

WEEK ONE

Introduction

This earth....
I never damage,
I look after.
Fire is nothing,
just clean up.
When you burn,
New grass coming up.
That mean good animal soon....
might be goose, long-neck turtle, goanna, possum.
Burn him off....
new grass coming up,
new life all over.

I don't know about white European way.
We, Aborigine, burn....
Make things grow.
Tree grow,
every night he grow.
Daylight....
he stop.
Just about dark....
he start again.
Just about morning I look.
I say,
'Oh, nice tree this.'

When you sleep,
tree growing like other trees....
they got lots of blood.

Rotten tree....
you got to burn him.
Use him to cook.
He's finished up....
cook or roast in coals.
White European cook in oven....
from university that.
Aborigine didn't know that before.
Now all this coming up with Toyota.

First people come to us,
they started and run our life.... quick.
They bring drink.
First they should ask about fish, cave, dreaming, but....
they rush in.
They make school.... teach.
Now Aborigine losing it,
losing everything.
Nearly all dead my people,
my old people gone.

Those first people was too quick,
wasn't Aborigine fault.
Still Aborigine all around 1929....
1952, 1953 few left but....
1970 to 1979.... gone.
Only me, Robin Gaden and Felix Holmes.

Each man he stay....
stay on his own country.
He can't move his country....
so he stay there,
stay with his language.
Language is different....
like skin.
Skin can be different,
but blood same.
Blood and bone....
all same.
Man can't split himself.

White European can't say
'Oh, that Aborigine no good.'
Might be that Aborigine alright.
Man can't growl at Aborigine,
Aborigine can't growl at white European....
Because both ways.
Might be both good men,
might be both no good....
you never know.

So you should get understand yourself.
No matter Aborigine or white European.
I was keeping this story myself.
It was secret in my mind,
but I see what other people doing,
and I was feeling sad.

Land

People....
they can't listen for us.
They just listen for money....
money.

We want goose, we want fish.
Other men want money.
Him can make million dollars,
but only last one year.
Next year him want another million.
Forever and ever him make million dollars....
him die.

Million no good for us.
We need this earth to live because....
we'll be dead,
we'll become earth.

This ground and this earth....
like brother and mother.

Trees and eagle....
you know eagle?
He can listen.
Eagle our brother,
like dingo our brother.

We like this earth to stay,
because he was staying for ever and ever.

We don't want to lose him.
We say 'Sacred, leave him.'

Goanna is dead because they cutting its body off us,
cutting our mother's belly,
grandpa's bones.
They squash him up....
no good,
and carve up our earth....
no good.

We come from earth....
bones.
We go to earth....
ashes.

My children got to hang onto this story.
This important story.
I hang onto this story all my life.
My father tell me this story.
My children can't lose it.

White European want to know....
asking 'What this story?'
This not easy story.
No-one else can tell it....
because this story for Aboriginal culture.

I speak English for you,
so you can listen....
so you can know....
you will understand.
If I put my words (language) in same place,
you won't understand.

Our story is in the land....
it is written in those sacred places.
My children will look after those places,
that's the law.

No-one can walk close to those sacred places.
No difference for Aborigine or white European,
that's the law.
We can't break law.

Old people tell me,
'You got to keep law.'
'What for?' I said.
'No matter we die but that law....
you got to keep it.
No camping in secret place,
no fire there,
no play for kids.
You can't break law.
Law must stay.'

When that law started?
I don't know how many thousands of years.
European say 40,000 years,
but I reckon myself probably was more because....
it is sacred.

Dreaming place....
you can't change it,
no matter who you are.
No matter you rich man,
no matter you king.
You can't change it.

We say that's secret because dreaming there.
We frightened you might get hurt if you go there....
not only my country but any secret place.
No matter if it Croker Island, Elcho Island, Brisbane or
Sydney.

Wherever, you'll get him same
because that secret place not small.
Secret place is biggest one,
everywhere....
powerful.

We walk on earth,
we look after....
like rainbow sitting on top.
But something underneath,
under the ground....
we don't know....
you don't know.

What you want to do?
If you touch....
you might get cyclone, heavy rain or flood.
Not just here,
you might kill someone in another place.
Might be kill him in another country.
You cannot touch him.

These very important places,
but we frightened that European might touch him.
If we tell white European story,
he slow to listen.
If we get little bit wild,
he might listen....
but slow.

Him got to always ask question.
He want that place.
That's why we frightened.

I worry about that place....
secret place.
That got painting there,
inside cave.
It got to be looked after because
my father, grandad all look after.
Now me,
I got to do same.

If that painting get rubbed off
there might be big trouble.
That important story.
It for all round this area.
That biggest story....
biggest place.

My grandpa teach me.
That painting is true.
Fish, python, goose,
all painting there.
Grandpa say
'You see painting,
Fish.... you got to eat.
Python.... you got to eat.
Mullet.... you got to eat.
Lily, turtle, all same.
They for you.'

That drawing there.... painting,
that's the size fish should be now.
Used to be that size.
I saw them myself.
Used to be that size at Oenpelli.
Need two men to carry one catfish.
That was when I was nearly man....
still young.

Now?....
Little boy can carry catfish.
Should be 50 pounds,
but only 15 pounds.

You can't see big fish anymore,
not at Oenpelli.
People say,
'Plenty fish there.
You see barramundi'
I say
'Yes, pocket fish.'
They say
'What you mean?'
I tell them,
'Pocket fish that barramundi,
little one.
You can put him in your pocket.'

They tell me
'Big catfish....
We got him plenty.'
I say
'Should be ten times size of that.'

We have to keep pressure on young people to learn.
They must learn these things.
I have to stay on to teach my children.
But, young people spread out (go elsewhere, to towns).
It like that everytime we have meetings,
meeting for business (ceremonies).
We make arrangement....
you know.... appointment,
about business, secret.
Young people all in town.

You look now....
nobody with me.
This old man here (Iyanuk, Felix Holmes)
he with me,
but we don't have a dozen behind us....
So, we must stay on....
Look after and teach.

All my uncle gone,
but this story I got him.
They told me....
they taught me....
and I can feel it.

I feel it with my body,
with my blood.
Feeling all these trees,
all this country
When this wind blow you can feel it.
Same for country....
You feel it.
You can look,
but feeling....
that make you.

Feeling make you,
Out there in open space.
He coming through your body.
Look while he blow and feel with your body....
because tree just about your brother or father....
and tree is watching you.

Earth....
like your father or brother or mother,
because you born from earth.
You got to come back to earth.
When you dead....
you'll come back to earth.
Maybe little while yet....
then you'll come to earth.
That's your bone,
your blood.
It's in this earth,
same as for tree.

Tree....
he watching you.
You look at tree,
he listen to you.
He got no finger,
he can't speak.
But that leaf....
he pumping, growing,
growing in the night.
While you sleeping
you dream something.
Tree and grass same thing.
They grow with your body,
with your feeling.

If you feel sore:...
headache, sore body,
that mean somebody killing tree or grass.
You feel because your body in that tree or earth.
Nobody can tell you,
you got to feel it yourself.

Tree might be sick....
you feel it.
You might feel it for 2 or 3 years.
You get weak....
little bit, little bit....
because tree going bit by bit....
dying.

Tree not die when you cut it.
He not die tomorrow,
he still green.
Might be 5 or 6 weeks,
might be 2 months.
You feel it then....
your body....
you feel it.

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PLATO AND THE BUSH

Philosophy and the Environment in Australia

VAL PLUMWOOD

How does philosophy in Australia treat the issue of how humans can or should relate to the natural world? The question is particularly interesting in the light of current interest in the environment, and because of the presence in this country of two cultures, Aboriginal and white, which contrast markedly on the issue of relations to the land. Philosophy in Australia is not simply Western philosophy. On this issue Aboriginal philosophies of nature must be considered. In this article I want to discuss the two Australian philosophical traditions, and the conflict between them, by focusing on two figures, one historical and one contemporary, which will help to crystallize aspects of the opposition in which they stand.

In its background assumptions about the place of nature, Western philosophy in Australia has generally worked within a framework imported from the Western philosophical tradition, and it must be considered in that context. Environmental philosophy is usually treated as a 'new' (and perhaps for that reason somewhat suspect) area. But it is not new: the philosophical tradition — the rationalist tradition especially — has always had a view about nature. It does not always express it clearly or explicitly, or devote much space to it, but as in the case of women, it speaks often by what is not considered, by its silences and its dismissals. What is new is the discussion and questioning of these background assumptions and priorities.

To see this, we can start at the beginning, with Plato, the father of Western philosophy. Plato is usually considered to have no environmental philosophy, apart from a passing reference regarding deforestation in Attica, but this is a misconception deriving from a mistaken idea of what is central in environmental philosophy. Plato's philosophy of nature, the basic elements of which are followed by a succession of rationalist philosophers, can be seen in the *Phaedo*. After identifying the aim of the true philosopher as death and philosophy as the study of

death, and after explaining that true knowledge and purity can only be achieved if we have the 'least possible intercourse or communion with the body' and its foolishness, Plato goes on to give his views on the inferior and corrupt state of the world of nature that we know and see around us. Just as the pure and incorruptible Forms lie beyond the inferior objects that participate in them, so beyond this world we know there is another, which is far, far better, much purer and fairer:

and, if the nature of man could sustain the sight, he would acknowledge that this other world was the place of the true heaven and the true light and the true earth. For our earth, and the stones, and the entire region that surrounds us, are spoilt and corroded, as in the sea all things are corroded by the brine . . .

This other world, which of course lies above our world, and to which ordinary humans have no access, is, he tells us,

decked with various colours, of which the colours used by painters on earth are in a manner samples. But there the whole earth is made up of them, and they are brighter far and clearer than ours . . . and in this fair region everything that grows — trees, and flowers, and fruits — are in a like degree fairer than any here; and there are hills, having stones in them in a like degree smoother, and more transparent, and fairer in colour than our highly valued emeralds and sardonyxes and jaspers, and other gems, which are but minute fragments of them: for there all the stones are like our precious stones, and fairer still. The reason is, that they are pure, and not, like our precious stones, infected or corroded by the corrupt briny elements which coagulate among us, and breed foulness and disease both in earth and stones, as well as in animals and plants.²

According to Plato the world of nature is, quite literally, a hole,³ its condition and status linked to that of the feminine by the metaphor of the Cave and their mutual association with the body. It is also a dump, a place where refuse from the higher world accumulates. Platonic philosophy not only devalues nature but is profoundly anti-ecological and anti-life; it is truly a philosophy of death (as Nietzsche says, but for different reasons). Change itself, the basis of life, is proof of inferiority, and only the changeless immaterial Forms can avoid its contamination. Biological change and decay are viewed with disgust.

Plato's devaluation of nature is consummated by those who come after him in the rationalist tradition, if not always in such an extreme form. It is not that his rationalist successors spend a lot of time setting out or justifying their assumptions: the inferiority of the world of nature, like that of women, is too obvious and its subject too unimportant to be worth much explicit discussion. The assumptions emerge indirectly: what is to be valued in human character and culture, and in the world generally, is not nature and what links humans to nature, but what is disinterred from and sets humans apart from nature, especially rationality.

'The latter has intrinsic value where other things have only instrumental value; as Aquinas puts it, 'the intellectual nature is alone requisite for its own sake in the universe, and all others for its sake'.⁴ The later rationalist traditions of Kant and Descartes continued to emphasize the overriding value of rationality (or of consciousness, which was taken to be closely related) and of its supposed beaters, human beings, who were the only possible objects of moral consideration.

Although the role and status of Reason is now under challenge, recent European philosophy has continued to be preoccupied with an account of the human character and situation that stresses human discontinuity from nature and attributes unique value to humans and human culture. This account no longer turns directly on rationality, but on related characteristics such as consciousness and language. In philosophy generally, a theory's adequacy in dealing with the natural world is no criterion of its acceptability.

These assumptions about the role of nature remained largely unchallenged in philosophy until the early 1970s, when they began to be brought up explicitly for questioning and discussion. This activity flourished especially in Australia, which has been the scene of a number of vigorous intellectual debates on the topic and from which came the first major book on the subject by an academic philosopher – John Passmore's *Man's Responsibility for Nature*, published in 1974. But this was a defence of the Western tradition rather than a challenge to it, and Passmore avoided the issue of the role of philosophy itself, as opposed to wider cultural traditions. Perhaps not surprisingly, given the tradition sketched above, debate on these assumptions takes place largely on the margins of institutionalized academic philosophy, which appears at best to tolerate the debate, and sometimes actively to discourage it. For many individuals, involvement in the area appears to have been a recipe for career disaster. Environmental philosophy, which made promising beginnings in philosophy courses a decade ago, is still not a widespread or accepted part of the philosophy curriculum, and is now taught in just three philosophy departments in Australia (at La Trobe, Wollongong and Flinders universities) and in Social Sciences at Murdoch. The important contribution it can make to interdisciplinary studies is similarly neglected. This treatment hardly reflects the importance of the issues involved, the level of public concern and student interest, or the vigour of the intellectual debate. I believe this neglect can be explained by two factors: the conservatism of philosophy (and indeed the timidity of academia generally), which leads it to resist what is perceived as controversial or radical and therefore possibly 'unscholarly'; and, secondly, the continued influence of the tradition outlined above, which brands nature as too unimportant an area to warrant sustained discussion.

The neglect of nature contributes to the ethnocentrism of current Australian philosophy, since the issue of relationship to the land is

fundamental to many non-Western philosophical traditions, and is often the issue where their distinctive contributions can be most clearly seen. If this issue is seen as marginal, their position is accordingly marginalized. This is especially true of Aboriginal philosophy. Academic philosophy in Australia has failed to set up any sort of dialogue with Aboriginal philosophy. The neglect of nature has also meant that philosophy has cut itself off from addressing one of the most important issues of our time, and, conversely, that there is little philosophical input into the environmental problem, which consequently continues to be addressed as primarily a technological one.

Many of the debates within academic philosophy have taken place in the area of environmental ethics. Ethics has tended to push other aspects of the issue undeservedly into the background; so many philosophers, environmental philosophy is environmental ethics. But themes of relevance to an environmental philosophy can be found in political philosophy, social philosophy, philosophy of mind, epistemology, metaphysics, theories of the self, philosophy of science, feminist philosophy, aesthetics and the history of philosophy – across virtually the whole spectrum of philosophy – and people doing environmental philosophy in Australia have produced work in all these areas. The high profile of ethics is in part a historical accident: this was the first area in environmental philosophy to come to the attention of modern academic philosophers. But it is increasingly apparent that environmental ethics is not explanatorily central; rather, we have to explain positions in environmental ethics by reference to a range of positions in other areas such as theory of the self.

Much of the most significant work in environmental ethics has been produced in Australia. The debate in Australia has centred on the question of the necessity of anthropocentrism or 'human chauvinism', and the defensibility of moral status or intrinsic values for nature. In 1973 the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess and Richard Routley of the Australian National University almost simultaneously proposed that the problem with the Western view of nature lies mainly in its anthropocentrism and its denial that the non-human world has any moral status or other significance that is not reducible to usefulness to humans, their ends and purposes.⁵ Naess and Routley argued that items in nature should be given value and moral consideration on their own account. There were similar suggestions around the same time from several other quarters; with the rise of the environmentalist movement, the idea was obviously in the wind. Both Naess and Routley called for a 'new ethic', and suggested that those parts of the environmentalist movement that really got to grips with the root causes of environmental problems should reject the purely instrumental status that nature had been assigned in Western thought. Naess's position, which he called 'Deep Ecology', has a number of Australian followers, although very few in academic philosophy.⁶

The first critic of these ideas was John Passmore. In the first edition of *Man's Responsibility for Nature* Passmore rejected the 'new ethic' approach as 'identified with nature mysticism, superstition and the view of nature as sacred'. According to Passmore, there is no intellectually defensible alternative to instrumentalism concerning nature, and any ethic regarding the land would have to be justified by reference to human interests.⁷ What is needed is not so much a 'new' ethic as a more general adherence to the 'perfectly familiar ethic' that rejects greed and shortsightedness.

Passmore seems to interpret the call for newness here as requiring that the ethic be without historical roots, something no-one has ever thought of before. But this seems much too strong. There has undoubtedly been a diversity of pre-modern traditions, and especially of minor or resistance traditions, some of which have the seeds of what 'new ethics' calls for. What seems to me to be important is that the dominant tradition in the development of modernity and technological culture has been a thoroughly instrumental one, and that a non-instrumental ethic would represent a major new direction for the culture of modernity. As the dominant approach, it would indeed be 'new', indeed revolutionary. Whether the changes that are needed can be accomplished within an instrumental framework remains one of the main issues in the area of ethics, along with the question of whether anthropocentrism is inevitable.

Anthropocentrism was initially understood mainly as a form of discrimination against animals. Peter Singer's influential *Animal Liberation*⁸ appeared in 1975. Under the slogan 'all animals are equal', Singer argued from a vigorous utilitarian position that anthropocentrism or 'speciesism' was a form of discrimination, analogous to racism and sexism, and should be eliminated. Singer's book made a powerful case against the modern treatment of animals, but his argument is problematic. As well as adopting a utilitarian framework that excluded non-sentient beings from moral consideration, Singer took humans as the ethical norm and argued that human rights should be extended outwards, by assimilating the moral status of animals to that of defective human beings. Though well-intentioned, Singer's argument was implicitly human-centred, in just the same way that early women's movement views often remained male-centred, retaining a male norm by reference to which women's virtue, abilities and opportunities were judged. That discrimination and 'human chauvinism' are no longer the favoured approach to the issue shows that our understanding has undergone some of the same kinds of changes, development and broadening that the women's liberation issue has. The view of the task as simply a matter of obtaining for animals human-style 'equality' is as limited as the view of the task for women as being simply the achievement of equal rights to work and political representation in the public sphere. In both areas, understanding of the problem has developed as a result of its connection to a dynamic social movement,

and through process of discovering still further levels and areas in which the problem is embedded. It seems that environmental philosophy has not yet gone as far in the direction of uncovering these levels as it needs to go, or as feminism has gone; it needs to expand and enrich its account of the problem and, in the process, to displace the centrality of ethics. Challenging anthropocentrism is not just an academic exercise; it involves searching examination of oneself and society.

As the idea caught on that part of the problem was the view of humans as the only items of value or significance in the world, the ranks of those opposing anthropocentrism grew. A number of people (including Routley, Elliot, Godfrey-Smith and myself) argued that such things as wilderness and rare species have a value that is not reducible to the needs or interests of humans or non-human animals, no matter how broadly conceived. They argued that such items deserve respect or moral consideration on their own account, in short that they are intrinsically and not merely instrumentally valuable, and that there is nothing intellectually disreputable about this (*contra* Passmore). Since any theory has to acknowledge intrinsic values somewhere, on pain of infinite regress, and usually simply locates them without explicit consideration or argument in human beings or human works, the dominant ethic already presupposes intrinsic values, and all that is in question is their location in a less arbitrary, prejudiced and self-serving way.

Against the argument that only humans could have rights because only humans were moral agents or capable of reciprocity, proponents of the intrinsic value of the non-human world pointed out that the broader notion of moral consideration should be distinguished from that of rights. They tried to show that human qualities such as rationality or moral responsibility were not necessary for moral consideration, and outlined how an ethic of respectful consideration and use would work in practice, sometimes basing their accounts on the practices of non-Western cultures. They distinguished carefully between the types of moral consideration appropriate to different sorts of beings. As Robert Elliot and Aran Gare write: 'an environmental ethic is an ethic which allows that future generations, nonhuman animals and nonsentient nature are all morally considerable.' They may not be counted considerable in exactly the same ways.⁹ All Australian proponents of the notion distinguished carefully between objective and intrinsic value. If an item has intrinsic value this means that it does not have value solely as a means to some other (usually human) end, but this does not exclude someone's being a valuer of it, or basing the valuation on his or her own perspectives.¹⁰ Environmental philosophers, then, have developed much more sophisticated accounts of the value of the natural world and the reasons to respect it than Mr Kerin seemed to be aware of when he attacked the greens as naïve and irrational.¹¹

Debate on the area, and especially the notion of intrinsic value, is

continuing vigorously.¹² Although the academic debate in Australia still centres around the area of ethics, a number of important issues do not seem able to be settled in a non-arbitrary way within the ethical framework: for example, where does moral consideration end? what are its units? and what lies behind the sort of nature-devaluating view found in Plato?¹³ The popular ethical approach, and especially the approach that simply extends human-style ethics to a bigger class, is the obvious way for Western philosophical systems to try to take account of the problem while minimizing any challenge to their own framework. Perhaps this is why it fails to open up any significant dialogue with Aboriginal worldviews, or to come to grips with the Platonic aspects of the problem as lying in a certain sort of account of the human self.

A consideration of Aboriginal views makes it clear that we need a deeper understanding of the problem. Many of the features of a very different philosophical account emerge in some remarkable first-hand statements of Aboriginal relationship to the land by the last remaining initiated member of the Gagadjju people, the traditional owners of the Kakadu region. These statements are contained in two books by Bill Neidjie,¹⁴ produced because Neidjie was anxious about his land (which, after more than 50,000 years of Aboriginal occupation, is still beautiful, rich and highly productive) and anxious to hand on his knowledge to anyone who would listen.

So you should get understand yourself.
No matter Aborigine or white European.
I was keeping this story myself.
It was secret in my mind.
But I see what other people doing,
and I was feeling sad. (*Kakadu Man*, 38)

As a significant source of information on Aboriginal philosophy, these accounts must replace accounts of Aboriginal views obtained through the filter of white anthropologists. What emerges is a worldview in which, firstly, there is a constant interchange of forms between human and non-human spheres. It is certainly not one that sees the human sphere as rigidly and totally divided from the non-human. As Bill Neidjie expresses it in *Kakadu Man*:

Those trees . . .
they grow and grow.
Every night they grow.
That grass . . .
no matter it burn
When it drink, it grow again.
When you cut tree,
it pump life away,
all the same as blood in my arm. (82)

Secondly, obligations concerning the land are at the centre of social, moral and religious life. The natural world is not, as in our case, the unconsidered background to human life – it is in the foreground.

Our story is in the land . . .
it is written in those sacred places.
My children will look after those places,
that's the law. (47)

Thirdly, human social identity and individual identity are intimately connected to the land:

This ground and this earth . . .
like brother and mother. . . .

Trees and eagle . . .
you know eagle ?
He can listen.

Eagle our brother,
like dingo our brother. (46)

He says in his more recent book, *Story About Feeling*:
I'm telling you because earth just like mother
and father or brother of you
That tree same thing
Your body, my body I suppose. (3)

Although the earth is often pictured as a mother, it is almost as often pictured in terms of other close kinship relations, such as those between brother and sister. The use of this kinship model is tied to Aboriginal localism, which makes Aboriginal culture a model of bioregionalism. Identity is not connected to nature as a general, abstract category (as urged upon us now by the proponents of Deep Ecology), but to particular areas of land, just as the connection one has to close relatives is highly particularistic,¹⁵ and involves special attachments and obligations not held to humankind in general. And, in complete contrast to Western views of land and nature as only accidentally related to self and as interchangeable means to human satisfaction, the land is conceptualized as just as essentially related to the self as kin are, and its loss may be as deeply grieved for and felt as the death of kin.

The account of death is very different from the Platonic one. Upon death, a human spirit does not depart for some other realm separate from the inferior world of nature, as in Christian and Platonic views, but is returned to the land; death thus provides, through the land, a link with ancestral beings who had done likewise, and the land is conceived in spiritualized terms. The land, the self, kin and ancestral beings are thus linked via death. Death, instead of marking the

separation between the real human self and the realm of nature and the body, as in the Platonic view, becomes instead the means of realizing human continuity with the earth. As Bill Neidjie puts it:

We come from earth . . .
bones.
We go to earth . . . ashes. (*Kakadu Man*, 46)

Rock stays,
earth stays.
I die and put my bones in cave or earth.
Soon my bones become earth . . .
all the same.
My spirit has gone back to my country . . .
my mother. (*Kakadu Man*, 82)

Death and the resulting unification with earth is a major theme in his philosophy.

Earth . . . like your father or brother or mother,
because you born from earth.
You got to come back to earth.
When you dead . . .
you'll come back to earth.
Maybe little while yet . . .
then you'll come to earth.
That's your bone,
your blood.
It's in this earth,
same as for tree. (51)

There is obviously no way we can take account of this rich and complex philosophy of nature just with the apparatus of ethics, the notions of intrinsic value or of rejection of 'human chauvinism'. Attempts to do so tend to end with the conclusion that Aboriginal philosophy has nothing of real philosophical significance to offer the debate, & rather than drawing the alternative conclusion that the debate has been set up in ethnocentric terms and that the heart of the matter does not lie in ethics. It is true that there is little to suggest that this philosophy has at its core a view of nature as intrinsically valuable, but to state that is about as helpful and informative as the suggestion that we account for kinship bonds in terms of a perception of intrinsic value. It seems clear that value is not instrumentally conceived, and that value is also value for other species.¹⁷ Certainly this philosophy does not leave people free to change their behaviour in relation to the land around in the way they can when nature is viewed as a means to independently conceived human ends.

What we need to give an account of, however, is not so much Bill Neidjie's views — they speak for themselves and interpretation is presumptuous — as our own in contrast to his. That is, his tradition suggests ways we can view our own, areas that are worth emphasizing in the critique of our own tradition, areas we may have failed to see as important. One of the ways in which we can learn from his tradition is by allowing it to illuminate features of our own tradition, throwing them into sharper contrast. I am not suggesting the simple appropriation of Aboriginal environmental philosophy; even if this were feasible such an imitation would not only ignore the social context in which such traditions developed, but would not be a proper substitute for a critical scrutiny and reworking of our own tradition, a reworking informed by some understanding of alternatives.

A striking feature of Bill Neidjie's tradition is the expression of kinship and continuity with the natural world. Here it contrasts sharply with our own. One key aspect of the Western view of nature, which the ethical stance neglects completely, is the view of the natural sphere as sharply discontinuous from or ontologically divided from the human sphere. This leads to a view of humans as apart from or 'outside of' nature, usually as masters or external controllers of it. Attempts to reject this often speak alternatively of humans as 'part of nature', but rarely clarify what is involved. As the passages from Plato illustrate, Western thought has given us a particularly strong division (usually gendered) between humans and nature. This human/nature division is part of the set of interrelated contrasts of mind/body, reason/nature, reason/emotion, masculine/feminine, and there are important interconnections between these contrasts. This set of contrasts in general, and the human/nature contrast in particular, has been especially stressed in the rationalist tradition. In this account, what is characteristically and authentically human is defined against what is taken to be natural, nature or the physical and biological realm. The authentically human nature is realized in terms of the exclusion and overcoming of nature, both within and without. Hence the prime human task is to overcome nature. For Plato it was especially nature *within* the human self that was stressed rather than nature without, but they have always been seen as closely connected (indeed the Western concept of nature derives its great power precisely from these connections), and later versions of the tradition varied the emphasis.

There are two variants of this in Plato. In his earlier work, the base areas to be excluded are not really part of the human self at all, but in his later work, the self is divided and includes higher reasoning elements and lower parts (identified with nature and including bodily appetites and emotions) and the task is to have the higher dominate and control the lower. But, whether it is seen as a lesser part of the human or as not really human at all, the result is a conception of the

human that is in opposition to nature, in which the characteristically human task is to separate from and control it. Death is the philosopher's ultimate goal because it is the ultimate separation from nature, both from the body (and the appetites associated with it), and from devalued nature without.

This ideal of separation and polarization is expressed in ethical and social, as well as philosophical ideals, and in the concept of the human self. For later rationalists, what is taken to be authentically and characteristically human, defining of the human, as well as the ideal for which humans should strive, is not to be found in what is shared with the natural and animal (for example, the body, sexuality, reproduction, emotionality, the senses, agency) but in what is thought to separate and distinguish them – especially reason and its offshoots. In these ideals, nature is 'what is to be left behind'. Hence humanity is defined not as part of nature (perhaps a special part) but as separate from and in opposition to it. A culture that views the natural sphere as a mere instrument to its own ends, defined as separate from it, and as a field upon which to display human mastery and control, cannot treat it with care and respect. And a culture that views the natural sphere as inferior and discontinuous from the human cannot see its fare and welfare as more than accidentally tied to that of nature; it dreams instead of a future based on human ingenuity and the technological conquest of distant space (the world of the forms in technological garb), while the natural world is treated as a dump, the latrine Plato wrote of, made to accept the filth and sweepings of the 'higher' technological order, so that wonders of nature millions of years in the making are destroyed forever, often for nothing.

One thing consideration of Bill Neidjie's tradition can illuminate, then, is a noxious and highly relevant aspect of the Western tradition – its view of the human as discontinuous from the inferior sphere of nature and its intertwined ideal of control and domination of nature. Another thing consideration of his tradition suggests is that continuity and the self should be seen as playing a much more central role in the account of the problem than it has so far had. Such an account of the self as discontinuous from and as only accidentally connected to nature and others can explain positions in ethics and value theory that allocate the natural world only instrumental value, but the converse does not seem to hold. And if we see these issues of self, continuity and separation as central, both Platonic and Aboriginal traditions come into focus as possessing powerful, and powerfully opposed, philosophies of nature.

What is up for challenge is the traditional Western account of what it means to be human, of the human self as oppositional to nature. Interestingly, the same challenge has been taken up by another current of environmental philosophy – that originating in feminist philosophy. As we have seen, a key element lies in the correspondence between

nature within and nature without. This is where gender enters the picture, for in the traditions of the West women and men have always been conceptualized very differently with respect to nature, the traditional identification being of women with nature and of men with what opposes it, especially reason. If women are taken to be identified with nature (and with the realm of necessity in human life over that of freedom) a masculine identity formed by exclusion of the feminine/natural within will also be one formed by exclusion of the feminine/natural without. Feminist philosophy has also developed a critique of the conception of the self as autonomous and lacking essential connection to others or to nature, pointing to its links to masculinity. They have also pointed to the ways in which the concept of the human needs reworking because of its masculine bias, and challenged the account in which the human is defined by exclusion from and in opposition to the natural (and the feminine), just as traditional masculinity is defined against and in opposition to the inferiorized feminine. What is in question is a reworking of both the concept of the human and the concept of the masculine self, and the ways in which it must be rethought to reintegrate what has been excluded and denied as feminine and as natural tend to converge.

This involves a revision of the concept of the human that is exciting and timely. The environmental crisis is intensifying the long overdue re-examination of the fundamentals of the human relation to nature, and this developing critique is especially interesting in the Australian context. A critical scrutiny of our own past philosophical traditions together with a dialogue with Aboriginal worldviews promises to open some new perspectives, and to enable better recognition of some of the wisdom of those who inhabited this land for so long before us, whose record of care contrasts so remarkably with our own.

NOTES

¹ Plato, *Phaedo*, in Scott Buchanan (ed.), *The Portable Plato* (Penguin, 1976), p. 204.

² ibid., p. 267.

³ ibid., pp. 267, 269.

⁴ St Thomas Aquinas, quoted in Tom Regan and Peter Singer (eds), *Animal Rights and Human Obligations* (Prentice-Hall, New Jersey, 1976), p. 57.

⁵ Arne Naess, 'The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement: a summary', *Inquiry*, 16, 1973, pp. 95–100; R. Routley, 'Is There a Need for a New, an Environmental Ethic?', in *Proceedings of the 13th World Congress of Philosophy*, Varna, 1973, pp. 205–10.

⁶ For a discussion of some of the problems in Deep Ecology see Richard Sylvan, 'A Critique of Deep Ecology', *Radical Philosophy* 40–41, Summer 1985, and V. Plumwood, 'Nature, Self and Gender', *Environmental Ethics*, forthcoming.

⁷ John Passmore, *Man's Responsibility for Nature* (Duckworth, London, 1974), p. 187.

⁸ Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation* (Random House, New York, 1975).

⁹ V. Plumwood, 'Critical Notice of Passmore's *Man's Responsibility for Nature*', *Australian Journal of Philosophy*, 53, 2, 1975, pp. 171–83; V. Plumwood and R. Routley, 'Against the Inevitability of Human Chauvinism' in K. E. Goodpaster and K. M. Sayre (eds), *Ethics and Problems of the 21st Century* (University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, 1979), pp. 36–59; R. Routley and V. Routley, 'Human Chauvinism and Environmental Ethics', in D. S. Mannison, M. A. McRobbie and R. Routley (eds), *Environmental Philosophy* (Australian National University, RSSS, 1980), pp. 96–189; William Godfrey-Smith, 'The Rights of Non-humans and Intrinsic Value' in D. S. Mannison et al. (eds), op. cit., pp. 30–47; Robert Elliot and Alan Gae (eds), *Environmental Philosophy* (University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1983), pp. 10–15; Robert Elliot, 'Environmental Degradation, Vandalsim and the Aesthetic Object Argument', *Australian Journal of Philosophy*, 67, 2, June 1989.

¹⁰ Godfrey-Smith (1980), op. cit.; Elliot and Gae (1983) op. cit., p. 10; V. Plumwood and R. Routley (1979, 1980) op. cit.; R. Routley and V. Plumwood, 'Semantical Foundations of Value Theory', *Nous*, 17, September 1983, pp. 441–56.

¹¹ 'Kerin Slams Greenies', *Australian*, 2 November 1989.

¹² See especially Janna Thompson, 'A Refutation of Environmental Ethics', *Environmental Ethics*, forthcoming, and Robert Elliot (1989), op. cit.

¹³ V. Plumwood, 'The Problem of the Extent of Moral Consideration', in *Proceedings of the Russellian Society*, 10, 1985, pp. 50–67.

¹⁴ Bill Neidjie, Stephen Davis and Allan Fox, *Kakadu Man* (Mybroad, Canberra, 1985); Bill Neidjie and Keith Taylor (ed.), *Story About Feeling* (Magabala Books, Broome, 1989).

¹⁵ A fact given no weight by Deep Ecology, which continues to inferiorize the particular, as in the rationalist tradition. See V. Plumwood, 'Nature, Self and Gender', op. cit.

¹⁶ David H. Bennett, 'Interspecies Ethics: a Brief Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Comparison', in *Dissertations Papers in Environmental Philosophy*, 7 (Department of Philosophy, Australian National University, 1985), p. 1.

¹⁷ Deborah Rose, 'Exploring An Aboriginal Land Ethic', *Meanjin*, 3/1988, p. 380; David H. Bennett, op. cit., p. 17.