

INUIT ETHICS AND THE PRIORITY OF THE FUTURE GENERATION

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by
Colin J. Irwin

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Abstract

As a result of ten years of travel in Arctic Alaska, Canada and Greenland the author found himself confronted with the question "Could Inuit ethics and virtuous morality be explained in functional environmental terms?"

Along with a holistic view of Inuit culture, that came from many years of participant observation, cognitive anthropological techniques were employed to describe Inuit ethics. This work focused on life histories, mythology, interviews and linguistic analysis that sought to give emic meanings to Inuit ethical terms by emic standards of truth.

Inuit religious ethics was shown to have only an incidental relationship to shamanism which concentrates on the power of helping spirits rather than the ideas of good or evil. The metaphysics in mythology was shown to be of traditional importance but belief in the name/soul and reincarnation was and is the central Inuit metaphysical concept in Inuit ethics. Naming rules are enumerated along with some modern examples of Inuit names. It is concluded that the Inuit Summum Bonum is the priority of the future generation as demonstrated by the strength and extent of the beliefs in reincarnation.

Inuit philosophic ethics is approached from an analysis of Inuit ethical terms. Firstly a description of the Inuit language is given that points out its agglutinative nature and the important relationship of symbol to form in which symbol can create form. Secondly the synonymy of the concept of human nature and wisdom in the Inuit concept of the good person is explained. This leads to the conclusion that Inuit philosophic ethics is not mere blunt pragmatism but rather a well-refined form of consequentialism.

Some related questions of Inuit ethics are examined that are distinctly concerned with survival, namely, authority, distribution of resources, suicide,

invalidicide, senilicide, and female infanticide. This examination demonstrates the functional necessity of Inuit morality in these examples and the associated rationality of Inuit religious and philosophic ethics.

It is suggested that relativism does not offer an adequate explanation for the divergent nature of ethics described here. Further the giving of priority to the future generation is more in keeping with the necessities of survival and an evolutionary explanation.

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1. Introduction

I first went to the Arctic from England in 1970 to sail through the North-West Passage in my yacht "Endeavour". I was then twenty-four years old. As a young romantic explorer I found the Inuit to be a courageous, dignified and above all kind and generous people. From the perspective of my scientific background it seemed to me that it should be possible to explain the appearance of this virtue in a whole society in environmental terms. I also came to the conclusion that understanding the dynamics of the relationship between virtue and environment as demonstrated by the Inuit could add significantly to a similar understanding of what seemed to be a comparative lack of virtue in contemporary western man.

With this thesis in mind I began undergraduate work at the University of Manitoba in 1978 majoring in Philosophy. This course of study was later expanded to include Anthropology and Religion so that the descriptive and comparative aspects of ethics could be introduced into my work. Thus this Masters Thesis is an Interdisciplinary attempt to provide an answer to the question that brought about my giving up travelling and writing in exchange for academic pursuits.

Of course my romantic concept of primitive man as a noble savage was not new. It was born out of the expanding consciousness of Renaissance Europe and elevated to an ideal of philosophic importance by Rousseau. In more recent times western philosophers have tended to keep away from defining human nature as a means to framing an ethics except for realistically surmising that man needs to be understood as self-interested. It may be useful to formulate a sense of justice and legal philosophy from such a premise in an institutionalized society, but is it reasonable to anchor all morality to such a pessimistic view of humankind?

There may be an inherent danger in such a perspective for like the people who elect the leaders they deserve we may precipitate an indifferent moral code upon ourselves where the active moral agent is only required to follow the law of the land in a society that takes its neighbours' selfishness for granted. The prospect of such a thesis exists among those who embrace the spirit of the rat race as an integral part of a free enterprise economy where selfishness may even be valued and seen as a good.

Perhaps we should not be surprised then when a girl can be murdered over a period of half an hour while 38 separate witnesses failed to help or even report the crime to the police in New York in 1964¹. During the Second World War inmates of concentration camps sometimes rationalized the behaviour of the Gestapo as good² and virtuous thereby increasing their own chances for survival as trustees. They did this although it required internalizing a reversal of their beliefs and values. The Ik described by Turnbull³ exhibit similar behaviour where thievery and lies are the accepted social norms. This was in a culture that had broken down at every level and was fast on the road to extinction.

If there is some natural virtue in man it surely needs to be understood lest inadvertently we create an environment in which it has little chance to flourish. The indifference of the New Yorkers referred to above seems only removed from the negative values of the Ik and concentration camp trustees by a margin of degree. Yet virtue does exist as a cultural norm among the Arapesh as described by Margaret Mead⁴ and the Inuit as described by Jean Briggs⁵ so perhaps it need not only be considered the quality of an idealized noble savage.

Rousseau considered the invention of property to be largely responsible for the evils that befall mankind. Many primitive people including the Inuit hold to communalistic property rights and Rousseau might have

thought this would explain virtue amongst the Inuit but what about the Ik who are starving and who are considered evil incarnate? The difference is that they are not surviving, they are on the path to self extermination whilst the Inuit, in spite of an actively hostile environment, spread their culture from North East Asia across Arctic North America to the East Coast of Greenland.

However, if these conjectures and speculations are to be of any practical value, they must be expressed in more precise and concrete terms that speak of the functionalism of ethics. Understanding the dynamics and defining the relationship between societies and their codes of behaviour has for the most part been undertaken by social scientists in recent times. Aberle, Cohen, Davis, Levy and Sutton⁶, for example, consider a society to be "a group of human beings showing a self-sufficient system of action which is capable of existing longer than the life-span of an individual, the group being recruited at least in part by the sexual reproduction of the members". However, "a society need not provide equally for the physiological needs of all its members. Infanticide, geronticide, limitation of marriage, and birth control may be necessary to maintain certain societies."

Malinowsky, in his conclusion to The Foundation of Faith and Morals,⁷ suggests that "The rationalist and agnostic must admit at least recognize them as indispensable pragmatic figments without which civilization cannot exist".

Campbell⁸ takes this sentiment to its logical conclusion when he suggests that

I believe the case for sociocultural evolution is strong enough so that psychologists and other social scientists, when considering an apparently bizarre, incomprehensible feature of their own social tradition, or that of another culture, should approach it with a similar awe, expecting that when eventually understood, when our theories have caught up with it, that seemingly bizarre superstition will turn out to make an adaptive sense.

It is in the functional vein of these authors that the ethics of the Inuit can be seen as being tailored to the needs of survival under the most hostile of circumstances. Although modern man has ventured into space he has not as yet maintained a society and culture in that environment. The culture of the Inuit contains a moral code which is successful in maintaining a society under some of the most adverse conditions in which man as a species has survived. As such Inuit ethics represent one of the best examples of a moral system tested to the limits of self destruction in which the necessity and sufficiency of certain ethical prescriptions will be seen to be imperative.

My thesis is therefore primarily descriptive, relating Inuit religious and philosophic beliefs to their ethical prescriptions and the environmental factors that determine their necessity. As to the implication of the work for the ethics of contemporary man, that is more problematic. I am of the opinion that the evolutionary ethics described by Campbell⁹ provides one of the best working theories for a naturalistic ethics. But it is far beyond the scope of this thesis to prove that point, although I would hope that it provides empirical support for his position which he sums up as follows:

My own interests, and those of most evolutionary ethicists, are properly called *descriptive*, and in these two ways: descriptive of the moral and ethical standards that various cultures past and present have exhorted their members to live up to; and hypothetically descriptive of laws of social organization, including optimal modes of individual behaviour for optimizing collective goals. The second meaning could be translated as a *science* of ethics, were the term not pretentious considering the state of the field. If perfected, the science could produce derivative normative ethics or mediational ethics. It could never prove that continued human existence in large cooperative groups was a desirable goal, nor provide any other ultimate goal, and thus would fail to provide the "normative basis" for ethics which philosophers have sought. But for persons who had already made such a value choice (however logically unjustified), a science of ethics once developed could provide sets of derived, mediational values which if adhered to would further the achievements of the chosen ultimate values. A descriptive ethics, using biological and social evolution, should also be able to predict which ultimate values animals such as social humankind are likely to choose, even though it would not thereby philosophically justify such normative values.

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2. Methodology

The original objective of this work was to document, describe and analyze the metaphysics and the ethics of the Netsilingmiut Inuit in order to establish the relationship of their traditional beliefs to their morals. Particular reference was made to those values needed to preserve social and ecological harmony in a hostile environment. However, it became clear during the course of collecting and interpreting data that it was far easier to show a functional relationship to be operating in cases of survival as opposed to mere harmony. Thus in practice the objective was modified to read "those values needed for survival in a hostile environment". This modified form of the original question naturally led the study into questions of "life-boat" ethics such that descriptive ethnographic research would have to include real examples of "life-boat" situations alongside the beliefs that formed the basis for these moral decisions.

With regard to such examples the literature on Inuit ethnography is full of life and death situations. But they often lack the motivation and state of conscience of the individuals involved. It is not sufficient to merely know when and under what circumstances A killed B or A refused to share his food with B. From an ethical point of view it is necessary to know if A thought he was acting rightly or wrongly and how he felt about the moral predicament he was in. This important but subjective aspect of the research is dependent on the honesty and openness of the informant. Fortunately I am able to offer, on this point, the autobiography of Aupudluk in Appendix 1.

It is a common practice in works that are principally ethnographic to begin with a brief description of the environment of the group under examination. In this case where the emic perspective of the Inuit is all important, an insight into their world view and the forces that shape it can best be obtained by first reading

Appendix 1. Aupudluk is my mother-in-law and the life history given here is her telling of that story to her daughter, my wife. Aupudluk is by nature a very open person, such that in this mother-daughter situation she laid bare all her values, hopes and fears as she was confronted with the difficult situations of her life. Her husband Kako, who has a more reserved personality, gave a more factual account of his life. It too is a remarkable story but it does not provide a holistic perspective of the paradigm that shapes Inuit ethics. Kako however did provide more than fifty myths that deal nearly exclusively with questions of morality and cosmology. For him they are historical stories of a distant past, a "Golden Era" of superlative events. A few of these are included in Appendix 2.

If an Inuit Moral System is seen as an interdependent set of working beliefs the interlocking descriptions of events, action, thought and values must be emic at the ethnographic descriptive level. Therefore all descriptions need to be understood with Inuit meaning. This requires firstly a holistic perspective of their culture so far as that is possible and secondly a precise understanding of at least the central Inuit terms for values, virtues, moral and ethical principles. These objectives can be met through participant observation and interviews.

Participant observation is largely a matter of the expenditure of time and patience amongst the culture under study. Fortunately, I have spent nearly a decade in the Arctic, travelling, hunting and living as extensively as is now possible a traditional life¹. Without this experience I do not think I could have meaningfully formulated the correct questions at the beginning of this work, let alone suggest means towards their answer. Therefore along with Appendix 1 I consider the holistic aspect of the research to be done.

The other data required is oral, descriptive and linguistic and the means

open to acquiring this data are principally interviews. Participant observation is not sufficiently systematic to produce precise results with an economy of effort whilst questionnaires are too structural and must necessarily partly pre-judge answers by forming a precisely focused finite series of questions. As emic description is wanted here the methods of Cognitive Anthropology seem most appropriate.

Initially I used various cognitive techniques such as taxonomics, domain analysis, ranking and componential analysis with my bilingual wife as informant. This work satisfactorily identified a number of key moral concepts but could not provide adequate descriptive meaning. I was trying the phenomenological approach of R. C. Solomon² with moderate success when Christopher Boehm³ published his paper "Exposing the Moral Self in Montenegro: The Use of Natural Definitions to Keep Ethnography Descriptive". His techniques of using folk definitions worked extremely well as might be expected from his epistemology and methodology given in his summary as follows:

Special epistemological problems arise when exotic systems of ideas and affects are studied by a foreigner. Difficulties in knowing "the native view" are discussed, and a partial solution for this epistemological problem is proposed. Exemplification through substantive semantic analysis of a key morality term used by Montenegrin tribesmen results in a descriptive portrait of the moral self. In contrast to certain trends in ethnographic semantics, which are antiseptically formal, overstructured, unduly self-contained, or static, emphasis here is placed upon open-ended semantic inquiry and fuller articulation with the general ethnographic context by taking native decisions and social processes into direct account.

Although my wife helped considerably with the early linguistic work, the collection of data and the almost endless translation of stories and myths she could not, as a bilingual informant, be relied upon for folk definitions. In fact when I asked for these from bilingual informants, I always ended up with a straight translation which turned out to be far removed from the traditional emic understanding. However I did not completely follow Boehm's methodology

of numerically tabulating the occurrence of themes in a large sample of definitions either.

In the Inuit culture, authority, knowledge and wisdom rest with the oldest generation such that if I asked a younger person what a certain ethical term meant they sometimes ventured an answer but more generally expressed their lack of expertise in the matter and referred me to one of the elders of the community. Fortunately my mother and father in law were two of half a dozen such people in the settlement of Chesterfield Inlet on the west coast of Hudson's Bay. Thus in collecting the definitions of those considered to be the "sages" of the village, both the consensus and the authority of the community was taken into account. As it turned out these few venerated informants, who took time to teach me in a student/professor relationship, were most consistent in their responses. This perhaps reveals a flaw in Boehm's methodology as it uses an etic epistemology of consensus by numeration. Of course this may have been valid amongst the Montenegrins but amongst the Inuit an appeal to the authority of the elder is the correct epistemology. In short I not only use emic folk definitions but discern the truth of those definitions by emic standards of truth.

On this question of sources it is interesting to note that my principal informant, my father-in-law Kako, met Rasmussen or "Kunoo" as he is known to the Inuit, in 1922 when he was about nine years old. However, Kako's name does not appear in Rasmussen's census⁴ nor for that matter many of his relatives, with the exception of Padluk, his mother's cousin. Aupudluk did not meet the explorer and her family was also left out of the census, which all suggests that the population of the Netsilikmiut was very likely more than twice Rasmussen's estimate of 259.

Lastly it is worth noting why my father-in-law so patiently instructed me in Inuit ethics. I might have thought it was to preserve a body of knowledge

before it was lost with the passing of his generation, or because the Government provided me with the funds to bring my family including his daughter to visit him at his home. However he carefully explained to me that he was giving me all the help he could because I was now providing for his daughter and grandchildren and that by contributing to my success at University he was advancing the well-being of his progeny. Although I didn't realise it at the time, this was my first lesson in Inuit ethics.

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3. Inuit Religious Ethics

3.1. Shamanism and Ethics

The Inuit term for Shaman is Angakok, and as Rasmussen¹ defines him he is someone who is

possessed of special gifts that can bring them in communication with the spirits of the earth, the air and the sea. By means of these preternatural beings they can see "the things that to others are hidden", and they can help their fellow men who have got into danger, either on account of sickness or on account of continuous misfortune on their hunts, or if, attacked by an enemy, they have become possessed of an evil spirit.

Kako² adds further precision to the definition of an Angakok by stating that they must always have a helping spirit and that they must use this helping spirit. Rasmussen³ was led to believe that there were no longer any great shamans practising their craft. This is certainly not the case as Aupudluk's father was a great shaman and was contemporary with Rasmussen's travels.

As the helping spirit was central to being an Angakok becoming a shaman involved acquiring such a helper. Although training, apprenticeship, isolation, meditation, visions⁴ and dramatic personal experiences are all possible means towards an individual becoming a shaman, they must culminate in the production of a helping spirit. Obtaining the services of a spirit could be brought about by either a shaman teaching a novice, by a person privately pursuing such an objective, or, as is the case with Aupudluk's father, the spirit coming to him.

Kako explained that "the shaman used to be able to find out anything, past and future, through his helper. If someone has a secret he will use his helper to discover it." In this way the Angakok was able to perform a social function that involved the sanctioning of those who stole, lied or broke taboos. However, the latter is not so much concerned with human ethics as offences against the natural forces and elements of the environment. As Weyer⁵ points out:

Strictly social crimes scarcely come within the scope of the Eskimo religion. Its regulative influence operates chiefly through an elaborate system of taboos concerned with the propitiation of the spirits, especially the spirits believed to control the food supply.

He goes on to explain that the system of duties and taboos is quite separate from the code of justice and further that actions involving worldly morality are rarely specified as entailing punishment in the afterworld.⁶ This lack of involvement extended to transitional social functions such as officiating over marriage and funeral rites⁷. Here an Angakok's intervention was only required when things went wrong, such as when the evil spirit of a dead person came to a camp with harmful intentions.

An Angakok is someone who controls spirits through the use of his helping spirits, to assist, or in some cases to do harm, to others. As such his skills and abilities are not distinctly ethical and certainly do not assist him in being or becoming a virtuous person. As Balikci⁸ notes,

The most striking characteristic of Netsilik shamanism and associated beliefs was the fusion of good and evil elements. Although the Netsilik distinguished clearly an evil shamanistic act from its positive counterpart, it was the same shaman who was capable of both. Thus, although most shamans were good, at some time in their career they committed aggressive acts; and the very few reputedly evil shamans were considered bad only during a limited period.

This neutrality of Inuit religion vis-a-vis good and bad persons is further explained by Aupudluk. She pointed out that magic words and amulets could be used for protection from wild animals, other people and the elements but could not help a person become good. "There were good Angakoks and bad Angakoks. The bad ones could kill someone who they hated or were jealous of. But if they wanted to help someone they could really give them a lot of help. My father was a great Angakok. If someone was sick they would give him something. They would place a gift close to where he slept. But he would only use the gift for a while and then he would give it away. He made himself an Angakok as a boy so he couldn't lose his power. In the old days an Angakok's thoughts would come true. His

father's father's spirit used to help him because his mother wished it." On this question of thought Kako offered the following specific observations. "I have met quite a few Angakoks. They were the only doctors in those days. Angakoks would not think casually of other people as that was dangerous. He had to control his thoughts because his spirit helper would carry them out even if they were good or bad. To stop themselves from thinking bad things the Angakoks would play games with other Angakoks or concentrate on good thoughts only."

In conclusion, therefore, it can be stated that practising shamanism as it is defined by the Inuit does not enhance the Angakok's virtue. Nor can it enhance the virtues of others. Being a good person has no direct relationship to being an Angakok, that is having one or more helping spirits. These spirits are controlled by the good or bad thoughts of the Angakok and these in turn are dependent on Inuit concepts of good, bad and thought, not spirits or the ability to control them.

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3.2 Metaphysics and Ethics

When the Christian Missionaries came to the Arctic and translated the Bible into Inuktitut they had to coin many new words including a term for God. They settled on Nanaliukti, which translates as "The one who made the Earth"; but prior to the invention of this word the Inuit had no cosmological need of a maker as the earth (Nuna) and sky (Sila) were animated and were the a priori given. The earth as a living entity gave rise to animals and men and the words, thoughts and actions of these sentient beings generated the other phenomena to be found in the universe (Silukuak).

Kako explained that "The first Inuit used to say that they came from mud, that is their maker and that is what they turn back into." This mother earth perspective is repeated slightly differently by Rasmussen¹:

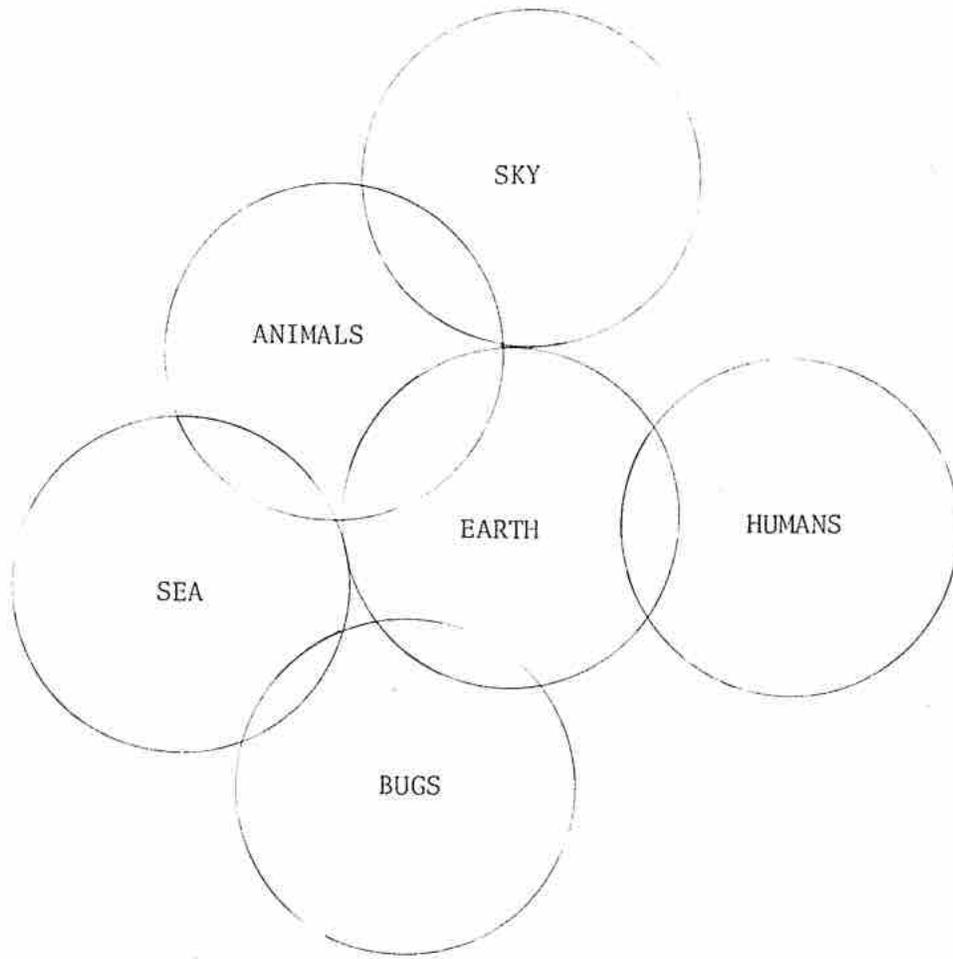
In the earth there are large eggs, far down inside the earth, eggs that are called silagsat: "Something that will become Sila". It is said that some of these earth eggs were turned into musk oxen.

Rasmussen's informant Nalungiaq² repeats the same theme when she says:

I have also heard that the earth was here before the people, and that the very first people came out of the ground from tussocks.

By asking the kind of question "What kind of x is y?" and "What other kinds of x are there?" it is possible to build up folk taxonomies that attempt to portray emic domains, concepts, and fields of meaning. Several interesting points come out of such an analysis. The division of the universe into Earth, Sea and Sky. Animate forms are divided into those that have "intelligence" (animals) and those that do not possess this essence (bugs). However, animate forms can equally well be divided up into "Those of the Sea" and "Those of the Land". In order to integrate these two concepts ("Animals vs. Bugs" and "Sea vs. Land") I found a conventional taxonomic tree misleading and adopted the overlapping circle concept in Figure 1. This clearly shows that the Sky, Sea and Earth are separate

Figure 1



UNIVERSE

(do not overlap) whilst Animals are part of the Earth, Sea and Sky (do overlap). Bugs are only part of the Sea and Earth whilst Humans are part of the Earth only. Furthermore, Earth occupies its central mythological position as the mother of life. This point is further enforced by the fact that fresh water, rivers, plants and flowers turn out to be as much a component of Earth as the rocks and mountains.

For the Inuit words are not simply symbols of reality or perhaps mirrors of reality but are considered to be the forms of reality. Consequently, according to Inuit metaphysics, phenomenon can come into existence by the conceptualization and articulation of that phenomenon. Appreciating this point is critical to understanding Inuit mythology, in which thoughts and utterances precipitate actions, creation and events. For the same reasons Inuit are traditionally economic in their use of language and careful not to think or speak casually or wrongly of others. This quality of language as form will be found repeatedly in the myths in Appendix 2 but to illustrate the point here I quote from Rasmussen's³ informant Nalungaq with her rendition of the myth concerning the creation of night and day.

The hare makes the earth to be light

In the very first times there was no light on earth. Everything was in darkness, the lands could not be seen, the animals could not be seen. And still, both people and animals lived on the earth, but there was no difference between them. They lived promiscuously: A person could become an animal, and an animal could become a human being. There were wolves, bears and foxes but as soon as they turned into humans they were all the same. They may have had different habits, but all spoke the same tongue, lived in the same kind of house, and spoke and hunted in the same way.

That is the way they lived here on earth in the very earliest times, times that no-one can understand now. That was the time when magic words were made. A word spoken by chance would suddenly become powerful, and what people wanted to happen could happen, and nobody could explain how it was.

From those times, when everybody lived promiscuously, when sometimes there were people and other times animals, and there was no difference, a talk between a fox and a hare has been remembered:

"Taq-taq-taq! Darkness, darkness, darkness!" said the fox; it liked

the dark when it was going out to steal from the caches of the humans.

"Ublaq-ublaq-ublaq: Day, day, day," said the hare; it wanted the light of day so that it could find a place to feed.

And suddenly it became as the hare wished it to be; its words were the most powerful. Day came and replaced night, and when night had gone day came again. And light and dark took turns with each other.

In the Inuit world where all that is natural is animated it is probably misleading to speak of the supernatural. However, superbeings that have control over the elements and game on which the Inuit are dependent for their lives came into existence by the wrongdoings of the people. Nuliajuk⁴ who controls the sea mammals gained her powers as a result of her father's uncontrollable anger. An orphaned brother and sister⁵ who were abandoned by their tribe turned into thunder and lightning. Another pair of unwanted children became the sun and moon⁶ and an abandoned infant boy ascended into the sky to rule over the wind, rain and snow⁷. Weyer⁸ is drawn to the conclusion that

Punishment for noncompliance with taboos does not take the abstract form of indemnity: it comes in the most direct form imaginable, through the depletion of the very necessities of life. All supplies, such as food, furs, and fuel, are supposed to be dispensed by the spirits. Privation and ultimately death may be inflicted upon the living at any time as punishment for some, to us, trivial offense.

However, it should be remembered that none of the offenses that brought these natural misfortunes into existence were ever trivial. The relinquishing of self-control to anger and the abandonment of orphans are recurring themes in Inuit mythology as they represent real threats to the survival of the group. For a starving hunter, anger could quickly turn to murder and cannibalism while healthy orphans offer better prospects for survival than unweaned infants amongst whom there is a higher mortality rate.

In the myth "The hare makes the earth to be light", it is stated that there was no difference between men and animals in ancient times. This lack of distinction extends to Inuit metaphysics as both men and animals have souls.

It is even possible for a human to live as an animal by having his soul enter its body. This belief as noted by Weyer⁹ is common to most Inuit groups.

A tale from Angmagsalik also tells how the "name", in the period between its existence in two human beings, wanders through a number of animals. Eskimo mythology is, indeed, replete with instances of transformation from man to animal and vice versa.

With many religions the metaphysical belief in a soul provides for the rational foundation of a sanctity of life. Consequently, for the Inuit, as noted by Rasmussen's informants Nakasuk, Qamssuaq, Qaqortingeq and Nanelaq¹⁰:

what makes life so difficult for people is not merely that they themselves have a soul in which lies all the vulnerability of their lives, but also that all the food they have to live on can only be procured by depriving animal-souls from their bodies.

In many cultures, including contemporary western, killing associated with hunting is often considered an act of prowess on the part of the hunter. The opposite is true among the Inuit, who traditionally viewed animals as giving themselves to humans as a gift in return for respect and kindness. The following extracts from Rasmussen illustrate this spirit of benevolence in regard to the souls of seals, caribou and the polar bear.

The careful hunter will always dip a piece of snow into the waterpail and let the water drip down into the seal's mouth. It is said that seals are always thirsty, and that they often let themselves be killed just to get a drink of water. For the thrust of the harpoon that kills it does not hurt and simply feels like a slight smarting. It is the belief that all seals know where killed animals are usually treated well, and therefore they always make their way to such people.¹¹

First of all the father and mother of the young hunter must hasten to eat of the seal, and as a matter of fact as many of the villagers as possible must do the same. In this way the soul of the seal feels that it is desired and welcome among men and will soon let itself be caught again.¹²

Nor must hay be used for kindling a fire over which caribou meat is to be cooked. For caribou live on grass, and it would shock the soul if the fire over which its flesh was to be cooked were to be lighted with something that is the caribou's own food.¹³

As long as this death taboo for the soul of the bear is being observed, no man's or woman's work must be done, nor may fuel be gathered or peat be cut for shoeing the sledge. There must be no sewing of new

garments, only the most necessary repairs being allowed.

The skin is hung up in the house with the hair-side out. Inside must be hung the animal's bladder, spleen, tongue and genitals, together with those presents that are made to the soul of the bear.¹⁴

So if a camp is left just after a kill has been made, it means that one has not much pleasure in the catch. And it offends the souls to give them the impression that their flesh was not enough to keep people at the old camp.¹⁵

On the whole, nothing is so detrimental to hunting luck as indifference towards a catch; one must shout aloud with joy and one must give others pleasure.¹⁶

Many of the metaphysical beliefs that support Inuit ethics have become weakened in recent times such that Aupudluk is of the opinion that "The weather is on its own although angakoks could control it in the past, but I never experienced that myself." Kako explained that "The weather does not have a mind but sometimes I feel it does stop me from going hunting." On the question of the sanctity of man, the animals and their environment Kako explained that "There's a tremendous difference between killing animals and people. Animals are killed for food. Killing humans is done through jealousy or madness. If a blameless or innocent person was killed they would be revenged. There was never any wasteful killing of animals. Life and death was a serious matter so everything was used or saved. But now people have many bullets so they just kill; it's wrong. They should only kill when they need to. We give the seal a drink of water but that is all, there is nothing for the other animals. If people keep killing animals the way they do the animals will be hard to find. With regard to the land it is all right to use heavy equipment in the settlement but not where people hunt. We used to live by travelling from camp to camp so all the land was used for hunting. Before the nickel mine came to Rankin Inlet I never used to stay in one place. But the mine tied me down and changed my life."

The Inuit metaphysical concept of man is not along simple dualistic lines but into a body (Timi) and three types of soul. Mind (Isuma) is part of the

Spirit (Tanak). The Name (Atak) of a human is a second element in the soul whilst the third is Breath (Anaksak). These terms were given by Kako and similar equivalents are to be found in Rasmussen¹⁷, Williamson¹⁸, and Weyer¹⁹, who provides the following accurate description.

In general, the Eskimos distinguish three sorts of human souls. One of them is the immortal spirit which leaves a person's body at death and goes to live in the future world; a second, which is conceived as the vital breath and warmth of the body, ceases to exist at death; and a third sort of soul is thought to abide in the person's name. Though the name-soul is not exactly a soul in the usual connotation of the word, it is thought to possess abstract traits of the person to whom it refers and to persist after his death.... The name-soul is chiefly a thing of this world, perpetuated, however, through the custom of naming children after relatives who have recently died.

Kako provided further explanation by adding that "If the Spirit (Tanak) leaves a body then that person dies as the Spirit lets the breath work and the heart beat. This is true of all living animals as they also have Spirit. As Mind (Isuma) is a part of the spirit then likewise all animals have mind. However humans hunt and can kill. Therefore because the animals are prey to the humans the animals have smaller minds. Even fish have minds because they swim away very fast when they are approached. Bugs do not have mind but animals that look out for hunters have quite large minds. All mind is the same in nature. Humans are curious through their minds and their eyes. People who have strong minds are even able to know things of other people when nothing has been said."

The importance of mind in ethics will be dealt with in the section on Philosophic Ethics but in this section, Religious Ethics, the name soul is of the greatest importance. Just as words provided form in cosmology so here too the name is the person as eloquently understood by Williamson²⁰:

The name, in Eskimo belief, is the soul, and the soul is the name. The Eskimo believed that the emitting of a word evoked an image, which was an actual reality. No one could say that an image once evoked, by being spoken, was not a reality, though a mental one. The language is a complex of mental images, but both the physical objects, and the words used to evoke them--are, in Eskimo thinking, equally real. The name of an individual is more than a label, it is the means whereby a person's separate

social existence is evoked, it is the symbolization of his personality, it is his very essence, and the spiritual and functional means whereby he is identified and related with the rest of his society and his physical and metaphysical environment.

Again bearing in mind these same metaphysical qualities that unite thought, word, form and reality it is easy to understand why the Inuit believe in a life after death. As Rasmussen's informant Nalungiaq pointed out,

We believe in dreams, and we believe that people can live a life apart from real life, a life they can go through in their sleep....that is why we believe that dead people whom we see so vividly in dreams really are alive.

However, a dead person does not spend his future existence in some heaven, hell, underworld, happy hunting ground or purgatory. For the Inuit, in spite of the harshness of their existence, temporal life is their greatest pleasure and is realised through re-birth. Many of the metaphysical beliefs to be found in Inuit mythology are fast dying out. However, the belief in reincarnation through the name is, so far as I am aware, universally held and still universally practised along with Christian beliefs. Therefore it seems most appropriate to give detailed emphasis to the name and the naming rules of the Inuit and how they support their ethics.

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21. Rasmussen, op. cit., p. 213.

3.3 The Name-Soul

As my field work for this thesis was principally done with the Netsilingmiut, I tend to refer to authors who worked with the same group of people. These are notably Rasmussen in the 1920s and Williamson and Balikci in more recent times. However, if the thesis is to be about Inuit Ethics as opposed to merely Netsilingmiut Ethics then it is important to cross-reference data with ethnographic work from other Inuit groups. Fortunately this work was done quite exhaustively by Weyer and so all references to his work lead to a host of supportive data. It would seem unnecessary to continually repeat the sources so well catalogued by Weyer. However, as the concept of the Name-Soul is central to the religious ethics of the Inuit, it would seem worthwhile, by way of an example, to quote Weyer¹ on this subject with his references in full. At least this one time anyway.

Personal names, according to the Eskimo belief, are endowed with intangible attributes such as wisdom, skill, and power, and so in one sense must be regarded as souls. They are not to be confused, however, with the souls that journey at death to a future world, there to enter upon the after life. For name souls are almost entirely of this earth, though, strangely, they are immortal in the sense that they do not perish with death, but are perpetuated through the custom of naming children after persons who have recently died. The implications of this naming custom differ widely among the various groups of Eskimos. In some the practice carries very little suggestion of a transfer of the soul, while in others this idea is so strong that the namesake is treated as though he were actually the dead person, living again on earth. With various shades of meaning, however, the custom of passing personal names on from the dead to the living is practiced generally by all groups of Eskimos.

Weyer's² references on this one point are as follows:

Nelson: 1899, 376 f. (Yukon Delta); Nelson: 1899, 219, 289 (Bering Sea and Bering Strait); Weyer: Field Notes (Diomed Islands and Cape Prince of Wales); Nelson: 1899, 433 (Kotzebue Sound); Stefansson: 1914, 161 (Colville Eskimos and Kogmollik Eskimos); Stefansson: 1914, 202 (near Point Barrow); Stefansson: 1914, 158, 384 f. (Mackenzie Delta region); Stefansson: 1913, 395 ff. (Mackenzie Delta region); Jenness: 1922, 167 f. (Copper Eskimos); Birket-Smith: 1929, I, 282 (Caribou Eskimos); Rasmussen: 1929, I, 58 f. (Iglulik Eskimos); Rasmussen: 1927, 130 (Iglulik Eskimos); Mathiassen: 1928, I, 212 (Iglulik

Eskimos); Boas: 1888, 612 (Davis Strait, Baffin Island); Boas: 1907; 130, 132 f., 145 (Cumberland Sound); Bilby: 1928, 144 (Baffin Island, "The children are named after some place or object, and many of the names descend from father to son."); Hawkes: 1916, 112 f. (Labrador); Rasmussen: 1908, 116 (Polar Eskimos); Rasmussen: 1921, 32 (Polar Eskimos); Kroeber: 1899, 309 (Polar Eskimos); Birket-Smith: 1924, 412 f. (West Greenland); Crantz: 1767, I, 161 (West Greenland); Thalbitzer: 1923, 184 (No. 1), 188 (No. 5), 191 (No. 6), and 500 (No. 244) (East Greenland).

Given the wide belief in and importance of the name-soul it is possible to detail the rules governing its use and the associated ethics supported by this metaphysical concept as follows.

3.3.1. Descriptive Value

Name-souls are value-neutral with regard to any meaning they may have. To a westerner "Piss-Pöt" seems degrading, whilst "Light of the Moon" is flattering and "The Only Man Around" is sexist. All these names are real and can equally apply to a virtuous or bad man or woman with equal neutrality.

As Kako pointed out "Names do not have meaning: I am not used to giving meaning to names. People don't think of the meaning, they think of the person when the name is used."

3.3.2. Sex

The name-soul is often given to a baby when a woman becomes pregnant. Consequently a male may be reincarnated in a male or female body so that the distinction "him" or "her" or "she" or "he" is not made in Inuktitut. Also, as a result of this lack of sexism in naming, a reborn person may be both male and female at the same time. This is the case with my own wife who is named after her father's aunt Kunga. One of her nephews is also named after the same Kunga and so far as sex is concerned this raises no problem or difficulty.

Weyer is able to confirm this fact as being fairly universal³.

Generally, there is no differentiation in Eskimo names with regard to sex. In view of this the child can be, and sometimes is, named before it is born.

As before Weyer's cross-referencing is extensive, ranging from the Bering Straits to Baffin Island and Northern Quebec.

Thus, as is the case with the descriptive meaning of the name, the name-

soul is sexually neutral. Of course a person is known to be a boy or a girl, a man or a woman, and they may express their preferences in these matters, but being male or female is of little metaphysical or ethical importance.

3.3.3. Death

Aupudluk explained that "when someone died they had to be very quiet and not work too hard so that the dead person could settle down. Before they died some people used to leave special instructions for their relatives, others would leave none. Things returned to normal after four days for a man and five days for a woman, because she menstruates. The body would be dressed in new clothes with the best boots and mitts, etc. The corpse was then covered with rocks separated from the rough covering with flat split rocks. All the cracks were filled so that animals would not come and eat the body. My father told me that people used to wait a year before the dead person could be named. Some people said they would help their relatives after their death so we knew they had spirits. My father, the shaman, knew the spirit was spherical and had a delicate surface and could be held in the hands as he did it."

As noted by Weyer⁴ there is considerable reluctance to mention the name of the recently dead. During the one-year waiting period the soul associated with the name is considered to be wandering and is very possibly making efforts to come back into full temporal existence. Consequently it is necessary for a widow or widower to wait a year before considering remarriage. If they fail to observe this rule, they are likely to become *abease*. After death a soul will often visit relatives at which time the manifestation should not be scared or shocked by any fast movement and the soul should be offered a drink of water. As with the seal, the giving of water to quench thirst is a common symbol of greeting, friendship and kindness, and through such acts the deceased may come back into existence. An account of persons living again is given in Appendix 1.

3.3.4. Authority

Rasmussen understood the central importance of the name when he wrote⁵:

There are also those who believe that all who have died have a strong desire to go on living on earth and therefore make their own choice of newborn people in whom they wish to live again. And in gratitude to those who satisfy their desire to live on in a new body they give special power and a special protection....The giving of names is an affair of the greatest importance, for of course it is essential to find out what "dead soul" it is that wants to reside in the body of a new-born person.

Authority in naming as with nearly all things in the Inuit culture rests with the oldest living generation. Consequently when a woman becomes pregnant, she asks her parents, who might in turn ask the grandparents if they are living, what the child should be called. This is of course synonymous with whom should the unborn fetus be. The parent or grandparent may then dream of a certain relative, or someone else, including the mother, may have such dreams, and report them to her parents, who will then decide if this is a wish on the part of the person dreamt of to return to a temporal existence. Having decided the matter, the baby is named and is now that human. However, if there is difficulty with the birth, the name may then be changed as the problem delivery would be interpreted as an error with the original naming process. It would be hoped, in such circumstances, that the gift of giving life to some other soul would be rewarded with a successful conclusion to the pregnancy, a healthy child and healthy mother.

Authority in naming gave power, in a very literal way, over life and death to the oldest generation. Weyer in quoting Boas remarks:

Also on the west coast of Hudson Bay it is believed that the souls of the dead, if they choose, may return and be born again. "An old man who died in 1896 said at his death that he would be borne again by a certain woman. Sometime after this the woman gave birth to a girl, who was believed to be the old man returned. Another man, who died in 1885, said that he would be born again as the child of his own daughter. The latter had a son; and soon another son was born, who was looked upon as the dead one returned.

3.3.5. Sickness

One of the most important aspects of illness is pointed to by Weyer when he notes:

Since death is characterized by the absence of the soul, sickness is sometimes interpreted as its temporary departure. Therefore, any tendency for the soul to take leave is regarded anxiously.... In Ponds Inlet and Davis Strait sickness is treated by changing the patient's name.

This form of treatment was provided to my wife Kunga when she was a child, as explained by Aupudluk her mother. "Once when Kunga was only a little girl and my husband Kako was away hunting I became very scared because she was so ill. I went to Inukshuk's house. He said I looked very pale and he suggested that if his dead daughter was alive she would play with Pesukti. Pesukti was my father's spirit helper, he was a pure white wolf born up out of the earth. From that thought about Pisukti the spirit wolf decided to help. We placed some white fur around the swollen neck of my daughter, she was now Pisukti and she became well."

In this way people can acquire additional names though the course of their lives. The new names become that person so that if they are subsequently reincarnated the complete group of names goes to the new baby. Consequently all Inuit have a number of names shared by various distant ancestors who through their gifts of strength in times of need have obtained additional opportunity for life

3.3.6. Reincarnation

The strength of Inuit beliefs in reincarnation is supported by reports that children will sometimes behave like their soul-name relative. Children have been heard to speak in a dialect, make requests or posit knowledge that could only have been known to their common ancestor.

The extent to which reincarnation is a real aspect of the Inuit metaphysical world is illustrated by Weyer in his reference to Stefansson's experiences⁸:

Stefansson's curiosity was roused by the odd custom he noted, chiefly among Eskimos of the Mackenzie region, of one native's calling another 'mother' or 'father', etc., when such a relationship did not actually exist and even sounded ridiculous in view of age relation. Questioning two grown women as to why they called a child of eight 'mother' he received the answer, "Simply because she is our mother." Thus, he was led to discover the true import of the name-soul among these people.

3.3.7. Respect

The name-soul as such is very rarely used within an extended family group but rather the pertinent relative term, brother, cousin, aunt, father, etc. If a child is named after a grandfather then that child will be called grandfather by its parents and will further be treated with respect accorded the authoritative status of grandfather.

For example, one of my wife's sisters has a son named after my wife's mother. This boy is called "Little Mother" by both my wife and her sister and he is thoroughly indulged by his mother. "Little Mother" does not have to go to school like the other children because he does not want to, he also does not cut his hair and speaks only Inuktitut. If he wishes to speak to any white children he uses his brothers or sisters as interpreters, just as his mother's real mother would. This behaviour would be considered overly spoilt by Western standards but when child mortality accounted for the greater part of human deaths in the traditional culture the brief happiness of children was seen as one of the few great virtues of a harsh existence. Further, in a more pragmatic vein, if "Little Mother" does grow up to be an accomplished provider, he will presumably return the kindness of his mother by protecting her as a daughter.

A further insight into the rationality of this respect afforded to children is again provided by Weyer⁹ quoting Stefansson:

If a child is scolded, it is not only the baby that one scolds, but also the soul of the one whose name it bears;

this will make the 'name' (soul-nappan) angry and it will make the child sick or cause it to die. If habitually scolded, the soul or souls received by name (the child's names) will (one, some or all of them) leave the child and go to a child that is not scolded. This will be to that child's advantage, and will not much hurt the child that loses them. Yet to lose the soul thus seems to be considered a misfortune. But if the souls have no child to which they can flee, they will make the child sick through their discontent at having to stay in a child so badly treated.

3.3.8 Integration

As Williamson¹⁰ points out, Inuit who share a name share in a companionate soul such that the name of an individual relates him with the helping spirits of others who share his name. My wife Kunga shares her name with her nephew in Repulse Bay. Consequently, when we had occasion to be visiting that settlement he gave my wife a sealskin and she gave him a new jacket. This was by way of a friendly contest to win favour, through generosity, of the ancestral Kunga. However, the winner is only a temporary winner in this form of potlatch. This theme is picked up and cross-referenced by Weyer¹¹:

With somewhat the same idea namesakes among the Iglulik Eskimos, upon meeting, must exchange gifts. This strengthens their souls and pleases all their dead name cousins. This group and the Polar Eskimos are stated to believe that the namesake receives the strength and skill of the person for whom he is named.

The social importance of the soul-name is well understood by Williamson in the following quotation¹² but the full importance of this metaphysical belief for ethics is perhaps even more significant.

Thus it can be shown that no individual Eskimo, even of the present young adult generation, feels himself to be entirely alone or isolated. The naming system itself engenders a very strong sense of integration, not only with the kin group, and the society in which it functions, but with the creatures and the forces of the entire natural environment.

3.3.9 Good and Evil

The consequences of living a good life in which one provides for others and given them strength is the reward of living life anew through

reincarnation. The consequences of bad and evil, however, is to be ignored. Sometimes a forgotten soul will take up existence in an animal body of if a bad person makes themselves known to a living relative through dreams that person's name may be given to a dog. This act is not meant as punishment but is done out of compassion, to allow the evil ancestor to live again without endangering the righteous life of a human child. For even life as a dog is better than no life and no life is to be forgotten. Kako once named his lead dog after such a relative and claimed that the dog was very good and obedient out of gratitude for the new life. He therefore treated the dog with unusual kindness, feeding it well when the circumstances allowed.

This point is elaborated on by Aupudluk. "If a person is good they will not get lonely after they die because they can wander on to other camps and visit and be happy. My father has met such spirits. If a person was bad people would make sure the grave was not pointing towards a camp or hunting ground and they would not be buried with any weapons. The mother of one of my great-grandparents was very bad. She stole, lied and cheated so her name was given to a dog first. After she had been a dog it was possible for her to be a human again. Her name was Kutekuark, she was Kako's lead dog but now she is Remie's daughter."

Kako added to this that Kutekuark was Aupudluk's grandmother on her mother's side and it was Aupudluk's mother who gave the name to his dog. As for Remie's daughter, Aupudluk named her. "No-one knew what to name the child and she thought of it right away so that was it."

In recent years, the Government of Canada has dispensed with the numbering or disk system for the Inuit and has imposed the Western practice of using a given name and a family name. This runs contrary to Inuit religious beliefs, but fortunately at the present time the Inuit

are able to joke about the new naming process and use it only for their dealings with Government institutions. This change has been encouraged by the missionaries in an effort to eradicate belief in reincarnation but to my knowledge all of the Inuit Christians I am acquainted with practice the traditional naming system and believe fully in its consequences. Unfortunately the changing of the naming system may weaken the Inuit culture in the long term as it contradicts one of the metaphysical beliefs that support their morality.

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3.4 Some Inuit Names

By way of illustrating the previous section on naming rules all the names of my principal informants will now be given with their individual histories so far as they are known.

Aupudluk

Aupudluk is my wife's mother; she has seven names in all. These are:

1) Aupudluk. When she was a little girl, about a year old, she would continually ask for tunuk (caribou fat). However, the word came out as 'aupudluk' in her baby language and so her parents gave her that name as a nickname.

No-one had this name before Aupudluk and no-one else, as yet, has been given it.

2) Nuglekumeuya. This is the name of her mother's father's mother, i.e. a great-grandmother on her mother's side. It is not known who gave her the name but she received it when she was sick as a child.

3) Kudteutekuq. This name was also given to her as a child to help her live longer when she was sick. It is not known who this person was but the name was given to her by her father.

4) Kigniq. This name was given to her by a relative whose name was Analuktetak, again when she was sick. Kigniq was Analuktetak's mother and prior to that Kigniq was a dog. Kigniq means black.

5) Kelunek. She was given this name by her grandmother on her father's side when she was sick. Kelunek was the mother of Kudteutekuq (see (3) above) and was described as a little old lady.

6) Paleeaq. This is her first and original name given to her before she was born. Paleeaq was a great shaman from the Baffin region, being a member of the Okokmiutuk (People from the Sheltered Area). It is not known who gave her the name.

7) Keepaniq. This is another name belonging to Paleeaq as in (6) above.

Aupudluk's name has been given to one of her granddaughters from her son Nimialik and also to one of her granddaughters from her daughter Ookpikuak. Her name Kudteutekuq was also given to one of the sons of her daughter Inouyk. But this was done by her cousin Pisuk who was Inouyk's husband's oldest brother and at the time Pisuk did not know Kudteutekuq was one of Aupudluk's names. So that child came to be "Little Mother" by way of a coincidence (see 3.3.7.).

Kako

Kako is my wife's father and he only has two names.

1) Kako. He was given this name by his grandmother on his mother's side. Kako never met the man who previously had the name but apparently he was given the name because the ancestral Kako wished to be a son of Kako's mother.

2) Ookaliak. He was given this name by Komaksutisak's father when he was a baby but he doesn't know why.

There are two other Kakos. One is named after the ancestral Kako and is the daughter of Putulik in Repulse Bay. Putulik is the daughter of Kako's sister. The other Kako is his grandson by his son Nimialik but people generally know him by his other name Ookaliak. Nimialik asked Kako if the child could receive his name when his wife was pregnant. Kako dreamed about it in his sleep and so it was that way. He didn't want to be a girl and so the child was a boy when born.

Tidlumaluk Ivaksat

These are the two names belonging to my daughter. They were given to her by her grandfather Kako. Tidlumaluk Ivaksat was previously a very old lady who was known to be kind and generous. She was a relative of his mother's and he chose her because no-one else had passed on the name.

Kunga

Kunga is my wife, Aupudluk and Kako are her mother and father. She has

five names.

1) Kunga. She was given this name by her father Kako. It had previously been the name of her sister, Aupudluk and Kako's daughter who had died when she was six or seven years old. The deceased Kooga had been given the name by an old blind lady named Aknatouook at the Chesterfield Inlet hospital. Kunga had been her dead sister.

2, 3, 4) Tutatsiak, Kalumena and Qaq are three more names that all belonged to the ancestral Kooga sister of Aknatouook. When the deceased daughter of Kako, my wife's dead sister, was born she was not named as her grandfather did not wish to keep her as Aupudluk already had too many girls. However, the child was kept anyway (see Autobiography) but was not given sanctity of life and personhood until she received a name from the unrelated Aknatouook when the baby was already able to crawl.

5) Pesuktee. This name was given to her by her uncle Inukshuk (see 3.3.5) when she was very ill. Pesuktee was Aupudluk's father's spirit helper, a white wolf that came from the earth. Aupudluk's father, the great shaman (see Appendix 1) was named Kenmuksara.

The name Kooga is shared with a middle-aged woman in Baker Lake who was named after the same ancestral Kooga by her adopted father Taparti. He was the nephew of Aknatouook.

Pisuktee is also the name of Kooga's cousin in Repulse Bay (see 3.3.8). He was named after Kako's sister Pesuktee who in turn had received the name from Aupudluk's father, the shaman Kenmuksara.

3.5 Summum Bonum

An ethical system is generally considered to be a set of rules fashioned to guide human conduct towards a conceptualization of what is good. Such codes of behaviour must be viewed along with the end to which they are directed. This object, or good, or human good or Summum Bonum of life varies in its form of expression from culture to culture. In order to understand the rationality of Inuit ethics it is essential to know and understand the end to which they are directed. What is the purpose of life for the Inuit? What is their Summum Bonum?

The most important and obvious questions are often the most difficult to answer so that when I first asked Kako what was important about life he came back with the rhetorical answer that man came from mud and returned to mud. He further explained that "No-one knows how long they will live. I can't hunt now." He remarked, "Even priests don't know how long they will live. Doctors don't know either, they only know when they are sick."

However, in dealing with the question of suicide Kako suggested that "Only unthinking people commit suicide as they don't think of the future, only of the present. They don't consider their families and relatives. But those who do not have a family, relatives or friends have no future and therefore they might have a reason to die. The most important thing is a family so you can look forward to them growing up. Having children and grandchildren makes you want to live to see them grow up."

Thus, according to Kako, the purpose to be found in life is family, children and grandchildren. The converse of this proposition is that if these objectives are absent then life's purpose is removed and suicide could be the rational

alternative. However, if one's life were to be an impediment to the wellbeing of the object of life, family and children, then suicide should be perceived as good. This is indeed the case as Weyer¹ points out.

Life sometimes seems harder than death, and so is regarded as a little thing to give. Like the Stoic who argues, metaphorically, that if the chimney smokes one should get out of the house, the Eskimo justifies suicide, especially if age or infirmity renders one useless and a burden....On King William Island, old folks no longer able to provide for themselves generally hang themselves.

But in sacrificing their lives in this way for the object of their lives, their progeny, they are not metaphysically surrendering temporal existence. Grandparents who give themselves to death in an act of benevolence know full well that they will continue to live in their namesakes that are their grandchildren and great-grandchildren. The future² generation give meaning and purpose to Inuit existence, they are the only object for which an individual would sacrifice his or her life. This priority of the future generation has such dominance in the Inuit culture it not only provides a foundation for their ethics but also for much of their metaphysics. It is articulated by Williamson³ as follows:

The observer has heard it stated frequently by the more philosophically-inclined Eskimo in Keewatin (and indeed in other parts of the Arctic)-- that the purpose of human existence is for the individual to make the fullest, and richest possible investment of his intellect, his knowledge, and his personality, in his own children. This is, after all, indicative of respect for long-established souls, and if a soul can be further enriched in the process of each earthbound lifetime, the parent has succeeded in perpetuating something of value. In turn, the highly successful, and therefore highly-esteemed parent, is very likely to be himself celebrated and perpetuated when his own children come to the stage in life where they are responsible for the investment of name-souls in the future generation. Very recently a Sauniqtimiut said to the writer rhetorically--

"What use am I, what purpose do I serve, if I cannot bring up my own children? I do not know myself, and I do not know what to do with myself and I have no sense of ongoing significance in my life if I cannot bring up my children." (The statement was aroused by the man's concern about having his children taken away from the family in order to be educated by the government authorities in a residential school.)

References and Notes

1. Weyer, E. M. The Eskimos: Their environment and folkways. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1932, p. 248.
2. The use here of the term future generation requires some clarification and justification. Clearly when an elderly Inuk surrenders his life in order to benefit his progeny he is only directly benefiting the progeny that are already born. These would be his children and grandchildren or the next and next plus one generation. However I do believe the Inuit give consideration to and do act in the interests of generations as yet unborn. Firstly, Williamson suggests this in the quotation given. Secondly, the metaphysics of the name soul support this view as reincarnations generally skip generations so that people wishing to live again must think in terms of realising a new life through children born after their death. Thirdly, in contemporary times, land claims negotiations in Central and Eastern Arctic Canada are always carried out by the Inuit with a view to a settlement that will benefit "their children, their children's children and in turn their children". For this reason the Inuit I know are quite unwilling to settle for compensation that will bring fast rewards. What they insist upon are rights that will not perish or diminish with time.
3. Williamson, R. G. Eskimo underground: Socio-cultural change in the Canadian Central Arctic. Uppsala: Institutionen för Allmän och Jämförande Etnografi vid Uppsala Universitet, 1974, p. 50.

4. Inuit Philosophic Ethics

4.1. The Nature of Inuktitut

The institutional distinction between religious, philosophic and scientific knowledge is not made by the Inuit. Therefore, in using such distinctions here an etic frame of reference is being imposed for the convenience of the author and reader. This frame may be nothing more than convention and it may be arbitrary. The previous section was concerned with mythology, metaphysics and ethics and was deemed religious. This section is concerned more with language and ethics and therefore more closely resembles what is understood to be philosophic.

As mentioned previously in section 3.2 on metaphysics, the Inuit language is distinctly different from our own not only in vocabulary and grammar but more fundamentally in the relationship of symbol to form. This point is best expressed by Edmund Carpenter¹ in Eskimo Realities when he wrote:

Eskimo wed themselves to nature, for nature's forms, they believe, lie hidden until man reveals them one by one. This is difficult for us to conceive, for our language emphasizes nouns, things already there, set apart from us, clearly defined and easily seen. The Eskimo language, by contrast, makes little distinction between "nouns" and "verbs"; rather, all words are forms of the verb "to be", which itself is lacking in Eskimo. That is, all words proclaim in themselves their own existence. Language is the principal tool with which the Eskimo make the natural world a human world. They use many "words" for snow which permit fine distinctions, not simply because they are much concerned with snow, but because snow takes its form from the actions in which it participates: sledding, falling, igloo-building. Different kinds of snow are brought into existence by the Eskimo as they experience their environment and speak: words do not label things already there. Words are like the knife of the carver: they free the idea, the thing, from the general formlessness of the outside. As a man speaks, not only is his language in a state of birth, but also the very thing about which he is talking.

The Eskimo language Inuktitut has an agglutinative structure where the root is modified by infixes and suffixes. For example Nuna - tsia - ungi - tok transliterates as Land-good-not-it or translates as 'it is not a good land',



Nunatsiaungitok.

Consequently various forms of quality can either be the subject of a "sentence-word" or a subject can be subsequently modified by a qualifying infix. The root for 'good' is PIU--and the root for 'right' is NAMA. These two roots can be modified in many ways to give various negations and shades of meaning that range from 'good' and 'bad' to 'very good', 'wrong', 'correct' and 'resent' and so forth as tabulated below.

| <u>English</u> | <u>Inuktitut and Literal Translation</u> |
|----------------|--|
| Bad | PIU - GE - TOK <i>good not²-ve one</i> |
| Good | PIU - Y - UK <i>good one</i> |
| Very good | PIU - TSIK - TUK <i>good good it</i> |
| Proud | PIU - SU - GE - UK <i>good from one not-ve one</i> |
| Dislike | PIU - GU - SUN - GI - TOK <i>good not-ve (from) one not-ve (at) one</i> |
| Wrong | NAMA - GE - TOK <i>right not-ve one</i> |
| Right | NAMA - K - TOK <i>right one</i> |
| Quite right | NAMA - TSIK - TOK <i>right good one</i> |
| Correct | NAMA - AN - IK <i>right to be</i> |
| Resent | NAMA - GU - SUN - GI - TOK <i>right not-ve (from) one not-ve (at) one</i> |

These few examples serve to illustrate the point made by Williamson³ that

the Eskimo language is capable, because of its agglutinative or holo-phrastic pattern of construction--of an almost infinite number of permutations of meaning-complexes, by the process of proliferation and arrangement of infixes and suffixes....We realize then, that the Eskimo language, far from being (as it is often popularly believed) a simple symbolic system employed by a people pursuing a very simple way of

life--is in fact a remarkably sophisticated language capable of considerable refinement of expression and extensive philosophical reaches.

In The Language of Morals R. M. Hare⁴ places considerable emphasis on the understanding of prescriptive language as a means to determining moral language and thence ethics. The principle behind this thesis being per genus ad differentiam. Eventually his study leads to a detailed analysis of abstract concepts like 'right' and 'good'. Such concepts and their derivative forms exist in Inuktitut, but they are not at all central to ethics as it is conceptualized by the Inuit. For them being moral is being human. Ethics as codes of behaviour are derived from human nature. Therefore, in order to understand Inuit Ethics from an analysis of their language it is necessary to begin with the word/root INUK which means 'human' and from there to examine word/sentences that give meaning to INUK with various suffixes and infixes.

References and Notes

1. Carpenter, E. Eskimo realities. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, p. 38, 43.
2. -ve is used here as an abbreviation for negative.
3. Williamson, R. G. Eskimo underground: Socio-cultural change in the Canadian Central Arctic. Uppsala: Institutionen för Allmän och Jämförande Etnografi vid Uppsala Universitet, 1974, p. 21.
4. Hare, R. M. The language of morals. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 2-3.

4.2 Concepts of Human Good

The Inuit language retains essentially the same grammar and vocabulary from North Alaska through Canada to Greenland.¹ There are, however, strong dialectical differences, these being most distinct in southern Alaska.

The root INUK, meaning 'person' or 'human being', is reported by Birket-Smith² to be Inuk in West Greenland, Inuk or Inun in the Thule district of West Greenland, Inun on the Melville peninsula in the Eastern Canadian Arctic, Inuk on the Simpson peninsula in the Central Arctic and Inuk again on the Upper Kazan River in the Western Arctic. Rasmussen³ likewise attributes Inuk to Greenland, Labrador and North Alaska.

In order to refer to virtues that are considered to be distinctly human it is necessary to modify the root Inu-- . This can be done with various degrees of positive and negative meaning which can be translated and transliterated for the Netsilingmiut as follows:

| <u>English</u> | <u>Inuktitut--Literal Translation</u> |
|-------------------|---|
| Cruel | INU - TAOGE - TOK <i>human not-ve one</i> |
| Kind | INU - TAOY - OK <i>human is+ve one</i> |
| Generous | INU - TSIA - UK <i>human nice one</i> |
| Benevolent | INU - TSIA - VA - LUK <i>human nice very one</i> |
| Altruist | INU - TSIA - VUMARREAR - LUK <i>human nice extremely one</i> |
| Real Eskimo | INU - MAR - IK <i>human real is</i> |
| Toy Eskimo (Doll) | INU - NGU - UK <i>human toy is</i> |

In order to bridge the gap of meaning between the translation and transliteration, a more literal translation could be as follows:

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| <u>Inutaogetok</u> | Not nice, unkind |
| <u>Inutaoyok</u> | A person is kind, is nice |
| <u>Inutsiauk</u> | Is very kind to the point of being generous |
| <u>Inutsiavaluk</u> | Extremely kind, most generous, very nice person |
| <u>Inutsiavumarrearluk</u> | An exceptional person that always behaves in a perfectly kind and generous manner before any thought of self-interest |
| <u>Inumarik</u> | A term increasingly used in modern times to denote a person who follows traditional Inuit values |
| <u>Inunguuk</u> | A toy, doll, carving, model, drawing or photograph of an Eskimo |

The sentence/word that most fully expresses the ideal of human virtue amongst these Netsilik words is Inutsiavumarrearluk. The infix and suffix 'tseavumarrearluk' can be added to any root that reasonably could have distinctive inherent qualities such that the infix--'tsia'--brings out the good in the object qualified. In other words -tsia- does not simply mean 'good', it could equally mean 'nice', 'correct' or 'proper'. So it is possible to speak of boots as being kamiktsiavumarrearluk, that is, boots - good - extremely or boots that fit well, are made of good skins and have strong seams, perfect boots. One could speak of a man as angutitsiavumarrearluk, which would mean perfect in qualities associated with men--that is, an excellent hunter who is strong and tireless, able to quickly make an igloo, predict the weather, find game, make tools and train dogs. But it is not possible to speak of an Uncle as -tsiavumarrearluk as uncle does not carry with it a set of particular qualities as a human, man or boot does except those qualities the uncle might hold as a human or man. Equally so in a very practical fashion a Polar Bear could not be -tsiavumarrearluk unless dead because

when alive it has no useful qualities vis-a-vis man. Consequently the only live animal that could be -tsiavumarrearluk is the dog (kenmek) who would be strong, intelligent, obedient and enduring: that is, kenmektsiavumarrearluk. Inutsiavumarrearluk can thus be understood as a perfect human vis-a-vis those qualities discerned as specifically human that have value to his fellow humans in a concrete and beneficial way. It is a good that is thoroughly pragmatic.

Although the word Inutsiavumarrearluk does not appear specifically in other ethnographic and linguistic studies of the Inuit it is most probable that the concept is widespread given the commonality of the root Inuk and the grammar. Webster and Zibell⁴, in their dictionary of the Inupiat of Alaska, include the word INUPIAK, meaning 'real Eskimo', and INUNNIKUSUK, meaning 'gentleman'. Gubser⁵ goes further by providing a folk definition for the Alaskan Nunamiut word INUALAUTAK (a good person) as

A good person never becomes angry; he works hard and is never lazy, helping friends and relatives in building a house or making clothes in time of need and giving them food, skins, and firewood; he does not steal; he does not lie; and he refrains from arguing or talking to people in a funny, affected, or 'neurotic' way.

By way of a corollary Gubser also offers a folk definition of a bad person, which begins

A bad person becomes angry with little provocation and is lazy and very sluggish in responding to other people's requests for help; he lies, cheats and steals, argues, acts strangely, and generally makes trouble with vicious gossip and impossible stories.

Apuvluk spoke of her first husband as being Inutsiavumarrearluk. "He was never angry and never gave anyone a hard time. Even when his relatives were unpleasant to him he didn't say anything. He was a very quiet man. Sometimes Kako reminds me of him. Today's people are nothing when compared to the old standard of Inutsiavumarrearluk. Life was different then. For example Samutuk's father died in the sea with a kyak and he saw his mother drown when she fell through thin ice. Nadjuk looked after

him for a while and then he became my adopted brother. Young people can never be really Inutsiavumarrearluk but they should try and learn to forgive right away. They shouldn't talk about other people, give whenever they are asked, and never dislike a person. Today they only forgive well."

For Kako someone who was Inutsiavumarrearluk was necessarily very smart and very intelligent. "When I was a child I had no problems. When I was young I met people who took their time, they were good. The impatient ones were bad. People can only be good if they think right. If a person wanted to be Inutsiavumarrearluk they could keep trying to be nice, kind and generous. That would help them to keep thinking about it and that in turn would help them to become good."

In order to confirm the folk definition of a good human and the necessary relationship of virtue to intelligence these points were put to other people at Chesterfield Inlet who were considered to have authoritative knowledge in such manners.

Kugeak: "Even if you don't know a person very well, it is easy to tell if they are kind, generous, loving and forgiving. It's very easy to tell when you see them. People who are happy, making jokes are also Inutsiavumarrearluk. It is not possible to be such a person without also being very intelligent, thoughtful."

Ipiak: "Someone who is Inutsiavumarrearluk doesn't say much to anybody. They don't bother other people. They never change. Someone who thinks correctly is always nice."

Samutuk: "To me someone who is Inutsiavumarrearluk is someone who never changes his attitude towards people, his personality never changes. Different people have different personalities, but someone who is wise can not be bad."

Egalak: (Samutuk's wife): "Someone who never changes their personality and who is sociable at all times, constant, is Inutsiavumarrearluk."

For the Inuit being wise is a necessary and sufficient condition to being good. Therefore a careful examination of the Inuit concepts of mind, thought, intelligence and wisdom is central to understanding their ethics.

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2. Birket-Smith, K. Five hundred Eskimo words: A comparative vocabulary from Greenland and central Eskimo dialects. Report of the Fifth Thule Expedition, 1921-24. Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandel, 1928, p. 37. Vol. III, No. 3.
3. Rasmussen, K. Alaskan Eskimo words: Report of the Fifth Thule Expedition 1921-24. Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandel, 1941, p. 17. Vol. III, No. 4.
4. Webster, D. H. & Zibell, W. Inupiat Eskimo Dictionary. P. 2, 30.
5. Gubser, N. J. The Nunamiut Eskimos: Hunters of caribou. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965, p. 218-219.
6. Ibid., p. 219.

4.3 Concepts of Mind and Wisdom

Kako explained the phenomenon of mind as follows: "Mind is part of our spirit and that is why we think from our spirit. Animals also have spirit and mind but humans hunt and kill them. Therefore animals have smaller minds than humans. All mammals must have minds because they hunt each other. Fish also have mind because they swim away very fast when approached. But I do not think bugs have mind. It is not possible to say exactly what qualities such as curiosity, generosity and kindness might be constituents of animal minds. However, some animals who look around for other hunters certainly have bigger minds."

Samutuk confirmed this view with the observation "Animals have brains and minds. I know this because they try to get away from hunters."

Kako elaborated on the nature of mind as it applies to humans with: "Some women can have a better mind than a man and some men can have a better mind than a woman. Therefore there is no difference between the mind of men and women. All mind is the same in nature. Apart from kindness, generosity and foresight a human mind is curious. Humans are also curious with their eyes. People who have strong minds and who are curious are able to know things of other people even when they say nothing. A person has to control their mind through their own efforts. As for me, when I get mad, I control it until it passes. It will go away. A very good person can also be talkative to control their thoughts and keep them healthy. A bad person who gives people a bad time and doesn't bother about anybody gets mad easily. This is because they don't think enough. They may have a lot of mind but they are not using it."

It is clear from this description that mind is of central importance to the Inuit. However, the probable functional reason for this is best expressed

by Williamson¹:

Traditionally the Keewatin Eskimos have survived for many centuries in an environment as severe and demanding as any in the world.... In such a setting, one might not be surprised to find a people who, more than most other Eskimo, are entirely absorbed with the struggle for sheer survival. It may to some seem paradoxical to discover that great value is attached to intellectual vigour and intelligent meta-physical appreciation of the cosmos. It should be realized, however, that the Eskimo of Keewatin were particularly well-suited to realize their physical dependency upon the whims of nature, and that simple physical exertion for the sake of survival would be insufficient.... A brief etymological glance at the Eskimo vocabulary for "thought" may perhaps illustrate to some extent the specific case in point. *Isu* is the Eskimo word-root meaning "the end", the ultimate: and built onto this root is the word *isuma* which is the word for "thought". From this root there spring many words connoting intelligence, the power of reason, the desire to exert oneself, the process of reflection and philosophizing, and the giving of opinions and advice. Significant is the fact that the word for leader, boss, chieftain, or person of authority, does not have any connotation of physical strength or technical facility. The word for leader is *isumatak*, which means, in essence, quite obviously, "the one who takes thought".

A breakdown of some of the more important terms that are formed from the root *Isuma* can be tabulated as follows:

| <u>English</u> | <u>Inuktitut and Literal Translation</u> |
|----------------|--|
| Good idea | ISUMA - TSIA - TOK <i>mind correct one</i> he or she is thinking correctly |
| Excellent idea | ISUMA - TSIA - VA - LUK <i>mind correct very one</i> he or she is thinking very well |
| Bad idea | ISUMA - TAOGE - TOK <i>mind negative one</i> he or she is thinking wrongly |
| Very bad idea | ISUMA - TAOGE - TUA - LUK <i>mind negative very one</i> he or she is thinking very badly |
| Concentration | ISUMA - MAR - IK - TOK <i>mind real is one</i> he or she is really thinking |

| <u>English</u> | <u>Inuktitut and Literal Translation</u> |
|----------------|--|
| Imagine | ISUMA - NGU - UK <i>mind pretend one</i> children's term for 'let us imagine' |
| Stupid | ISUMA - KA - TSIA - GNE - TOK <i>mind with correct negative one</i> he or she is without a good mind |
| Senile | ISUMA - EGRUTE - LIK - TOK <i>mind fading now one</i> he or she is losing their mind |
| Retarded | ISUMA - KA - NGNE - TOK <i>mind with negative one</i> he or she is without mind, undeveloped |

These words serve to illustrate how many important concepts are built into the idea of mind. However for the purposes of ethics, wisdom and great intelligence become synonymous with virtue and altruism when the word ISUMAKUTUYOUMARIARLUK is used.

| <u>English</u> | <u>Inuktitut and Literal Translation</u> |
|----------------|---|
| Wise | ISUMA - KUTU - YOUMARIA - LUK <i>mind with extremely one</i> |
| Very wise | ISUMA - KUTU - YUK - YOUAMARIA - LUK <i>mind with very extremely one</i> |

However, the latter term 'very wise' is not often used in general conversation. The synonymity of wisdom and virtue is further brought out through folk definitions of Isumakutuyoumariarluq as follows:

Hugeak: "It refers to someone who has not said his or her thought for a long long period of time."

Ipiak: "Someone who is kind and generous. Whatever that person thinks is always right and never wrong."

Samutuk: "It has much the same meaning as Inuktsiaviemarearluk. Such a person never changes. They think correctly. Their thoughts are directed towards what is right and strong. I have found that people who get mad easily or who are not strong in their minds can not look directly at people."

Although the word Isumakutuyoumariarluk is not to be found in other ethnographic works very similar terms based on the root Isuma are quite common. Rasmussen² provides words for 'concentrate' and 'thoughtless' (isumalerpoq and isumalunerpoq) for the Mackenzie Inuit. Thibert³ gives sixteen different forms of issuma including a Padlarmiut (Southern Keewatin, close to Churchill) word issumadguyuk, meaning 'great thinker'. Webster and Zibell⁴ include six derivatives of isuma in their dictionary for the Inupiat of Alaska, including isumatturuk for 'is wise' and isumalluagiitchuk for 'is foolish, unwise'.

Briggs⁵ provides a detailed analysis of the concept of mind (ihuma) amongst the Inuit of the Backs River in the Central Canadian Arctic. These people live adjacent to the Netsilingmiut and the substitution of an 'h' for an 's' in nearly all of their vocabulary is merely dialectical. According to Briggs⁶ a person who has (or uses) ihuma is

cheerful but not giddy. He is patient in the face of difficulties and accepts unpleasant but uncontrollable events with calmness; and he does not sulk, scold, get annoyed, or attack others physically.

A person who lacks ihuma,

will be immoderately happy and playful and will laugh too easily. He will be easily upset and frightened, unable to distinguish between real physical danger and imaginary danger; and he will be easily angered or annoyed. He will cry, scold, and hit on slight provocation, but on the other hand, he will also forget his distresses quickly. His perception of his environment and his judgements concerning the future will be confused and unrealistic.

Briggs extends the folk definitions to elaborate on the nature and meaning of an individual having too little or too much mind⁸. Her understanding of an insufficiency of mind corresponds with the opinions of Kako mentioned earlier.

However, she considers ihumataaq to be fairly translated as 'a wise person', which it is not as the word does not contain any infixes that give it a superlative meaning. This term is sometimes used in a derogatory sense to denote someone who is 'too bossy', particularly when young bilingual Inuit are referring to white people. From this experience and also her failure to deal with terms that contain superlative infixes Briggs wrongly concludes that too much mind can be detrimental. What is bad is an inadequate control of mind, which of course would not be a problem for an extremely wise person. Gubser⁹ quite rightly points out that "thinking too much" can have a negative effect on a person's happiness. Anxiety and worrying are expressed by the word isumaguluyaktok for the Netsilingmiut and it contains no infixes denoting a superlative quantity of mind but simply a 'worried' mind. It concerns a question of a state of mind and not too much mind as Briggs¹⁰ interprets the case.

The central importance of thought, intelligence and wisdom in the Inuit culture is well summed up by Williamson when he observed,

it will be readily understood that the value system of the Eskimo people ascribes considerable importance to the capacity of the individual for thought....Only by the exercise of intelligence, alertness, and imagination was the simplest form of survival possible. It is a common observation among the Eskimo that the stupid do not survive. The Eskimo have remarkably well-developed powers of observation, and retention of visual memory, so that they are able to quickly discern changes in weather, which can come with great rapidity, the condition of ice, and the signs of wildlife upon which they depend. Nevertheless the Eskimo feel that the ability to observe is meaningless without the ability to analyze and interpret what is observed.

The Inuit ability for empirical observation and interpretation is more scientific than it is folkloric and it is the association of this ability with wisdom and virtue that makes much of Inuit ethics characteristically pragmatic.

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7. Ibid., p. 360.
8. Ibid., p. 362.
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10. Briggs, op. cit., p. 364.
11. Williamson, op. cit., p. 28-29.

Inuit Consequentialism

The pragmatic nature of Inuit ethics is well expressed by Jenness¹ with reference to his ethnographic work in the Central Arctic:

To the Copper Eskimo goodness means social goodness, that and no more. Whatever affects the welfare of the community as a whole is morally good or bad... The foremost virtues therefore are peacefulness and good-nature, courage and energy, patience and endurance, honesty, hospitality, charity towards both the old and the young, loyal co-operation with one's kin and providence in all questions relating to the food supply.

However, this simple pragmatism becomes sophisticated consequentialism in the hands of a wise man who is Isumakutuyoumariarluk.

In addressing the question of what happened to people who were not good Aupudluk explained "The people who weren't nice but not all bad wouldn't help others and would keep food to themselves. Such people would get left behind. But their lives didn't depend on it, they still got help in the end when they really needed it."

In pursuing the same point I asked Kako how mentally retarded people could be happy, kind and loving. He replied, "A person can only use their brain the way it is meant to be used when they have limited intelligence and that is the right way." On the corollary of the same question I asked Kako how some intelligent people could use their abilities for selfish ends such as greed. "A greedy person," he explained, "is not smart because some day a greedy person will end up with nothing and then that person will end up receiving no help."

This at first sounds very much like the Socratic ethical egoist position of "do yourselves concern yourselves with your own true self-interest"². Clearly Kako is suggesting that the greedy man is not acting in his true self-interest, that he is not taking an objective consequentialist approach to the ethical question of hoarding and sharing. But Kako would not consider self-interest and ethical egoism to offer a foundation for a prime directive.

As Kako pointed out to me when I began my studies with him he was helping me because I was supporting his daughter and granddaughter and his assistance and cooperation would further that objective.

In conclusion therefore Inuit consequentialism, which is so often characterized as pragmatism, must be viewed in the context of the Inuit *Summum Bonum* (3.5). The primary interest of the Inuit is the future generation. They use every part of their physical and intellectual abilities in the advancement of that end. Numerous, healthy children and grandchildren in a physical and social environment that enhance their well-being is what is good for the Inuit. Consequentialist ethics directed towards this good can be conceived as the Inuit prime directive: do what is best for the future generation.

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5. Some Questions of Inuit Ethics

5.1. Authority

If ethical decisions are to be made by consequential analysis, then it follows that authority in ethical matters should fall to those most able to be objective with regard to such questions. Individually speaking, it may be impossible to determine who most closely resembles an ideal observer. However, within the context of the Inuit hunting camp, the oldest members of the community have the greatest experience from which to make comparisons and draw conclusions. It therefore follows that authority should rest with the elders, and this is indeed the case as Williamson¹ explains:

In a society where experience in the task of survival is won only by a life of hazard, and the exercise of intelligence, ingenuity and wisdom--the guiding and guarding knowledge of people who by their years are thought to be well-endowed with such experience, the older people--are very highly valued and respected.

Aupudluk gives testimony to the nature of authority in her autobiography (Appendix 1, "My Values") when she explains, "My mother and father told me to obey and listen to any person who was older than myself, whether it was a man or woman. And I did. Whenever anyone older told me or taught me, whatever they had in their mind, I would listen to them carefully and if there was ever something to do I would follow their instructions and obey them immediately because in the Inuit way the older people are the head of life."

The strength of this authority is poignantly expressed in the observation of Geert van den Steenhoven² in regard to suicide among the elderly Netsilingmiut. (The underlining is his.)

More common, perhaps, was their suicide under conditions of miserable infirmity or sickness. Often unable to commit the suicide all by themselves, they would use their parental authority, ordering their son to attach the seal thongs to the walls or to push down their head in the loop. I know of several cases, where the children hesitated

out of pure and simple human attachment to their father or mother (rather than of fear for the police), but where the repeated and urged commands of the parents made them obey in the end.

However, this authority³ does not go beyond the extended family as he further explains⁴:

In short, the husband, i.e. the ihumatar of the nuclear family, though he is the autonomous authority within his own restricted jurisdiction of daily affairs, is ideally not sovereign but subject to the higher authority of his father, grandfather, oldest uncle or brother, whatever the case may be. Therefore, Netsilik formal anarchy does not stop at the last possible stage, e.g. the nuclear family, but at the next to last where a small number of nuclear families, closely related along the father's line, co-operates under recognized common leadership. The leadership should indeed be regarded as: "understood" and "recognized" rather than formally expressed....outside the family, formal anarchy prevails among these Eskimos. Again, there may at any given time be found individuals of general or specialized prestige whose influence is felt throughout the entire camp, or even band, but they have neither formal authority nor recognized jurisdiction; their stars rise and fall, and to follow them remains a matter of voluntary choice for everyone else.

This authority, and the accompanying responsibility, is felt in a very real way by the individuals to whom it befalls. In recent years the father of a close friend and in another case the father of a relative died. In both cases they were the oldest sons and they were left without grandparents or uncles alive in their community. On separate occasions when these middle-aged men were visiting me they specifically remarked on how much they had aged and how advanced in years they now considered themselves to be. All their younger brothers and sisters, nephews and nieces, now looked to them for guidance and willingly confirmed the observation that this oldest brother or uncle was indeed very much older.

However, the respect that goes with age is not entirely automatic. Steenhoven⁵ considers the observations of Jean Gabus amongst the Caribou Eskimos⁶ to be equally applicable to the Netsilingmiut.

Generally, the children will do the talking and make the propositions; the old father listens, and as soon as he feels that everything has been said, he gives his own opinion and decides. Thus is the

principle, for in certain camps the old father is not even consulted any more, because his control is not good and his sons far surpass him in energy and intelligence....It was only very rarely that I have met senile old men; and even if the physical effects of their age were clearly felt, I was struck by their valour and their lively spirit. But if the old man gives bad counsel, the repercussions of the latter may be serious, and he will lose his authority.

Thus, although the oldest male member of an extended family may be given authority by some sense of "birth right", he only maintains it and keeps it through wise counsel. This fluid concept of leadership is the extent to which the traditional Inuit authority is institutionalized. Weyer⁷ explains that this lack of any kind of chieftainship is for the most part universal among the Inuit from Alaska to Greenland.

Complementary to the Inuit premise that truth is to be found amongst the beliefs and statements of the elderly is the premise that peers share equality in such matters. Just as the aged members of the community are respected for the truths they possess, so too are peers respected for the truths they may possess. Williamson observes on this point that⁸

Equally (vis-a-vis their seniors) respect is accorded by Eskimo people to their peers, their doings and their opinions being rarely challenged, their shortcomings tactfully minimized and their good qualities strongly praised. Verbal self-denigration is habitual and frequent and often genuinely felt. In the intimate society of the Eskimo camp, each individual is allowed as much room for initiative and personal satisfaction as possible. Idiosyncracies, foibles, ugliness and all forms of individual unattractiveness are tolerated to an extreme degree.

In implementing a consequentialist ethic good and right become synonymous with objective truth. Given the respect afforded to experience within the extended family and given the respect afforded to individual freedom beyond it, the Inuit would seem to have created a social environment in which truth in ethical matters would have considerable opportunity to emerge and be heeded. Birket-Smith⁹ was clearly much impressed by this situation when he

wrote,

there are no chiefs, nobility, nor slaves. No clan system and no secret society lay bonds upon the initiative of the individual,... They know no government. Here, for once, is a society which is entirely built of that voluntary agreement of which Kropotkin dreamt. Subject to personal liability toward the inherited laws everyone enjoys full individual freedom.

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5.2 Distribution of Resources

Inuit ethics with regard to the distribution of resources are built on the already quoted insight of Kako that "A greedy person is not smart because a greedy person will end up with nothing some day and then he will end up with no help." The critical difference between the situation the Inuit found themselves in and the predicament of most other cultures was the certainty with which it could be stated that "a greedy person will end up with nothing some day". This fact necessitated communalism with regard to all resources. Not merely food, land and game but also an individual's willingness to contribute labour, effort and perhaps even patience were included. In this context behaviour that might be disruptive of the group's harmony, such as anger, could be regarded as a negative resource, for anger wastes energy just as carelessness or greed can waste food. This necessity for sharing and cooperation is explained by Williamson in environmental terms as follows:

Among a people particularly vulnerable to the vagaries of climate and game-availability, a high degree of social interdependency was a basic necessity. No hunter could hope to invariably bring home food for the family. Thus within the extended family, and in fact beyond, within the camp group, the practice of sharing is highly valued and firmly institutionalized.

In order to substantiate the thesis that communalism for the Inuit was an environmental necessity it may prove valuable to illustrate how their situation differs fundamentally from that of contemporary Western society. Garret Hardin² in The Tragedy of the Commons demonstrates why it is essential for resources to be legally regulated and not held in common. Using game theory he demonstrates the inevitable disastrous effects of ethical egoism illustrated with the case of shared grazing land. In Figure 1 "A" benefits greatly if he grazes one extra cow if all the "others" do not. This is represented numerically as +1 for "A". Due to a deterioration of the common

Figure 1

| | "Others" do not graze extra cow | "Others" graze extra cow |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| "A" grazes extra cow | +1 | 0 |
| "A" does not graze extra cow | Less than 1 | -1 |

Figure 2

| | "Others" share | "Others" do not share |
|---------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|
| "A" shares his catch | +1 | -1 |
| "A" does not share his catch | 0 | 0 |

grass land no-one would benefit if "A" and the "others" all graze an extra cow. This is a 0 benefit. If no-one including "others" and "A" graze extra cows then "A" benefits slightly but not as much as if he had grazed one more cow. This benefit to "A" is therefore less than 1. Finally, if "A" does not graze an extra cow and everyone else does "A" will be one cow down, i.e. -1. The best solution for everyone would be to graze no extra cows so that "A" and "others" would all obtain a "less than 1" advantage. But, ethical egoism being what it is, the only way to bring about this solution is to have regulations enacted that restrict the growth of grazing herds. If this is not done, it is argued, all "others" will think like "A's" and graze extra cows to everyone's disadvantage.

However, it is not necessary to regulate sharing amongst the Inuit, as they must share or very possibly die. This different situation is illustrated in Figure 2. Here if "A" shares his catch and "others" also share their catch then "A" will benefit due to an enhanced security of food supply (+1). If "A" shares and "others" do not then "A" clearly loses (-1) and no doubt would very soon stop sharing as he became hungry while his associates grew fat. If both "A" and "others" do not share no-one will benefit from the advantage of a secure food supply which represents a 0 benefit to "A". At first, in the very short term, "A" might benefit from not sharing his catch while the "others" did. But the others would find themselves in a disadvantaged -1 situation and would soon cut "A" out of their sharing. At this point "A" would again be in a 0 benefit situation.

This game plan is equally applicable to any resource be it food, hunting rights, or labour, such that if an individual shares he will enjoy the security of the community. If he does not share, the security of the community will be denied him. Weyer³ sums up these property mores regarding food resources

as follows:

These mores are basic; for they govern the apportioning of the primary essential to life, sustenance. Naturally, they owe their distinctive character to the unusual life-conditions upon which they have developed.

(1) Hunting grounds, or rather the privilege of hunting on them, is a communal right, except in rather rare instances.

(2) The hunter or hunters almost always have the preferential share in the game secured, but part of each catch is generally divided among the community or among those present at the apportioning.

(3) Stored provisions are normally the property of the family or household; but in time of scarcity there is a tendency toward communalism. Hospitality is stressed under all circumstances.

However, Birket-Smith⁴ quite rightly adds to this unwritten "Inuit Constitution" the principle that "No-one may be excused from hunting except in the case of bodily infirmity". This properly recognizes labour as a common resource.

In their situation sharing, benevolence, produces the greatest rewards for the Inuit. It brings security of food supply in a hostile environment where there can be no other rational choice. In the Arctic it is not sufficient to "do unto others as you would have them do unto you"; it is essential to survival that an Inuk "does unto others as he needs to have them do unto him". Such people are necessarily Inutsiavumarrearluk, kind and generous, in a very practical and pragmatic way.

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Suicide, Invalidicide and Senilicide

Williamson correctly observes that¹:

Suicide, or voluntary death, or assisted suicide, whereby an old and sick person is helped to kill himself, (as occurred in Igloodik in the early 1960's)--do not carry the moral stigma which is known in Christian society, because of the religious conviction that death is merely a transcendancy whereby the person simply passes out of a temporary vehicle, the body of the time.

This is in keeping with the Inuit metaphysical beliefs in reincarnation, which help to provide a rationale for suicide when it was a required altruistic act. Steenhoven notes from his work amongst the Netsilingmiut that

As regards abandonment, it is known that in times of starvation it may be imperative to leave infirm parents behind, if longer journeys have to be made in search of game. With only a few dogs available, one had to be able either to pull or at least to keep up with a sled by walking. I have no doubt that a hunter who had in this way to abandon his old parent(s) by departing to other hunting grounds with his wife and children, would normally return to the former, if he had succeeded in obtaining game in time and if he had the dogs to return. It is also known that the old and infirm who feel that they have become, under the circumstances, too much of an unproductive burden to their children, sometimes followed a standing tradition by causing their own abandonment, for instance, letting themselves slide from the sled, thus freezing to death.

On the ethics of suicide Kako clearly discriminates between altruistic and egoistic suicide, the latter in his view being quite wrong. "The people who commit suicide are often those who lack intelligence. They don't think of the future, only the present. They don't consider their families and relatives. However, those who do not have a family, relatives or friends have no future. Therefore such people do have a reason to kill themselves. Some old people could be killed because they made a request to be helped with their suicide. Or they would be left behind so that their children could get to a hunting ground."

Weyer³ substantiates the practice of suicide, invalidicide and senilicide amongst the Inuit from Alaska to Greenland with approximately 25 references. These include anthropologists and explorers namely Stefansson,

Ray, Jenness, Rasmussen, Birket-Smith, Boas, Mathiassen, Bilby, Turner, Hawks, Holm and Nansen. In all the cases quoted the people involved in the act and the authors reporting the event perceive the suicide or assisted suicide as justifiable and unselfish. However, in more recent times, the influence of the R.C.M.P. and missionaries sometimes confused what for the Inuit was a simple and straightforward problem as Aupudluk illustrates from her experience. "The old lady couldn't kill herself because she didn't have sufficient strength. She was very small and didn't weigh much. When her husband died her relatives treated her badly, she used to eat her own feces and drink her own urine. She asked to be left behind many times but her relatives wouldn't just let the old woman die. They were scared of the R.C.M.P. and there was no hospital then." Of course this situation doesn't occur now since the introduction of pensions, welfare and health care. But if this problem was at one time confused for the Inuit it did at the same time create ethical difficulties for the representatives of the Church. A Catholic priest who had strong views about the wrongness of suicide once explained to me that he knew of five suicides which he found difficult to deal with as they involved old people killing themselves in order to provide more food for their children.

Balikci⁴ in The Netsilik Eskimo: Adoptive Processes, is of the opinion that such suicides are beneficial and enhance future survival:

Furthermore, suicide in crisis situations, invalidicide and senilicide were additional responses to harsh pressures (Balikci, 1960). We may consider these forms of demographic controls as adaptive, in the sense that unproductive members of the family were eliminated, the size of the family adjusted to the capacity of the provider, and the survival chances of future hunters were maximized.

However, in his earlier work, Suicide Behaviour Among the Netsilik Eskimos⁵, he concludes that Netsilik suicide belongs to the egoistic type. I do not agree with this thesis, but rather share the views of Kako, Williamson, Weyer and the authors he refers to. It is therefore necessary to briefly look at some

of Balikci's arguments and criticize them.

Firstly, on a methodological point, Balikci was assisted by Rev. Frans Van de Velde⁶ who "help(ed) in securing some of the data". Priests, in my experience, generally have a deep and sophisticated understanding of native religions. However, although they openly discuss such subjects with their native parishioners they really discuss it outside their Church. For this reason I believe A. R. Gualtieri⁷ came to the wrong conclusion that missionaries held the "perception that prior to their arrival there had been little or no religion among the Dene and Inuit" when he interviewed priests on this subject, because his informants simply were not candid with him.

It is most probably due to this methodological difficulty that Balikci fails to identify the belief in the name/soul and its importance as the religious foundation for the integration of Netsilingmiut society. Thus Balikci wrongly comes to the conclusion that

Following the arrival of a Catholic missionary in 1936, these Eskimos collectively converted to Christianity....In the field of religious beliefs and practices the consequences of this conversion were far-reaching. In 1959⁸ the younger generation was largely ignorant of the ancient beliefs.

The overwhelmed individual seems *no longer related* to his wider social milieu, to his people. It is precisely this *lack of wider relatedness* that we have to understand.⁹

To sum up, except for certain group elaborations resulting from technological and ecological necessities, Netsilik society presents a very loose form of social integration. The absence of formal government, priestly organization, territorial administration, formalized means of social control, and unilinear kinship groupings point essentially to a family level of social integration.¹⁰

Admitting Durkheim's generalization that suicide varies inversely with the degree of integration of religious, domestic and political societies, we can consider Netsilik suicide as belonging to the egoistic type of suicide.¹¹

Another major difficulty with his thesis is in relying on etic interpretations of suicide causes in a cross-cultural situation¹².

In our search for meaningful criteria for classifying the suicide cases we followed Durkheim's approach and paid little attention to the multiplicity of immediate causes of suicide as outlined by our informants.

Certainly Kako would consider the 6¹³ cases of suicide due to marital dissatisfaction as egoistic. But not the 4 cases of senilicide or the 16 cases of invalidicide, or most of the 20 cases of suicide where a near relative died. To understand this very different interpretation it is necessary to take into account the high priority given by the Inuit to the future generation. There is little or no dispute by Balikci over the interpretation of the 4 cases of senilicide, but in the case of invalidicide even the most valued members of the community, the productive hunters, are an intolerable burden to their families when incapacitated.

At first a hunter who was taken ill would be given food for himself and his family by those with whom he shared his catch when he was healthy. But this one-way giving could not continue forever, such that when his friends started to "cut him off" then it would be in the best interests of his wife and children for him to die. Once dead his children would be adopted and would probably stay with their mother if she found a new husband or was taken on as a second wife. Probably such arrangements would be made to everyone's mutual satisfaction before the incapacitated hunter killed himself.

In the case of the death of a near relative, which Balikci notes to be usually a descendant, similar logic applies. Normally the head of a large family would not be driven to suicide by the loss of a son. But if a parent lost their only son and particularly if they were an only parent then, as Kako suggests, "they would have no future". In Netsilik society wives go to the households of their husbands, in return for which the first-born son goes to the wife's parents. If the husband died the wife and her children would go

back to the wife's parents or to a new marriage. But the parents of the husband, if he were an only son, would have nowhere to go. Each family needs as many hunters as possible but they only require one matriarch and patriarch. These elderly people would therefore be redundant in a brother's or sister's household. They might not be overly advanced in years but if they were past the age of being able to produce or adopt and raise more sons, then their practical value would terminate. In such a situation they would only be a drain on the food supply of whomever they lived with, at which point their deaths would contribute more to the future generation than their lives.

Given the above economic interpretation of suicide and the integrative power of the name/soul concept the Durkheimian classification of "altruistic type" would seem more appropriate than the "egoistic type" with regard to the Netsilingmiut and probably most Inuit. This is in keeping with the Durkheimian¹³ thesis and is a rejection of Balikci's rejection of that thesis¹⁴.

References and Notes

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5.4 Female Infanticide

The Arctic environment is so actively hostile to life the Inuit find they must not only adapt their technology for hunting, clothing and shelter to the needs of survival but they must also tailor their social relationships and beliefs to the same needs. In the traditional culture the most unfortunate of these adaptations was perhaps the necessity of killing approximately 50% of all baby girls.

This fact has been documented by a number of anthropologists and the figures in Figure 1, collected by Weyer¹, show the phenomenon to be a common feature across Arctic North America. However, the figures in Figure 2 show how the situation of more boys than girls is turned around in the adult population to give more women than men. This is due to female infanticides in the first place and a subsequent high mortality rate amongst young male hunters inexperienced in the techniques of Arctic survival. Weyer² tells us that

The death rate among young men is especially high; within the period dealt with by Bertelsen, proportionally four and a half times as many men of the age group thirty to thirty-five died as did within the same age-group in Denmark. This enormous rate of mortality among younger men is due primarily to the dangers of their hunting activities. Drowning in kayaks is the fate of many. In South Greenland in 1889 the death rate among males from this cause alone was 9.3 per thousand male population, or almost as high as the death rate from all causes in the United States in recent years.

In contemporary times the bringing of the Inuit community at large under the wing of a welfare state has removed the need for female infanticide. In spite of this there is still a higher mortality rate amongst young men drowning and freezing than young women. During my field work in the Arctic this past summer I was requested to recover the body of a nine-year-old boy who was my wife's nephew. If I reflect on this matter I cannot remember a summer or winter

when some young man has not died from a hunting accident in the community where I was living during the ten years I spent in the Arctic. This situation brings about an imbalance in the contemporary population, although it is relieved in part by the fact that relatively few Inuit men marry non-Inuit women while a comparatively large number of Inuit women marry non-Inuit men.

The Inuit metaphysics of reincarnation produce a situation in which the qualities of personhood are synonymous with the name. Consequently in traditional times the fetus was generally named after birth so that humans did not receive the sanctity of personhood until their sex was known. Names, and with it sanctity and personhood, were normally given by the oldest and most senior relatives. When a child was born, therefore, the grandparents generally had the authority of life and death over the baby. Providing no extraordinary circumstances such as acute starvation prevailed the infant would be promptly named if it was a boy. However, it would only receive a name if it was a girl under the most favourable conditions, such as plenty of food, a promise of future marriage, or a general surfeit of boys in that particular family group. In more recent times, now that female infanticide is no longer a required practice, naming is done during pregnancy so that sanctity and personhood is given to the fetus before the sex is known.

In spite of the appearance of a certain stoic cruelty in these matters it should be understood that the event of female infanticide was never passed without considerable emotional difficulty. Such deaths were perceived as necessary, "they could not be helped", but the accompanying distress, particularly for the mother, was not perceived as in any sense good. My mother-in-law had thirteen children of which five are living. The grandparents would not give her first daughter by her third and present husband a name. The parents wanted to keep

the child but would not go openly against the wishes of the older relatives and therefore could not give the baby a name themselves. Consequently the infant existed without sanctity and personhood for several months, until an unrelated elderly friend took pity on my mother-in-law and gave the infant a name. Unfortunately, that girl died when she was six but because she was loved so much her name was given to my wife when she was born.

Kako explains, "Infanticide was mostly for the baby girls when there were too many girls and not enough boys. Those infants didn't have names. Sometimes they were named before birth but naming during delivery was most popular. Nowadays the names are often given during pregnancy."

Balikci, in his paper Female Infanticide on the Arctic Coast, reaches essentially the same conclusions as myself, i.e., the practice is an adaptation to the harsh environment. However, he also concludes that it is to some degree chauvinistic and arbitrary³:

Female infanticide is thus in harmony with the image of the ideal Netsilik personality. Female infanticide works flexibly. It is not governed by a rigid social rule; decisions to kill seem to be made on an ad hoc basis within the family.

This opinion would not be supported by the Inuit; it is an etic perspective. It is also not compatible with Inuit metaphysics and consequentialism. Inuit proper names and pronouns are devoid of sex gender and while decisions may be taken quickly they are, by the authority of age, founded on the greatest experience. The "ideal Netsilik personality" has nothing to do with being a man or woman, but is concerned rather with being human, Inutsiavamariarluk.⁴ Balikci is not entirely alone in his views about the unsophisticated nature of female infanticide; Weyer writes⁵:

Possibly it should not be called a policy, inasmuch as there is very little deliberate and purposeful group direction of group destiny. If there is shown any approach toward a philosophy it is merely a blunt pragmatism.

This opinion is shared by many anthropologists⁵ with perhaps the notable exception of Williamson. I do not consider there to be anything "blunt" about Kako's understanding of the true best interests of the greedy man. Such pragmatism is consequentialism when handled by the wise man who is Isumakutumavearluk.

Figure 1

Population Statistics

Proportion according to sex

Children

| <u>Location or Tribe</u> | <u>No. of Girls</u> | <u>No. of Boys</u> | <u>Girls per 100 Boys</u> |
|--|-------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Cape Prince of Wales, Alaska | 46 | 50 | 92 |
| Cape Smyth, Alaska | 14 | 27 | 52 |
| Bernard Harbour (Dolphin and Union Strait) | 18 | 21 | 86 |
| Netsilik Eskimos (1902) | 66 | 138 | 48 |
| Sinamiut (Boothia Peninsula) (1902) | 7 | 12 | 58 |
| Sauniktumiut (south and west of Chesterfield Inlet) (1902) | 33 | 41 | 80 |
| Qaernermiut (Barren Grounds) | 11 | 24 | 46 |
| Coast Padlimiut (Barren Grounds) | 26 | 31 | 84 |
| Interior Padlimiut (Barren Grounds) | 20 | 28 | 71 |
| Hauneqtormiut (Barren Grounds) | 10 | 13 | 77 |
| Harvaqtormiut (Barren Grounds) | 15 | 23 | 65 |
| Kinipetu (Qaernermiut) (Barren Grounds) | 27 | 38 | 71 |
| Aivilik Eskimos (northwest coast of Huson Bay) | 15 | 27 | 56 |
| North Greenland exclusive of Thule (1921) | 773 | 803 | 96* |
| South Greenland | 1106 | 1058 | 104* |
| East Greenland | 117 | 118 | 99* |
| East Greenland | 128 | 99 | 129 |

*Age group 0-9 years

Figure 2
Population Statistics
Proportion according to sex

| <u>Location or Tribe</u> | <u>No. of Females</u> | <u>No. of Males</u> | <u>Females per 100 Males</u> |
|--|-----------------------|---------------------|------------------------------|
| Cape Prince of Wales, Alaska | 29 | 30 | 97 |
| Cape Smyth, Alaska | 52 | 45 | 116 |
| Bernard Harbour (Dolphin and Union Strait) | 42 | 46 | 91 |
| Cape Bexley (Dolphin and Union Strait) | 10 | 19 | 53 |
| Netsilik Eskimos (Boothia Isthmus) (1902) | 123 | 119 | 103 |
| Sinamiut (Boothia Isthmus) (1902) | 13 | 13 | 100 |
| Sauniktumiut (south and west of Chesterfield Inlet) (1902) | 58 | 46 | 126 |
| Qaernermiut (Barren Grounds) | 30 | 25 | 120 |
| Coast Padlimiut (Barren Grounds) | 28 | 22 | 127 |
| Interior Padlimiut (Barren Grounds) | 31 | 25 | 124 |
| Hauneqtormiut (Barren Grounds) | 18 | 13 | 129 |
| Harvaqtormiut (Barren Grounds) | 21 | 17 | 123 |
| Kinipetu (Qaernermiut) (Chesterfield Inlet) | 46 | 35 | 131 |
| Aivilik Eskimos (northwest coast of Hudson Bay) | 34 | 26 | 131 |
| Iglulik Eskimos (north of Hudson Bay) | 161 | 146 | 110 |
| Baffin Island | 119 | 111 | 107 |
| North Greenland exclusive of Thule (1921) | 2321 | 2018 | 115* |
| South Greenland (1921) | 2801 | 2421 | 116* |
| East Greenland (1921) | 234 | 211 | 111* |
| East Greenland (1921) | 175 | 146 | 120 |

*10 years and over

References and Notes

1. Weyer, E. M. The Eskimos: Their environment and folkways. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1932, p. 134-135.
2. Ibid., p. 127-128.
3. Balikci, A. Female infanticide on the Arctic coast. Man, 1967, 2, 615-625.
4. Weyer, op. cit., p. 131-132.
5. Milton Freeman in A Social and Ecologic Analysis of Systematic Female Infanticide Among the Netsilik Eskimos, American Anthropologist, Vol. 73, 1971, p. 1017, reviews much of the work done in this area and comes to the conclusion that infanticide is to be explained by an understanding of sex roles within the culture. However like the anthropologistshe builds his arguments on, he fails to take into account a cognitive understanding of Inuit consequentialism and concepts of being human.

6. Conclusion

A practice in a culture other than our own may appear strange to us while that same practice is considered the norm to the people who uphold it. Conversely a similar practice in our own culture will appear equally unusual to the members of the culture under examination. The problem for the anthropologist is to overcome such divergent perspectives by understanding the underlying principles that create and shape cultural phenomena. In this thesis the phenomenon under examination is Inuit ethics. Thus it follows that if an explanation can be offered that rationalizes cultural divergencies as they appear here then that explanation will be making a statement about the underlying principles of ethics. Such principles are not merely the concern of the anthropologist but also the ethicist and moral philosopher. As stated in the Introduction it is beyond the scope of this thesis to describe or defend a particular ethical theory, although it is hoped that the conclusions made here might lend support to the position held by Campbell¹.

Confronted with the kinds of divergent ethics described here, many anthropologists and philosophers have opted for some form of ethical relativism. In her critique of Turnbull's Mountain People Christine Battersby² concludes,

Turnbull is able to discover non-moral society only because he starts out with a fairly rigid conception of what a moral society should be like. Hence Turnbull's 'lesson for humanity' is only a genuine lesson if we accept that Turnbull's criteria for morality are the correct criteria....There seems to be a problem not simply with the definition of the term 'morality'; there also seems to be a problem with examples of 'morality'. Bearing this in mind, it would seem to be over-optimistic of philosophers to expect to provide a generally accepted list of necessary and sufficient conditions which have to be satisfied in order to class a rule, an action, or a society as 'moral'. It would seem useful to spell out some of the more commonly

accepted paradigms of morality-- particularly those used by anthropologists in 'reporting' on other cultures. But to hope to adjudicate between these conflicting paradigms, and say that one is correct and another incorrect, would seem a hopeless task.

Surrendering to the "hopeless task" would seem to be accepting the impossibility of any moral absolutes. However, if as I suggested the task of the anthropologist is to look for underlying principles that create and shape cultural phenomena, relativism could be avoided.

One common denominator in many of these discussions is the question of inviolability and where lines of inviolability are drawn between creation, life, human life, moral agents, and their dependent group. The necessities of a group's best interests have often been the deciding factor in how those lines are drawn and ideologies have sometimes been subservient to those needs. In the Inuit culture the fetus or near born is inviolability when it is given a name. This name was metaphysically considered to be a person's spirit so that the passing on of the name provided the means for reincarnation. When female infanticide was practised naming was done at birth so that a baby need not be given inviolability through a reincarnation if the child was to be allowed to perish. However, in recent times, naming is done during pregnancy so that the inviolability of the Inuit fetus has moved backwards from time of birth to middle of pregnancy. This change in metaphysics is coincidental with the current abandonment of systematic female infanticide.

Ethnocentricity, relativism and the problems of ethical and moral absolutes, are all parts of a debate that is at least as old as Sophism. If Inuit ethics can offer anything towards the resolution of this question such an insight will most likely come from what is particularly unique to the Inuit situation, namely, the ever-present necessities of survival. In the debate over reducing ethics to sociobiology it is perhaps instructive

to observe that the biological wishes of the mother in cases of female infanticide are overridden by culturally made decisions. Further, these decisions are not based on rules or ritual but are empirical and therefore flexible to the needs of the particular situation. The Inuit have lived, developed a culture and produced an ethics under the daily threat of mass starvation and possible extinction. Such a prospect is now considered a part of the contemporary ethos since man has acquired the ability to bring about his own destruction. This situation has stimulated a proliferation of literature that purports to offer social and ethical prescriptions that can best thwart the impending demise of the human race. Perhaps not untypical of such views are those expressed here by Quine: ³

One thinks also of unborn generations. Insofar as our moral standards were shaped by evolution for fostering the survival of the race, a concern for the unborn was assured. One then proceeds, as one will, to systematize and minimize one's ethical axioms by reducing some casually to others. This effort at system-building leads to the formulation and scrutiny of principles, and one is then taken aback by the seeming absurdity of respecting the interests of nonexistent people: of unactualized possibilities. This counter-revolutionary bit of moral rationalization is welcome as it touches population control, since the blind drive to mass procreation is now so counter-productive. But the gratification is short-lived, for the same rationalization would seem to condone a despoiling of the environment for the exclusive convenience of people now living.

It need not. A formulation is ready to hand which sustains the moral values that favour limiting the population while still safeguarding the environment. Namely, it is a matter of respecting the future interests of people now unborn, but only of future actual people. We recognize no present unactualized possibilities.

The Inuit have maintained a culture for thousands of years on the principle of the priority of the future generation. The idea is not new of just "ready to hand". We can take comfort in the knowledge that it is a well-tested prime directive, successful under the most adverse conditions.

References

1. Campbell, D. T. On the conflicts between biological and social evolution and between psychology and moral tradition. American Psychologist, 1975, 30(12).
2. Battersby, C. Morality and the Ik. Philosophy, 1978, 53, p. 212, 214.
3. Quine, W. V. On the nature of moral values. In A. I. Goldman & J. Kim (Eds.), Values and morals, Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel Publishing, p. 45.