

Introduction

The Central Problem of Human Life Today

An Indian who is as bad as the white men could not live in our nation; he would be put to death, and . . . [be eaten] up by the wolves. The white men are bad schoolmasters; they carry false looks, and deal in false actions; they smile in the face of the poor Indian to cheat him; they shake them by the hand to gain their confidence, to make them drunk, to deceive them, and ruin our wives. We told them to let us alone; but they followed on and beset our paths, and they coiled themselves among us like the snake. They poisoned us by their touch. We were not safe. We lived in danger. We were becoming like them, hypocrites and liars, adulterers, lazy drones, all talkers, and no workers.¹

As for baptizing Indians and Negroes, several of the [white] people disapproved it, because they say it often makes them proud, and not so good servants; but these, and such objections, are easily refuted . . . for Christianity encourages and orders them to become more humble and better servants, and not worse, than when they were heathens.²

FOR SEVERAL thousands of years human beings have suffered from plague, a disease worse than leprosy, a sickness worse than malaria a malady much more terrible than smallpox.

A woman is attacked by men who brutally rape her and leave her for dead.

Indians are murdered in order to force impoverished mixed-Indians to gather rubber in the forest under conditions that doom the rubber-hunters themselves to miserable deaths.

Small countries are invaded so that an entire people and their resources can be exploited.

Human beings of all colors are seized or ensnared in debts, and are forced to live out their brief lives as slaves or serfs.

Boys are raised to obey orders and serve as cannon-fodder, while girls are raised to give their children over to armies, factories or plantations.

People and other living creatures are tortured in the most fiendish ways imaginable.

The "cult of aggression and violence" reigns supreme, and the prisons and insane asylums are full to bursting.

Imperialism, colonialism, torture, enslavement, conquest, brutality, lying, cheating, secret police, greed, rape, terrorism—they are only words until we are touched by them. Then they are no longer words, but become a vicious reality that overwhelms, consumes and changes our lives forever.

This is the disease, then, with which I hope to deal—the disease of aggression against other living things and, more precisely, the disease of the consuming of other creatures' lives and possessions.

I call it *cannibalism*, and I shall try to explain why. But whatever we call it, this disease, this *wétiko* (cannibal) psychosis, is the greatest epidemic sickness known to man. The rape of a woman, the rape of a land, and the rape of a people, they are all the same. And they are the same as the rape of the earth, the rape of the rivers, the rape of the forest, the rape of the air, the rape of the animals. Brutality knows no boundaries. Greed knows no limits. Perversion knows no borders. Arrogance knows no frontiers. Deceit knows no edges. These characteristics all tend to push towards an extreme, always moving forward once the initial infection sets in. From the raping of a woman, to the

raping of a country, to the raping of the world. Acts of aggression, of hate, of conquest, of empire-building. Harems of women and harems of people; houses of prostitution and houses of pimps.

Many centuries ago a Mexican (Aztec) father said to his son:

Son of mine, jewel of mine, my rich quetzal plumage:
You have arrived at life, you are born, the Creator and
Owner has made you come to the world.

The Creator conceived you, he formed you, he made
you born, the One for whom all live...

Very well: for a brief time you have come to contemplate things, you have come to go evolving, you have come to make a way in your person, you have come to grow...

What will be the plan of the One for whom all live?
Will you perhaps attain a goal? Are you going to live on the earth? If only that you will grow peacefully and in sweet calm...

Be very careful of lies and falseness: Such a way is not straight, upright, they are not good...

Are you, perhaps, as an ear of corn, as a spike of grain, therefore releasing that which is in your inner being? Can you see that which you have inside yourself? Well harnessed, well guided, very reconcile you are in your inner being, as in a chest or in a strong-box...

If you live well, if you work as has been indicated, you will be very well respected and your life will serve as an example to others!

Many people have examined the subjects of aggression, violence, imperialism, rape, and so on. I propose to do something a little different: first, I propose to examine these things from a Native American perspective; and, second, from a perspective as free as possible from

assumptions created by the very disease being studied. Finally, I will look at these evils, not simply as "bad" choices that men make, but as a genuine, very real epidemic sickness. Imperialists, rapists and exploiters are not just people who have strayed down a wrong path. They are insane (unclean) in the true sense of that word. They are mentally ill and, tragically, the form of soul-sickness that they carry is catching.

In many respects, the twentieth century has been the most disappointing period in modern human history. We have witnessed the failure of the so-called "western democracies" to solve their most pressing internal problems, the failure of Marxist-Leninism to come to grips with the issues of bureaucracy, authoritarianism, and the self-interest of newly-empowered elites, the failure of so-called mass education, the failure of technology, the failure of organized religion, and the failure of the most highly-trained and "educated" generations of human beings in all of history to do more than paper over the great problems facing the world.

We have witnessed devastating wars, the deaths of millions upon millions, the squandering of the earth's resources, and the continuing exploitation of the smaller nationalities (especially of folk peoples) and of the politically weak in general.

The brutality and hypocrisy of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries would not be so frightening if, indeed, the leadership of the world were in the hands of uneducated soldiers (of the Idi Amin type) or of openly criminal elements. But by and large such is not the case. People like Idi Amin and Saddam Hussein could not stray in power without "technocrats" and trained civil servants who collect necessary revenues and maintain a structure of governance. Neither Joseph Stalin, Adolph Hitler, Huey Long, Ferdinand Marcos, nor Augusto Pinochet could govern without the active support or cooperation of many thousands of "educated" experts, technicians and bureaucrats. All of the modern secret police of the world depend upon well-trained personnel, scientific equipment, advanced social science studies of human behavior, and bureaucratic management systems (either pre-computer or post-computer). Even organized crime depends upon

college-trained lawyers, administrators and executives, and upon the technology of modern society.

The people who rule the world today are, on the whole, highly educated (or at least highly trained). They are graduates of the "great" military schools or the elite universities of their respective countries. They have (by and large) "refined" tastes and cultivate the "finer" things of life (at least for public consumption). In spite of this, they have given us the most brutal epoch in history and, currently, a collection of military dictatorships, totalitarian societies, racist-exploitative "representative" republics and resource-gobbling states of such a nature as to lead one to predict that there may soon be very few places in the world where a nonaggressive person can survive except as a lackey or a slave.

The truth of the matter is that Harvard or Yale graduates, for example, are quite capable of lobbying for a "concession" of territory in Brazil, or Colombia, or Bolivia, the development of which causes the utter annihilation of thousands of Native Americans. Of course, the refined gentlemen will not personally order the liquidation of the First Americans, but they will set in motion a chain of events leading inevitably (under conditions current in South America) to the enslavement, removal and death of the indigenous tribes.

"Education" of the kind we know in the modern world usually has little to do with ethics or with bringing forth the individual potential of the learner. On the contrary, it is largely technical in nature (whether in natural science, social science, or whatever) and seldom (in and of itself) serves to alter the class and ethnic "interests" of the graduates.

In any case, the *wétiko* disease, the sickness of exploitation, has been spreading as a contagion for the past several thousand years. And as a contagion unchecked by most vaccines it tends to become worse rather than better with time. More and more people catch it, in more and more places, and they become the true teachers of the young.

Thus the youth in twentieth century societies are taught not primarily by underpaid public school teachers or "ivory-tower" professors, but by their parents, by movies, by television and the Internet, and

in fact, by what they observe in the society. And this type of learning is often reinforced by the structure and content of school disciplines, such as history, that exalt the aggressive and the exploitative (Alexander the Great, Napoleon, Cecil Rhodes, James K. Polk, George Washington, and Thomas Jefferson, who was both a dedicated slave owner and an insatiable imperialist against Native Americans) and tend to categorize as "backward" or "uninteresting" persons who do not conquer others or acquire vast amounts of stolen property.

In any case, the great human problems of imperialism, colonialism, exploitation and greed have not been brought under control. Ask the Kurds, or the Tibetans, or the Bretons, or the Chechens, or the Ainu, or the Sioux, or the Inuit, or the Aché, or the Colla; or ask the migrant farm workers of the United States, or the rural Afro-Americans of the South, or the near slave-laborers of South Africa; or ask the often terrorized populations of Guatemala, Palestine, or El Salvador.

And in the United States and other so-called "advanced" societies, billions upon billions of dollars are being spent on prisons and mental institutions, and still crime rates climb upward and more and more people go "crazy." On top of that, the pornography industry thrives and the fundamentalist Christian revival seems to go hand in hand with rape, child abuse, child pornography, sadism, and a hatred for women.

Exploitation, in other words, is *thriving*. The exploitation of children, of love, of women, of old people, of the weak, of the poor and, of course, the *intentional* commercial exploitation of *every* conceivable thing, from the hair around women's vaginal areas (as in *Playboy*, for example) to worry over natural body odors, to adolescent insecurity, to the fear of growing old, to thirst (for example, persuading people to drink liquid chemicals and sugar in place of water or natural beverages).

This is a no holds-barred modern society in which college graduates are expected to be willing to "give their all" to developing or selling a product, even if the product is harmful or worthless, where technicians are expected to kill and torture captive animals because

they are ordered to do so by some government experimenter or paper producing professor, and where the opportunities for being "one's own boss" in a non-exploitative, non-crooked, or non-demeaning role are precious few indeed.

People who are concerned about violence, about the environment about decency, and about human authenticity must have the means for analyzing the objective conditions which today surround us all. I am my hope that by enlarging upon the concept of the *wetiko* disease and by discussing its origin, epidemiology, and characteristics that can be of some help to such people. I will also try to present some ideas relating to antidotes for the disease, but I cannot pretend to have all of the answers for the most fundamental problem of human life.

How to live in this life? is the real question we all face. All other subjects are insignificant when compared with this one.

TWO

Consuming Another's Life The *Wetiko* Cannibal Psychosis

NATIVE AMERICAN traditions point out to us that all forms of life, including humans, animals, birds, plants, and insects, are children of the same parents. The earth is our mother and the Great Mystery, or Great Creative Power, is seen as our grandfather or grandmother-grandfather.

As Standing Bear, a Lakota, said in 1931 when reciting an ancient prayer:

To mother earth, it is said . . . you are the only mother
that has shown mercy to your children . . . Behold me,
the four quarters of the earth, relative-like I am . . .
All over the earth faces of all living things are alike.
Mother earth has turned these faces out of the earth
with tenderness. Oh Great Spirit behold them, all
these faces with children in their hands.

In very ancient times, perhaps a thousand years
ago and before the different northern Plains nations
had split into separate groups, a wise one named Slow
Buffalo taught them: "Remember . . . the ones you are

going to depend upon. Up in the heavens, the Mysterious One, that is your grandfather. In between the earth and the heavens, that is your father. This earth is your grandmother. The dirt is your grandmother. Whatever grows in the earth is your mother. It is just like a sucking baby on a mother... Always remember, your grandmother is underneath your feet always. You are always on her, and your father is above."¹

It is certainly an empirical, observable fact that we are all totally and absolutely dependent on our earth-mother and on the water, air, sun and other elements for every moment of life.

The Great Spirit made the flowers, the streams, the pines, the cedars—takes care of them... He takes care of me, waters me, feeds me, makes me live with the plants and animals as one of them... All of nature is in us, all of us is in nature.²

At the same time that we are all children of the same parents, it is also true that the nature of life involves eating one another. In some manner or another all forms of life eat some other living thing and then, in turn, are eaten by someone else. Our deaths are usually sad for ourselves but, as Juan Matus, the Yaqui *nagualli* of Carlos Castaneda, points out so well, our deaths are also gifts for someone else, if only for micro-organisms.³

Human beings, for example, stalk and eat all manner of plants, animals and birds, but we in turn are hunted and eaten by other animals as well as by bacteria and other tiny living things. Ultimately, of course, worms, bugs and plants will feed upon our bodies and help our mother, the earth, to digest us.

The surface of our mother is largely comprised of the transformed bodies of our relatives who have been dying for millions of years. "Soil fertility" is, in large part, nothing but a measure of the extent to which

a particular bit of ground is saturated with our dead ancestors and relatives. Death, then, is a necessary part of life.

Most living creatures show no evidence of cruelty or excessive greed (except some "domestic" animals who may become cruel or gluttonous). Generally, they inflict pain upon another creature only when necessary as a part of eating. Very seldom do the vast majority of creatures ever interfere with the free movement or "freedom" of other creatures except for the moment of direct killing. Normally, also, they do not kill or feed upon their own kind.

Native Americans and many other "folk" peoples have struggled long and hard with the contradiction inherent in eating other living creatures. Very simply, Native philosophy, based upon the recognition that all living creatures are brothers and sisters, came to the conclusion that killing and eating, while unavoidable, can be done in such a way as to make it less ugly and less brutalizing. As Juan Matus says, "we must be on good terms with all the living things of the world. This is the reason why we must talk to plants we are about to kill and apologize for hurting them; the same thing must be done with the animals we are going to hurt."⁴

... today we took a little snake. I had to apologize to her for cutting her life off so suddenly and so definitely; I did what I did knowing that my own life will also be cut off someday in very much the same fashion, suddenly and definitely.⁵

Ruby Modesto, a Cahuilla doctor, has said:

You can talk to the plants... I mean be sincere. Be humble. The plants are like friends. Some of them have powerful spirits.⁶

The Lakota people, according to Luther Standing Bear, actively felt themselves to be kin with all creatures:

The animal had rights—the right of man's protection, the right to live, the right to multiply, the right to freedom, and the right to man's indebtedness . . . the Lakota never enslaved the animal, and spared all life that was not needed for food and clothing.

This concept of life and its relations was humanizing and gave to the Lakota an abiding love. It filled his being with the joy and mystery of living; it gave him reverence for all life . . .⁷

This reverence for life and respect for birds and other animals is illustrated by a Pawnee story about a young curing man who lived long, long ago. He was poisoned by a jealous doctor. The victim appealed to *Ti-rá-wa*, the Supreme Power, and to *Nahúrac* (the animals). A small messenger bird led him to the lodge of the leaders of the animals, under a cliff and beneath the waters of a river. He had to visit several lodges and finally was cured by prairie dogs and bears after returning to the first *Nahúrac*. The head bear then said:

Now, *Nahúrac*, this is what I can do. I do not care how dangerously wounded I may be, I know how to cure myself . . .

The head animal doctor then said to the young man:

Now you can see who we are. I move in the water. I have no breath, but I exist. We, every one of us, shall die except *Ti-rá-wa*. He made us, just as he made you. He made you to live in the air. We live where there is no air. You see the difference. I know where there is that great water that surrounds us [the ocean]. I know that the heaven [sky] is the house of *Ti-rá-wa*, and we live inside it. You must imitate us. Do as we

do. You must place your dependence on us, but still, if anything comes up that is very difficult, you must put your dependence on *Ti-rá-wa*. Ask help from the ruler. He made us. He made everything. There are different ways to different creatures. What you do I do not do, and what I do you do not do. We are different. When you imitate us you must always blow a smoke to each one of these four chief doctors, once to each; but to *Ti-rá-wa* you must blow four smokes . . .⁸

Thus the Pawnee learned doctoring from the animals, and learned more about everyone's dependence upon the Supreme Power. Native American philosophy recognizes the right of every living creature to life and to live its own life without interference. For this reason, Native people traditionally avoid the killing of living trees, avoid trampling on plants and seldom, if ever, kill any creature except for food. Fallen wood, for example, is usually used for firewood, house timbers, and so on. Sitting Bull was very specific:

I wish all to know that I do not propose to sell any of my country, nor will I have the Whites cutting our timber along the rivers, more especially the oak. I am particularly fond of the little groves of oak trees. I love to look at them and feel a reverence for them, because they endure the wintry storms and the summer's heat, and—not unlike ourselves—seem to thrive and flourish by them.⁹

When a plant, tree or animal is to be killed, first, the need must be great; second, permission is asked for, if time allows; third, the creature is thanked; and, fourth, dances, prayers and ceremonies are used to further thank the creatures so killed and to help those that are alive to grow and prosper. In the 1920s Cora DuBois recorded this prophecy from a powerful doctor, Kate Luckie, of the Wintu Nation:

When the Indians all die, then God will let the water come down from the north. Everyone will drown.

That is because the white people never cared for land or deer or bear. When we Indians kill meat, we eat it all up. When we dig roots, we make little holes. When we build houses, we make little holes. When we burn grass for grasshoppers, we don't ruin things. We shake down acorns and pine nuts. We don't chop down trees. We only use dead wood. But the White people plow up the ground, pull up the trees, kill everything. The tree says, "Don't. I am sore. Don't hurt me." But they chop it down and cut it up. The spirit of the land hates them. They blast out trees... They saw up the trees. That hurts them. The Indians never hurt anything but the White people destroy all... How can the spirit of the earth like the White man?... Everywhere the White man has touched, it is sore.¹⁰

In short, Native people do not just go out with a high-powered gun, kill an animal, take off its head as a trophy, and throw the body in a dump (as do many modern hunters). Native people are not barbarians or savages who kill for "thrills" or for "showing off." Killing is a serious business and it requires spiritual preparation. Moreover, one should feel the pain and sorrow of killing a brother or sister, whether it is a weed, a tree or a deer. If one does not feel that pain, one has become brutalized and "sick." One is, in short, out of harmony with the Universe.

In any case, Native Americans, with rare exceptions, were (like most other creatures) careful in their killing. As Juan Matius points out to his apprentice, Carlos Castaneda, it is better to eat two quail and let three go free, than to eat all five like a glutton.¹¹

Greed and gluttony, along with the cruel using of others' lives without remorse, is seen as destructive of one's own spiritual potential as well as a form of sickness. The cruel exploitation of other creatures is also not

usually found among animals or among tribal, traditional peoples. For example, Old Man Hat, a Navajo elder, spent many months teaching his nephew, Who Has Mules, how to care for livestock:

After you've raised everything, sheep, horses, and cattle, and have gotten lots of property you shouldn't cuss and swear at your properties and stock... these things are like your children. You've got to go easy with them, then you'll have something all the time... And don't talk roughly. If you do you won't get these things, because all the stocks and properties will know that you'll be rough with them. They'll be afraid and won't want to come to you. If you think kindly and talk in the kindest manner then they'll know you're a kind man, and then everything will go to you.¹²

The life of Native American peoples revolves around the concept of the sacredness, beauty, power and relatedness of *all forms* of existence. In short, the ethics or moral values of Native people are part and parcel of their cosmology or total world view. Most Native languages have no word for "religion" and it may be true that a word for religion is never needed until a people no longer have it. As Ohiyesa (Charles Eastman) said: "Every act of his [the Indian's] life is, in a very real sense, a religious act."¹³

Religion is, in reality, living. Our religion is not what we profess, or what we say, or what we proclaim; our religion is what we do, what we desire, what we seek, what we dream about, what we fantasize, what we think—all of these things—twenty-four hours a day. *One's religion, then, is one's life, not merely the ideal life but the life as it is actually lived.*

Religion is not prayer, it is not a church, it is not theistic, it is not atheistic, it has little to do with what white people call "religion." It is our every act. If we tromp on a bug, that is our religion; if we experiment on living animals, that is our religion; if we cheat at cards, that is our religion; if we dream of being famous, that is our religion; if we

gossip maliciously, that is our religion; if we are rude and aggressive, that is our religion. *All that we do, and are, is our religion.*

Joe Washington, a Lenápe man, said some seventy years ago that:

A man goes to heaven when he dies, if he is good.

Goodness was put in man by God. It is in him, and

going to church does not make him good. Praying and going to church will . . . not send a man to heaven . . .

A man will go to heaven because of the goodness that is in him . . . You don't have to eat Peyote or any other herb in order to go to heaven. To go to heaven all you have to do is to be good . . .

I frequently (read) Henry Jensen

CERTAIN FUNDAMENTALIST Christians, followers of the "Christians are not perfect, just forgiven" slogan, pretend that their "faith in Jesus Christ as personal savior" shields them from the consequences of their own deeds. Thus the atrocious deaths of more than 12,000 rural Nicaraguans at the hands of the Contras (organized and controlled by President Ronald Reagan) is irrelevant to their salvation, since being "born again" will cause God to ignore the blood-stained hands of those fundamentalists who supported the Contras and many other right-wing terrorist groups. But to argue that murderers are forgiven when they continue to murder (or pay and hire the killers) is, I would argue, a form of blasphemy.

Our religion is what we are, what we do.

Thus New York City, with its dirt, its slums, its crime, its violence, its greed, its wealthy elite, its tall buildings, its Mafia, its crooked leadership, and its art galleries—all of New York City—is the white society's "church." In the same way the massive federal center for experimentation with animals on Staten Island is a church, the Pentagon and CIA complexes near Washington, DC, are churches, etc. Many people often pretend that they can escape from the consequences of their own acts, but Native philosophy reaches differently. We create

our own reality. Perhaps the acts of creation are our "religion" and the concrete creations are our "churches."

An old Lenápe (Delaware) ceremony begins with:

Truly we are thankful that we have lived long enough to see the time come when these our grandfathers, the trees, bloom forth, and also the coming up of vegetation. Now as well for this water and for him our Grandfather fire, and again this air, again this sunlight. When everyone has been blessed with such gifts it is enough to make one realize what kind of benevolence comes from our father, because he it is who has created everything . . .¹⁵

To the Ashwini (Zuñi) people all of nature is animate, and human beings can aid life by singing and praying for water:

That our earth mother may wrap herself
In a four-fold robe of white meal;
That she may be covered with frost flowers;
That yonder on all the mossy mountains,
The forests may huddle together with the cold
That their arms may be broken by the snow,
In order that the land may be thus,
I have made my prayer sticks into living beings . . .

When our earth mother is replete with living waters,
When spring comes,
The source of our flesh,
All the different kinds of corn,
We shall lay to rest in the ground with the earth
mother's living waters,
They will be made into new beings,

Coming out standing into the daylight of their Sun
father
Calling for rain,
To all sides they will stretch out their hands . . .

That our earth mother
May wear a four-fold green robe,
Full of moss,
Full of flowers,
Full of pollen,
That the land may be thus
I have made you into living beings . . .

With eagle's wing,
And with the striped cloud wings of all the birds of
summer,
With these four times wrapping our plume wands . . .
With our mother, cotton woman,
Even a roughly spun cotton thread,
A soiled cotton thread,
With the four times encircling them
And tying it about their bodies
And with a water bringing hair feather,
We made our plume wands into living beings.
With the flesh of our mother,
Clay woman,
Four times clothing our plume wands with flesh,
We made them into living beings.
Holding them fast,
We made them our representatives in prayer . . .¹⁶

The closeness of Native Americans to the natural world and to animal life is also illustrated by innumerable stories, including one in which the Crow woman, Pretty Shield, tells how a woman found

a "mouse-woman" and her babies nesting in a pouch. She spared the mouse family and later the mouse-woman warned her of an impending attack by Lakota enemies. Pretty Shield stated, "I named my own children, and all of my grandchildren. My Helpers, the ants, gave me all these names. I listen to the ant-people, even to this day, and often hear them calling each other by names that are fine, I never forget them."¹⁷ This respect for animals and elements, of the natural world, arose not only from a sense of relatedness but also from a sense of honoring the Great Spirit by honoring the world. An old Sioux man, Taranaka-obitika or Brave Buffalo, recalled at age seventy-three how he had learned that teaching:

When I was ten years of age, I looked at the land and the rivers, the sky above, and the animals around me and could not fail to realize that they were made by some great power . . . Then I had a dream and in my dream one of these small round stones appeared to me, and told me that the maker of all was Wakan-tanka, and that in order to honor him I must honor his works in nature . . .¹⁸

Thus, "ecology" and "environmental sensitivity" was born among Native Americans as a part of their "religion," which, in turn, was a way of living that incorporated profound respect for the *sacredness* of all living things. Black Hawk wrote,

When the corn is fit to use another great ceremony takes place, with feasting, and returning thanks to the Great Spirit for giving us corn . . . According to tradition, handed down to our people, a beautiful woman was seen to descend from the clouds, and alight upon the earth, by two of our ancestors, who had killed a deer, and were sitting by a fire, roasting a part of it to eat. They were astonished at seeing her, and concluded

that she must be hungry, and had smelt the meat—and immediately went to her, taking with them a piece of the roasted venison. They presented it to her, and she ate—and told them to return to the spot where she was sitting, at the end of one year, and they would find a reward for their kindness and generosity. She then ascended to the clouds, and disappeared . . . When the period arrived for them to visit this consecrated ground, where they were to find a reward for their attention to the beautiful woman of the clouds, they went with a large party, and found, where her right hand had rested on ground, *corn* growing—and where the left had had rested, *beans*—and immediately where she had been seated, *tobacco* . . . We thank the Great Spirit for all the benefits he has conferred upon us. For myself, I never take a drink of water from a spring without being mindful of his goodness.¹⁹

Many centuries ago White Buffalo Woman visited the Lakota people and gave them a special pipe. She said,

With this pipe you will be bound to all your relatives: Your Grandfather and Father [Wakan-tankal, your Grandmother and Mother the Earth . . . All of this is sacred and so do not forget! Every dawn as it comes is a holy event, and every day is holy, for the light comes from your father Wakan-tankal; and also you must always remember that the two-leggeds and the other peoples who stand upon this earth are sacred and should be treated as such.²⁰

{ The “cosmology” or “world-view” of a people is closely related, of course, to all of their actions. *The world-view influences actions and, in turn, actions tell us what the world-view really is!* In short, one must

judge cosmology by actions as much as (or more than) by listening to words. As Lame Deer says, “You can tell a good medicine man by his actions and his way of life. Is he lean? Does he live in a poor cabin? Does money leave him cold?”²¹ Sanapia, a Comanche eagle-power doctor, said in a similar vein:

... my mother told me. She said, “Don’t you ever ask for anything [when doctoring]. It’s going to be given to you
... Now, up to today, when anybody give to me . . . give me blanket or any kind of goods . . . I ain’t supposed to keep it . . . I call [to others and] then say, “Here, you all. Take your choice out of this.” And whatever they leave, that’s mine . . .”²²

WHEN CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS reached the West Indies he found a people who practiced a radically different way of life from that of Europe. He reported,

... since they have become more assured, and are losing that terror, they are artless and generous with what they have, to such a degree as no one would believe but him who had seen it. Of anything they have, if it be asked for, they never say no, but do rather invite the person to accept it, and show as much lovingness as though they would give their hearts . . . And they know no sect nor idolatry; save that they all believe that power and goodness are in the sky . . . And this comes not because they are ignorant; on the contrary, they are men of very subtle wit, who navigate all those seas, and who give a marvelous good account of everything . . . And as soon as I arrived in the Indies, in the first island that I found, I took some

of them by force . . . Their [Spanish] Highnesses may see that I shall give them [The Spanish Crown] as much gold as they may need . . . and slaves as many as they shall order to be shipped, and these shall be from idolators.²³

Columbus proceeded to enslave these "loving" people, shipping thousands of them to Europe and Africa for a profit. Then he and his European cohorts enslaved tens of thousands of others and liquidated several millions of similar humans in the islands within a generation.

Now, were Columbus and his fellow European exploiters simply greedy men whose ethics were such as to allow for mass slaughter and genocide?

I shall argue that Columbus was a wétiko, that he was mentally ill or insane, the carrier of a terribly contagious psychological disease, the wétiko psychosis. The Native people he described were, on the other hand, sane people with a healthy state of mind.

Sanity or healthy normality among humans and other living creatures involves a respect for other forms of life and other individuals, as I have described earlier. I believe that is the way people *have* lived (and should live).

On the whole, the history of the Americas (prior to European conquest) reveals a land where most human groups followed, or tried to follow, the "pollen path" (as the Navajo people call it) or the "good, red road" (as the Lakota call it). The pollen path and the red road lead to living life in a sacred manner with continual awareness of the inter-relationships of all forms of life. Unfortunately, the history of much of the rest of the world, and of modern times everywhere, reveals something different.

It is quite clear that in modern times we have witnessed the widespread brutalization of human beings. The history of Europe in the last 1,500 years and the history of European imperialism in Africa, Asia and the Americas reveal atrocities of almost unimaginable

proportions. The brutality of the "religious" wars in Europe, the unrelenting exploitation of Original Americans, the sacrifice of tens of millions of Africans and First Americans in order to obtain slaves; or peons, the genocidal policies of the English toward the Irish, or Europeans generally towards Native People, of the Nazis toward Jews, Slavs and Gypsies, represent only a few examples of large-scale cruelty, aggression and exploitation almost beyond belief.

Various terms, such as "wild," "savage" and "barbarian" have been used frequently to refer to violent, crude, brutal, cruel, destructive and aggressive behavior. Ironically, such terms have often been used by European writers to refer to non-European peoples whose customs were different and were therefore (because of that element of difference) called "wild" or "savage." The irony stems from the fact that few, if any, societies on the face of the earth have ever been as avaricious, cruel, violent and aggressive as have certain European populations. Luther Standing Bear, a Native American thinker summarized the more correct state of affairs in the following revealing passage:

We did not think of the great open plains, the beautiful rolling hills, and the winding streams with tangled growth as "wild." Only to the White man was nature a "wilderness" and only to him was the land infested by "wild" animals and "savage" people. To us it was tame. Earth was bountiful and we were surrounded with the blessings of the Great Mystery. Not until the hairy man from the east came and with brutal frenzy heaped injustices upon us and the families we loved was it "wild" for us. When the very animals of the forest began fleeing; from his approach, then it was that for us the "wild west" began.²⁴

The "west" of the United States became "wild," then, only when European imperialism commenced the annihilation of the Native

people, of the buffalo, and of the social and cultural structures of the Native nations. The hordes of aggressive, armed white intruders, backed by supporting "regular" troops and government functionaries, in short, made the region "wild." I am quite sure that Native people in the Amazonian basin, in Peru and elsewhere in the Americas would heartily agree with Standing Bear. Everywhere the Europeans brought unimaginable death, destruction, exploitation and greed. Tragically, many South American Native groups are currently experiencing the birth of "wildness." The Amazonian basin is only now being completely reduced to the state of a "wilderness." The kind of greed, exploitation, imperialism and duplicity which together forms a sort of culture of evil has been in the past referred to by the term "Machiavellian." I have so used the latter concept and have suggested that Machiavellianism probably originated in the Middle East some 3,000 to 5,000 years ago when the first documented systems of oppression and exploitation appeared in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia.²⁵

Now, however, I believe that the term Machiavellian does not adequately describe the nature of what we are dealing with. Thus I now wish to explain the nature of the *wétiko* concept. *Wétiko* is a Cree term (*windigo* in Ojibway, *wintiko* in Powhatan) which refers to a cannibal or, more specifically, to an evil person or spirit who terrorizes other creatures by means of terrible evil acts, including cannibalism. *Wétikowatisewin*, an abstract noun, refers to "diabolical wickedness or cannibalism."

I have come to the conclusion that imperialism and exploitation are forms of cannibalism and, in fact, are precisely those forms of cannibalism which are most diabolical or evil. Traditional ritualistic "cannibalism" (so-called) found among many folk peoples was essentially an act of eating a small portion of a dead enemy's flesh in order to gain part of the strength or power of that person or to show respect (in a spiritual way) for that person. (Thus, usually only a respected enemy warrior was so used.)

Cannibalism, as I define it, is the consuming of another's life for one's own private purpose or profit.

Thus, the slaver who forces blacks or Indians to lose their lives in the slave-trade or who drains away their lives in a slave system is a cannibal. He may "eat" other people immediately (as in the deaths of tens of millions of blacks in the process of enslavement or shipment or he may "eat" their flesh gradually over a period of years.

Thus, the wealthy exploiter "eats" the flesh of oppressed workers the wealthy maroon "eats" the lives of her servants, the imperialists "eats" the flesh of the conquered, and so on. Nazism, for example may be described as a German form of cannibalism designed to consume Jews, Gypsies, Poles and other Slavs in order to fatter Germans. Anglo-American imperialism is a form of cannibalism designed to "eat" Indians and also to consume the Native people's land and resources (a process which continues in Central America and elsewhere today).

It should be understood that *wétikos* do not eat other humans only in a symbolic sense. The deaths of tens of millions of Jews, Slavs, etc. at the hands of the Nazis, the deaths of tens of millions of blacks in slavery days, the deaths of up to 30 million or more Indians in the 1500s, the terribly short life spans of Mexican Indian farm workers in the US, and of Native Americans generally today, the high death rates in the early industrial centers among factory workers, and so on, all clearly attest to the fact that the wealthy and exploitative literally consume the lives of those that they exploit.

That, I would affirm, is truly and literally cannibalism, and it is cannibalism accompanied by no spiritually meaningful ceremony or ritual. It is simply raw consumption for profit, carried out often in an ugly and brutal manner. There is no respect for a peon whose life is being eaten. No ceremony. No mystical communication. Only self-serving consumption.