



Notebook n° 3

Content:

- Politically Incorrect Savages. By Chahta-Ima
- Primitivism without Catastrophe. By Ave Cabrera
- All who fashion idols. By Chiaroscuro

Cover page: Howard Terpning.
Edit Regresión Magazine
Autumn 2016

Politically Incorrect Savages

Steve Sheldon told me about a woman giving birth alone on a beach. Something went wrong. A breech birth. The woman was in agony. 'Help me, please! The baby will not come,' she cried out. The Pirahas sat passively, some looking tense, some talking normally. "I'm dying! This hurts. The baby will not come!" she screamed. No one answered. It was late afternoon. Steve started toward her. "No, she doesn't want you. She wants her parents," he was told, the implication clearly being that he was not to go to her. But her parents were not around and no one else was going to her aid. The evening came and her cries came regularly, but even more weakly. Finally, they stopped. In the morning Steve learned that she and the baby had died on the beach, unassisted.

Steve recorded the story about this incident, repeated here. The text... recounts [the] tragic incident that provides insight into Piraha culture. In particular it tells us that the Piraha let a young woman die, alone and without help, because of their belief that people must be strong and get through difficulties on their own.
-Daniel Everett, Don't Sleep, There are Snakes: Life and Language in the Amazonian Jungle pg. 90-91

One curious effect was observed which gave rise to much complaint on the part of the native male population. As a result of the wholesale association of the women with white men a spontaneous feminist movement developed. Aboriginally, the woman was not only physically, but economically and spiritually, subservient to the man. The squaw performed most of the hard manual labor associated with village life while her husband and father loafed away their time. She was obliged to obey every command and whim of her lord and master.

To do otherwise was to invite stern and inevitable retribution. With the influx of thousands of white men, unmarried and on the hunt for females, the situation altered. She could confront the Indian male with the choice of better treatment or loss of his spouse to some white suitor. Moreover, the Indian woman was undoubtedly influenced profoundly by the enviable position which her sex occupied in the newly established white communities. Although no contemporary sociologist gave the matter attention, we get inklings of a pretty formidable feminine revolt. The agent at the Fresno Indian Farm reported:

"Though the men are, or once were, absolute masters of the women, many of them at this time... have found shelter among the whites, and are consequently independent of the men."

A statement also appeared at about the same period to the effect that "white men have taken the Indians' wives from their lodges and taught them to despise the lazy creatures who used to make them slaves." If this state of mind was characteristic of a large body of female opinion, it is easy to see how, although no vast social upheaval was involved, the change could act as an irritant and thereby serve as another factor in the disruption of aboriginal family life.

"The American Invasion, 1848-1870" pgs. 81-82 in Cook, Sherburne F. The Conflict Between the California Indian and White Civilization. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976.

The Jarawas, who number about 400 and whom one geneticist described as "arguably the most enigmatic people on our planet," are believed to have migrated from Africa around 50,000 years ago. They are very dark-skinned, small in stature and until 1998 lived in complete cultural isolation, shooting outsiders with steel-tipped arrows if they came too near...

It is no secret that the tribe has, in the past, carried out ritual killings of infants born to widows or — much rarer — fathered by outsiders. Dr. Ratan Chandra Kar, a government physician who wrote a memoir about his work with the Jarawas, described a tradition in which newborn babies were breast-fed by each of the tribe's lactating women before being strangled by one of the tribal elders, so as to maintain "the so-called purity and sanctity of the society."

-"Baby's Killing Tests India's Protection of an Aboriginal Culture," New York Times, March 13, 2016

One evening Debe walked right into Gau's camp and without saying a word shot three arrows into Gau, one in the left shoulder, one in the forehead, and a third one in the chest. Gau's people made no move to protect him. After three arrows were shot, Gau still sat facing the attacker. The Debe raised his spear as if to stab him. But Gau said, "You have hit me three times. Isn't it enough to kill me, that you want to stab me too?"

When Gau tried to dodge away from the spear, Gau's people came forward to disarm Debe of his spear. Having been so badly wounded, Gau died quickly.

-Richard Lee, *The Dobe !Kung*, cited in *Ultrasociety: How 10,000 Years of War Made Humans the Greatest Cooperators on Earth*, pg. 104

For me, all of these quotes above remind me of a seemingly insignificant quote that appeared toward the end of the polemic, "Ya se habían tardado," which reads:

Before this commentary, [Reacción Salvaje – RS] states that, if [Destroy the Prisons] considers himself an expert on communities, we would hope that he would be aware that for hundreds of years the mountain peoples of Mexico have been accustomed to forms of life that are frowned upon by citizens who adhere to sick Western culture. Some of their practices are counted as "brutal" such as, for example, trading a woman for a cow or a few pigs. For natives that's common, it's their custom, their modus vivendi and thus normal. But for Western moralists (including anarchists) it is something shameful, they get indignant and cry out to heaven when they hear people speak of these things. And of course, self-proclaimed anarchist feminists are the most scandalized by this. RS however doesn't see any of this in a bad light. RS respects the development and customs of these communities, because it's not our business to change them. We emphasize that we are not misogynists, but we really don't oppose these native attitudes. This is how we think in the end even if the anarchists are enraged that we talk like this.

I cannot speak for all of eco-extremism, only myself, and I will accept other viewpoints of the tendency if correction is needed, but from this, I can state that anarchism, primitivism, leftism etc. are wrong-headed and moralistic precisely because they try to organize / judge / improve on society, whereas human animals cannot possibly do this, not with any competence at least. Many of these societies have barbarous, violent, and "unenlightened" practices but have been around for hundreds if not thousands of years. Why is it that our own life-span in an exceptionally young (if powerful) society gives us the right to determine how human society should be in EVERY circumstance? I would argue that it doesn't. Societies that evolved within their environments from time immemorial have proven that they can sustain their way of life over millennia. Our own society (that is, the one we are stuck in, though not willingly) cannot make the same claim, quite the contrary.

Personally, this view is why I cannot take anarchism, Marxism, leftism, liberalism, etc. seriously as means by which to interpret reality. These ideologies obsess over accidental things, namely, social organization, equality among individuals, division of labor, etc. In our animal reality, that is like choosing something to eat based solely on its color, rather than on its taste and how nourishing it is. The main relationship is not that of human beings between themselves, but of human beings to nature, or rather, their natural surroundings and the other entities, sentient or not, that they share them with. All of these flawed and civilized ideologies, even self-proclaimed "primitivism", are humanist and anthropocentric, while we want only a relationship with Wild Nature and the cultures that it has formed over millennia like drops of water can form stone, unconsciously, organically, and unplanned.

Humans no doubt have a role to play in that, and their actions do shape the landscape and themselves, just as the actions of beavers, ants, birds, etc. shape a forest or a river. But that is completely determined by the incarnation of Wild Nature that they encounter, it takes place over centuries, and it is by no means "planned" or "controlled" by a determining human intellect. It merely happens. Present a "savage" with the idea that selective burning of brush or similar activities make him the master of the landscape, he would more than likely be puzzled by such a claim.

Here I would then state that humans in the past always struck a balance between their own power and mind and that of Wild Nature itself. The point is not that some lived in complete harmony with nature, without hierarchy or war or anything that offends Western bourgeois sensibilities. The point is that the balance of power between the human and Wild Nature was maintained. In some cases, that would entail patriarchy, in some places that would not be the case (Were the Selk'nam of Tierra del Fuego "more domesticated" than other hunter-gatherers because they were ruled by a patriarchy? Considering their culture, that would be an absurdity to state.) Were the Choctaw of what is now the southeastern United States as civilized as the Aztecs

or Maya simply because they also grew corn? Were the Yuroks of northern California somehow evil because they had a rigid social hierarchy but no agriculture?

“Domestication” and “civilization” then may not be as clear-cut categories as some other anti-civilization ideologies claim that they are. This is because our knowledge is animal and thus flawed. Here we must look at things not in black and white but on a spectrum, and in this spectrum, we are not judging human societies by how “nice” they were and how well they treated women, gays, the disabled, etc. We don’t care about those things, and those who obsess over them are extremely stupid and let their own civilized prejudices get the better of them. We would rather trust societies that lived for thousands of years in their respective environments and their “values” than the values of humanistic Westerners who hide the violence of modern techno-industrial society behind platitudes of morality and decency.

The most important thing about domestication and civilization, then, is that they arise but they have been in most places quite fragile. That is, they have never been able to dominate completely, they have never exalted individual human societies into complete dominance over nature, and when they have, collapse inevitably occurred. What we have now is a complete monstrosity, a Leviathan that cannot collapse without possibly taking most living things with it, something that seeks complete domination. Before this unnatural being, the only attitude we can have is complete and utter hostility.

These may appear to be completely scholastic reflections, and perhaps they are. At the very least, I write and record them to support the eco-extremist claim that liberal Western values absolutely do not matter, and thus when people try to shove them in our face, we should reject them energetically and insult those who still buy into those fairy tales. Also, it is to indicate that eco-extremist pessimism is all the more warranted: if all we have going for us in terms of “hope” are the incomplete observations of anthropologists and our own flawed intellectual powers, it is clear that we are completely screwed.

We cannot make societies from scratch overnight, and nor should we have to. A possum does not ask itself nor is it qualified to determine what it means to be a possum. It merely is a possum. In other words, it doesn’t seek to be a god, and neither should we. In the past, humans lived in societies that existed for thousands of years that also told them what it was like to be human; societies that were small, sustainable, and more often than not, very stable. That we do not have this and instead think that we can play the part of social engineer is the real foundational problem. That we are tempted to think that a !Kung Bushman is more “wild” or “better” than a Selk’nam hunter, or a Choctaw warrior, or a Yurok “noble” is not an indication of knowledge, but of foolishness.

The primary relationship in eco-extremism is between the human animal and Wild Nature as embodied in his immediate environment, and not with some abstraction known as humanity. It is thus an inhumanist and not humanist tendency. Just as all bears do not have solidarity with bear-kind, but rather depend on all of the surrounding plants, animals, waters, and rocks to survive, thus all humans should not have solidarity with all humankind, but only with those of similar disposition and with the beings who they have come to love in their surroundings. That should go without saying, and many savages have that attitude.

Also, we realize that civilization is a “transient sickness”, one that emerges at times and goes away, sometimes leaving scars, but never terminal, as the Whole can never be destroyed by the Part. That we are deficient in this regard, that we don’t really know our places, or have been robbed of them, indicates the tragedy of our state, and our rage in the indiscriminate war against those who would destroy and enslave Wildness. Even if the only Wild Nature we have left is ourselves, or perhaps only the pain and anger of having been deprived of it, that is enough to carry on this war against domesticated humanity.

-Chahta-Ima

*Nanah Waiya
Spring 2016*

Primitivism without Catastrophe

Every good idea needs a selling point. The selling point of the all-encompassing ideology that can go by any name from “anarcho-primitivism” to “anti-civilization thinking” is that modern techno-industrial civilization is destroying the human race, and if we want to stop this destruction, we have to destroy civilization. It’s a matter of self-preservation. We must renounce technology, science, modern medicine, etc. in order to save ourselves. How do we know this? Well, technology, science, modern medicine, etc. tell us so. I am likely not the first one who has noticed the inconsistency in this perspective, but perhaps I am one of the first to say something about it.

“Anti-civilization thought” (for lack of a better term) has a “knowledge problem.” That is, it seeks to criticize the totality from the view of the totality. It seeks to dismantle the tools that have built everything that it despises using the same tools. This culminates in the idea of “catastrophe”: the cathartic collapse of its enemy and a chance for the restoration of a just order. For someone with a hammer, everything appears to be a nail, and for someone with an apocalyptic narrative, everything leads to the end of the world. Indeed, some could say that catastrophe is to the primitivist what the Resurrection of Jesus was to St. Paul: the sine qua non outside of which the message cannot not exist. If humanity is not damned via technology, if all life on earth is not endangered by the upstart selfish ape from Africa, then what are we doing here? We might as well just go home and enjoy the flat screen TVs and air conditioning.

Things of course aren’t really that simple. But the first question should be, “Are we doomed?” A few books have come out recently that seek to answer the question in the negative, even though they take the Cassandra-like science of climate change and resource depletion very seriously. Ronald Bailey’s *The End of Doom: Environmental Renewal in the Twenty-first Century* is one of the stronger contributions to this eco-modernist genre. Though we will not have the time to review it all here, we can at least go over the strongest point in his book (at least from my perspective): the analysis of the ecological idea that “doing nothing” is better than “doing something.”

This concept is undoubtedly a trope in environmentalist discourse. Nature has been doing any given thing for millions of years, and thus, so the story goes, nature knows best. Bailey calls this, “the precautionary principle,” best formulated by the phrase after which he names his third chapter, “Never Try Anything the First Time.” Anything new is guilty until proven innocent, the burden of proof lies with the novel thing to demonstrate beyond a reasonable doubt that it won’t create more problems than it is trying to solve. It becomes evident that those who cling to the precautionary principle are paralyzed from performing any action because they don’t have complete metaphysical certainty concerning how a technological development will pan out. (Think here, for example, of genetically modified foods and the fierce debate around them.) Those who suffer because of this hesitation, Bailey argues, do not have the luxury of doubt: they need the cancer drug, cheap food, and other benefits that technological advancement can provide. As Bailey states:

Unfortunately, the precautionary principle sounds sensible to many people, especially those who live in societies already replete with technology. These people have their centrally heated house in the woods; they already enjoy the freedom from want, disease, and ignorance that technology can provide. They may think they can afford the luxury of ultimate precaution. But there are billions of people who still yearn to have their lives transformed. For them, the precautionary principle is a warrant for continued poverty, not safety. (93-94)

So here a knowledge problem is turned around and then turned around again. The anti-civilization neo-Luddite thinker has studied enough concerning techno-industrial society to know that it is a lost cause. He knows this through use of the tools that techno-industrial society has given him. He knows that there are no technological fixes for the quagmire that modern society has created. Yet, the eco-modernist like Bailey then turns the tables around and shows how this pessimism is based on an optimistic view of human knowledge supported by a technological infrastructure that enables study and reflection. If we don’t really know, and know that we don’t really know, aren’t we under obligation to try? Isn’t such ignorance an opportunity and not a roadblock? Is this not what the Enlightenment and the Scientific Revolution were all about?

In much of the rest of the book, Bailey shows time and again, on issues ranging from population to peak oil, to the supposed spread of cancer due to use of industrial products, that the Cassandras have been wrong, and very wrong, up to this point. Bailey concludes from this that homo sapiens is a crafty and cunning animal, able to pull victory out of the jaws of defeat time and again. Bailey has little doubt we will continue to do so, even if he concedes that some things, such as climate change, do appear to be real problems facing the entire human race.

Ironically, accepting Bailey's premises might be the most "primitivist" position of all. If we are ultimately animals who are helpless to save ourselves unless we get rid of the instruments of our own seemingly absolute power, how is it that we can totally damn ourselves to non-existence? Or rather, if we are too dumb to save ourselves, we may be too dumb to kill ourselves off. There is of course the principle of entropy, and the intuition that it is easier to break something than it is to fix it. But that analogy doesn't really hold here, as we are talking about billions of individual animals all over the globe who have proven themselves to be resilient to the point of crowding everything else out.

So which one is it then? Are we saved or are we damned? Is catastrophe an inescapable reality or a masochistic wish? The long and the short of it is: we don't know. And those who pretend to know are perhaps clinging to an odd bulwark of certainty in damnation or optimism wherein Nassim Nicholas Taleb's black swans never occur. The future cannot be totally bleak, nor can we rest assured that disaster won't happen just because it hasn't happened yet. All that we have is the present.

So we return to the title: Can there be a primitivism without catastrophe? What if this society can work things out just fine? Do we all get to go home then? Do we give this techno-industrial capitalist order a pass, and at least acknowledge that, if we can't be in the society that we want, we should love the society that we are in? After all, we're all humans, we all share the same souls and bodies, the same intellect and feelings. We might as well work to save everyone, and who cares how we do it? Dreams of going back to an idealized hunter-gatherer simpler life become less appealing by the day.

Into this impasse, we add the thoughts from a recent interview with members of the Mexican eco-extremist tendency:

The main difference between what Kaczynski and his acolytes propose and our own position is rather simple: we don't wait for a "Great World Crisis" to start attacking the physical and moral structures of the techno-industrial system. We attack now because the future is uncertain. You can't create a strategy based on assumptions, thinking that all will go according to plan and with assured victory. We stopped believing in that once we grasped the enormity of the system itself, its components and its vast reach on this planet and even outside of it. If civilization collapses tomorrow, or within 30 to 50 years, we'll know that we waged a necessary war against it from our own individuality...

We don't know if there will be a global collapse of the system one day. The experts say that there will be, but we cannot know for certain. It could be the case and nature will rise from the ruins. But it could be that the system is always one step ahead of things, and could become self-sufficient and repair itself with ease. As we said, we don't know the future. We would like to, but the reality is otherwise.

With the eco-extremists, then, we can find our way out of the flawed position of "a better future by returning to the past." Here, we would say that the future is our enemy. Every single proposed way out, whether it be from Bailey's libertarian assurances or leftist techno-progressive schemes, is something that we refuse right out of the gate. We don't want to cooperate, we reject saving the world. We refuse to offer up our lives or the lives of others for a better tomorrow. This is always promised, but it never arrives. And here, the knowledge problem enters again: it never arrives because no one can possibly deliver it. Things only "get better all of the time" because we have domesticated ourselves into thinking that the carrot is the goal and that we are getting closer, and the stick isn't really there even when it strikes us right on the nose. Such is the essence of civilization, the foggy mythical past, and the constantly-deferred future.

Catastrophe is the catharsis that ends the cycle of suffering. But like the Buddhist version, it is also elusive and never happens in this life. Indeed, the real problem with "anti-civilization thought," especially in its

anarcho-primitivist form, is that it does not know what it wants, because what it wants is shaped by what it hates...

Abe Cabrera

All who fashion idols

And I will destroy your high places, and cut down your images, and cast your carcasses upon the carcasses of your idols, and my soul shall abhor you. — Leviticus 26:30

All man's work will disappear
from the soft trickle of the light rain
and the raging heat of the forest fire
from the wild winds and the rivers with indomitable spirits
raging against the dams that impede their freedom

I am the soft trickle of the light rain
and the raging river

I am the blowing winds
and the fiery forest

I am the indomitable spirit who with nature
destroys the idols of man's hubris

All man's work will disappear
The concrete slabs will lose to the grass
and the burrowing animals who fight as the savage man does
The buildings will crumble from the rivers,
blood of the earth
And man himself will one day find death,
death which he has tried so hard to flee
but which unrelentingly returns like the force of nature it is

I am wild nature, which resists domination
and which will prevail in the end
But in the present I am prepared to
live wild or die

Regresión

Cuadernos contra el progreso tecnolindustrial