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Good Reasons or Bad Conscience? Or Why Some Indian Peoples of Amazonia Are Ambivalent about Eating Meat

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When they first visited Amazonia, our small children were horrified to see people killing monkeys and macaws to eat.¹ Viewing the killing of any animal was bad enough, but this was even worse. These particular ones could not possibly be food; they were the sacred inhabitants of a fantasy world of picture books, zoos, and far-away jungles now fast becoming very real. To add insult to injury, their parents were not only prepared to eat such animals themselves but also expected their children to do so too. At first, they refused outright but as they became hungrier, refusal gave way to grudging acceptance, first of a few tentative nibbles and then of whole mouthfuls. If they never became entirely reconciled to the traumas of this exotic diet, it certainly had its compensations: a baby marmoset, orphaned in the chase, became a treasured pet, and even the animals they were forced to eat came packaged with exotic beaks, teeth, fur, and feathers that could be stored away to show friends back home. Returning hunters, once condemned as murderers, were soon greeted with enthusiastic expectation.

Faced with the stark realities that lie behind the consumption of meat, our children's reactions were symptomatic of the world from which they came. In Europe, meat (especially red meat) has a markedly ambiguous status. Europeans typically consider meat to be food par excellence, the focal dish of feasts, banquets, and family meals, and a sign of wealth, luxury, sociability, and well-being. It is also a sign and source of strength—it comes from large, strong animals, it has masculine connotations, it is the diet of preference for those who rely on physical strength, and it is held to make them yet stronger.

However, if meat makes one strong, one also requires a certain kind of strength to eat meat. Red meat is powerful stuff that both body and mind can sometimes find hard to take. On our plates and throughout our meals we balance the strength of meat by pairing it with white, bland, soft, watery, or sweet foods of vegetable origin. These same foods also dominate the diets of invalids' and children, who are considered as not strong enough to resist the strength of meat. Meat also demands strength of another kind, a strength of will in the face of knowing that in eating meat, one's own enjoyment of life also presupposes the enjoyment of *a* life, the killing and destruction of another living being.

Given this problem, one would predict considerable instability in attitudes and behavior associated with meat consumption: habits will change through time, there will be inconsistencies between thought and action, and contradictions between rival opinions as to what is right and wrong. This is precisely what the works of Keith Thomas (1983), Noëlle Vialles (1987), and Nicholas Fiddes (1991) all demonstrate. For France, Vialles shows how abattoirs have been progressively displaced away from urban centers and subject to increasingly strict regulation, a cleansing of the activities that is at once both practical and symbolic. For England, Thomas and Fiddes document steadily declining meat consumption, a corresponding rise in vegetarianism, and increasingly intense public debates and changing legislation concerning the proper treatment of animals.

These authors all seem to agree that this increase in sensitivity regarding the killing of animals for food, itself deeply implicated in our ideas about the nature of civilization, is correlated with the rise of modern, industrial society, with its spreading urbanization and marginalization of animals from production. Associated with these changes, there has been a redefinition of what animals are and of how we should relate to them: a move away from the idea of dominating creatures considered to be radically different from ourselves and toward one of stewardship of beings to whom we increasingly extend the rights and duties associated with personhood. In Thomas's words, "There was a growing conflict between the new sensibilities and the material foundations of human society. A mixture of compromise and concealment

has so far prevented this conflict from having to be fully resolved. But the issue cannot be completely evaded and it can be relied upon to recur. It is one of the contradictions upon which modern civilisation may be said to rest. About its ultimate consequences we can only speculate” (1983:303).

When I read Vialles’s study of abattoirs in southwest France, what struck me were the similarities between what she describes and what I and other colleagues have observed in Amazonia: a mixture of compromise and concealment with respect to the killing and eating of meat. However, in Amazonia we are dealing not with the end point of civilization but with societies that some historians might characterize as archaic and uncivilized. Are these modern sensibilities really so new, or have they been with us all along?

I want to suggest that they have. In certain respects, Amerindian attitudes are really quite similar to those of modern Europeans, and they stem ultimately from two quite general existential problems, of concern to most human beings, which are thrown into especially sharp relief by the killing of animals for meat. The first is a preoccupation with the fact that the line that divides people from animals is far from clear; the second is an awareness that the reproduction and integration of human life depends upon the destruction and disintegration of other components of the world. I also want to suggest that efforts to systematize and rationalize Amerindian beliefs and practices often obscure this common ground. This search for good or logical cultural reasoning behind apparently alien customs not only tends to exaggerate the cultural distance between Amerindians and ourselves but also gives the impression that their ideas are more homogenous and less subject to historical change than is actually the case.

I shall base my discussion on the Barasana and Makuna, who are Tukanoan peoples of southeastern Colombia. Like my children, but for distinct reasons, the Tukanoans also make use of the derivative products of meat consumption as a way of coming to terms with some of the problems involved. However, I also want to use a wider comparative focus. It is best to see the Indians of Amazonia not as discrete tribes, each with their own peculiar customs and beliefs, but instead as a community of diverse people living in a common geographic area and sharing elements of a common cultural heritage. In Amazonia, as in Europe, we find a range of attitudes toward the eating of meat that vary not just between different ethnic groups but also between different individuals and between different historical periods.

Some Amazonian Attitudes toward Meat

Amazonian Indians have a proverbial passion and hunger for meat. A meal with no meat is not considered a proper meal at all, and many Amerindian languages make a verbal distinction between ordinary hunger and a special hunger for meat.² Apparently never available in adequate quantities, meat is esteemed above all other foods and is a favorite topic of conversation. Meat is also the focus of intense social interest as a highly charged object of exchange: men use gifts of meat to secure sexual favours from lovers or to underwrite their status as husbands and household heads; households share meat as a key expression of community ties; in-laws give each other meat as an expression of their reciprocal obligations whilst asymmetrical exchanges of meat—from leader to followers, from son-in-law to father-in-law, from nomadic hunter to settled farmer—express asymmetries of status and power.

Despite this enthusiasm for meat, Amazonian Indians also realize that one can have too much of a good thing. Eating meat, especially the meat of large animals, carries both moral and physical dangers and should be done in moderation. Amongst the Achuar, “an evident enthusiasm for eat eating ... is played down in both speech and table manners” (Descola 1986:308, my trans.),³ whilst the Araweté say they ended their resistance to contact with White people because they “were tired of eating only meat” (Viveiros de Castro 1992:47). Throughout Amazonia, to eat meat without manioc or maize is morally condemned as savagery. The Amerindians’ passion for meat must therefore be placed in the context of their other ideas about what constitute ideal or proper foods. When the Trio say, “We can live without meat; without bread we die” (Rivière 1969:42), this is at once an affirmation of the dependability of manioc as a staple and an endorsement of its status as the paradigmatic food of most Amazonian peoples.

The Tukanoan Barasana and Makuna like meat, but they consider fish to be the proper food for human beings. Fishing is also considered to be a peaceful and harmless activity that contrasts with the danger, emotion, and symbolic charge of hunting.⁴ Consistent with this

preference for fish, game animals are *wai būkūrā*, literally “old, mature fish,” a term that suggests game animals are considered a subclass of “fish.” As they are always eating one kind of “fish” or another, it could be said that Tukanoans never fail to eat their proper food.

The central Brazilian Kalapalo have a similar preference for fish and normally eat only the meat of smaller animals and a few birds. Officially, the meat of larger animals is “disgusting” and fit only for their aggressive and warlike neighbors, but when others are not looking some Kalapalo will happily eat the deer and peccary they publicly deny to be food of true human beings (Basso 1973:16). “Eating only the ‘right’ things (is) a significant public demonstration of individual responsibility for engendering qualities of restraint and respect” (Basso 1995:17), the qualities that mark being truly Kalapalo. Here, as elsewhere in the region, this emphasis on self-restraint reveals a tension between two kinds of preference—between what people might like to eat and what they feel they ought to eat.

Most dangerous

PREDATORS

(*yayiya*, “jaguars”)

GAME ANIMALS

(*wai būkūrā*, “mature fish”)

Big game: tapir, deer, peccaries

Small game: monkeys, rodents, birds (esp. Cracidae)

Birds with white flesh

(Tinamous)

FISH

(*wai*)

Big Fish (*wai hakarā*)

Small fish (*wai ria*)

GATHERED ANIMAL FOOD

(*baarierā*, “edible creatures”)

Frogs, ants, termites, caterpillars, beetle larvae, etc

VEGETABLE FOOD

Tree fruits (*hee rika*)

Cultivated plants (*ote*)

Manioc, maize, plantains, yams, etc

Least Dangerous

Figure 1. Tukanoan hierarchy of foods

Restraint regarding eating meat not only defines one’s identity but also protects oneself from harm. The Tukanoans ascribe many illnesses to eating animal food without the proper ritual precautions. Rules of avoidance depend on the intersection between categories of people and classes of food, on who eats what. The dangers posed by different foods are relative both to a person’s stage in life and to their circumstances. Categorically, small children are most at risk and eat only the safest items; as young people become adults, they progressively add new items to their diet until, as elders now past the age of rearing children, they can eat the full range of potential foods. Situationally, those who are ill, who are undergoing life crises, growth

or change, who have recently taken part in ritual, or who have otherwise had contact with the world of spirits and vital processes are all at risk. As if returning to an infantile state, such people must reduce their diet to a safe minimum, adding “stronger” and more risky items only when each has been ritually treated to make it safe.

The classification of food is based on the natural categories from which it derives, with further distinctions according to criteria such as provenance, habitat, mode of procurement, and mode of cooking. The different classes of food have a ranking according to the risks they pose, and that also reflects the esteem in which the foods are held. Figure 1 shows a simplified version of this hierarchy of foods for the Tukanoans.⁵ It has some clear parallels not only for other Amazonian populations but also European ones (see Figure 2). Each rests upon similar principles concerning size, amount of blood, and the taking of life, the same principles that also govern European attitudes concerning cruelty to animals.

forbidden	<i>Too strong</i>	human flesh carnivores uncastrated animals	<i>uncooked</i>	raw meat
Limits of majority culture				
meat	<i>Strong blood potent</i>	red meat	<i>cooking necessary</i>	roast joints stews
	<i>white meat less potent</i>	poultry fish		roast boiled fried steamed
Limits of vegetarians				
animal products	<i>Less strong</i>	eggs cheese		fried boiled as main dish raw, gratin
Limits of vegans				
fruit and vegetables	<i>Too weak</i>	fruit leaf vegetables root vegetables cereals		

Figure 2. European hierarchy of foods (after Twigg 1983:21)

The dangers of various kinds of meat are closely related to the animal’s size and amount of blood. White meat is safer than red meat, whilst the meat of large terrestrial animals—peccary, deer, and tapir—is the strongest and most dangerous of all and eaten only by full adults.⁶ Illness caused by meat comes either directly from the animal’s revenge for being killed and eaten or from the spirit owners of game who are insulted by a lack of respect for their proprietary rights.⁷ To avoid illness, shamans first blow spells on the food in question. Consistent with the classification outlined above, these spells operate, in part, by taking dangerous foods one or more notches down the hierarchy.

By changing their skins, fish can transform themselves into game animals. Shamans can use spells to transform these animals back into fish and, in their spells, they speak of them as the fish they are to be. More radically, when shamans ask the spirit owners of large game animals for permission to hunt, they do not ask for gifts of meat but rather for gifts of vegetable food. The spells they blow on the resulting meat reiterate this transformation, converting animal flesh into manioc bread, plantains, pineapples, or other cultivated foods, a technique also practiced by the Piaroa (Overing Kaplan 1975:3). The effect of such practices is to allow the Tukanoans to consider themselves as vegetarians who also eat fish. They also call to mind Vialles's account of the various linguistic and practical procedures that serve to de-animalize animal carcasses in French abattoirs, procedures she refers to as "vegetalization" (1987:50–3, 69–70, my trans.).⁸

If a tendency to associate illness with the consumption of meat is quite common in Amazonia, it is also important to stress that there are important variations in attitudes and behavior amongst different Amazonian peoples. The Tukanoans are not very enthusiastic or energetic hunters, they worry about the possibility of animal vengeance, observe strict rules about eating meat, and are punctilious about giving gifts to the masters of animals in return for the animals they kill. The Jivaroans are keen hunters, with a more relaxed attitude toward eating meat. They do not normally eat tapir or deer but not due to any fear of vengeance; vengeance is a leitmotif of interpersonal relations but seems to play little or no role in their relations with animals. The Yanomamö are likewise keen hunters, but they also have elaborate ideas concerning animal vengeance; some subgroups exempt tapirs from their system of prohibitions and readily eat them; others are more circumspect.⁹ Despite such variations, good evidence exists all over Amazonia showing meat is something that is at once highly esteemed but also inherently problematic, and that desirability and danger are typically correlated with the size of the animal involved. As Christopher Crocker says of the Bororo, "Big animals are the epitome of things that are dangerous but good to consume" (1985:143).

Explanations for Ambivalence

Although there are some important and often polemical differences involved, most anthropological discussions of Amerindian attitudes toward hunting animals and consuming meat share in common an assumption that, in one way or another, these attitudes have a systematic ecological or sociological rationality, either as symbolic statements about peoples' relations with the natural world or as structural homologues of their relations with each other.

The ecological argument comes in two forms: one gives priority to Western science and practical reason while the other gives primacy to native science and cultural logic but both implying a convergence between our notions of ecology and theirs. Eric Ross suggests that Amerindian food prohibitions particularly apply to the larger animals because these are the ones most vulnerable to over-predation. Though they may not be consciously phrased in such terms, taboos that favor the predation of smaller animals confer selective advantage in promoting "a sustained yield rather than encouraging maximal resource use" (Ross 1978:5). This practical emphasis would tend to see hunting as simply a way of obtaining protein.

On the other hand, Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff (1971, 1976) takes a more symbolic approach, arguing that rules and restrictions concerning hunting animals represent a resource management strategy based on a conscious understanding of ecology as a system of finite energy flow requiring a balance between input and output for its continued viability.¹⁰ Much of this ecological knowledge is phrased in symbolic terms as part of a wider cosmology in which the moral and existential implications of hunting go well beyond a simple maximization of returns.

In an argument with greater sociological emphasis, Philippe Descola (1993, 1994) draws attention to a structural homology between the rules that organize social relations and those that organize relations with animals, a feature also underlined by Kaj Århem (1991). Descola elaborates this argument in relation to the contrastive Tukanoan and Jivaro attitudes toward hunting mentioned above. In the Tukanoan case, a common principle of reciprocal exchange organizes relations with human affines and animal others, whilst in the Jivaro case they are based on a principle of predation that negates peaceful exchanges between men and animals. For the Tukanoans, the human and animal worlds form elements of a huge meta-system in which all exchanges must be balanced: the killing of animals must be compensated by deaths

amongst human beings. For the Jivaro, “the circulation of energies, substances or identities excludes those of non-human beings: the deficit generated by the death of a human being must be compensated by a recycling process within the human sphere, by means of head-hunting” (Descola 1993:118).

I do not intend to comment here on the merits of these arguments except to say that if European attitudes toward animals and the consumption of meat are complex phenomena that reflect simultaneously practical, sociological, philosophical, and ethical considerations, the same is also likely to be true in Amazonia. Although a bad conscience concerning the killing and eating of animals is manifestly one component of European attitudes to meat, thus far the possibility that a similar bad conscience might also form one component of such attitudes in Amazonia has received very little consideration. Two exceptions are Laura Rival’s mention of occasional displays of compassion by Huaorani hunters (1986:155) and Philippe Erikson’s (1987) suggestion that, in keeping the young of game animals as pets, Amerindians may be seeking to repair the damage done to their parents in the chase, an argument that Descola (1994:339) explicitly rejects.

The Personhood of Animals

If one asks Tukanoans about the rationale behind their rules and prohibitions concerning the hunting of animals and eating of their meat, they eventually make it clear that the root of the problem lies in the animals’ status as persons. To quote a Makuna shaman, “Game animals are people. They have their own mind and their own thoughts just like humans. They have their own houses and communities, their own dances, ritual equipment and musical instruments. They have chiefs, shamans, singers, dancers and workers. Each community has its own territory” (Århem 1991:112). In the time of myth, animals and people were one and the same; various stories now account for how they became partially differentiated. Some animals were animals all along; others who were once more like people lost the chance of remaining full persons, usually through their own ignorance and stupidity. As Descola says of the Achuar, “The mythological corpus thus appears as a grand gloss on the diverse circumstances of speciation, a painstaking enunciation of the various forms of passage from the undifferentiated to the differentiated” (1986:120, my trans.).¹¹

As the result of their common origins, all living things are interrelated and have similar status as people. Personhood is contextual and differs by degree: our own people are more persons than enemies and strangers; most animals are less fully persons than most human beings, and certain animals—the larger wild predators and herbivores and the pets of human beings—are more persons than their smaller, undomesticated brethren. The broader ontological equivalence between humans and animals means that relations between different human beings and relations between them and animals also differ only in degree. Different in appearance but all composed of flesh and blood, living beings can transform their identity from one being to another to another, a process compared to a change of clothing and ornament. “A tapir is a person clothed in a tapir skin. In the tapir peoples’ houses these skins hang along the walls like white men’s shirts. When a tapir enters his house, he takes off his shirt and becomes a person. When they leave their houses they put their shirts back on again and become animals. Today because of unregulated hunting, the houses of the tapir people are full of sadness; the skins hanging on the walls are full of bullet holes and stained with blood” (Århem 1991:115).

Many Amerindian peoples share ideas such as these. Although they do indeed draw many metaphorical parallels between the world of human beings and that of animals, for Amerindians the personhood of animals goes well beyond mere analogy or figures of speech. Animals are not merely like people; they *are* people, an idea that runs directly counter to the Cartesian bias of much Western thought. Descola (1993:114) suggests it is this kind of thinking’s apparent irrationality that has made anthropologists wary of the topic of animism, preferring instead to concentrate on the more logical aspects of totemism. Although the two may coexist, he argues that “animic systems are a symmetrical inversion of totemic classifications: they do not exploit the differential relations between natural species to confer a conceptual order on society but rather use the elementary categories structuring social life, to organise, in conceptual terms, the relations between human beings and natural species” (1993:114).

I agree with this and find it helpful. However, the neat structural formulation of this argument in terms of parallel conceptual orders obscures the fact that such animism also

involves moral considerations about what constitutes proper interaction with the animal world, an interaction that takes place between living organisms and not merely between collective abstractions.

The personal character of real-life interaction is underlined by the Huaorani hunter's stress that their occasional compassion for animals arises via eye contact. Acknowledgement of mutual gaze's powerful effects is one instance of a more general intimacy that characterizes Amerindian relations with animals. Engaging with them on a day-to-day basis, Amerindians display a profound knowledge of the animals that surround them. Their anthropomorphization of animals (and plants) conveys many things at once and is "as much the manifestation of mythic thought as a metaphoric code that serves to translate a form of 'popular science'" (Descola 1986:124, my trans.).¹² This knowledge also emerges in the Amerindian propensity to see the world through the eyes of other beings—"those fish wonder how we can breathe under water; the jaguar sees the hunter as a jaguar coming to eat him." This way of thinking, the basis of much Amerindian mythology and shamanism, extends to animals the same intention and purposefulness that motivates human behavior. Both as pets and as the subjects of endless hunting stories, animals come across as sources of intense interest, admiration, and pleasure, the subjects of considerable affection and respect, and the focus of forceful emotional experiences. Their behavior, their sounds, and the products of their bodies—above all those of birds—are also of profound importance as sources and inspiration of human aesthetic endeavor in song, dance, and bodily ornamentation.

In making these remarks, I do not wish to suggest that Amerindians are prone to sentimentalize their interactions with animals or that their attitudes toward them and the wider natural world are directly comparable to those which are manifest in the pet-keeping, vegetarianism, or animal rights movements of modern society. Nothing could be further from the truth. What I do want to suggest though is that, hunting notwithstanding, the intimacy of their relations with animals is on a par with the mix of pragmatism and closeness found in premodern farming communities, an intimacy that prefigured the new sensibilities of the early modern period, which encouraged their development, and which led ultimately to contemporary attitudes (see Thomas 1983). I also want to suggest that, as in contemporary Europe, a bad conscience concerning the taking of life is one part of the widespread Amerindian ambivalence toward eating meat. This bad conscience is directly linked to the personhood of animals and to the intimacy of human relationships with them. This is not to say that other practical, sociological, or cosmological factors are not also relevant, only that to focus on these more global considerations deflects attention away from how eating meat also implies a whole way of being and raises issues of self-control, issues which are also of concern to ourselves.

Ideal Victims

How then does this bad conscience's workings relate to the choice of animals in hunting and to the processing and eating of their meat? I have already suggested that in Amazonia, as in Europe, red meat from large animals is often considered the quintessence of meat. But what else makes animals edible? The brief answer is they should be like human beings—but not too alike. Tukanoans distinguish between "those-who-eat-people" (*masa baara*) and "those-who-people-eat" (*masa baare*). "Those-who-eat-people" are jaguars (*yaiya*), a category relative to a given perspective and which carries the more general meaning of "predator"—for European snails, the thrush would be their "jaguar." Human beings do not eat the large predators most like them, the jaguars and other felines, the eagles and hawks in the air, and the otters in the water, all of whom stand in the same predator or "jaguar" relationship to other animals as do humans themselves. The "people" who humans eat are "fish" (*vai*), i.e., those who are considerably less people than themselves. As indicated above, some of these "fish" are also game animals, *wai bükürã* or "mature fish."

If Tukanoans avoid large predators as food because they are too like human beings in their more aggressive, asocial, and solitary guise, the preferred food animals are also emblematic of human beings in another, more positive guise. Tukanoans variously describe their ideal characteristics as pacific, fruit-eating, vegetarian, defenceless, diurnal, territorial, and sociable, all characteristics emblematic of peaceful cooperative sociality and of family life. These animals are eaten precisely *because* they are like human beings.¹³ It seems, then, that animals preferred as food epitomize one kind of human ideal, itself exemplified by their gentle nature and

gregarious feeding behavior, and stand opposed to another ideal, exemplified by the solitary and aggressive behavior of those who prey upon them. These ideals may be recast in terms of gender: aggressive men are hunters, and defenseless women are their “meat”—the ethnography of the region is replete with symbolic parallels between hunting and the taking of women in marriage and between eating and sex. For the Tukanoans, they also relate to opposed masculine ideals and ways of being: the hot-headed, controlling warrior versus the self-controlled, reflective man of peace. Thus, like human behavior toward animals, the selection of animals for meat also carries moral overtones in representing a particular human ideal, an identity between the eater and the eaten.

Size and habitat are also relevant considerations. Tapirs provide an abundance of very good meat, but their large size, copious blood, terrestrial habits, gentle nature, and vegetable diet combine to make them very like human beings. They thus pose, in an especially acute way, a dilemma underlying the selection of all prey: that between what is morally desirable and what is desirable as food. Collectively and as individuals, people must choose what they consider to be edible and choose whether they will stick to the rules. For some, tapirs are brothers, ancestors, or reincarnated spirits and avoided altogether. To eat them would raise in too acute a form the ever-present but latent issue of cannibalism that meat eating implies. Some seize the opportunity of a chance encounter but would not set out with the intention of hunting tapir, thus avoiding the implication of a premeditated killing. Others kill tapirs intentionally but only in the context of collective ritual hunts, whilst yet others appear to kill and eat tapirs with no qualms at all. The common Amerindian preference for monkeys and birds as ideal game thus appears to have both a statistical and a moral component. The smaller, arboreal animals are abundant and easy to kill; they are also like—but not too like—the people who eat them. On both counts they are thus a safe bet.

Size and habitat are also related to a hunting technology that likewise involves both practical and ideological considerations. Prior to the introduction of guns, hunters usually killed larger game animals with spears or clubs. As close extensions of the body, these weapons are identified with their owner-users and not usually lent to others. Clubs and spears are effective insofar as they are used with maximum effort and aggression to cause significant wounds and loss of blood. In short, they presume direct responsibility for the death of animals through the same wild, uncontrolled, aggressive, and blood-thirsty behavior that is otherwise associated with warriors and jaguars.¹⁴

Hunters normally kill smaller game animals with the blowpipe, a weapon possessing quite different connotations than spears and clubs. When Tukanoan hunters use spears or guns they say they are “killing game.” The phrase they use, *wai büküürã siaãgji*, makes explicit that blood spills and physical damage occurs. With a blowpipe they are merely “blowing game” (*wai büküürã hutirã*); no blood is shed and the space between killer and victim is mediated by breath and air. It thus remains unclear as to who or what actually did the killing—was it the hunter, his breath, the blowpipe, the dart, or the poison? This potential shift of blame calls to mind the ambiguity surrounding the slaughter of animals in our own abattoirs. As Vialles (1987:49) observes, because one man first stuns the animal and another then slits its throat, it is unclear who actually does the killing.¹⁵ For the Tukanoans, as for the Huaorani (Rival 1966:164), the calm, patience, reflection, and self-control required to use a blowpipe are directly opposed to the behavior of the spear-wielding warrior-killer. The Kalapalo make a similar contrast between the bow and arrow and the club (Basso 1995:19). Like choice of prey, the choice of a weapon can also reflect a way of being.

Considerations such as these also throw light on the fact that large animals are typically killed in collective hunts governed by strict rules of etiquette: even if it is more efficient to hunt large and sometimes numerous animals collectively, social and moral issues also play their roles. In individual hunting there is a relation of relative equality between the hunter and his prey. In hunting magic and in the stories of hunters, the language is typically that of seduction, an enterprise whose outcome is always uncertain, for the intended victim can always run away. By contrast, collective hunts are anonymous, massive, and can result in the slaughter of sometimes thirty or more animals that stand little or no chance of escape. No magic is used in these collective hunts, and their idiom is that of war.

White-lipped peccaries have a special status throughout Amazonia. They have no fixed territory, wander around in large herds, and are aggressive animals with sharp tusks that stand their ground when attacked. All over Amazonia they serve as an image of the savage,

marauding enemy. Whilst any collective hunt has some connotations of warfare, it is the collective hunting of peccary that brings these to the fore. In the case of the Araweté, for whom warfare provides a cornerstone of their very existence, the leader of a collective hunt has the symbolic attributes of a killer. Here the homicidal implications of hunting are close to the surface and focus on one individual (Viveiros de Castro 1992:132). The WaiWai, for whom warfare has no such importance, appear to take the opposite tack. Here, though people generally know who killed what, the responsibility for the massacre of peccaries is collective, a point further underlined by a sharing of whole dead animals not just amongst the hunters but also amongst others not directly involved (Mentore 1995).

Throughout the region, these collective hunts and subsequent feasting have a markedly orgiastic quality that sets them apart from normal life.¹⁶ Like Carnival or “*carne-vale*,” the farewell to meat before the lean times of Lent, these blowouts alternate with periods of relative scarcity in which, quite apart from normal fluctuations in hunting success, hunting is itself consciously reduced. This is especially clear in the Tukanoans’ seasonal alternation between intercommunity exchanges of collectively obtained fish or meat (*baare ekaria wii*) and tightly controlled feasts of forest fruit (*bee rika soria wii*), or between predominantly carnivorous and vegetarian modes of existence (Hugh-Jones 1979, 1995). Different groups seem to face up to the cannibalistic excess that meat implies in different ways: some accept it with enthusiasm, some temper it with an emphasis on restraint, and some try to avoid it in their preference for fish.

Rules of etiquette that enjoin control at other levels often further temper the abandonment of control displayed in the violence of massive killing and gluttony of orgiastic feasting. Many groups insist that hunters should treat their prey with respect, that they be killed cleanly, not maimed or wounded, and that hunters should not kill more animals than they need.¹⁷ The reciprocal of this last rule is one that large animals such as tapir, deer, and peccary should only be killed if their abundant meat is to be widely distributed along lines of kinship between one or more communities. As George Mentore (1995:31) says of the WaiWai, the exchange and sharing of meat and cooking and ritualization of meals distinguishes the jaguar-like hunters from real jaguars. Human beings subject their food intake to collective, intellectual control, whilst jaguars hunt and selfishly eat raw meat alone. In communal hunts, and through this rule of sharing, the relationship normally established between an individual hunter, his family, and a particular animal transforms into a collective relationship between a community and a collectivity or species of animals.

The masters of animals that Tukanoan shamans petition for supplies of game are also the masters of species as collectivities, and shamans should only make such interventions in the context of communal feasts. The shaman’s strict control of the proceedings thus reflects the social ends for which the meat is destined; they exert relatively little control over individual hunting and the typically small results are rarely shared beyond the family or small household. If the shaman does his job properly, seeking license for the animals killed and paying for them with gifts of tobacco and coca, and if people stick to the rules and behave as true human beings should, then the boundaries between them and animals remain intact. Only when people act foolishly and misbehave do things go wrong. Then, as in their myths, peoples’ ignorance and stupidity result in them losing their humanity—spirit tapirs and peccaries termed ‘ingesters’ (*soori masa*) capture their souls and use them to replenish the stock of animal souls. Instead of reincarnating as other human beings, they reappear as animals in the forest.

The Economy of Blood, Fur, and Feathers

Once they have been killed, animals must undergo a series of linked and complementary operations—butchery; disposal of fur, feathers, guts, and other remains; cooking; and shamanic treatment—before their meat can be safely consumed. Beyond their purely practical function, these operations’ design ensures the proper circulation of humans’ and animals’ vital essences, each in their proper domain. Again, they call to mind a set of analogous European ideas, laid bare by Vialles (1987:139ff.).

Larger animals are sometimes gutted where they fall, but Tukanoans normally butcher animals at a river or stream close to the settlement, a marginal zone between the forest and the house used for bathing and as a landing place for canoes. Relative to the mud and blood of the chase, the river is a clean area and, as in the case of European abattoirs built by rivers

(Vialles 1987:87), the emphasis is on water as a vehicle to remove blood from the meat. Tukanos have a strong aversion to the ingestion of blood and were horrified by my habit of sucking a cut finger. To rid meat of blood, it must be thoroughly boiled or smoked till it is dry. Roasting is not merely considered to be profligate and wasteful; it also leaves meat with the smell and sight of blood.¹⁸

This aversion to blood also has its positive side. Blood is the life force of both people and animals; their different bloods must be conserved but not mixed. To ingest blood would be to behave like a jaguar and would blur the substantial and moral boundary that sustains the distinct identities of human beings and animals. Instead, the vital parts of animals, their blood and guts, are washed downriver, returning their vitality to its source and leaving their meat in a safely de-animated condition similar to that of vegetable food. This separation between meat and blood is as fine as that between *rii* and *ri*, the respective terms by which they are known.

The Barasana story of Warimi, a watery, sperm-like homunculus who appears from the guts of his butchered mother abandoned in a river (Hugh-Jones 1979:277), would suggest the separation of meat from blood is also a separation of nutritive and procreative substances that serves to prevent what would otherwise be a dangerous mixing or cross-fertilization. The Piaroa belief that if meat is not converted to vegetable matter it can make women pregnant also suggests the same idea (Overing Kaplan 1975:39). Further evidence for this assertion comes from the role of rivers in Barasana ideas about procreation. *Ria*, the word for semen, is itself close to both *ri*, “blood” and *riaga*, “river.” In Tukanos origin myth, an ancestral anaconda lying in the river vomited up the first human beings. In the ritual practices surrounding birth and initiation, Tukanos again portray birth as a passage from a riverine to a terrestrial existence, a portrayal that also uses images of vomiting or ejaculation. At death, the cycle is completed. Corpses are buried in the floor of the house floor in coffins made from a canoe and return to the river of the dead. From there, souls return to a terrestrial river and are born anew.

The return of vitality washed away in blood has its counterpart in the return of another kind of vitality whose special location is in fur and feathers, which are both referred to as *boa* or “hair.” If blood represents the invisible flow of internal essence and has to do with organic processes, “hair” represents the more-permanent aspects of external identity. The growth of “hair” is an index of internal organic change and, in human beings, these changes are socialized by the cutting or dressing of hair. The vitality of human hair can also be enhanced through adding ornaments made of bird feathers and animal fur that are worn on the head.

The “hair” of game must not be treated casually. Before butchering birds and animals, their feathers and fur must be totally removed by burning in a fire. Beyond its practical role, this operation also serves to return their vitality and ensures their continued reproduction. Parallel to this physical return in the form of smoke, the shaman uses spells to effect the same result on an invisible plane. What the Tukanos achieve by burning, other groups do by skinning and plucking. The WaiWai leave peccary hides at the edge of the forest so that the Father of Peccaries can breathe new life into them (Morton 1984:43); the Yekuana pluck birds in the forest to ensure the reproduction of game (Wilbert 1972:107).

If the flesh and blood of all living creatures is much the same, what gives people, animals, and birds their specific identities are their ornaments and weapons, their fur and their feathers, their coloration or paint, their teeth, their beaks, and their claws. These materialized identities also embody the enduring strength of the groups or species to which they belong and ensure their continuity. In the language of shamans, all such ornaments and weapons are *kiimi oka*, a concept that encapsulates ideas of title, identity, clothing, defense, and weapon in a manner very similar to the heraldic concept of arms. Beyond the threat of contamination by their blood, it is precisely these arms that make animals and, to a lesser extent, fish, so dangerous to eat. In the past, different Tukanos groups would raid their enemies and steal their “arms” in the form of boxes of ornaments and other valuables. In their raids for meat, they also steal the arms of animals, which get ingested along with the animal’s flesh. The animals resent this theft. Unless raiders take precautions, the animal spirits use their arms to take revenge and make the people ill. This action is at once an attack on their bodies and a confounding of their identity so that they no longer retain their human form.

By blowing spells over food before eating, the shamans remove these arms and return them to the houses of their owners. The animal spirits use these arms and ornaments in feasts and dances—the mating and spawning activities of animals and fish—that ensure the reproduction of the species concerned, just as human feasts and dances ensure reproduction in the

world as a whole. In the words of a Makuna shaman, “When people dance in this world, our spirits also dance in the houses of the animals. When the shaman dances in this world, at the same time he invites the animals to dance in their own houses; we cause them to reproduce and multiply” (Århem 1991:113). In these ideas we find a relationship with “nature” that is not one of domination and exploitation but rather one of responsibility toward a world that includes people and animals in a single moral universe, an idea of stewardship over nature parallel to that which has become increasingly prominent in modern European history and which underlies contemporary attitudes toward the consumption of meat (Thomas 1983).

Although some of the raw material used to make human ornaments comes from hunting, its proper source is the “hair” periodically plucked from wild animals and birds the Tukanoans rear as pets. Generically, such pets are referred to as “birds” (*minia*). On moral grounds, these pets are the proper source for ornaments because, as adopted members of the group, the removal of their “hair” involves no theft. On practical grounds, the color and arrangement of their “hair” can be altered and enhanced through the cultural procedures involved in featherwork and tapirage.¹⁹ In the case of game animals, the equivalents of affines, their de-animated flesh is appropriated, cooked, and ingested to give people strength, whilst their identity and reproductive potential, their blood, “hair,” and arms, are returned still notionally intact to their spirit owners. In the case of pets, the equivalent of children, their bodies are carefully nurtured, and their animated flesh and blood left undisturbed; their “hair” is appropriated, crafted, and worn on the surface of their owners’ bodies as ornaments or arms.

In ritual and shamanic contexts, body ornaments, and certain musical instruments, may also be referred to as “pets.” When Tukanoans make ornaments from the “hair” of wild animals killed for food, the whole animal is not domesticated, only the potentially dangerous powers of their arms. Animals have their own songs and ornaments that they use in their own reproductive dances; human beings borrow songs and ornaments from the animals, refashion them to their own design, then use them in dances to the benefit of all concerned. In Europe, the decoration or “flowering” of animal carcasses (see Vialles 1987:69), elaborate cooking, and the development of the art of carving (Visser 1991:227ff.) all combine to make meat itself the focus of aesthetic elaboration. The Tukanoans prepare their meat quite simply, but an emphasis on aesthetic elaboration reappears in the attention lavished on its by-products

Although a bad conscience surrounding the hunting of animals is not the only factor involved, Erikson was surely right to point to it as one of the motives behind the Amerindians’ enthusiasm for pets. In addition to pet keeping, the Tukanoans employ aesthetics, crafts, and the niceties of etiquette, the hallmarks of their civilization, to convert the moral dilemmas surrounding the taking of life into a positive virtue. In killing animals and eating their meat, human beings ensure not only their own survival but also that of the animals on which they depend. In this Panglossian world, if everyone sticks to the rules, no one loses what is rightfully theirs, the line between human and animal people remains intact, and everyone gains. All that is asked of the animals—and politely too—is that they should give their meat to human beings. As this meat comes in the form of vegetable food, this is hardly to ask too much. Thomas’s conclusion (1983:303) applies as much to the Tukanoans as it does to ourselves: the conflict between their sensitivities and the material foundations of their society is one of the contradictions on which their civilization rests. For them, too, a mixture of compromise and concealment has so far prevented this conflict from having to be fully resolved.

Control of Others, Control of Self

I do not intend to suggest that my analysis of the Tukanoans applies throughout Amazonia.²⁰ However, as I have already emphasized, given the inherently problematic status of meat, we should not expect equivalence but rather diversity as different people come to terms with the tensions and contradictions involved, integrating them into other aspects of their lives in different ways and at different times. Is it possible to account for these differences?

Descola bases his comparison of the Tukanoans and Jivaro, mentioned above, on the more general thesis that there is a “homology between the way in which people deal with nature and the way in which they treat each other” (1993:112). Whilst I find both this general argument and its specific ethnographic application very convincing, due to its formulation as a structural homology between the ideological schema of whole groups it leaves little room

for politics, aesthetics, ethics, and morality, and makes no allowance for individual variation or historical change.²¹

It would follow from Descola's argument that peoples' attitudes toward killing animals for meat should also reflect their attitudes toward killing other people and toward the associated practices of cannibalism, head-hunting, and the like. There is some evidence demonstrating this. The Yanomamö and Araweté, two groups for whom warfare plays a central ideological role, are both concerned with the threat of vengeance from the spirits of the animals they kill and eat—much as they are concerned with vengeance in human affairs. But what we do not find amongst these peoples, nor amongst the Jivaro, is the peculiar emphasis on the crafting of feather ornaments and other items of ceremonial regalia so characteristic of the Tukanoans, the Bororo, and the people of the Upper Xingu. For these peoples, feather-work and other valuables are one of the most important vehicles and indices of their civilization and a crucial element in their identity. As I have shown for the Tukanoans, this elaboration of crafted goods it is inextricably linked to their attitudes toward hunting animals for meat.

Mary Helms (1993) drew attention to the political and ideological significance of long-distance acquisitive trade and skilled crafting as two alternative but equivalent modes. By acquiring and transforming exotic goods that serve as signs of cosmic powers, political elites can demonstrate the values, qualities, and ideals associated with leadership positions. In the case of long-distance trade, the domineering and predatory qualities needed to acquire powers from a source externally located in tangible horizontal space are reflected in the political values of what she calls "acquisitional polities" who constantly seek to dominate the outside and the "other" in order to strengthen and legitimate their own political center. In the case of skilled crafting, aesthetic inspiration and knowledge of a quite different kind is required to produce highly valued crafts—ornaments, songs, dances, ritual performances—which are manifestations of intangible ancestral powers located vertically above a politico-ideological center. Such crafting is associated with wider and more firmly structured "superordinate societies" who seek to expand the scope of influence of an ordered center by the defensive control of the external powers that threaten their integrity. Related as center to periphery, superordinate societies and acquisitional polities form wider regional systems.

One can usefully apply these ideas to the peoples mentioned above, for whilst they all both hunt and trade, the values associated with these activities are radically different in each case. The various Araweté, Yanomamö, and Jivaroan groups would all be examples of "acquisitional polities." In each case, the emphasis is on domination and control of the "other" and on predatory acquisition from the outside. Hunting, warfare, cannibalism, and head-taking themselves emerge as skilled crafts and are the main focus of ritual and aesthetic elaboration. The Jivaroans' highly individualistic trading is similarly bound up with the desire to acquire external shamanic powers, and their leaders exemplify the qualities required for success in such activities (Harner 1972:120–5). Relatively speaking, these groups also appear to find the eating of meat to be less of a problem. A parallel might thus be drawn between the values of these "acquisitional polities" and those manifest in the European ideology of nature as something to be dominated and controlled, an ideology that Fiddes (1991) sees as reflected in a positive emphasis on meat consumption.

The Tukanoans, Xinguanos, and Bororo all fit the notion of "superordinate societies." The Tukanoans and Xinguanos are both polyglot federations of different village communities. In each case, the communities share a common culture and are bound together by ties of marriage, by collective, ceremonial trading of skilfully crafted goods, and by reciprocal attendance at each other's rituals. For the monolingual Bororo, a common ideal structure, replicated in the layout of each village, underwrites a series of balanced, harmonious exchanges between opposed moieties in which feather ornaments play a pivotal role (Crocker 1985). Adherence to a common morality and set of values that define the limits of the wider community integrate these higher-order units. Tukanoans and Xinguanos downplay the predatory and aggressive values associated with acquisitive trade, warfare, and hunting and, in most contexts, directly condemn them. Instead, we find an emphasis on peaceful behavior, on the reflective contemplation involved in fishing and skilled crafting, on generosity in trade and other exchanges, and on what Ellen Basso describes as "a 'distanced' personal composure involving a modest respectful calm in relations with one another" (1995:15).

In each case, too, the antithesis of these values is projected onto hostile neighbors, who exemplify the image of the cannibalistic and sadistic savage. For the Xinguanos, these are their

Carib- and Gê-speaking neighbors with whom they once fought. For the Tukanoans, they are the cannibal Karijona, the slave-raiding Baré, and the sadistic Colombian rubber gatherers. Still fresh in peoples' minds, the memories of these foreigners' inhuman and jaguar-like behavior earned them the title of *masa baara*, "those who eat people."

In a slightly different way, these negative values are also reflected in Tukanoan attitudes toward the Makú, groups of seminomadic hunters who live within their territory. Like the citizens of Moore's Utopia, keen gardeners who rejected bloodthirsty pursuits and relied on slaves to hunt and butcher their meat (see Vialles 1989:172–3.), the agricultural Tukanoans consider the Makú to be their servants. In exchange for manioc and other cultivated foods, the Makú supply meat from the forest, allowing Tukanoans to maintain their identity as fishermen and cultivators. As Richard Grinker says of the central African Lese and their pygmy Efe "servants," "the hunter-gatherer/farmer division is a symbolic representation, an ethnic identity framed in terms of the economy" (1994:10).

It would also follow from Descola's argument that a change in peoples' relations with human "others" might also be reflected in a corresponding change in their attitudes toward meat. In a recent book, Basso uses Kalapalo oral history to document the formation of the Xinguano federation, a process that required an ideological shift. "From perceiving neighbours as strangers at best but more frequently (as) dangerous adversaries ... these people gradually came to create a moral sphere of action extending beyond the immediate settlement, recognising that there were others sharing a sense of common purpose: the contrast between the Kalapalo and their wild neighbours is thus also a contrast between the present and their own past" (1995:17).

The Xinguanos' developing sense of pity toward human others also extended to an extension of compassion toward the animal world. In their historical narratives, the Kalapalo reveal that they too were once more prone to the vices of which they now accuse their distant neighbors, vices that, alongside interpersonal violence and aggression, also included the killing and eating of large game animals. "Just as they have gladly (they say) given up eating most meat, so have they freed themselves from activities of the kind they see continued by their violent neighbours" (Basso 1995:17). I have no evidence of any similar reduction in meat eating amongst the Tukanoans. Indeed, their elders complain that the introduction of shotguns and a decline in morals has resulted in the unrestrained and wanton killing of bigger game. However, amongst them, too, the various verbal and other ways in which they appear to downplay their consumption of meat seem also to be correlated with the existence of a wider, all-embracing polity. Their contemporary rejection of values associated with the warrior and the disappearance of their jaguar shamans, a status associated with both warfare and hunting, certainly represent a continuing ideological shift away from activities and values that were once more relevant to their lives (Hugh-Jones 1994).

The Xinguano example is interesting not simply because it provides evidence of a historical change in attitudes toward the eating of meat that is in some ways comparable to that which has occurred in Europe but also because it shows clearly the articulation between collective ideologies and individual behavior, attitudes, and self-image. This is important in relation to the dominant emphasis on cosmological systems in many of the discussions of Amerindian food prohibitions and attitudes toward animals mentioned above. A focus on the meaningful or symbolic aspects of ritual tends to deflect attention away from its directly iconic aspects. The idea that ritual behavior stands for, or represents, the body's inner state depends upon the prior assumption of a clear distinction between mind and body, a distinction that often goes hand in hand with the idea of a clear division between human beings and other animals. I have already argued that, for Amerindians, the division between people and animals is far from clear and add here that they also make no clear distinction between body and mind. An alternative to a symbolic view of ritual would be to treat outer behavior as being a direct sign or index of inner states and as causally linked to them as parts of undivided self, a view that appears to correspond more closely to an Amerindian perspective.²²

Tukanoan and Xinguano rejection of overt dominance and control over others matches an equally strong emphasis on self-discipline and self-control that finds one of its clearest expressions in the ascetic regimes associated with puberty seclusion. Here various dietary restrictions form one component of a more general emphasis on the disciplining and training of the body, which produces a particular image of the self and serves to inculcate a set of moral attitudes that guide behavior toward others. The Bororo place a similar emphasis on self-

control and assume a consistency between the treatment of fellow human beings and other animals, especially the larger game animals owned by *Bope* spirits (Crocker 1985:260). Crocker writes that “man must learn to subject his own organic impulses to symbolic injunctions if his own share of these (vital) powers is not to be destroyed . . . By respecting the *Bope*’s rights over a set of things symbolising all that is at once good, facile and dangerous, the Bororo establish a mode of transacting with nature that parallels the mode governing human relationships” (1985:177).

Much the same considerations apply to the Tukanoans, amongst whom prescribed fasting, sleep deprivation, whipping, early morning cold baths, the use of emetics, a prohibition on sexual relations, and an emphasis on self-deprivation all form parts of a more general complex of character training. The result is what, with reference to the Barasana and Taiwano, Thomas Langdon (1981:66) terms an “intra-psychic economy,” which revolves around the tension between two sets of opposed values: weakness vs. strength; fear vs. courage; greed vs. restraint; self-indulgence vs. self-deprivation. Significantly, the focus of this socialization clusters around the values associated with food and eating, and in particular with those to do with the consumption of the most dangerous of foods, namely meat. The shamans’ own parsimonious diet, their control over other peoples’ food intake, their constant blowing of spells to make food safe, and their regular harangues about the illness and moral decay brought on by self-indulgence and failure to observe the proper dietary restrictions certainly reflect what are sometimes real shortages. At the same time, they also produce a generalized anxiety and bad conscience surrounding food and eating even in times of abundance.

My own experience of living with the Barasana, of eating their food and of keeping to their dietary rules, would lead me to argue that, for them as for the Melanesian Kalauna, food is “good to think with” (Young 1983:48) precisely because of their ambivalent attitudes toward it being so good to eat. Their anxiety over food, their covering of their mouths when speaking and eating, their use of food and feeding as both the foundation of kinship bonds and as a covert means of social control, their obsessive emphasis on the consumption of coca, their extreme elaboration of various modes of ritual speech used to control food resources and make them safe, and their mythological elaboration upon the themes of oral and anal excess and restraint, all suggest that ingestion is a center of their experience and orality a dominant focus of their culture.²³

For the Barasana, as for other Amerindian groups, the oral experiences of eating and singing represent the two moments of maximal conjunction between humans and animals. Through killing and eating, the flesh of animals transforms into human substance; through singing and dancing, human beings transcend their normal state and become one with animals and birds. Behind oral greed lies a treat of cannibalism marked with the stamp of selfish individualism; in the oral generosity of collective singing, dancing, and feasting, the potentially antisocial connotations of meat eating and the antipathy and violence towards animals it entails are converted into a sympathy and communion between the worlds of human beings and animals that is the source of life itself.²⁴

Conclusion

In opposing explanation in terms of “good reasons” and “bad conscience,” I have argued that anthropologists’ attempts to rationalize Amazonian attitudes toward the hunting of animals for their meat sometimes have the unintended effect of making Amerindians seem more alien and exotic than they are. If such rationalizations have the advantage of allowing the detailed exploration of the Amerindians’ peculiar social philosophies of nature or innate ecological wisdom through an in-depth analysis of local customs and beliefs, their disadvantage is that they tend to create an ethnographic universe closed in upon itself and apparently quite remote from the modern world. In contrast, I have suggested that the ethnography of Amerindian hunting practices can be usefully considered alongside an ethnography of European attitudes toward meat as exemplified in Vialles’s work on French abattoirs.

I have used the notion of “bad conscience” as a convenient, familiar, and nontechnical shorthand to bring out some points in common. However, “bad conscience” evokes a morality of sin and guilt not readily transposed to an Amazonian context; perhaps Erikson’s (1987:105) more neutral “malaise conceptual” would be more appropriate. That said, in certain respects at least, we Europeans can quite readily understand the contradictions and compromises

revealed in the Amerindians' apparently alien beliefs and practices, for, at a very general level, they have their roots in a way of thought that transcends cultural and historical differences. "Anthropomorphic thinking about animal behaviour is built into us ... it has presumably ... been programmed into our hereditary make up by natural selection" (Kennedy 1992:5).

If there is some common ground, there are also some important distinctions. But it is also the case that, in any society, attitudes toward animals are so varied, complex, and multidimensional, and often so contradictory, that many different and equally plausible reasons may be offered for a particular attitude or item of behavior. This complexity means that we should be cautious about drawing global contrasts between the attitudes toward animals and "nature" displayed by different cultures, whether these are seen as stemming from the development of agriculture (Serpel 1986:174–5) or from the rise of industrial society (Thomas 1983; Løfgren 1985; Fiddes 1991). Whilst there are indeed some significant differences, these are not well served by monolithic characterizations of Western culture versus tribal peoples. Supposedly opposed attitudes toward animals—respect and egalitarianism or domination and exploitation—held to be characteristic of one or another pole have an unfortunate tendency to crop up on the other side as well (see also Morris 1995).

A further problem with analyses of Amerindian attitudes toward animals phrased at the generalized level of cultural logic is that they tend, inadvertently, to suggest that cultures are seamless wholes and that people obey their dictates without question. The British might see eating horse as "typically French," but by no means all French people would agree that horse-meat is edible. In a similar vein, I have been present at a highly contentious meal of giant armadillo (*Priodontes giganteus*) served up in a Barasana communal house. Whilst the proud hunter, his family, and two hungry anthropologists made show of enjoying their food, the other people present kept ostentatiously to the sidelines, mocking the disgusting habits of those squatting round the pot and accusing them of exposing the whole household to danger and misfortune. A notion like "bad conscience" has the added advantage of making clear that, especially in matters of food preferences and ways of relating to animals, there is an important area of choice. Differences in diet and in attitudes toward animals allow the expression of collective identity between different groups; at the same time, they allow particular individuals to express their own preferences, self-image, and way of being.

Notes

¹ Originally published as "Bonnes raisons ou mauvaise conscience? De l'ambivalence de certains Amazoniens envers la consommation de viande" (trans. Philippe Erikson), *Terrain* 26, 1996:123–48.

² See, for example, Gross 1975:532; Viveiros de Castro 1992:47; Descola 1986:308.

³ Original: "Le goût très marqué pour la viande ... est ... censuré dans le discours et dans les manières de table."

⁴ See also Århem 1977, 1991.

⁵ For more details, see Langdon 1975; Århem 1977; Hugh-Jones 1979:93.

⁶ The Bororo have a similar scale of values: the largest terrestrial animals—peccary, tapir, deer, capybara, and rhea—are the most meaty and bloody, the best source of *raka* ("blood, life force"), and also the most dangerous (Crocker 1985:chaps. 4, 5).

⁷ Some illnesses are common to a whole class of foods, others are specific to a given species and/or to particular modes of procurement and preparation—see Langdon (1975) for the Barasana and Taiwano; cf. Taylor (1974, 1981) for the Sanumá.

⁸ Original: "végétalisation."

⁹ See Taylor 1981:29; cf. Smole 1976:181.

¹⁰ See also Århem 1991; van der Hammen 1991.

¹¹ Original: "Le corpus mythologique apparaît ainsi comme une grande glose sur les circonstances diverses de la spéciation, comme un énoncé minutieux des formes de passage de l'indifférencié au différencié."

¹² Original: "Tout autant la manifestation d'une pensée mythique qu'un code métaphorique servant à traduire une forme de 'savoir populaire.'"

¹³ See, for example, Basso 1973:17; Descola 1994:262; Rival 1996:155.

¹⁴ The use of such weapons often involves some idea of direct identity or contagion between hunter and victim, the result of a close and unmediated contact between hunter and prey. In

the WaiWai case, a hunter's soul or vitality (*ekati*) transfers to his victim in proportion to the energy he expends (Mentore 1995:21). This calls to mind the cannibalistic identity between killers and their human victims amongst the Yanomamö and Araweté. Here, rather than a transfer of soul-stuff from killer to victim, the killer's body itself becomes saturated with his victim's blood. All Yanomamö have spirit doubles lodged in the bodies of game animals living in the territories of distant strangers. Upon diagnosing illness as resulting from these strangers' sorcery on a person's animal double, a game animal living close by, the double of the stranger, is killed in revenge. With blood on his hands, the avenging hunter must be secluded as if he had killed the human stranger himself (Albert 1985:330–1). Many Amerindians go to great lengths to avoid such transfers of blood, and this is probably one of the considerations behind the common prohibition preventing hunters from butchering their own kills.

¹⁵ The gun, which many groups blame for an undesirable and uncontrolled increase in the killing of large animals, might be said to combine the “best” features of both spear and blow-pipe. Although a lethal weapon that will kill big game, it nonetheless involves no direct contact between hunter and victim. Significantly, the Achuar will not kill game with a gun used in homicide (Descola 1986:282).

¹⁶ See, for example, Rival 1996:166; Overing Kaplan 1975:56; Mentore 1995; Viveiros de Castro 1992:133.

¹⁷ See Kensinger 1981:163; Crocker 1985:142; Descola 1986:318; Morton 1995:52.

¹⁸ Crocker's (1985:159–60) discussion of the Bororo term *jerimaga*, the organic smell of blood and semen, could be applied almost word for word to the Barasana term *emari sūtise* as a category of smell.

¹⁹ Altering the color of bird feathers by anointing the feather follicles of living birds with vegetable saps and secretions from the bodies of batrachians.

²⁰ Echoes of these ideas are, however, quite common in Amazonia. The Bororo distinction between *raka* (“blood, organic vitality”) and *aroe* (“nominal essence, feathers and ornaments”) fits Tukanoan ideas almost to the letter.

²¹ On a point of detail, I am not convinced that Tukanoans regularly and systematically exchange human souls for the animals they kill. In fact, they go to some lengths to avoid this (see also Århem 1996).

²² I have found Talal Asad's (1993) discussion of monastic asceticism useful here.

²³ See also Hugh-Jones 1979, chap. 8; Lévi-Strauss 1985, chap. 12.

²⁴ See also Seeger 1987:60–61.

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