kinship that arises from being in a natural relation to things in the beginning of this chapter, what he is referencing are the actions that arise out of this understanding of our relationships to things based on Native science. I am being unnatural, primarily, when I am not acting with awareness of and respect for my kinship with the things around me.

This way of understanding naturalness paints a very different picture than those given in the beginning of this chapter. There is nothing about uranium or lithium that makes them natural in this sense. Naturalness, like so many concepts I have described, is based on kinship; it is a relation, not a property of something. Tobacco is not natural, but it is how I act toward this relation, with respect toward our kinship, that makes my relations natural or unnatural. When I act unnaturally toward tobacco (when I do not treat it with respect) it is rather harmful to me, but it is not the harmfulness that makes the action bad. I am acting disrespectfully and so behaving badly. It does not matter to the wrongness of this action that there is a consequence to such bad behaving in this case, but it is only possible to receive the benefit of kinship by acting respectfully, as in the case of my sad friend to whom I can bring cheer. When we apply this notion of naturalness back to notions that lithium, willow bark, or whatever is natural and so better, we find little support for this notion. It is not that one is using something that occurs in nature without human

interference that makes something natural. It is the relation of respect toward the kinship we have with something, be it natural in this other sense or not, that makes our actions natural. It is not puzzling, then, when elders said to me as a child that I was treating my blanket or my toys unnaturally. I did not treat them with the respect that toys and blankets are to have as the kinds of kin they are to me, and so I was not treating them naturally—that is, I did not understand how they were related to me and how that relationship called out to me for a moral response. What is referred to as “natural medicine” in Western culture is also not natural in the Native sense. When one takes a plant and grinds it up into particular compounds that are believed to have effects that we desire, and places these compounds in bottles on a shelf for people to consume, there is nothing natural about this from a Native perspective. Where is the relationship to the plant as one’s kin? The healing power of the plant is akin to the healing power of my being able to cheer up my sad friend. In order to receive the healing power from my relationship, I must ask it what it wants to give to me and not simply take what I think I should have from it if I am to act naturally, to act out of respect for our kinship. Giving, as intertwined with receiving in the metaphor of reciprocity as the form of relationships between agency, provides the material form of agency. I show my respect and understanding of our relationship as mutual agents by giving or giving back, through reciprocity. When I take leaves from a plant for medicine, I might, as a Chumash medicine woman instructed me in the Indigenous locality here in California, give back to the plant some of my hair as I am taking its. This is the material expression of our moral relationship as agents.

In order to figure out what is right for me in my path, I must start with an attitude of respect. This attitude first arises from the background

context of universal sacrality. I am fully aware in my reflections on my particular relationships that all things near me now or at a far distance removed are connected together on this web of life and are each one imbued with the sacredness and seriousness that this provides. Moral reflection and even moral action all arise from this attitude of respect. Universal sacrality provides the foundation of the initial attitude. In my search for the right path to walk for me as a human or for the right relations between a human community and its broader nonhuman relatives, I must extend my reflections beyond the mere sacredness of all my relations to the particularity of those relationships. This particularity is kinship. When the Cree bands of James Bay drafted a petition to the Canadian government to ask for an end to the plans to build a massive hydroelectric power plant, they rested their case on the following proposition: “We . . . oppose . . . these projects because we believe that only the beavers [have] a right to build dams in our territory” (Quoted in Desbiens, 43-44). The moral claim was not meant to express some abstract relationship between all people and animals or even all people and all beavers, but to say something about the particular kinship morality of the humans of James Bay and those beavers in that locality. The understanding of this kinship relationship required a lot of knowledge to build up over a long time in the story of those people and those animals. The people had to understand the history and meaning of the place, the plants, the animals, and themselves as far back as time immemorial. The people had to understand the meaning of the Native science story of these relationships, which is often expressed with the metaphor of older (animals and plants) to younger (humans) siblings. As our older brothers and sisters, the animals and plants provide us with guidance and nourishment. We humans, the story continues,

are very young and naive in relation even to our closest relatives. This natural knowledge story provides moral guidance for humans in their search for the right path to walk in life. The James Bay Cree understood this kinship relationship with their neighbors, the beavers, and they understood the beaver's place in that ecosystem they shared. This relationship the beavers had with that place developed over millions of years, even millions of years before humans arrived at that place to establish kinship. This is what forms the foundation of the claim made by the Cree that those rivers were only supposed to be dammed by the beavers. The particularity of these kinship relations provides a context for better understanding the often misunderstood and misappropriated words from Indian people. When the Wintu women speaks of her and her people's relationship to their place such that chopping down trees is inappropriate, and when Smohalla of the Paiute people refuses to plow as to not "take a knife and tear my mother's bosom" or to harvest as to not "cut my mother's hair and sell it," one should not understand their statements as universal ethical claims. They express particular kinship relations that those people have to that place, their community in that locality. When the Seneca establish the kinship with the three sisters (corn, beans, and squash), they have accepted a different relational role between their people and their place—its plants, soil, and so on. In their kinship relations, these plants, their sisters, provide for them by allowing their "hair" or their "children" (the corn, beans, and squash that come from these plants) to be sacrificed in order to sustain their young relatives, the Seneca. Alternatively, the Seneca might not understand the kinship relationship that Plains Indian people have with the buffalo, where they do little planting and do not have the same kinship relations with plants and the soil, but depend in a similar sense

on the buffalo nation, *Tatanka Oyate*, sacrificing its members in order to sustain their little brothers and sisters, the Lakota people. The point is that these issues about the “naturalness” of certain activities ought not be understood as providing a basis for a universal ethic but rather should be understood as the expression of particular kinship relations and the obligations that arise from the creation of kinships.

Kinship has a regulative role similar to completeness. Kinship is not something that is automatic, like those who head to the wilderness to commune with their brother the bear or whatever. Kinship is something that must be established within a local community of beings (animals, rocks, and trees). Humans must find and establish their kinship relationships with those beings in order for the community to come together as a bottom-up unity. The general concepts of brother, sister, cousin, and so on are only metaphors of beginning—just as sacredness is only the starting place. Both sacredness and general kinship terms mark our attitude and approach to the search for our right path and right relationships.

Completeness also has a further regulative wrinkle in the expression of its layers of meaning. Just as the establishment of kinship creates a context for continual moral response, the completeness ideal requires continual examinations of the continuity of things, places, and so on. Deloria tells us that “spiritual aspect of knowledge about the world taught the people that relationships must not be left complete,” and that in “stories about how the world came to be . . . the common themes . . . are the completion of relationships and the determination of how this would should function” (2001, 23). An Indigenous Hawaiian friend of mine told me a story about something that happened while he was doing construction on the big island. Just before his crew was about to begin breaking ground for a new housing complex, one of the elders from the

local community asked to do a ceremony for the place. In this ceremony, he asks permission of the place to take on the housing of these buildings and the new lives of the people who would be there, but he also attempted in actions and prayers to connect the new shape this place would take with all the other shapes, events, rocks, plants, animals, and the like that were there and had been there. The continuity of relationships is embedded in the goal of completeness, and the continuity of relationships is the power of locality. All new relationships must be continuous with the other relationships that brought this new relationship into being. This is why when a singer is taught a song or a medicine person is given medicine, they always tell the people who taught them the song and where it comes from and its meaning or tell the people who gave them the medicine when they use the song or the medicine. This continuity of relationship is demanded by the goal of completeness. No relationship, meaning, or being can be ignored if we are to move forward with the greatest possible sustainable unity.

### The Place of Kinship Relations in Western Environmental Ethics: The Future of Indigenous Morality in Locality

Regardless whether my readers are able to grasp the Native moral philosophies with all their nuances, there seem to be many surface-level conclusions that environmental ethicists might find useful. The issue of sustainability as a fundamental feature of epistemology and communities even before environmental policies might prove rather useful to thinking about what sustainability is and ought to be within the



confines of Western environmental ethics. The spiritual or attitudinal approach to ecology might also prove inspirational. Native people do not place the emphasis of their thought of environmental ethics on the foundations of material resources. Recycling and resource management will never truly address what is really at issue in what we describe as our “environmental crisis.” Of course, Native people understand that material resources can be depleted or that animals and plants can become extinct. However, their insight into the cause of these depletions and extinctions might prove insightful. For Native people, the disappearing of plants and animals is often the result of human treatment of these plants and animals, and just as the Ghost Dancers on the plains in the late 1800s believed in the return of the buffalo, Native people believe that these plants and animals might return if the people changed their attitudes and behaviors. The deeper insight is in the attitude of respect that Native philosophy puts much emphasis upon. It seems useful to think of the leaving of the plant and animal entities as a result of our disrespectful attitudes toward them. Even if one cannot see beyond the literalness of plants and animals being offended by our disrespect and going away, one surely can see that the root of the problems that cause extinctions brought about by humans is in the attitudes we take and in particular the lack of respect in our attitudes toward our relatives.

In addition to the debates regarding the importance and nature of value as it relates to the environment, Indigenous moral philosophy can provide helpful insight, I believe, into a number of other entrenched debates. One is the debate over the objects of environmental worth and relation. There has been great debate over just what sorts of things ought to carry the weight of moral worth and relation in environmental philosophy. There are those who argue that individuals are the primary

objects of value. Nicholas Agar claims, for example, that the worth of a species is accounted for by the worth of the individuals that make up that species (1995). Holmes Rolston III argues that species are the foundation of worth since they carry biological potential and the possibilities even of individuals within a species (1975). John Rodman claims that an ecological community has a good of its own that is not based merely on the collective goods of its individuals (1977). In addition to these debates between holism and individualism, there are issues that arise with many of the attempts to define what makes an individual, species, or ecosystem valuable. If one defines this value in terms of being goal oriented, for example, critics will say that many machines are goal oriented (guided missiles, chess-playing computers, thermostatic heaters, and so on) but, whatever environmental value turns out to be, critics say that machines cannot have it.

In addition to the problems I have raised with placing the foundations of environmental ethics on the determination of object of value, there are important points that a relational or kinship ethics could make in regard to these debates. This point cuts across this field of issues: our relations are always to individuals or persons even when our relations are species and ecosystems. We do not have relationships to ecosystems as a collection of individuals; we have relationships to ecosystems as individuals. The point is that we have possible kinship relations to many sorts of individuals or relatives. One might be a particular plant in my backyard, one might be a particular mountain (made up of millions of individual plants, bugs, pieces of dirt, animals, fungal spores, and so on), one might be the coyote that roam the hills, but at each level of my relationships to these things and even things within things (the coyote may very well live on the mountain after all), I am relating to

and understanding my kinship relation regarding an individual agent, however simple or complex that individual to whom I am relating is. A similar comment can be made about the worry that we might accidentally give machine or artificial items environmental value and thereby undermine our claim to such value: we relate to machines and artificial things too. Only if we worry about conforming to abstract categories of environmental object, simple objects, or artificial objects will any of these worries arise. One of the very important relatives in many Native localities is the drum. The drum forms the center and coming-together of people and sings the heartbeat of Mother Earth for the people. But this relative is made by human beings. This becomes a worry only if we are attempting to place categories of value on categories of things. If we take our relationship as the primary mode of moral reflection, we need not worry about any of these abstract categories under which the objects of our relationships might be subsumed. All our relationships can be an I/Thou. The relationship I have with my drum, the drum that I have made, is different, of course, than the relationship I have with animals or plants that provide me with food or with the relatives in my human communities that sustain me as well, but this does not change the fact that I do relate to it and so must treat it with respect as the relative that it is. I must understand how this drum is my kin and treat it with respect. I must approach my relationship with it and my understanding with this attitude of respect no matter what sort of thing it is. However, the thing it is helps determine what particular actions I ought to take in relation to it and in what particular manner is it my kin. This is not different for the drum, for tobacco, for the mountain I see to the north, or for the bear that teaches me about the Osha root medicine or can just as well eat me. The particulars of respect for any one of these kin are determined by our

relationship and by all of the other relationships that go into any particular engagement within that kinship relationship. Future reflection on and further application of these concepts to other areas of environmental ethics seem set to provide an interesting context for very different and perhaps very useful and insightful discussions about morality.