For Richard Sylvan

In Memoriam
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**List of contributors**

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Contributors

Robin Attfield is Professor of Philosophy at Cardiff University, Philosophy Section, ENCAP, Cardiff University, P.O. Box 94, Cardiff CF10 3XB, United Kingdom. He has also taught in several places in Africa. His books include Environmental Philosophy: Principles and Prospects (1994), Value, Obligation and Meta-Ethics (1995), and The Ethics of the Global Environment (1999), Environmental Ethics: An Overview for the Twenty-First Century (2002). He can be contacted on the internet at attfieldr@cardiff.ac.uk.

Andrew Brennan is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Western Australia, Perth, WA 6907, Australia. His most recent book is Philosophical Dialogues: Arne Naess and the Progress of Eco-philosophy (1999), co-edited with Nina Witoszek. He is presently working on a book on animals, ethics, and science. He can be contacted on the internet at abrennan@cyllene.uwa.edu.au.

J. Baird Callicott is Professor of Philosophy and Religion Studies at the University of North Texas, Denton, TX 76203. He is editor or author of a dozen books and more than a hundred book chapters, journal articles, and book reviews in environmental philosophy, the most recent of which is Beyond the Land Ethic: More Essays in Environmental Philosophy (1999). He can be contacted on the internet at callicott@unt.edu.

Gabriela R. Carone is Assistant Professor of philosophy at the University of Colorado at Boulder, CB 232, Boulder, CO 80309. She has published in both Spanish and English on Plato’s cosmology and its relation to his ethics together with its impact on Neoplatonism. She has also published various articles on the moral philosophy of Socrates. Carone is working on a book on Plato’s cosmology in relation to his ethics. She can be contacted on the internet at carone@stripe.colorado.edu.

Christopher Key Chapple is Professor of Theological Studies and Director of Asian and Pacific Studies at Loyola Marymount University, 7900 Loyola Blvd, Los Angeles, CA 90045. He has published eight books and is the editor of two forthcoming volumes: Hinduism and Ecology and Jainism and Ecology. He can be contacted on the internet at cchapple@lmu.edu. His home page is clawww.lmu.edu/faculty/cchapple/cchapple.html.

Victoria Davion is Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of Georgia, Athens, GA 30602. She is the founding and current editor of the international journal Ethics and the Environment and is co-editor (with Clark Wolf) of The Idea of a Political Liberalism: Essays on Rawls (1999). She can be contacted on the internet at vdavion@arches.uga.edu.
O. P. Dwivedi is Professor of Public and Environmental Administration at the University of Guelph, Guelph, Ontario, Canada, N1G 2W1. He has published 29 books and many articles in refereed journals and chapters in books, and is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada. He can be contacted on the internet at odwivedi@uoguelph.ca.

Robyn Eckersley teaches in the School of Political and Social Inquiry, Monash University, Wellington Road, Clayton 3168, Victoria, Australia. She has published widely in the fields of environmental philosophy, green political theory, and environmental policy. She can be contacted on the internet at robyn.eckersley@arts.monash.edu.au.

Robert Elliot is Professor of Philosophy at University of the Sunshine Coast, Maroochydore DC, Queensland, Australia. He is the author of Faking Nature (1997). He can be contacted on the internet at elliot@usc.edu.au.

Robert Figueroa is Visiting Assistant Professor at Colgate University, 13 Oak Drive, Hamilton, NY 13346. He is currently working on comparative studies of environmental justice between global and domestic contexts, and is developing theoretical components of social justice on issues of climate affairs. He can be contacted on the internet at rfigueroa@mail.colgate.edu.

John Andrew Fisher is Professor of Philosophy at the University at Colorado at Boulder, CB 232, Boulder, CO 80309. He is the author of Reflecting on Art (1992). He has also written articles about animal minds and anthropomorphism and articles on various aesthetic themes, including rock music, the ontology of recordings, and the aesthetics of nature. He can be contacted on the internet at jafisher@spot.colorado.edu.

A. Myrick Freeman III is William D. Shipman Research Professor at Bowdoin College, Department of Economics, 9700 College Station, Brunswick, Maine 04011. The Economic Approach to Environmental Policy (1998) is a selection of his essays. He can be contacted on the internet at rfreeman@bowdoin.edu.

Lori Gruen is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Wesleyan University, 350 High Street, Middletown, CT 06459. She can be reached on the internet at lgruen@wesleyan.edu.

S. Nomanul Haq is Assistant Professor in the Department of Religion, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ 08901, and a visiting scholar at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. He is General Editor of the Studies in Islamic Philosophy of Oxford University Press, and is currently working on Arabic metaphysical texts. Haq can be contacted on the internet at nomanhaq@rci.rutgers.edu.

Ned Hettinger teaches social, political, and environmental philosophy at the College of Charleston, Charleston, SC 29424. He is currently writing a book about respect for nature’s autonomy that allows for a positive role for humans in nature. He can be contacted on the internet at hettingern@cofc.edu. His home page is http://www.cofc.edu/~philo/dept.htg/hettinger.htm.

Alan Holland is Professor of Applied Philosophy at Lancaster University, Furness College. Lancaster University,
Lancaster, LA1 4YG, United Kingdom, and is editor of *Environmental Values*. He recently co-edited *Animal Biotechnology and Ethics* (1998). He is a newly appointed member of the UK government’s Animal Procedures Committee. He can be contacted on the internet at a.holland@lancaster.ac.uk.

**Sheila Jasanoff** is Professor of Science and Public Policy at Harvard University’s John F. Kennedy School of Government, 79 John F. Kennedy Street, Cambridge, MA 02138. She is currently completing a book on biotechnology regulation in Europe and the USA. She can be contacted on the internet at sheilajasanoff@harvard.edu.

**Eric Katz** is Associate Professor of Philosophy and Director of the Science, Technology, and Society Program at the New Jersey Institute of Technology, University Heights, Newark, NJ 07102–1982. He has been an invited speaker at the United Nations and is the author of *Nature as Subject* (1997) and editor of *Environmental Pragmatism* (1996) and *Beneath the Surface: Critical Essays in the Philosophy of Deep Ecology* (2000). He can be contacted on the internet at katze@admin.njit.edu.

**Karyn L. Lai** lectures at the School of Philosophy at the University of New South Wales, PO Box 1, NSW 2052, Australia. She works in moral philosophy, applied ethics, environmental ethics, and Confucian and Daoist philosophy. She can be contacted on the internet at K.Lai@unsw.edu.au.

**Keekok Lee** is with the Philosophy Department, in a research position, at the University of Lancaster, Furness College, Lancaster University, Lancaster, LA1 4YG, United Kingdom. Her most recent book is *The Natural and the Artefactual: The Implications of Deep Science and Deep Technology for Environmental Philosophy* (1999). She can be contacted on the internet at keekok.lee@man.ac.uk.

**Freya Mathews** is Senior Lecturer in the School of Philosophy at La Trobe University, Bundoora VIC, 3083, Australia. Her most recent book is *Ecology and Democracy* (1996), and she is currently developing a theory of ecological “countermodernity.” She can be contacted on the internet at F.Mathews@latrobe.edu.au. Her homepage is http://www.latrobe.edu.au/www/philosophy/.

**Claudia Mills** is Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of Colorado at Boulder, CN 232, Boulder, CO 80309–0232. She writes on a wide range of topics in ethics, practical ethics, and social and political philosophy, and is also the author of 30 books for children. She can be contacted on the internet at cmills@colorado.edu.

**John O'Neill** is Professor of Philosophy at Lancaster University, Furness College, Lancaster, LA1 4YG, United Kingdom, before which he taught in Beijing and Sussex. His books include *The Market: Ethics, Knowledge and Politics* (1998) and *Ecology, Policy and Politics* (1993). He is currently working on a research project on the environmental dimensions of the socialist calculation debates. He can be contacted on the internet at j.oneill@lancaster.ac.uk.

**Ernest Partridge** is a Research Philosopher at the University of California – Riverside, 900 University Ave., Riverside,
Henry Shue is the Wyn and William Y. Hutchinson Professor of Ethics and Public Life, and Professor of Philosophy, at Cornell University in Ithaca, NY 14853–2801. Best-known for *Basic Rights* (1996), he has also recently written a series of ten articles on climate change and international justice. He can be contacted on the internet at hs23@cornell.edu.

Holmes Rolston III is University Distinguished Professor and Professor of Philosophy at Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO 80523. His most recent book is *Genes, Genesis and God* (1999). He gave the Gifford Lectures at the University of Edinburgh in 1997–8. He can be contacted on the internet at rolston@lamar.colostate.edu. His homepage is http://lamar.colostate.edu/~rolston/.

Mark Sagoff is Senior Research Scholar at the Institute for Philosophy and Public Policy in the School of Public Affairs, 3111 Van Munching Hall, College Park, MD 20742. He is the author of *The Economy of the Earth* (1988) and has served as President of the International Society for Environmental Ethics. He can be reached on the internet at ms2@umail.umd.edu.

Kristin Shrader-Frechette is O'Neill Family Chair, Professor of Philosophy, and Concurrent Professor of Biological Sciences at the University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, Indiana, 46556. Most of her 14 books and 280 articles are on quantitative risk assessment, philosophy of science, and environmental ethics. With Swedish physicist Lars Persson, she currently has a multi-year NSF grant to examine ethical and scientific problems with workplace standards for ionizing radiation. She can be contacted on the internet at kristin.shrader-frechette.1@nd.edu. Her home page is http://www.nd.edu/~kshrader.


Scott Slovic is Associate Professor of Literature and the Environment, and Director of the Center for Environmental Arts and Humanities at the University of Nevada – Reno. Reno, Nevada, 89557. He was the founding president of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment, and currently he serves as editor of the journal *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*. He can be contacted on the internet at slovic@unr.edu.

Charles Taliaferro is Professor of Philosophy and a member of the Environmental Studies Faculty at St. Olaf College, Northfield, MN 55057. His most recent book is *Contemporary*
Philosophy of Religion (1998), and he is the co-editor of the Blackwell Companion to the Philosophy of Religion (1998). He can be contacted on the internet at taliafer@stolaf.edu.

Paul B. Thompson holds the Joyce and Edward E. Brewer Chair of Applied Ethics at Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN 47907. Most recently, he co-edited a collection of essays called The Agrarian Roots of Pragmatism. He is starting the Center for Food Animal Productivity and Well-Being at Purdue which will examine issues of animal welfare within a livestock production context. He can be contacted on the internet at pault@purdue.edu.

Laurie Anne Whitt teaches philosophy in the Humanities Department at Michigan Technological University, Houghton, MI. Mere Roberts teaches Maori Environmental Perspectives at the School of Environmental and Marine Sciences, University of Auckland, New Zealand. Waereate Norman teaches Maori language and culture in the Maori Studies Department, University of Auckland, New Zealand. Vicki Grieves teaches Aboriginal history at Macquarie University, Sydney, NSW, Australia. They are, respectively, of Choctaw, Tainui (Ngati Apakura), Muriwhenua (Ngati Kuri), and Worimi-Kattang descent.

Clark Wolf is Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of Georgia, Athens, GA 30602. He is currently writing a book on justice between generations. He can be contacted on the internet at cwolf@uga.edu. His home page is http://www.phil.uga.edu/faculty/wolf/.

Mark Woods is Assistant Professor in the Department of Philosophy at the University of San Diego, 5998 Alcala Park, San Diego, CA 92110–2492. Currently, he is writing a book on the concept of wilderness and the philosophy of wilderness preservation. He can be contacted on the internet at mwoods@acisd.edu.

Gary Varner is Associate Professor in the Department of Philosophy at Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas, 77843–4237. He is the author of In Nature’s Interests? Interests, Animal Rights, and Environmental Ethics (1998) and numerous articles on environmental ethics, animal rights, and environmental law. He can be contacted on the internet at g-varner@tamu.edu. His home page is http://www-phil.tamu.edu/~gary/index.html.
The late French director, François Truffaut, once said that every time he begins a project he hopes that it will turn out to be the best film ever made; halfway through, he wants only to finish the movie with his sanity intact. For me, commissioning and editing 36 new essays in environmental philosophy was a little like that. However, I still harbor the hope that this is the best single volume collection on the subject that is currently available.

The first environmental philosophy courses were offered in the 1970s, and over the last two decades they have steadily proliferated. Nearly every university and college in North America, Britain, and Australia now offers at least one class in environmental philosophy. Through most of the 1980s good materials were hard to find for use in these courses but in the last three years more than a half dozen new environmental philosophy anthologies have been published. Several of these are excellent, but since they mainly reprint articles published in professional journals they are fundamentally different from this book.

After an anarchic quarter century, environmental philosophy has yet to become fully defined as a field. Indeed, it probably has more than its share of divisions and academic infighting. My purpose in editing this volume is both to present a snapshot of the field as it currently exists, and to contribute to consolidating the field. I have been guided by the following principles. First, I have tried to be as inclusive as possible, presenting the rich diversity of work characteristic of this field. Second, I have tried to bring environmental philosophy into conversation with other fields and disciplines such as economics, ecology, and law. Third, I have been concerned to connect environmental philosophy to the cultural traditions from which it springs. Fourth, I have tried to keep a firm focus on the environmental problems that motivate the enterprise in the first place. Finally, without abandoning my editorial responsibilities, I have tried to let the contributors speak in their own voices to the greatest extent possible. My hope is that this book will be used as a primary text in courses on environmental philosophy, as a secondary text for courses in related fields, and as a reference book for those who are working on related topics. Most of all I hope that this volume finds its way into the hands of readers who simply want to learn something about the subject.

A project like this necessarily involves so many complicated interactions with people that I’m not quite sure whether to have a paragraph of acknowledgements or one with apologies. I’ll start with the easy stuff. Carleton College has supported this project in various ways. Thanks to the students who assisted me with this book: Matthew Varilek, Kelly Knutson, and especially Max Wilson, whose work on the proofs, index, and just about everything else relating to this volume went beyond the call of duty. Thanks to Paula Lackie, my computer guru, for turning various virus-infected floppies in obsolete word-processing programs into readable text. The folks at Blackwell, who seduced me into this project, were unfailingly supportive. Thanks
especially to Sarah Dancy for her efficient copy-editing, Beth Remmes for her good humor, and Steve Smith for calmly presiding over the proceedings. (The subject of Blackwell reminds me that I should warn the reader that the text is governed by various conventions. Words that appear in small capitals refer to other chapters in the volume explicitly concerned with the topic to which the word refers. I leave it to the reader to decipher the other conventions.) So many of my colleagues in environmental philosophy provided me with helpful advice about who and what should be included in this book that I cannot even begin to acknowledge them here. And obviously, without the contributors, this book would not exist. I thank them all for putting up with a stream of hectoring phone calls and emails, punctuated by long silences, over a several-year period. I especially thank those who responded in a graceful and timely manner, making all of our lives a bit easier. While I feel honored by those who have contributed to this volume, I am also painfully aware that there are many people doing important work in this field who, for various reasons, did not contribute.

I have dedicated this book to Richard Sylvan, formerly Senior Research Fellow in the Research School of Social Sciences at the Australian National University, who died unexpectedly of a heart attack in Bali, Indonesia on June 16, 1996. His 1973 paper, "Is There a Need for a New, an Environmental, Ethic?", originally presented to the Fifteenth World Congress of Philosophy, subsequently published under the name "Richard Routley," marked the beginning of a new field. Not only is Richard’s claim to be the founder of this field as strong as anyone’s, but he also expressed many of the ideals of environmental philosophy in his life and work. There are many good “Richard stories” around, and I hope that this dedication will prompt those who knew him to pass a few on to those who continue to struggle with fundamental questions about the human relationship with the rest of nature.

Dale Jamieson
Northfield, Minnesota
May 2000
PART I

CULTURAL TRADITIONS
Indigenous perspectives

Laurie Anne Whitt, Mere Roberts, Waereate Norman, and Vicki Grieves

Some years ago, the Cherokee mounted fierce resistance to the construction of the Tellico Dam and the subsequent flooding of the Little Tennessee Valley. Many of their objections were based on the threat it posed to their cultural heritage. Ammoneta Sequoyah, a medicine man who gathered healing plants in the valley, explained that his people believe that all that a person knows is placed in the ground with that person at the time of burial. So flooding the valley, or digging up the Indian graves there, will destroy “the knowledge and beliefs of [the] people who are in the ground” (Sequoyah v. Tennessee Valley Authority, 1980). It will also destroy what they have taught. Consequently, he believes that if the valley were flooded, he would lose his knowledge of medicine.

That knowledge and land are intimately bound to one another is a belief widely shared among indigenous peoples, as is the accompanying belief that the natural world is alive, spiritually replete. Consider Alice Benally, a Diné woman who expresses the incomprehensibility of her removal from Big Mountain by commenting that in the proposed relocation site the plants and animals would not know her—nor would she know them. She says: “If we are to make our offerings at a new place, the spiritual beings would not know us. We would not know the mountains or the significance of them. We would not know the land and the land would not know us” (in Jenny Manybeads et al. 1989, p. 248). Indeed, in some native languages such relocations are literally unthinkable. There is no term for them; no concept by which they are known.

Knowledge is tied to the natural world in different ways within indigenous and western knowledge systems; so too is knowledge transmission. Ammoneta Sequoyah realizes that if the valley is flooded his knowledge of medicine—and not just the medicinal plants themselves—will be lost. This knowledge is the cultural heritage and responsibility of his people. He also realizes that when he is buried this knowledge returns with him to the land in which it is embedded, and so continues to be present within the land for others to experience. This may seem strange to someone deeply committed to certain prevailing convictions in western philosophy and the science which it sustains—e.g. “knowledge of nature is ultimately distinct, and separable from, nature” and “what is known are true propositions about reality.” One way of capturing the contrast between such convictions and those of Sequoyah would be to say that western science, western knowledge of the natural world, is representational. Indigenous science, indigenous knowledge of the natural world, is (if Sequoyah’s and Benally’s comments are taken as typical) presentational. Its continuation, its
transmission, its possibility turn vitally upon the presence of the natural world, and on the kind of experiences it offers.

We will say little more about this contrast, for it is the words of Sequoyah and Benally that concern us here. Spoken in the context of specific political struggles, they are not offered primarily as philosophical commentary, or as insight into the environmental ethics of their cultures. Nor should they be heard that way. They are part of political struggle. This essay ends as it begins, by reflecting on them. The words that lie in between belong to many different people(s). If they speak with one voice on any single issue, it may well be this: “We are indigenous people to this land...our brothers are all the natural world...remember that as long as [we] exist, so will you. But when we are gone, you too will go” (Oren Lyons, quoted in Dooling and Smith 1989, p. 274). Why this is so, how this is so, and the significance of granting that it is so, is what this essay relates.

Belonging and genealogical bonds

All around me are my ancestors, 
my unborn children. 
I am the tear between them 
and both sides live.

(Linda Hogan)

Indigenous responsibilities to and for the natural world are based on an understanding of the relatedness, or affiliation, of the human and non-human worlds, which is best understood in its primary – genealogical – context. Genealogies provide stories of origins. They tell a person, or a people, where and from whom they are descended. In this sense they bind through time, showing how ancestors and descendants course together through a continuous, unfolding history. Properly told, they set out the changing contours and constitution of families, including how they have branched into and out of one another over time.

Genealogies need not, and for indigenous peoples typically do not, confine themselves to the human. Since they relate origins, they address themselves to specific places, and the non-human beings inhabiting them. So genealogies map affiliations spatially as well, placing individuals and families in relation to one another, and locating them in – by connecting them to – the earth. Insofar as everything has an origin, everything has a genealogy which situates it relationally in time – linking those who have been with those yet to be – and in space – linking everything to a particular place and to everything in that place. In this sense, genealogies are stories of temporal and spatial belonging. They relate how a person or a people belongs in a particular time and place, how the non-human things in that place have come to belong there, and how all of these belong to one another.

A genealogy draws a family or a people together, distinguishing them from others. It also acknowledges that members of a family or clan already are drawn together, and sets out how they are related to others. To recite a genealogy, to recall affiliational
ties, is to affirm a reciprocal bonding. It has the powerful function of reminding members of a family or clan of who they are, individually and collectively, and with this of their moral responsibilities to one another.

Genealogies, then, are potent sources of knowledge about the past and present, about the natural world and the beings that inhabit it. Integral aspects of many indigenous cultures, they locate a people spatially, temporally, and spiritually, investing them in certain lands with certain responsibilities at a particular time. They are sources of identity, binding individuals and groups to others, past, present, and to come. They also serve to integrate, and to reflect the integration of, the human and non-human worlds.

The centrality of whakapapa, or genealogy, within Maori culture cannot be overstated. The eloquent formal introductions which Maori use to identify themselves by reference to their mountain and river, to their ancestral dwelling place within the tribal landscape, are illustrative. This relationship of the people to the land is expressed through whakapapa. To Maori, whakapapa is a most fundamental form of knowing: it functions as an epistemological template. Hence, to know something is to locate it in space and time, and knowledge of whakapapa is essential to this: ‘‘To ‘know’ oneself is to know one’s whakapapa. To ‘know’ about a tree, a rock, the wind, or the fishes in the sea – is to know their whakapapa’’ (Roberts and Wills 1998, p. 45).

All beings, human and non-human, share descent; they have the same origin. As Erenora Puketapu-Hetet explains, harakeke (flax) “is a descendant of the great god Tane-mahuta… today’s Maori are related to harakeke and all the other plants: Tane is their common ancestor” (1989, p. 18).

Among the peoples of the Andes, a similar sense of the pervasiveness and significance of genealogical bonding is evident. An ayllu – a group of related persons who live in a particular place – includes the human and the non-human. It refers to relationships between humans and between “all members of the Pacha”: “the stars, the sun, the moon, the hills, lakes… the plants and animals… along with the rocks and the human beings… they are all relatives and are at once children, parents, and siblings” (Apffel-Marglin and Rivera 1995, p. 25). Rembarrnga storyteller Paddy Wainburranga relates that talking and singing to the country is “the law for the center of Arnhem Land… The law about singing out was made… to make you notice that all
as part human” (Neidjie 1986, p. 11). Given the interpenetration of the human and non-human, to speak of “pristine wilderness” (land devoid of humans) is to speak of something which does not, did not, and cannot exist, at least not on this planet.

The nature of a genealogy is such that individuals cannot appear in it without thereby assuming relational ties to all others within the genealogy; the Lakota prayer *mitakuye oyasin* (“I am related to all that is”) reflects this. It is not possible to exist within genealogies and stand outside such affiliational ties, although one may fail to acknowledge their presence. Nor is it possible to exist in such genealogies and be “outside” of nature: “nature is not something apart from [the Native American… it is] an element in which he exists. He has existence within that element, much in the same way that we think of having existence within the element of air” (Momaday 1976, p. 84). An analogous perspective is evident in the Maori tendency to speak of themselves as mountains or rivers: “These cannot be objectified or externalized. They are not ‘out there’, but ‘in here’… Maori cannot conceptualize an entity called ‘Nature’ as something separate from oneself and one’s tribal identity” (Roberts and Wills 1998, p. 55). In a clear sense, it is simply not possible to exist outside a genealogy. Hence the psychological, spiritual, and physical trauma of tribal “relocations,” which involve the severing of affiliational ties with the non-human world. (“Dislocations” would more accurately describe the wrenching, the pulling out of joint, that is involved in the removals of indigenous peoples from the lands to which they belong.)

The significance of human ties of affiliation with the non-human world is symbolically captured in many indigenous languages and practices. It can be seen in the Mayan custom of burying a newborn’s umbilical cord in the parents’ house “in the hope that when the baby reaches adulthood he or she will understand the importance of home and the dependence on land” (Chay 1993, p. 21). Or in the analogous Dine practice: “so the child will be familiar with the spiritual beings of the area… the woman offers the afterbirth to a young tree and buries the child’s umbilical cord in Mother Earth. These things create spiritual ties between us and the land” (Jenny Manybeads et al. 1989, p. 230). It is captured by the Maori term *whenua* (meaning land as well as placenta), and *hapu* (meaning both pregnant and extended family or sub-tribe). The expression *te u kai po* refers to the area where you were brought up; it also means to be breast fed (Roberts et al. 1995, p. 10). As Waerete Norman notes, the burying of *whenua*

was also seen as helping to sustain the land. The practice of burial reflects the importance of *tiaki whenua* and *tiaki taiao* [caring for the land and environment] to ensure a future sustained by *papatuanuku* [earth mother]… *whenua* and placenta is one and the same land. (unpublished ms., p. 136–7)

These practices reveal how crucial affiliational ties between the human and non-human are. As one senior Gumadj clan leader observes:

Aboriginal belief systems based on affinity to land underpin Aboriginal existence. (Yunupingu 1997, pp. xv–xvi)
We believe the land is all life. We are part of the land and the land is part of us. It cannot be one or the other. We cannot be separated by anything or anybody. (Yunupingu 1996, p. 16)

Such practices affirm the presence and persistence of genealogical bonds which link the human and non-human. They are expressions of human belonging, of the intimate relationship between a people and a land. Aboriginal activist Mick Dodson comments that “our... reason for existence is the land... We have grown the land up... Removed from our lands, we are literally removed from ourselves (in Yunupingu 1997, p. 41). For Maori too, “People belong to earth. Earth is not a possession of the people” (Norman unpublished ms., p. 131).

If a people belongs to a land, and land inheres in a people, it cannot be alienated or disowned. It cannot be reduced to a commodity. It cannot be replaced or done without. Haunani-Kai Trask notes that the Hawaiian language has two ways of showing possession: the “a” possessive indicates acquired status and the “o” possessive indicates inherent status. While most material objects take the “a” form, land – like one’s body and one’s parents – takes the “o” form: “Thus, in our way of speaking, land is inherent to the people; it is like our bodies and our parents. The people cannot exist without the land, and the land cannot exist without the people” (1993, p. 152).

A comparable observation is made by Aboriginal author Bill Neidjie:

So I’m saying now.  
earth is my mother or father...  
Tree is mine.  
In my body that tree.  

(1989, p. 170)

And for Maori “land was not something that could be owned or traded. [They] did not seek to own or possess anything, but to belong. One belonged to a family that belonged to a hapu that belonged to a tribe. One did not own land. One belonged to the land” (Eddie Durie, in Phillips 1987, p. 78).

When possession or ownership is understood as an inherent, rather than acquired, status, the term “belong” becomes especially apt. To belong to land is to be attached or bound to it by birth, by allegiance, and by dependence. The resulting relationship of belonging may be characterized as one of intimacy, or inherency. The land is involved in the constitution of a people. It characterizes them, as they do it:

The relationship between the crocodile and myself and all my clansmen is a very special relationship... I see a crocodile as an animal that is part of me and I belong to him, he belongs to me. It’s a commonness of land ownership... Crocodile, he’s the creator and the land giver to the Gumatj people... we have always treated crocodile in a way that it is part of a family. (Galarrwuy Yunupingu, in Watson and Chambers 1989, p. 26)

The land and living entities which make it up are not apart from, but part of, the people. Nor is “the environment” something surrounding a people. The relation of belonging is ontologically basic.
With inherent possession, agency is sometimes held to be reciprocal – a people belongs to/owns the land, and the land belongs to/owns a people. Sometimes it is the inverse of that implied by acquired possession – while a people belongs to the land or the land owns a people, a people do not own land nor does land belong to a people. Several Maori commentators, for example, reject the notion of stewardship as a translation of the term kaitiaki because it connotes guarding someone else’s property: “ownership of property was a foreign concept... the earth did not belong to man, but rather man belonged to the earth” (Roberts et al. 1995, p. 14). Dell Wihongi concurs: “It is wrong to think that we humans act as ‘kaitiaki’ (guardians) of nature... The earth kaitiaki’s us” (ibid, p. 14). According to the Muriwhenua Land Report: “Maori saw themselves as users of the land rather than its owners. While their use must equate with ownership for the purpose of English law, they saw themselves not as owning the land but as being owned by it” (1997, p. 23).

Belonging or inherent possession is the type of relationship that genealogical bonds affirm. As such, it endures; it does not cease to be as the result of “removals,” nor is it ended by death. Progenitors and progeny continue to belong to, to inhere in, one another. When the constancy of affiliational ties is conjoined to widespread beliefs regarding the cyclical nature of time and of the natural order, the full sense of Linda Hogan’s words at the start of this section becomes plain. It is a theme taken up by Darcy Nicholas as well:

Nothing dies in the Maori world. Things merely move through different dimensions – the flax, for example, becomes a cloak of immense beauty. Those we love become part of the beautiful land around us. This is our bond with the land. It is our ancestor and as such part and parcel of what we are. It has sustained the life of our people for hundreds of years. (1980, p. 32)

**Beholdenness and reciprocal relations**

Because genealogies affirm affiliational ties that exist between individual beings and between generations, they also establish moral bonds. Individual beings are situated within a family, within a generation, and within a land filled with other beings – human and non-human. Genealogically embedded individuals are bound, and answerable, to one another. At the most fundamental level, they are responsible for one another, ontologically and morally.

The moral implications of genealogical bonding are expressed directly in the system of gurrutu embraced by the Yolngu people: “these precise relationships are those of kinship and thus entail certain obligations and responsibilities: certain types of beholdenness like those of sister to brother or parent to child” (Watson and Chambers 1989, p. 36). A stranger with whom Yolngu expect prolonged contact will be given a Yolngu name and instructed in his or her genealogical relations: “To be a ‘real’ entity in Yolngu life, a person or place must be named, and thus located within the genealogical order” (ibid). One of the most important functions of the gurrutu system is that it brings orderliness to individual and group relations, to the land and to everything in the Yolngu world: “At a general level, it is a formally articulated system of beholdenness: it orders degrees and types of indebtedness” (ibid, p. 37).
Such beholdenness is decidedly not limited to the human. The Lakota speak of the *Nagila* "that dwells in everything...[part of the] force that makes all things and beings relatives to each other and to their common ancestor" (Arthur Amiotte, in Doeling and Smith 1989, p. 171). This common ancestry of the human and non-human grounds Maori responsibilities of care, or guardianship, toward the environment and the ancestors:

Everybody on this planet has a role to play as a guardian [*kaitiaki*]...to be a *kaitiaki* means looking after one's own blood and bones - literally. One's *whanaunga* (relatives) and *tupuna* (ancestors) include the plants and animals, rocks and trees. We are all descended from *Papatuanuku* (Earth Mother); she is our *kaitiaki* and we in turn are hers. (Carmen Kirkwood, in Roberts et al. 1995, p. 13)

Guardianship is a moral responsibility, an appropriate response to a sense of beholdenness in the presence of genealogical relatedness. It is the acknowledgement of a people that they are held by, and enebted to, their affiliational ties with the non-human world. These ties are as much prescriptive as descriptive; they suggest ways in which it is appropriate, or inappropriate, to behave. This idea of "appropriateness," Kiowa writer M. Scott Momaday suggests, "is central to the Indian experience of the natural world...[it] is a moral idea...a basic understanding of right within the framework of relationship" (1976, p. 82).

Like beholdenness, the moral responsibilities of genealogically-imbedded individuals also extend temporally beyond the present to include past and future generations. As the *Bining*, the community of traditional owners of the Kakadu National Park, have noted: "A main part of traditional culture is that *Bining* are responsible for caring for country - a responsibility with important obligations to past, current and future generations of traditional owners" (Kakadu 1996, p. 16). First Nations author Lee Maracle (1988, pp. 8–9) acknowledges this openly:

I do know
that the farther backward
in time that I travel
the more grandmothers
and the farther forward
the more grandchildren.
I am obligated to both.

The injunction to act always to protect the seventh generation is a particularly compelling example of this. Onondaga spiritual leader Oren Lyons observes that the first mandate of traditional Haudenosaunee chiefs is to ensure that their decision-making is guided by consideration of the welfare and well-being of the seventh generation to come: "What about that seventh generation? Where are you taking them? What will they have?" (1980, p. 174). The seventh generation principle applies to the ancestors as well. In honoring the ancestors, one expresses gratitude to them as the seventh generation, which they kept foremost in their decision-making and for whom they sacrificed. As a general injunction to live responsibly and respectfully, and
as a practical guide to specific moral decision-making, the seventh generation principle may be without equal:

We say that the faces of the coming generations are looking up from the earth. So when you put your feet down, you put them down very carefully – because there are generations coming one after the other. If you think in these terms, then you’ll walk a lot more carefully, be more respectful of this earth. (Lyons 1995)

Genealogical bonds are normative bonds, generating moral responsibilities to the natural world and the living beings it sustains; they give rise to “reciprocal relations” which define “responsibilities…between humans and the ecosystem” (LaDuke 1994, p. 128). Relations of reciprocity involve mutual exchange or co-responsidence, something that is shared, felt, and shown by both (or all) sides. While one may be in such relations without responding, or acknowledging them, one remains beholden to them. There is no escaping the fact of interdependency, even when the attendant obligation of reciprocity is ignored. In the words of April Bright (1995): “It is part of our responsibility [to be] looking after our country. If you don’t look after country, country won’t look after you” (p. 59).

Within Australia, the term “traditional owners” is frequently used to designate the relationship between diverse Aboriginal communities and their homelands, although the English understanding of “ownership” is very different from the Arrernte term, *pmere-k-artweye*, used to translate it. The latter acknowledges the custodial role responsibilities of indigenous peoples and the genealogical-embeddedness on which they rely. *Pmere-k-artweye* refers to those with “inherited or acquired responsibilities for the proper care and treatment of a site,” with “the rights to speak for that site and determine what constitutes proper use” of it (Wilkins 1993, p. 24). The Arrernte words for “the ancestors” (“those who have primary responsibility for looking after us properly”) and for “parents” (“those who have primary responsibility for looking after a child properly”) are linguistically parallel (ibid). As guardians, the Arrernte are charged with protecting and maintaining the lands they co-inhabit with the other beings that constitute the natural world.

That the human and non-human worlds are bound by relations of reciprocity has significant implications for appreciating the role responsibilities of indigenous peoples. They are obligated to provide their lands with sustenance, to sustain them by means of practices and ceremonies (and if needed, by protest and resistance), even as the land sustains them. Speaking from a Bundjalung perspective, Pauline Gordon notes:

Aboriginal people dance the corroboree…they’re doing a traditional thing – they’re making something happen. So they dance and sing, and as they dance their powers dance up. The spirit of the land replenishes the land, all the animals…And it comes from the land, that power…that’s why for Aboriginal people it’s our obligation to protect the land, those sacred sites – it’s our life. And our Law. (Ishtar 1994, p. 9)

Assuming responsibility for a sacred site involves being responsible for maintaining the power of the site, tending it, through observance of proper ceremonies (Thornton 1996, p. 11). One aboriginal man acknowledges that
the Bandhamarr track is his track... his responsibility. He has to know the route and the purposes of following it in the order he takes—in the footsteps of the ancestors. He has to maintain it by acting in accordance with this knowledge, following practices and performing ceremonies in the course of everyday life. (in ibid, p. 20)

What such spirituality secures for the natural world is health, balance, and survival—the holding of disintegration at bay (ibid, p. 15). This, in turn, is what the natural world secures for its people. Maori lawyer Moana Jackson remarks that among the duties of traditional Maori law was “the ancestrally defined responsibility to maintain order and protect the land by ensuring a balance between the interlinked animal, plant, spirit and human worlds” (1988, p. 40).

The reciprocity of human and non-human relations, the mutuality of beholden-ness, is aptly expressed by Jake Swamp’s account of how the Mohawk are trained to gather medicinal herbs:

What I was taught was that when you see that plant, to first see that it’s the one you offer thanksgiving to, that plant is still here with us, still performing its duty and that you wish it to continue. You walk past it and you look for the other one, and that one you can pick. For if you take that first one, who is to know, maybe that’s the last one that exists in the world. (Quoted in Barreiro 1992, p. 21)

Humans may, of course, interfere with a plant’s, or the planet’s, ability to continue performing its duty. Given the reciprocity of relations, however, when country is treated improperly and desecrated, the natural world becomes unbalanced and all within it are affected. For the Mayans, because every human has an animal counterpart and every animal has a human counterpart, to harm one is simultaneously to harm the other (Hogan et al. 1998, p. 27). Laguna Pueblo author Leslie Silko makes a comparable point:

According to the elders, destruction of any part of the earth does immediate harm to all living things. Teachers at Indian School would ridicule these ideas; they would laugh and say, “how stupid you Indians are! How can the death of one tree in the jungle possibly affect a person in NYC? But isn’t it far more obvious these days how important that single tree in the rain forest of Brazil is to the Manhattanite? (1996, pp. 131–2)

However desecrated a place, a people’s custodial responsibilities remain. No matter how damaged, the land retains its power and significance:

RF: the place that they’ve smashed to pieces, is it still a tywerrenge for you, is it still sacred to you?
MC: It’s gotta be. It’s a tywerrenge, a sacred place right down to and inside the ground. It was created that way. (Wilkins 1993, p. 73)

The perspective from another people in another hemisphere is the same, warning of the danger of valuing only the “pristine” and of recognizing only some places as sacred:
No part of the earth is expendable... Those who claim to love and protect the Mother Earth have to love all of her, even the places that are no longer pristine. Ma ah shra true ee, the giant serpent messenger, chose the edge of the uranium mining tailings at Jackpile Mine for his reappearance; he was making this point when he chose that unlikely location. (Silko 1996, pp. 94–5)

The contrast between country that has been cared for by its people and country that has been either neglected or abused is captured by a Ngarinman distinction between “quiet” and “wild” country. Daly Pulkara, one of the senior custodians of Ngarinman land allocated by the Australian government to pastoral leaseholders for many years, was asked what he called the heavily cattle-eroded area:

He looked at it for a while and said, “It’s the wild, just the wild”... where life is absent, where all the care, intelligence and respect that generations of Aboriginal people have put into the country have been eradicated in a matter of a few short years. (in Rose 1988, p. 386)

Quiet country is tame, domesticated: “country in which those who know how to read the signs see human action of the most responsible sort” (ibid). Frank Gurrmanamana, a Gidgingali man, had a similar response while visiting Australia’s capital city. What he found in Canberra was barrenness and disorder. He said that once long ago, “Aborigines had lived there and that they would have known these attributes of the land which still existed somewhere, but that now, in his own words, ‘this country bin lose ’im Dreaming.’ He was disturbed by this” (in Donaldson and Donaldson 1985, p. 207).

The state of a land that has lost its guardians, and of a people who have lost their land, are comparable: abandonment and banishment. The words of Mary Tall Mountain (quoted in Hobson 1979, pp. 404–5) bring the two together – the last wolf in an abandoned city and an Athabascan Indian woman alone in an empty hospital room:

the last wolf hurried toward me
through the ruined city...
baying his way eastward...
through clutter and rubble of quiet blocks

I heard his voice ascending the hill
and at last his low whine as he came
floor by empty floor to the room
where I sat
in my narrow bed looking west, waiting...

he laid his long gray muzzle
on the spare white spread
and his eyes burned yellow
his small dotted eyebrows quivered

Yes, I said,
I know what they have done.