

## **WELCOME HOME TO THE PLEISTOCENE. PAUL SHEPARD'S ECOLOGICAL PHILOSOPHY**

### **I. Main features of Shepard's ecological philosophy**

In early Shepard's<sup>1</sup> philosophical work idealistic approach, with primacy of ideas and worldviews, was dominant. Then he thought that preservation or destruction of nature primarily depends of personal and social cosmology.<sup>2</sup> In the book *Man in the Landscape* (1967) Shepard analyzed different ways of showing of organic environment and nature in European and American art and literature from 15th to 20th century. In the book his main conviction was that adequate vision of the natural world – with acknowledgment of biological and ecological continuity of man with other species – was fundamental condition for betterment of ecological situation.<sup>3</sup> In the well-known article „Ecology and Man: A Viewpoint“ (1979) Shepard argued for ontological extensionism or understanding of human self as small part of natural world or vision of nature as enlarged self.<sup>4</sup>

Early Shepard's idealistic convictions or faith in change-of-consciousness were quickly lost in his work. In the forward of his last book Shepard mentioned his disappointment in ecological movement in early 1970s and disappearance of his faith in philosophically founded ecology as a basis for better ecological behaviour.<sup>5</sup> In *Tender Carnivore and the Sacred Game* (1973) consistently argued for materialistic position with primacy of material factors – population, technology, standard of living, genetic adaptation etc. – as crucial for ecological state of some human society. Fundamental thought of whole Shepard's work from early 1970s on is conviction

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Shepard (1925-1996) was American biologist, anthropologist and ecological philosopher. In his earlier years he was working in several national parks. From 1970. to retirement in 1994. Shepard was teaching, as the Avery professor of Natural Philosophy and Human Ecology, at Californian Pitzer College and the Claremont Graduate School. Long time ignored, his work is often mentioned, sometimes positively, sometimes negatively, in contemporary ecological philosophy, psychology and other branches of human ecological theory (f. e. Nash 1989, 2001, Oelschlaeger 1991, Turner 1996, Rubin 1998, Peterson 2000, Taylor 2000, 2009, Kidner 2001, Fisher 2002, Mason 2005, Evans 2005, Fellencz 2007, Sale 2007, Bender 2003, 2007, Rochberg-Halton 2007, Kheel 2008, Esbjörn-Hargens-Zimmerman 2009). This article is shorter version of article in Croatian „Dobro došli kući u Pleistocen: ekološka filozofija Paula Shepada“, also on our web-page ([www.isp.hr/~tmarkus/](http://www.isp.hr/~tmarkus/)).

<sup>2</sup> Shepard 1999:51.

<sup>3</sup> Shepard 2002.

<sup>4</sup> Shepard 1996:111-122.

<sup>5</sup> Shepard 1998b:2

about destructive and pathological character of civilization. Neolithic domestication and civilization mean abandonment of hunter-gatherer life which is suitable for human biogramacy and evolved human nature. Already in his first book Shepard emphasized importance of the human deep evolutionary past without which later civilized history can't be explained. This evolutionary past is our firm connection with other species and natural world as a whole. Wildness is not just outside, in the wild habitats and species, but also inside, in the form of wild pleistocenic genome and our biological heritage. Shepard wrote that wild pleistocenic world live inside us even today, despite big changes in social organization and human way of life.<sup>6</sup> That means that man can be civilized, but he/she cannot be domesticated.<sup>7</sup>

Theory of bio-social discontinuity, crucial component of Shepard's human ecology, can't be reconciled with myth of historical progress (central meta-narrative of all modern secular ideologies) and vision of civilization as rise-and-achievement. For Shepard, nothing is further from truth than myth of historical progress. In Shepard's vision, abrupt (from deep evolutionary perspective, that is) appearance of domestication and civilization was main cause of many anthropogenic problems and human misery. Human intelligence, suitable for small groups, became dysfunctional and misadaptive in the overpopulated agrarian and urban environment.<sup>8</sup> Man can survive in civilized environment, but only with ever decreasing quality of living and creation of many ecological and social disturbances.<sup>9</sup> Conviction that man is his/her own construction is ideological, not scientifically, founded. Social forms are not limitless, because men can create society only within constraints from their evolutionary past.<sup>10</sup> Human beings, like every other, need specific environment in which their fundamental psychological and physiological features are formed through eons of evolutionary time. But confession of the evolutionary limits are not welcome in modern ideology of unlimited expectations.<sup>11</sup>

Shepard wrote that culture doesn't replace biological evolution – for him „cultural/social evolution“ is misnomer or wrong analogy – but can be deformed by its too fast rate, as in the recent human history. Chaos, loneliness, anomie, sporadic violence, isolation, overpopulated and polluted environment are typical features – or different forms of collective pathologies - of all cities in all civilizations, symptoms of very poor man's adaptations to civilized conditions.<sup>12</sup> Men are pleistocenic beings who need, as always, wildness and open spaces, but, in civilized conditions, they are trapped in overpopulated, biologically impoverished and ecologically devastated environment.<sup>13</sup> Shepard has criticized common assertions about man's domestication,

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<sup>6</sup> Shepard 2002:30-31, 97. This interpretation, which contains radical distinction between human nature (or genetic adaptation to hunter-gatherer life) and social macrodynamics of the recent human history, we called theory of bio-social discontinuity. More about it see: Markus 2008, 2009.

<sup>7</sup> Shepard 1998c:15-16.

<sup>8</sup> Shepard 1998c:98, 227.

<sup>9</sup> Shepard 1998c:113.

<sup>10</sup> Shepard 1998c:121.

<sup>11</sup> Shepard 1998b:135, 1998c:122.

<sup>12</sup> Shepard 1998a:XIX, 93-108; 1998b:137.

<sup>13</sup> Shepard 1997:317-319; 1998b:137.

because human beings were not subject of sexual selection, as domestic animals. Humans are today equally wild as their pleistocenic ancestors, 10.000 years ago.<sup>14</sup> Genetically, we are wild pleistocenic species which can survive in fundamental different environment, but only with many problems and low quality of life.<sup>15</sup> According to Shepard, wildness within us is the best part of us because appreciation of our evolutionary heritage is the main precondition for human happiness and good life. Some cultures are better than others if they appreciate more our natural context and evolutionary past.<sup>16</sup> Human beings can create very different cultures – and they did it for last several thousand years – but there is a catch. Men cannot control consequences of their behaviour and every culture cannot satisfied fundamental human needs equally well. All cultures do not work equally well.<sup>17</sup>

Shepard wrote about hunter-gatherers very often and in detail, because he thought that that life is our natural evolutionary context, suitable for human fundamental human needs. Very early, at the end of 1960s, he wrote that long existence of hunter-gatherer societies some kind of proof of success and that all recent human history, from neolithic domestication on, can be downstream route.<sup>18</sup> According to Shepard, among hunter-gatherers there are no war, state, class stratification, gross economic or political inequalities, pollution and other anthropogenic problems, typical for civilized societies. Civilized men transfer their problems into „savages“ and „primitives“. Noble and demonic savage are ideological constructions: the first is distorted view of our evolutionary past and the second is symptom of cultural chauvinism.<sup>19</sup> Modern hunter-gatherers are not living fossils, but this is life the most similar to ancient way, which we genetically never abandoned.<sup>20</sup> Shepard dismissed sc. hypothesis about pleistocenic overkill – extinction of many species of big animals in the late Pleistocene in North America by paleo-Indians – believing that is wrong and another example of demonization of hunter-gatherers.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Shepard 1996:126.

<sup>15</sup> Shepard 1996:216-217, 1998:134.

<sup>16</sup> Shepard 1998b:34-38, 117, 145.

<sup>17</sup> Shepard 1998b:78.

<sup>18</sup> Shepard 2002:100. Shepard was well aware of big prejudices about hunter-gatherers in modern society which celebrates „progress“, „change“ and every search for standard in deep evolutionary past is easily dismissed as „regression“, „primitivism“ and „atavism“ or, in the best case, „romantism“ (Shepard 1998b:1-2). Shepard used different – and not always scientifically the most precise – names for hunter-gatherers, like „tribal societies“, „kynegetic people“ etc. Shepard was not aware of significant difference between simple/mobile hunter-gatherers (probably real and the best model for our evolutionary past) and complex/sedentary hunter-gatherers (recent phenomena in the late Pleistocene). This distinction is important because some anthropogenic problems, like slavery and war, probably originated among complex hunter-gatherers and sedentary life, with storage of surplus, was basis for later domestication in early Neolithic. About that see: Fry 2006, 2007.

<sup>19</sup> Shepard 1998c:90-93, 131-174, 1996:136-140, 1998b:67-77. Two Shepard's main works about hunter-gatherers are *The Tender Carnivore and the Sacred Game* (1973) and *Coming Home to the Pleistocene* (1998).

<sup>20</sup> Shepard 1996:202.

<sup>21</sup> Shepard 1996:178-179, 1998b:31-33. Today most experts believe that anthropogenic factor had significant role – with climatic changes as the second factor – in pleistocenic extinction but it is neither necessarily affirmation of neo-hobbesian demonization of hunter-gatherers nor negation important differences between them and complex societies in their ecological footprint.

Shepard was adherent and very enthusiastic about sc. hunting hypothesis – very influential in 1960s and 1970s - which stated that hunting has very important role in the human evolution. According to Shepard, hunting is not cruel barbarity, but recognition of human belonging and dependence of nature and social organization which recognizes extra-human context. Hunting is a part of our evolutionary past, because humans were living as hunters cca 99 % of their history. Hunting acknowledges broader context of interrelationship between man and nature and permanent significance of powers beyond human control.<sup>22</sup> Hunting can be a factor of ecological stability and balance between human society and broader natural world.<sup>23</sup> Hunting and killing in tribal society don't mean destructive barbarism, victory over enemy or triumph of masculinity but they are parts of broader gift of life and natural evolutionary processes in which life has to take life. In hunting crucial happening is not killing, but moment of respect and affirmation of the giving world and participation in the eternal flux of matter and energy.<sup>24</sup>

In the last several decades critique of civilization became quite common and Shepard was one of the first in it. According to him, degradation of women was consequence of agriculture and pastoralism and their transformation into the machine for child-birth. Low status of women in civilization culminate in civilization because of absence of sanctification of place and mythology rooted in nature.<sup>25</sup> War, state repression, many diseases, interpersonal exploitation and other anthropogenic problems were fundamental features of civilization from the beginning. Civilized men have been making genocide over hunter-gatherers and ecocide over wild habitats and species for 10.000 years.<sup>26</sup> Pathological behaviour of civilized humans – wars, genocides, urban violence, ecological destruction etc. – are not consequence of some moral failure or omission of respect of „high moral standards“ of civilization, but consequences of evolutionary non-adaptation. Our problems are manifestations of deviation from our genetic core, not consequences of some social or technical defects which can be repaired by technological fixes or political revolutions. Civilized human have been living under tyrans, demagogues, dictators, kings and emperors for thousands of years. Desperation and homelessness of civilized man culminate today, because industrial societies are the most artificial and abnormal social order in human history.<sup>27</sup> Industrial order is just extension of the fundamental mistake made in neolithic domestication. War and opsessive territoriality are consequences not of our

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<sup>22</sup> Shepard 2002:202, 209-313.

<sup>23</sup> Shepard 1999:71-76, 2002:213.

<sup>24</sup> Shepard 1996:47-49, 1999:69. In his earlier works, from 1950s to the end of 1970s, hunting had central place in Shepard's theory, later less so. For some problems with his over-emphasis of hunting see concluding thoughts.

<sup>25</sup> Shepard 2002:108, 1998c:96.

<sup>26</sup> Shepard 1998a:19-46, 1998b:32-33, 1998c:26-40.

<sup>27</sup> Shepard 1998:5, 148.

biogrammacy but of overpopulation and other pathological circumstances of domestication and civilization.<sup>28</sup>

Theory of bio-social discontinuity has central place in Shepard's theory. So, he cannot be accused for „fallacy of noble savage“, standard objection for all position which maintain that civilization (including domestication) can be – or *is* – the deepest root of all chief ecological and other anthropogenic problems. As we already said<sup>29</sup> - but what must be constantly repeated – theory of bio-social discontinuity has nothing with morality (nobleness) and everything with genetic adaptation. It is relatively the best explanation of anthropogenic problems as main characteristic of all civilizations. Two dominant interpretation – standard model of humanistic disciplines (man as *tabula rasa*, problems are particular social circumstances) and standard model of social darwinism (problem is aggressive/selfish/competitive human nature) – cannot explain neither anthropogenic problems nor fundamental human needs. Shepard criticized concept of „social/cultural evolution“ as wrong analogy with biological (darwinian) evolution and as quasi-scientific justification of myth of historical progress.<sup>30</sup>

In Shepard's work there was detailed critique not only civilization, but agriculture and pastoralism as well. According to Shepard, cattle-herding has been causing vast destruction of wild habitats, especially deforestation. Domestic animals have been creating domesticating habitat for thousands years. Pastoralism and nomadism have been making a big contribution to anthropocentric philosophy theoretically and ecological destruction practically.<sup>31</sup> Agrarian domestication was beginning of gradual but permanent decrease of quality of human life: „Domestication would create catastrophic biology of nutritional deficiencies, alternating feasts and famine, health and epidemics, peace and social conflict, all set in millennial rhythms of slowly collapsing ecosystems.“<sup>32</sup> For Shepard, agriculture, pastoralism and urban civilization are all parts social macrodynamics, leading to ever increasing alienation of humans from natural social and ecological conditions. Urban men have been always idealizing surrounding country, but, historically, country and city are two sides of the same coin. Idealization of agrarian life – as „arkadian“ or „bucolic“ garden-environment – is one of the most popular and dangerous illusion of urban man. Agrarian life – characterized by dull, hard and monotonous labour – can be idealized only by urban men, who live in even more degraded and overpopulated environment.<sup>33</sup> Agriculture is real historical source of warfare, because increasing competition between human groups were caused by demographic pressure and

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<sup>28</sup> Shepard 1998b:81-85, 1998c:40, 62, 90, 126, 154-155. Some recent analyses support Shepard's thesis of war as recent phenomenon in the human history (Fry 2006, 2007), but there are different opinions about this topic in scholarly circles.

<sup>29</sup> Markus 2008, 2009.

<sup>30</sup> Shepard 1996:188-192.

<sup>31</sup> Shepard 1996:221, 1998a:3-6, 1998b:124, 154, 155, 2002:52-54, 73-76.

<sup>32</sup> Shepard 1996:182, 1998b:82-90, 93.

<sup>33</sup> Shepard 1998b:103, 1998c:16-20, 34-35, 241-243.

disappearance of wild nature.<sup>34</sup> Agriculture and pastoralism had catastrophic social and ecological consequences: hunger, many diseases, warfare, increasing inequalities, degraded and polluted environment, vast destruction of wild habitats and species, genetic degeneration of domesticated species etc. Urban societies have been just continuation of these tendencies.<sup>35</sup> For Shepard, „modern“ industrial societies are just part – and, in many ways, culmination - of long-term trends of ever increasing alienation of humans from their natural social and ecological conditions. Fanatical effort of civilized man for separation from other species and pathological illusions about human omnipotence and independence from nature are especially strong in industrial mega-cities. Modern myth of „historical progress“ is symptom of fanatical desire of industrial man to control everything and to convert everything into commodity for mass consumption and object of technological manipulation.<sup>36</sup>

Critique of illusion of human exemptionalism was common theme in Shepard's work. He criticized civilized humans' effort to dig up gulf between themselves and other species and to forget their evolutionary past. Reason, culture, learning and language are features of living world as a whole, in less or more measure, and not specialities of one species. Human culture is a part of broader ecological and organic realities and energy's flow through eco-systems and web of life.<sup>37</sup> Humans are really cultural animals, but that fact doesn't emancipate them from nature culture is a system of information transfer, genetically founded and under biological constraints. Without respect of biological constraints culture becomes center of fantastic world with no connection with reality.<sup>38</sup> We should not overemphasize cultural difference and ignore universal human nature as product of the long-term evolutionary processes. Other species, eco-systems, soil, air, water and other ecological realities are not cultural constructions but foundations of human existence.<sup>39</sup> Effort of secular humanists to replace christian God with Man were and are pointless. Despite several centuries of secular humanism's anthropocentric illusions humans are not their own construction. Social sciences and humanistic philosophy are mainly part of antinaturalistic ideology of modern civilization with ancient roots in axial religions and philosophies. This ideology argue that humans can do whatever they want and that there are no ecological and biological constraints for human adventures.<sup>40</sup> Shepard criticized postmodern deconstructivism as the last humanistic fad and another example of old antinaturalistic philosophy, alienated from nature and organic processes. Conventional feminist movement, that tries to integrate women into destructive society, is also symptom of

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<sup>34</sup> Shepard 1998b:86-88. Shepard was one of the first thinker who has emphasized today common sc. circumscription theory: increasing demographic pressure within geographical closed region (by sea, high mountains, deserts etc.) is the main cause of intensification of intersocietal conflicts and origin of state.

<sup>35</sup> Shepard 1998b:81-89, 1998c:237-239, 245-258.

<sup>36</sup> Shepard 1998a:99-105, 1998d:146.

<sup>37</sup> Shepard 2002:XXXIV-XXXVII, 16, 23-26.

<sup>38</sup> Shepard 1998c:60, 112, 219.

<sup>39</sup> Shepard 1999:158-169.

<sup>40</sup> Shepard 1999:12, 158-163

negation of ecological and biological realities, especially in the form of moral vegetarianism.<sup>41</sup>

Shepard was aware that science can be (mis)used for destructive goals, like production of weapons or ecological destruction and it can stimulate anthropocentric arrogance toward nature<sup>42</sup> but he never argued for relativism and antiscientific irrationalism. He show up that strive for scientific objectivity hasn't mean apology for industrialism or some other kind of social particularities. According to Shepard, modern scientific naturalism is not a source of desperation and sense of meaninglessness which persecutes modern man. Especially ecology has significant role in more balanced vision of man as small part of the natural world. Towards the end of 1960s Shepard believed that ecology as science has radical and subversive character because it „requires a kind of vision across boundaries.“ Modern languages, with many idealistic and dualistic overtones, difficultly express ecological realities. Ecology implies unity and makes possible to regard world from human perspective but not from human chauvinism.<sup>43</sup>

In Shepard's work human ecology was always founded in evolutionary (darwinian) biology because humans are animal species and product of eons of biological (darwinian) evolution. He wrote that dominant indifference or even hostility toward Darwin's theory, among humanistic intellectuals, is consequence of its irreconcilableness with anthropocentric humanism and humanistic illusions of human exemptionalism. Humanists don't like statements about human kinship with other creatures or man as small part of natural world: this is some kind of offence for „human dignity“. Confusion of evolution and progress – only way to make Darwin's theory acceptable in humanistic circles – created a lot of damage, even more that overemphasis of competition and violence in nature. But darwinian natural selection and darwinian evolution are not progressive processes. Evolution is not some kind of upward movement with culmination in one species, but branching bush with man as the last shoot of genus homo on the one small and recent branchlet.<sup>44</sup> Evolutionary theory could help to overcome man's alienation from natural world but instead it was used as vindication of social inequalities and exploitation. Modern humanism never forgave Darwin who demollished illusions of human independence and uniqueness.<sup>45</sup> Shepard had great sympathy toward ethology, sociobiology and other neo-darwinian theories and their extension into domain of social sciences. Morris, Fox, Wilson and other contemporary neo-darwinians rightly emphasize great significance of our evolutionary past and criticize prejudices of anthropocentric humanism. Contemporary humanistic critiques of sociobiology are continuation of the old humanistic antinaturalism, as secular version of ancient religions of agrarian civilization.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Shepard 1996:153-163, 204, 1998c:120, 2002:107-108.

<sup>42</sup> Shepard 1996:117-118.

<sup>43</sup> Shepard 1996:112-113, 122.

<sup>44</sup> Shepard 1996:117, 310, 1997:309-310, 1998c:102-103, 1999:166. For popularity of that kind of pop-evolutionism among contemporary New Age and some ecological thinkers see Sessions 1995c, Esbjörn-Hargens-Zimmerman 2009.

<sup>45</sup> Shepard 1996:117, 1997:228, 1998:104.

<sup>46</sup> Shepard 1996:219-220, 1998d:146-147, 1999:170-175.

Not surprisingly for ecocentric and naturalistic thinker, wildness has central place in Shepard's work. He made difference between *wildness* and *wilderness*. *Wildness* living world of Earth, complex of wild habitats and species which perpetuates biosphere, real framework of human existence, unity of place, specific environment of evolutionary adaptation for some species and genetic state. *Wilderness* is social construction of urban man, landscape and touristic attraction, form of escape of urban men from boring and deseperating conditions of civilized existence. Corporative forces try to destroy *wildness* in the favour of *wilderness* or to convert *wildness* into many landscapes for touristic consumption.<sup>47</sup> *Wildness* is our natural ecological context in which we have been living for millions of years and which cannot be erased by several thousands of years or agro-urban existence. Disappearance of *wildness* is like amputation of body's part.<sup>48</sup> Shepard has given detailed critique of concept of „landscape“ as symptom of anthropocentric reduction of nature to human nice-to-see picture. In the new mechanical paradigm wild nature is reduced to quantitative abstraction and landscape as interesting touristic attraction, thing of fadish and ever changing taste. Adherents of nature-as-landscape were never enemies of prometheus hybris but only its helpers and suggesters of humanization of wild nature. But even that crippled concept of nature can be symptom of the healthy human need for organic and wild nature.<sup>49</sup>

Shepard has written extensively about animals. For him, many of our abilities, to which we point in explaining how we are different from other species, actually are derived from our primate origins.<sup>50</sup> Fundamental to Shepard's philosophy is conviction that animal Others played a crucial role in making us human.<sup>51</sup> Without wild animal Others we cannot be truly human because wild animals are necessary for human health and spiritual maturation. There is deep ontological need, in every human being, for wild animals as something necessary for a development of humanity. This perspective is incompatible with different humanistic ideologies emphasizing human exceptionalism and alleged gulf between humans and other species. Industrial humans live in domesticated environment with crippled and controlled animals, but need for wild animal Other remains nevertheless. Misunderstanding animals as machines or cute babies are also product of humanistic ideology, refusal to accept independence of Others.<sup>52</sup> Humans are not unfinished animals and we don't mature

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<sup>47</sup> Shepard 1996:192-195, 1998b:131-151.

<sup>48</sup> Shepard 2002:266-267, 274

<sup>49</sup> Shepard 1998b:13-14, 1998c:148, 2002:XXI-XXVIII. Mass tourism, in which wild nature is „experienced“ as „interesting“ and „stimulating“ environment, is one popular example of nature-as-landscape vision (Shepard 1996:104). But parks and reservats should not be open for tourists. They are temporarily refuges for endangered species till more favourable circumstances, perhaps after decline of human population, when will be more space for wild nature (Shepard 1999:179).

<sup>50</sup> About in Shepard wrote extensively in *Tender Carnivore and the Sacred Game* (1973), and, although some of his analyses are outdated today, main line of his reasoning is still valid.

<sup>51</sup> About it Shepard wrote in all his works, but more extensively in *Thinking Animals* (1978) and *The Others* (1996).

<sup>52</sup> Shepard 1996:104, 1998c:40-41, 84-85, 231, 1998d:35-36, 233, 1997:4, 278.



from animality but through it.<sup>53</sup> Expansion of agriculture and pastoralism has created ever increasing disappearance of animal Other from culture and perspective. Living metaphors for hunter-gatherers are other species, for agriculturalists mother, for pastoralists father and for industrial humans machine.<sup>54</sup>

Shepard had very negative view about domestic animals. They are degenerates, crippled monsters, because their wild genome was changed under human control, something unseen in billions of years of evolution. They are miserable caricatures and cannot be true substitutes for the wild species. Like civilized humans, domestic animals lose a connection with their natural habitat and possibility of normal maturation. Animals isolated from their natural context are ecologically dead. Domestic animals have many defects in comparisons with their wild cousins: smaller brain, deviation of many organs, weaker smell, seeing and hearing, longer maturation etc.<sup>55</sup> Domestic animals are human slaves which distract our attention from wild species. ZOOs and pets can give satisfaction to civilized humans because of pauperity of their lives. ZOOs, like prisons, became refuges for defected and unable animals which habitats were devastated.<sup>56</sup> Humans don't want to admit that domestic animals are their slaves and degenerates, because they remind them of ancient wild life. Humans are even more insane than their pets because they are not genetically altered through process of domestication. Extremes in attitudes of modern humans toward domestic animals – from deep love to cruel misuse – are symptoms of our deep disappointment with their inability to re-connect us with our wild genetic past. Pets are organic slaves and cannot satisfy deep human need for wild nature. But petomania is symptom of intuitive understanding that animals are necessary for human development and maturation and defence from desperation and insanity.<sup>57</sup>

Critique of animal liberation and (moral) vegetarianism is often exposed in Shepard's work. According to him, animalism – whose the most famous representatives are P. Singer and T. Regan – has some sense if applied to domestic and wild animals under human control. But it is completely meaningless if it should be forced upon wild animals in their natural habitats. Wild animals don't have „rights“ but they have something much more important: genetic heritage and evolutionary past and it must be respected. Concept of „right“ is product of modern liberalism and it doesn't have sense outside industrial society. In nature there is much cooperation and altruism, but no friendship. Wild animals don't need our „friendship“ but they need a protection from those who want to destroy their habitats in the name of „technological progress“, and those who want to expand humanistic ethic onto them in the name of „moral progress“. True, animalism is healthy symptom of human need for animal Other, but expressed in distorted way, without connection with ecology and with reduction of

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<sup>53</sup> Shepard 1997:112, 1998d:3, 40.

<sup>54</sup> Shepard 1996:9.

<sup>55</sup> Shepard 1996:61-62, 1998a:113, 1998c:9-16, 264-266. About domestic animals Shepard wrote extensively in *The Others: How Animals Made Us Human* (1996), his last written book.

<sup>56</sup> Shepard 1997:231, 1998c:265-266, 1999:195.

<sup>57</sup> Shepard 1997:98, 140-152, 284-289.

nature on some individual beings, similar to human.<sup>58</sup> Humans must, like any other species, intervene in and modify parts of natural world but they must not try to impose their social and ethical values onto it.<sup>59</sup>

Shepard pointed out that animalists often preach, with great fervour, moral vegetarianism, believing that death and killing are something evil and unnatural. But this is absurd, because life feeds on life – death and killing are interwoven into foundations of life. Condemnation of hunting and meat eating are symptoms of humanistic ideology, neurotic obsession and hysterical fear from death, inability to accept death and killing as normal part of natural world. Moral vegetarianism has its roots in India, in degraded and overpopulated environment but it finds a fruitful soil in all civilized societies.<sup>60</sup> Shepard also criticized ethical philosophy of Albert Schweitzer, very respectful name in ecological circles, as example of anti-naturalistic ideology. Schweitzer's famous maxime „reverence for life“ (*Erfurcht für Leben*) only seemingly appears as naturalistic and proto-ecological orientation, but, in fact, it is symptom of old humanistic desire for eternal life and denial of death. Schweitzer was atomist, without understanding of ecological realities and man who has looked upon nature as bloody battlefield. For him, man has „mission“ to bring „order“ and „meaning“ into chaotic and cruel nature. Schweitzer's ethic is product of several thousands years of agro-pastoral domestication and christian humanism with white-black vision of nature and demonization of predatory killing.<sup>61</sup>

Shepard has sharply criticized traditional (institutional) or axial religions, like christianity, islam, buddhism, hinduism etc., but especially christianity as dominant western religion.<sup>62</sup> Hatred toward wild nature was and is deeply ingrained in christianity as the most urban of all religions. Christianity take its part in destruction of natural world which was understood as temporarily way-station and valley of tears or, in the best case, as background of stage on which human drama was played.<sup>63</sup> Central religious and philosophical dogma of the West is effort to radical distinction between spiritual and natural world. The New Testament is perhaps the most antiorganic and

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<sup>58</sup> Shepard 1996:63, 197, 1997:304-320. Shepard has basically criticized animal rights position, most often associated with Tom Regan, but denial of pain, typical for Peter Singer, was equally non-natural for Shepard and symptom of humanistic arrogance. Regan and Singer equally argued for moral vegetarianism for which Shepard had nothing but contempt.

<sup>59</sup> Shepard 2002:208.

<sup>60</sup> Shepard 1996:188, 1998b:164, 1998c:152, 1998d:188, 1999:157.

<sup>61</sup> Shepard 1999:56-66, 2002:190-205.

<sup>62</sup> That critique was become more common in recent years and many scholars emphasize abnormal socio-historical circumstances as precondition to rise of axial religions (DiZerega 2000, Lerro 2000, 2005, Harvey 2006).

<sup>63</sup> Shepard 2002:104, 220-226. Shepard's first critique of christianity was published in 1967 – the same year in which famous article of Lynn White „The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis“ was published – but his analysis, founded on much broader historical and biological perspective, is superior to White's, although much less notorious. Shepard's critique was materialistic – not idealistic as White's – because for Shepard religious and philosophical ideas are much more symptoms and consequences of material conditions of human life than causes. Recent historiographical re-evaluation of Asian history – China as the center of world economy till the end of 18th century – is very damaging for White's thesis (especially his connection christianity-technology), but not for Shepard's.

antinaturalistic example of human thought ever.<sup>64</sup> But according to Shepard, there is no significant difference between oriental (christianity, islam and judaism) and oriental (especially Indian) religions. All world religions are anthropocentric and other-worldly orientated and contain deep hate or indifference toward wild nature. They cannot much help, because they are symptom of the fundamental alienation of our natural evolutionary context and consequence of abandonment of hunter-gatherer life. Their otherworldly orientation and individualistic salvationism are consequences of increasing social and ecological desintegration, meaningless life and abnormal social conditions of civilized humans.<sup>65</sup> Jainism and buddhism are not manifestation of proto-ecological love of nature but hate of organic process and desire to escape from intolerable, social repressive and ecological devastated world of agrarian India.<sup>66</sup> Sacrifice – typical characteristic of all pastoral and agrarian religions – is symptom of abandonment of ancient conviction, typical for hunter-gatherers, that humans are gots who receive gifts, in the favour of bargaining with supernatural beings, full of envy and greed. Liturgy of sacrifice reveals de-spiritualized natural world, full of scarcity and violence, becoming resource for human bargaining. Part of this change is shamanism, because shaman is not embodiment of ecological consciousness but latecomer and usurper who misuses fear of pastoral and agrarian population due to increasing scarcity and wars. Shamanism has been creating de-spiritualization of wild habitats and species in favour of abstract and decontextualized celestial world. Shamanism is probably the first case of patriarchal domination, because shamans were and are always men.<sup>67</sup>

There is significant and extensive critique of concept of „history“ in Shepard's work. Shepard argued that central theme of history, as western construction, is «rejection of habitat. It formulates experience outside of nature and tend to reduce place to location... History is inimical to compliance with nature, having arisen in a tragic perspective of man against nature, or nature as neutral. Using nature as a parable of politics, it sees all events in ideological texts.»<sup>68</sup> Jewish and greek demitologisations had destroyed myth about eternal return which was beginning of the later model of nature-as-alienation. History refuses «ambiguities of overlapping identity, space and time, and creates its own dilemmas of discontent and alienation from Others, from nonhuman life, primitive ancestors, and tribal people.» It creates continual neuroses and life of quiet desperation under the yoke of illusions and forgeries.<sup>69</sup> History is «declaration of independence from the deep past and its peoples, living and dead, the natural state of being, which is outside its own domain». History means a desacralization of past, place and nature, it is an ideological construction of civilized

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<sup>64</sup> Shepard 1998a:70-80.

<sup>65</sup> Shepard 1997:317, 325, 1998d:127, 210. Shepard didn't make comments on more recent efforts to „greening“ of axial religions and appearance of sc. eco-christianity/islam/buddhism etc. but he hardly could have any sympathy for it. This quasi-ecology-comes-lately is futile effort for additionally „greening“ of something profoundly antinaturalistic and antiorganic. He probably would be more sympathetic with (primitivist) neo-paganism.

<sup>66</sup> Shepard 1996:198, 1997:312.

<sup>67</sup> Shepard 1998b:91-92, 114-116, 1999:94-95.

<sup>68</sup> Shepard 1998a:46-47, 62.

<sup>69</sup> Shepard 1996:167-171.

man, which makes a great contribution to collective pathology and insanity.<sup>70</sup> History denies ancient mythological interpretation of the world «which sees time as a continuous return and space as sacred, where all life is autochthonous». History creates state of alienation from other species, human ancestors and (local) homeland. Historical consciousness had gradually «weeded out animal metaphors, organic continuities, and especially the perception of nonhuman spirits of the earth». Historical thought can't answer to question how to become native in place, because it is «great de-nativizing process, the great deracinator. Historical time is invested in change, novelty, and escape from the renewing stability and continuity of the great natural cycles that ground us to place and the greater of life on earth.»<sup>71</sup> History is not neutral recording of the past events, but «an active, psychological force that separates humankind from the rest of nature because of its disregard for the deep connections to the past.» History is also declaration of independence from nature which remains important only as object of science and technological manipulation. Rejecting importance of myth history distorted basic human sensual and intellectual processes which were always vital parts of our humanity.<sup>72</sup> History is «ideological framework exempting (Western) man from the constraints of season, place, nature, and their religious integrations. History is the desacralizing of the world based on writing, prophetic intrusion, and opposition to the natural order. It is precisely not what it seems – the evidence of continuity with the past. It is instead a convulsive break from the true deep past, a divine intercession, full of accident and radical novelty.»<sup>73</sup>

Shepard was ambivalent about human future. In one earlier work Shepard had argued for creation of techno-kynegetic societies with complex technology, synthetic food, genetic designed bacteria for food processing and other techno-miracles. In these societies about 8 billions people would live in big mega-cities with wild interiors between them.<sup>74</sup> But later he didn't write about techno-kynegetic societies or any other future utopia. Instead, he called for restoration at least some aspects of ancient life within present industrial order. He knew that we cannot restore hunter-gatherer life or animistic consciousness, but restoration at least some aspects of the ancient life perhaps could be possible. Humans are animals species belonging to the Pleistocene and this is our hope for better future.<sup>75</sup> We never abandoned our evolutionary heritage and it is enough to stop to deny it and to develop ecological civicism with restoration some basic principles, metaphysical insights and spiritual qualities of pleistocenic life. This has to be a thing of rational choice, because humans are unconscious culture-

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<sup>70</sup> Shepard 1996:170-171.

<sup>71</sup> Shepard 1998b:9-13.

<sup>72</sup> Shepard 1998b:14-16.

<sup>73</sup> Shepard 1999:174. Professional historians would be very perplexed hearing what their profession actually means and what they are doing. I am professional historian and well aware how Shepard's critique of historical thinking convincing and devastating is.

<sup>74</sup> Shepard 1996:142-143, 1998c:277-278. These techno-optimism and pretty much absurd utopianism were quite untypical for Shepard and exception in their opus.

<sup>75</sup> Shepard 1996:15, 107.

builders.<sup>76</sup> There are many hardships and problems but there is a hope for human beings as long as green Earth and wild nature are still with us.<sup>77</sup>

## II. Continuous actuality and some problems in Shepard's thought

As it said, one of the great strength of Shepard's philosophy is connection between ecology and evolutionary biology or foundation of human ecology in darwinian biology. Many philosophers, theologians, sociologists and other thinker were „discovering“ ecology in the last 30-40 years, but for them ecology was (and, mainly, still is) remaining separated from biology. Majority of these thinkers have humanistic education and they feel uncomfortably with darwinism, especially if they cannot separate original Darwin's insights from sc. social darwinism. Without biology „greening“ of social thought remains quite superficial and skin-deep. Very often, „darwinism“ has negative connotations in contemporary ecological thought or it is simply ignored. Pop-darwinism usually means a primacy of competition and dark vision of nature as bloody battlefield<sup>78</sup> or confusion evolution and progress. But Shepard knew better recognizing that sc. social darwinism is misnomer or misapplication of Darwin's theory for justification of different inequalities in human societies. „Essence“ of darwinian evolution is genetic adaptation to changes in local environment and it cannot be used for justification of some important aspects of complex societies which are product of social macrodynamics in the recent human past. There is one normative implication of Darwin's theory – every living beings should live in his/her natural environment – but for humans that means that we should live as – hunter-gatherers. Civilizations are recent phenomena and they cannot be product of long-term processes of darwinian evolution. Contemporary darwinian thinkers – evolutionary psychologists, sociobiologists, bio-anthropologists and others – accept existence of evolutionary framed human nature which means nothing else but genetic adaptation to living in small nomadic groups in wild environment.<sup>79</sup> Shepard made clear distinction between evolution and progress and, from early 1970s on, he consequently argued for theory of bio-social discontinuity. Integrating three crucial

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<sup>76</sup> Shepard 1998b:88-89, 107, 154-155, 164, 170, 173. These statements are obscure and confusing and Shepard was probably aware of it. But in his time, he thought that this is the best what we can do.

<sup>77</sup> Shepard 1996:209.

<sup>78</sup> Or „darwinism“ can be simply immersed in some „modern scientific paradigm“ which means physical mechanicism and which has to be countered by some new ecological philosophy of nature (f. e. Capra 1983, 1998, Goldsmith 1998, Rowe 2003, 2006). But, as Shepard has pointed out, it is not necessarily so. „Conventional“ interpretation of neo-darwinism – as genetic adaptation to local environment – is quite enough for understanding of our ecological predicament if we accept theory of bio-social discontinuity. There is no need for hostility toward modern science which contains strong anti-anthropocentric elements.

<sup>79</sup> Of course, there are many different opinions and divergences what exactly human nature would mean. Many social scientists are insisting on traditional faith in human exceptionalism and crucial significance of the cultural adaptation (standard model of social sciences). And some darwinians try to defend old human exceptionalism and faith in „historical progress“, but it is a consequence of their personal moral (liberal) prejudices, not their scientific (darwinian) position. About contemporary disputes about social implications of Darwin's theory and theory of bio-social discontinuity see: Markus 2008 (soon in English as well), 2009.

perspectives about human behaviour – ecological, evolutionary and socio-historical – he was an early integral thinker.

There is detailed and well-argued critique of civilization and domestication in Shepard's opus. This critique was consequent – unlike many others, Shepard didn't refuse myth of historical progress only partially – and founded on theory of bio-social discontinuity. So, the common objection – fallacy of noble savage – is avoided. Critiques of civilization, which ignore evolutionary biology and theory of bio-social discontinuity, easily fall prey to romantization and idealization of hunter-gatherers.<sup>80</sup> But, there is no need for moralization and idealization of ancient way of life. Optimal quality of life and non-existence of anthropogenic problems are consequences of genetic adaptation, not some moral perfection. These two criteria – that is, fundamental needs (positive approach) and anthropogenic problems (negative approach) – are crucial for any substantial and scientific critique of social macrodynamics and its harmful consequences. Shepard clearly differentiated between wildness (or wild natural world) on the one side, and domestication/civilization on the other. In recent years there were many disputes about is wildness a cultural/social construct or not.<sup>81</sup> Many futile disputes would be avoided if Shepard's distinction between wildness and wilderness (not necessary with these concepts) was adopted. But it implies radical critique of not only industrial society – too much radical for many ecological thinkers – but civilization as a whole. Even for many deep ecologists, with their often idealized emphasis on „anthropocentrism“ (that is, anthropocentric ideas and worldviews), Shepard thinking looks too radical.<sup>82</sup> His critique of animalism and moral vegetarianism is very convincing but much ignored in recent scholarly literature.<sup>83</sup>

Shepard has united three „revolutions“ – or paradigmatic shift – in contemporary human sciences: historical/anthropological (significantly different interpretation of recent human history, civilization and hunter-gatherers), evolutionary/darwinian (significance of deep human evolutionary past) and ecological (man as a part of nature and significance of natural world for human health and well-being, not only for physical survival). Shepard was true integral thinker because he has united three crucial aspects of human life and three perspectives crucial for understanding of human behaviour: ecological (our belonging to wider natural world), socio-historical (social macrodynamics) and biological (our evolutionary past or

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<sup>80</sup> That mistake is typical for most anarcho-primitivists, including John Zerzan. As naturalist, Shepard didn't try to mix some modern humanistic ideology, like anarchism, and darwinian critique of civilization.

<sup>81</sup> Cronon 1995, Callicott-Nelson 1998, Nelson-Callicott 2008.

<sup>82</sup> Some scholars follow Shepard emphasizing theory of bio-social discontinuity at first but then forget it almost completely (f. e. Oelschlaeger 1991, Sessions 1995b, Bender 2003), perhaps due to partial reading of Shepard's opus. Some critics of Shepard's work completely ignore a theory of bio-social discontinuity and charge Shepard for noble savage fallacy (Esbjörn-Hargens-Zimmerman 2009). But, as we saw, it misses the point.

<sup>83</sup> F. e. some contemporary ecological thinkers sporadically mention Shepard but ignore his critique of animalism and vegetarianism, although these topics are central for their books (Evans 2005, Kheel 2008). Most others ignore him completely.

genetic heritage). This is scientific valid integral approach, not some confusing and obscure New Age considerations about „inner dimension“, „spirituality“, „subjective life“ etc. These terms has meaning as expressions of human genetic heritage or human biogramacy, that is, our genetic adaptation to specific, evolutionary framed, social and ecological environment.<sup>84</sup> Shepard's approach was completely naturalistic one but this is, in our opinion, his greatest strenght, not defect. He showed quite convincigly that naturalistic approach and scientific materialism don't lead into nihilism and moral relativism. Quite the opposite, naturalistic approach – not necessarily with all Shepard's conclusions, of course – is the only way to avoid subjectivism and metaphysical obscurantism. Science – and it means chiefly evolutionary biology – can tell us what meaning and good life or how we should live – and if not science what can?<sup>85</sup> But affirmation of scientific materialism does not lead into apology of modern society, industrialism or capitalism either because Shepard knew that foundations of scientific objectivity are in the cognitive structure of human brain – product of hundreds of millions of years of biological evolution – and not in this or that socio-historical particularity. He has integrated the best parts of modern science and its ecocentric (non-anthropocentric) tradition. So, defence of scientific rationality and objectivity cannot mean defence of industrial civilization or civilization as such. This conclusion is especially relevant for his countrymen in the USA where fundamental religion and attacks on scientific naturalism were and are very strong. Shepard knew that we can find meaning and good life in this world, but not in industrial society or some other unnatural social order but in the wild natural world to which our genome was and is adapted. He had no patience for humanistic talk about „social construction“ of meaning which has to be imposed to meaningless world.

Shepard's theory, founded on theory of bio-social discontinuity, is a succesful alternative for two opposite but comparably one-sided approaches: standard model of social sciences (human is tabula rasa, only socio-historical contingency matters, social macrodynamics is only important thing) and standard model of social darwinism<sup>86</sup> (only human nature matters, biology is only important thing). For Shepard, human behaviour changes – and very much, along with „ideas“ and other idealistic baggage – but not a human nature. Shepard was not biological determinist, because he acknowledged big significance of social macrodynamics (with mainly harmful consequences) and different forms of human behaviour in different societies. Shepard avoided false dichotomies of cultural and biological determinism, typical for two standard models, but also obscure metaphysics and idealistic/subjectivistic spirituality typical for many New Age and (especially Californian-spin) sc. integral thinking.

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<sup>84</sup> About our more detailed opinion what true integral theory would mean see: Markus 2009.

<sup>85</sup> Hostility toward science in radical ecological circles is a consequence of its reduction either to technology or physics and mechanical paradigm, but neo-darwinism fits to neither. Unlike physics (or astronomy, geology etc.) evolutionary biology is very relevant for living beings, including humans. Some scholars, like Eugene Halton, criticize civilization on the basis of theory of bio-social discontinuity, with invocation of Shepard's theory, but reject darwinism that, ironically, opened the door for that theory (Halton 2005, 2007).

<sup>86</sup> That is, *real* social darwinism or darwinian social theory – as in contemporary sociobiology and evolutionary psychology – not sc. „social darwinism“ (or, more correctly, social lamarckianism) in popular sense.

Shepard knew that acknowledgment of elementary facts about humans as an animal species and a part of nature is not enough. These are true, but superficial statements. Our naturalness and animality mean something deeper, that is, genetic adaptation to specific social and ecological conditions and existence of universal human biogramacy.

In scholarly literature Shepard is mainly understood as adherent of deep ecology „school“.<sup>87</sup> This is true as critique of anthropocentrism and „cult“ of wildness are typical for deep ecology. But there are significant differences as well, because Shepard was much more consistent in this approach than most deep ecologists are. For example, Arne Naess creator of concept of „deep ecology“, knew nothing about theory of bio-social discontinuity and darwinian approach and critique of civilization were quite alien to him.<sup>88</sup> Lack of evolutionary (darwinian) perspective is a big defect in mainstream deep ecology's literature. In deep ecology idealistic approach – f. e. G. Sessions, B. Devall, A. Drengson and many others - often is the most significant one. But, as we have saw, for Shepard ideas, consciousness and worldviews are much more symptoms and consequences than causes of ecological and other anthropogenic misfits. Most advocates of deep ecology accepted Naess' fundamental ideas – Self-realization and identification – as being crucial to this kind of ecological philosophy. But Naess' understanding of these ideas were very confusing, appearing as some kind of obscure psychologizing metaphysics.<sup>89</sup> From Shepard's work, Self-realization (that is, satisfaction of fundamental needs) and identification (that is, with local social and ecological context, or environment of evolutionary adaptation) have a sense from darwinian perspective. But, for Naess and most of deep ecologists, that darwinian approach was very much *terra incognita*.

Certainly, there are some problems and confusions in Shepard's opus. He unnecessarily loaded his theory with hunting hypothesis and was incapable to reject it altogether till his death. His terms for hunter-gatherers – „cynegetic“ or „venatic“ societies – also show a primacy of hunting in his thinking. In 1960s and 1970s that hypothesis was very popular but later much less so. Today, majority of scholars think that hunting did not play crucial role in human evolution, and had important significance only with appearance of anatomically modern *homo sapiens sapiens*, too

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<sup>87</sup> Oelschlaeger 1991, Sessions 1995b, 1995c, Taylor 2000, 2009, Luton 2001, Kidner 2001, Fisher 2002, Hibbard 2003, Bender 2003, 2007, Esbjörn-Hargens-Zimmerman 2009.

<sup>88</sup> In fact, there is big difference between Naess (who had background in Spinoza, Gandhi and Continental humanistic philosophy) and Shepard (who was biologist and field-naturalist). Shepard's basis for ecological philosophy was epistemologically better than Naess's, because ecology is naturally connected with biology and naturalistic thought, but not so with Continental or Indian traditional philosophy. With modern natural sciences, especially evolutionary biology, we don't need to look for some vague proto-ecological thoughts in the old philosophy. George Sessions criticizes postmodern deconstructivists for negation of human biology, but never says why is our evolutionary past relevant and how his admiration for Shepard can be reconciled with his (Sessions's) idealistic change-of-consciousness approach (Sessions 2006).

<sup>89</sup> In my book (Markus 2006) I explained in detail why Naess was „guilty“ for deep ecology's „digression“ into abstract psychology and quasi-metaphysical thinking.



late for being part of our evolutionary heritage.<sup>90</sup> Certainly, hunting with firearms and by members of industrial middle classes – which Shepard belonged – and in national parks (kind of mega-zoo) cannot be in touch with our ancient way of life.<sup>91</sup> But, unlike theory of bio-social discontinuity, hunting hypothesis was never crucial for fundamental Shepard's position. Also, there is some discrepancy between materialistic and idealistic position in Shepard's work. Theory of bio-social discontinuity is basically materialistic position, but Shepard often emphasized, in giving some practical suggestions, great significance of worldviews and ideas. He argued for some kind of transcultural utopianism or effort to restore some vital aspects of hunter-gatherer life within industrial society (or to construct a way of life that is better suited to our genetic legacy) but he never explained how it is possible. His suggestions oscillated between impractical utopianism and lofty idealism. Community, homeland, equality clean and wild environment are integral part of hunter-gatherer life and they probably cannot be implemented into fundamentally different social order. Perhaps Shepard would think differently today, when demographic and social collapse is much greater possibility than was in his life-time. Contemporary mega-crisis of whole industrial civilization would not be much surprise for him, but logical consequence of *overshoot*, one more symptom of culmination of ten thousands of years of crisis.

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<sup>90</sup> Some scholars even think that our ancestors were much more prey than hunters and that being prey had crucial role in human evolution (Hart-Sussman 2008). It is probably the opposite extreme but we will never know for sure due to lack of evidence.

<sup>91</sup> Shepard just sporadically mentioned and rejected an objection that hunting is quite right in hunter-gatherer society but not as a sport practiced by middle-class (Shepard 1996:179). But this is substantial objection, deserving much detailed analysis. Personally, I am not a hunter and cannot find any satisfaction in hunting not because of moral vegetarianism, „sanctity of life“, condemnation of death and similar humanistic/idealistic constructions, but because sport hunting is much more affirmation of unnatural social order than its transcendence. And certainly this is not a behaviour which can be made by many humans in the contemporary world.

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In this book, Paul Shepard presents concrete suggestions for fostering the kinds of ecological settings and cultural practices that are optimal for human health and well-being. Coming Home to the Pleistocene is a valuable book for those familiar with the life and work of Paul Shepard, as well as for new readers seeking an accessible introduction to and overview of his thought. A Shearwater Book. Coming Home to the Pleistocene. Coming Home to the Pleistocene Paul Shepard Edited by Florence R. Shepard /. Shearwater Books Washington, D.C. © Covelo, California ISLAND PRESS. A Shearwater Book published by Island Press Copyright © 1998 Florence Shepard. All rights reserved under International and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. Shepard basically argues that the three million year period of the Pleistocene and the hunter and gathering practices honed during that period have indelibly shaped human nature in ways that make the past 10,000 year history of civilization appear to be but a light gloss. While avoiding a simple-minded idealization of the "noble savage," Shepard maintains that our pre-history is alive and well in the deepest, wild dimensions of every human being alive today. Transcending the usual call to return to Nature, Shepard makes clear that we are integral to Nature. Shepard's research came to conclusions that did not thrill the stodgy professors of mainstream academia. He was more or less dismissed as a nutjob. They also welcomed visiting raiders with spears, arrows, and impolite remarks. Coming Home to the Pleistocene. More. "When we grasp fully that the best expressions of our humanity were not invented by civilization but by cultures that preceded it, that the natural world is not only a set of constraints but of contexts within which we can more fully..." Paul Shepard is one of the most profound and original thinkers of our time. He has helped define the field of human ecology, and has played a vital role in the development of what have come to be known as environmental philosophy, ecophilosophy Paul Shepard was one of the most profound and original thinkers of our time. Seminal works like The Tender Carnivore and the Sacred Game, Thinking Animals, and Nature and Madness introduced readers to new and provocative ideas about humanity and its relationship to the natural world. Throughout his long and distinguished career, Paul Shepard returned repeatedly to his guiding theme, the central tenet of his thought: that our essential human nature is a product of our genetic heritage, formed through thousands of years of evolution during the Pleistocene epoch, and that the cursubversion of that P... The Pleistocene is the geological epoch that lasted from about 2,580,000 to 11,700 years ago, spanning the world's most recent period of repeated glaciations. Before a change finally confirmed in 2009 by the International Union of Geological Sciences, the cutoff of the Pleistocene and the preceding Pliocene was regarded as being at 1.806 million years Before Present (BP). Publications from earlier years may use either definition of the period. The end of the Pleistocene corresponds with the end of the