

## 7 Soul and land

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1. Whatever culture is, it is not nature. Culture is that which is distinct from nature. That is the fundamental contrast in which the concept of culture is set – at least in our culture.

Apples and pears  
grow on trees  
when they get ripe  
then they fall down.

That is an old children's rule about nature. But if we pick the apples just before they fall on the ground, we interfere ever so slightly with the course of nature – for our own good and without any harm to nature. This, perhaps, is one of the points at which culture borders on nature. Then we store the apples so they will keep until Christmas or New Year. We do something now, four months before Christmas, with a view to Christmas. While we are harvesting the apples, the squirrel is harvesting nuts and storing them up for winter. And we could well say 'with a view to winter'. But maybe not 'with a view to Christmas'. There is little to suggest that the squirrel makes a distinction between Christmas Eve and other days of winter. Here it is what we have in view, Christmas Eve, rather than the length of the view, that makes the storing culture. As well as the way we store the apples, say, indoors and, say, in a different room than the potatoes.

On Christmas Eve mother puts the apples on a dish and passes it around, first to the eldest and then by turns to the youngest, or the other way round. That is culture. The eldest first is one culture, the youngest first another. These are two different cultures within one culture. (We can see why cultures cannot be counted.) But the gift lies at the core of both of them.

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<sup>1</sup>Translated from Norwegian by Lars Hertzberg.

2. But when mother gives each of the other family members an apple as a gift, does she not give to each of them that which they had already received as a gift of nature when they harvested the apples? Or did she make the apples her own by storing them? There may be a rich pattern in the simple apple ceremony. The pattern may, for instance, be this: The gifts of nature, in this case the apples, do not go to us, but to the master, who has, say, planted the apple trees. (Thus when the children water the apple trees, this does not make them fellow owners. It only counts as helping father, or only as obeying him.) He gives mother the apples, as a gift. She stores them so as to have something to give away. On Christmas Eve mother gives an apple to each of the guests at the family celebration, including father who now receives from her as a gift one of the gifts he gave her last autumn. Or the pattern may be completely different. Father may not have given mother the apples, but may simply have asked her to store them, as his servant, and then to hand them around, as his servant, i.e. as his gift to the person to whom she hands an apple. Or he may be the servant. Or the two of them may in some sense be one, rather than two as in my stories, say, as far as managing the gifts of nature is concerned. The pattern may also be indeterminate between all these stories and some others. (The apple ceremony is like a language game. We see that several worlds may hide in what looks like one and the same language game.)

But whatever pattern the gift is woven into, the gift itself must be there before you can give it away. The gift must be there as a thing, and the thing must be yours, before you can give it away as a gift. It is hard to give things away empty-handed. And the things we acquire, for gifts or for barter, or for ourselves, we either get ready-made from nature, or we get the stuff (the raw materials) for them from nature. In that sense our dealings with nature, say the fact that we can harvest her or get raw materials from her, is basic to our relation to other people. If the apples are not there or if they are not ours, we have no apples to give away as a gift. And in my story the apples are mine because the apple trees are, and the apple trees are mine because I have planted them in my land.

3. But my land, the land I own or have a right to cultivate, is not mine unless others accept it as mine. Relations between people go deep into our relations with nature, into who can harvest what, who can extract raw materials where, etc. This does not mean that the relation between people is more basic than the relation to nature. But it means that the relations between people which order our relation to nature, what we can harvest, what raw materials we can extract, etc, is basic to other relations between people.

Even love between two lovers dies if the lovers die, from starvation, cold, etc. An essential part of love between two people is the division of labour between them. She bakes the bread and he brings the fish ashore. Or the other way round. (When it is the other way round, it is nearly always an exception. But that is a different story.)

Here in Northern Norway we harvest the sea, then the earth and the forest, and the highlands with their lichen and heather. We harvest the sea and the land and we get the material from the forest, for houses and boats. The large trees give us boards for the houses and for the boats, and the smaller trees give us firewood – provided we have the tools. And we could get far with only axe and knife. We built as good boats here in the north before we had saws as after getting them.

First we let the goats eat in the forest and we gathered fodder for the winter wherever we could. Then we drained the marshes, when we had the tools to do so, made fields, made hay and got winter fodder for cattle and goats as well as sheep. In the field we worked on nature in order to remould it into a more yielding nature. There is both skilled work and a long view in a good field. Therefore the field is both culture and nature. In gathering in the hay we gather the fruits of the culture nature we have created in the field.

4. Haymaking is both work and celebration. Those who ordinarily row fishing boats now cut swathes of hay with scythes. (Cutting a swathe: If two or more men are to cut a square field, the first one starts out below in the left corner. When he has made five or six strokes, the next one starts out. Etc. They all hold the same rhythm and they do not get in each other's way.) Those who ordinarily work in the cowshed are now in the field, with a rake. The whole family is working and for the whole family to be working is a celebration, at least on the coast and at least for the kids. The smallest kids sit on the haycart and the biggest may be allowed to jump in the haybarn. And the hay-racks are great to hide in. There is harvest porridge and maybe brandy for the grownups.

Haymaking is the great outdoors celebration just as Christmas is the great indoors celebration. Between the two there is thanksgiving for the harvest, but mainly where the crops of the land support the life of the community. (God does not turn the same face on the farming community as on the fishing community.) The church is richly decorated with flowers, and the stairway leading up to the choir is brimming with bushels of potatoes, cabbage, carrots, turnips, red currants, black currants, and whatever other crops the soil yields in that area. It is a church service in joy over the good gifts of the

earth, or the good gifts of God as we also say, since a gift should by rights have a giver. Our joy over the gifts is our thanks to the giver. (If the harvest has been poor, we give thanks all the same. And worry about making up for what is missing.)

Here the church holds a service that springs from our relation to nature. Even if a great deal of work goes into a head of cabbage or a bunch of carrots, starting perhaps with the draining of the marsh, we know that our work did not create the cabbage or the carrot. That is why they are gifts and that is why we give thanks.

A harvest thanksgiving grows naturally from the lives of people where the crops of the soil support that life, whether in Målselv, in Samaria or in Chaldea. But Christmas Eve is a different matter. It is also a time of thanksgiving, in which we give thanks for God becoming man. It is a story that may grip us deeply, but it does not grow naturally out of people's lives whether in Målselv (with its farming and its forestry) or in Lofoten (with its fishing villages). It has reached us from elsewhere, and perhaps we have to understand another culture well before we can understand its deeper meaning. Many of us, or maybe not so many, derive their nourishment from the Old and the New Testament, and maybe understand the deep significance of Christmas. But all the same we celebrate Christmas, most of us do, and put our soul into it, as well as we understand Christmas and the soul.

But haymaking is also a feast or a celebration whether we make it part of harvest thanksgiving or not. Today there are not so many children who can see the grownup men cut strings through the timothy. But even though the mowing machine has removed a rhythm, the making of hay-racks remains, and the promise to be allowed to sit on the haycart, the harvest porridge, the family gathered around the food basket between the hay-racks, etc.

5. But is haymaking a celebration? Is it not enough to say that haymaking is so many workdays for gathering fodder for the cattle for winter, so that we can then get so many liters of milk from them, at a price of so many crowns a liter? For it is all about money, the money we earn selling milk and the money we save by not buying the milk we need for ourselves. And we have had money in view the whole time, through all our calculations, from the time when we first drained the marsh until now when we figure out running and maintenance costs for the tractor and the milking machine. Etc.

The story may be told thus. And we can write out the calculations and put in figures so that we get a true story of incomes and costs. But it is false as a story about what it means to be a human being on earth or as a story about why we do what we do.

We cannot get by without working, and the classical form of work along the coast of Northern Norway is done in the boat and in the cowshed all year round, and in the hayfield in summer. But the fact that we cannot get by without working can be read in two ways, in both of which it is true. On one way of reading it, it tells us that unless we work we will have neither food to eat nor a roof over our heads. Not since the Garden of Eden. The other way of reading it tells us that it is good for a man or a woman to work (that we fare ill, as human beings, from not working). We have hands for working, eyes for seeing, a head for thinking, etc. Our constitution is such that we need boats for getting out to sea to catch fish. Up here in the north we need houses and heating to get by. Etc. But our constitution is also such that what we have to do because of our constitution and because we are here, we also have to do in order to flourish as human beings. That is why it is good to do what we need our hands, eyes, head, language, each other, etc., in order to do. That is why it does us good to build boats, to row for fish, to build houses, bake bread, weave mats, to play with children, to teach the children to row, to bake, to weave, etc., to tell each other what we have seen or learnt, each in our corner of the world, to write letters about it, etc. And it does us good to do so with the skill we gradually acquire through experience.

If we are made for thinking, we are perhaps also made for counting, doing calculations, etc. And the concepts of economics get their human connection through farming, fishing, handicrafts, and other good forms of human life. But if we make economic calculations *the* story of why we do what we do, of what it is to be human, we lose our understanding both of ourselves and of others. The very point of making an occasional calculation also gets lost.

If we are to describe life on a farm, accounting belongs there. But the place of haymaking in the life on the farm is not its place in the accounts. The true story of haymaking can only be told in the light of a true understanding of what a human life is, or the other way round. And when a true account is given of haymaking, we see that it can spring forth as a celebration, in our joy over nature and each other. That is what haymaking is like, even if now and then it is not like that.