

Is it good that some people feel sad  
about the animals killed painfully  
by hunter-gatherers?

Ted Kaczynski

Undated, ~1980(?)

I doubt that the pygmies have any guilt, conscious or otherwise, about killing animals. Guilt is a conflict between what we're trained *not* to do and impulses that lead us to do it anyway. Apparently there is nothing in pygmy culture that leads them not to kill or inflict pain on animals. What the pygmies love and celebrate is their way of life, and they see no conflict between that and killing for meat; in fact, the hunting is an essential part of their way of life — they gotta eat. We tend to see a conflict there because we come from a world where there is a gross excess of people who even apart from hunting destroy the material world through their very presence in such numbers. But to the pygmies — until very recently anyway — there's been no need for "conservation". The forest is full of animals; with the pygmies primitive weapons and sparse population the question of exterminating the game never arises. The pygmies problem is to fill his belly. The civilized man can afford to feel sorry for wild animals because he can take his food for granted. Some psychologists claim that man is attracted to "death" as they call it. Certainly young men are attracted to action, violence, aggression, and that sort of thing. Note the amount of make-believe violence in the entertainment media — in spite of the fact that in our culture that sort of thing is considered bad and unwholesome and so forth. Since man has been a hunter for the last million years, it is possible that, like other predatory animals, he has some kind of a "killer instinct". It would thus seem that the pygmies are just acting like perfectly good predatory animals. Why should they feel sorry for their prey any more than a hawk, a fox, or a leopard does? On the other hand, when a modern "sport" goes out with a high-powered rifle, you have a different situation. Some obvious differences are: much less skill is required with a rifle than with primitive weapons; the "sport" does it fun, not because he needs the meat; he is in a world where there are too many people and not enough wildlife, and a rifle makes it too easy to kill too many animals. Of course, the fish and game dept. will see to it that the animals don't get exterminated, but this entails "wildlife management" — manipulation of nature which to me is even worse than extermination. Beyond that, while the pygmy lives in the wilderness and belongs to it, the "sport" is an alien intruder whose presence is a kind of desecration. In a sense, the sport hunter is a masturbator: His hunting is not the "real thing" — it's not what hunting is for a primitive man — he is trying to satisfy an instinct in a debased and sordid way, just like when you rub your prick to crudely simulate what you really want, which is a love affair with a woman. Of course there's nothing wrong with jaggging off to relieve yourself when you get horny — it's harmless. But — even apart from the question of depletion of wildlife — the presence of "sports" in the wilderness tends to spoil it for those who know better how to appreciate nature.

So, as I said, I see no reason why the pygmies should have any pity for the animals they kill — they gotta kill to eat anyway, so why make themselves uncomfortable by worrying about the animals pain? On the other hand, I did share your (and the author's) adverse reaction to the account of the pygmies callousness toward animals. For one thing — much as I hate to admit it — my feelings probably have been influenced by the attitudes prevalent in our society; for another thing — and this too is probably

in some way related to the social background — I am more ready to put myself in the position of, and see things from the point of view of, another being, such as an animal; finally — and this does not derive from the social background — I see wild animals as “good guys”, the ones who are on my side, in contrast to civilization and its forces (the bad guys), hence I tend to identify with the wild animals. Certainly I would be much less prone to have pity for a domestic animal than for a wild one. I kill rabbits and so forth because I need the meat, but (now more than formerly — youth tends to be callous) I always regret that something alive and beautiful has been turned into just a piece of meat. (Though when you’re hungry enough for meat, you don’t worry too much about that.)

If you wanted, you could perhaps justify the pygmies this way: The pygmy kills without compunction or pity in order to eat. The pygmy too has to die some day, but he isn’t afraid of that. Perhaps he’ll be killed some day by a leopard or a buffalo, but he doesn’t whine about it or ask the leopard or buffalo to have mercy on him. He is an animal like the others in the forest and he shares the hardships and dangers with the other animals. He lives in an amoral world. But it’s a free world and I would say a much wholesome and fulfilling world than that of modern civilization. I do share your negative emotional reaction to the pygmies’ ruthlessness, but I’m inclined to suspect that that reaction is perhaps a little decadent, and I don’t see that anything would be improved much by the pygmy’s vicariously sharing the sufferings of the animals he kills.

I mentioned the fact that the pygmies’ world is an amoral one and that such a world may be a wholesome world than the moral one of civilization. Note that amorality does not exclude generous behavior toward others: human beings have impulses of love and loyalty to one another and these are animal impulses, not products of morality. By morality I mean feelings of guilt and shame that we are trained to associate with certain actions that our instinctive impulses would otherwise lead us to perform. Of course it’s disagreeable to admit the extent to which we’ve been influenced by all that brainwashing—attitudes to which we are constantly exposed in school, in books, in the mass communicative media, etc. I hate to admit it, but — as I believe I mentioned to you once before — I would be incapable of premeditatedly committing a serious crime,<sup>(1)</sup> and the reason for this is simply that I am subject to the same trained-in inhibitions as most other people. I couldn’t commit a serious crime cause I’d be scared to — quite apart from the fear of getting caught. On an intellectual level I don’t believe in any moral code. To what extent is our aversion to the pygmies ruthlessness simply the result of our having been brainwashed? Now the point I want to make is this: One of the principile justifications — or rather rationalizations — given for moral training is that it promotes human welfare — we are better off if we don’t kill each other, steal

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<sup>(1)</sup> [Note from one of Ted’s coded journals: “I recently wrote in a letter to my brother that the inhibitions that have been trained into me are too strong to permit me ever to commit a serious crime. This may surprise the reader considering some things reported in these notes, but motive is clear. I want to avoid any possible suspicion on my brothers part.”]

from each other, etc. But what I would argue is that a strongly developed morality and system of inhibitions exacts a psychological price that is too much to pay for the added physical security. We would lead more fulfilling lives with less trained-in inhibitions even at the price of considerably less physical security. People who are habituated from childhood to a relatively unsafe mode of existence — such as primitive savages — don't seem to mind it a bit. It doesn't make them feel insecure. As for the price of inhibitions, I've read in more than one place that there is an inverse relation between murder and suicide statistics. Countries that have a high murder rate tend to have a low suicide rate and countries with a low murder rate tend to have a high suicide rate. This seems to suggest that people who are too inhibited about expressing aggression pay a high psychological price — for every one who commits suicide there are probably a great many who are miserable but never quite get to the point of stringing themselves up. Primitives are probably not wholly free of morality, but they are undoubtedly far less clamped down by moral inhibitions than we are. One thing I've noted in reading about very primitive people is that in many cases there seems to be a great deal of squabbling and quarrelling among them. This used to repel me, because like other people of our sort of background I've been trained to hold in the feelings that give rise to quarrelling. We have to be trained to do that because our machine-like society would function very poorly if workers got into a shouting match with the boss or their fellow-workers every time they got pissed off about something. Our society requires order above all else: But I don't see why primitive societies should be regarded as worse than ours because of this quarelsomeness. Unquestionably the resentments and jealousy are present in our society — the only difference is that they are not usually expressed openly. They come out as snide remarks made behind someones back or in other pettiness, or (perhaps worse) they are just held in, where they fester. Probably the primitives do better to openly express their annoyances and resentments. Well, I could go on forever pursuing the ramifications of this — I could bring in personal loyalty among the Somalis, political corruption in Latin America ... but I guess I've rambled on long enough. Also, I did a sloppy job of expressing all this, but I don't want to spend forever writing this letter, so fuck it.

The Ted K Archive

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A meandering train of thoughts extracted from a letter Ted sent to his brother David.

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