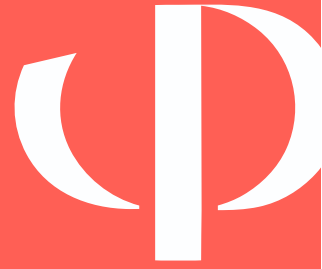


Native American and Indigenous Philosophy



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11. Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint: Morality, Respect, and Accountability*, 9.
12. Darwall, "Moral Obligation: Form and Substance," 42.
13. This is not absolute, of course—children do sometimes have standing, depending on the context. I do not want to endorse this style of parenting here, either. I only use this example as one with which most readers will be familiar.
14. Darwall, "Moral Obligation," 46–47.
15. Darwall, "Moral Obligation," 47.
16. Darwall, "Moral Obligation," 47.
17. Darwall, "Moral Obligation," 47.
18. Darwall, "Moral Obligation," 9.
19. That is, between two people. In this context, this means it's both direct and singular. I take that to be the basic case of both kinship and obligation, here.
20. I am not a linguist nor a philosopher of language, but I want to leave space here because it seems to me like complex communication between other species could be counted as language, at least in some cases—I'm thinking here of orcas, who have complex cultures and pass down information from one generation to another, apparently through some means other than genetics.
21. Darwall, "Moral Obligation," 70.
22. This may be even more liberal than Darwall would prefer—it seems that reactive attitudes might require more recognizably human cognitive capacities than I indicate here. If that's so, then his view is even more restrictive, and reactive attitudes are clearly not going to solve the anthropocentrism problem. In this section, I grant perhaps too relaxed a picture of the capacities needed for reactive attitudes, yet I think even that relaxed picture fails.
23. Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*, 195.
24. Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*, 182–83.
25. Marshall Sahlins, *What Kinship Is—and Is Not*, 2.
26. Sahlins, *What Kinship Is—and Is Not*, 2.
27. Sahlins, *What Kinship Is—and Is Not*, 1, 62.
28. Macdougall, *One of the Family*, 132.
29. Campbell, "We Need to Return to the Principles of Wahkotowin," 5.
30. Macdougall, *One of the Family*, 132.

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"Surely, you don't mean rocks": Indigenous Kinship Ethics, Moral Responsibility, and So-Called 'Natural Objects'

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Mino-Mnaamodzawin [living well] considers the critical importance of mutually respectful and beneficial relationships among not only peoples but all our relations, which includes all living things and many entities not considered by Western society as living, such as water, rocks, and Earth itself.¹

Traditionally, one of the most important ways to maintain relations and the socio-cosmic order has been the practice of honoring various *siedis* with gifts. *Siedis* are sites of thanking for the abundance of the land and giving back to various spirits that guard certain activities or spheres of life. Commonly they are rocks in their natural locations which sometimes are of unusual shape and color.²

1. INTRODUCTION

"Surely, you don't mean rocks?"—I have been asked this question more than a dozen times during philosophy presentations on moral responsibility within the ethical framework of Indigenous Kinship Ethics. As the opening epigraph from Deborah McGregor (Anishinaabe) outlines, *living well* in Indigenous Kinship Ethics requires moral consideration of other-than-human animals and so-called "natural objects,"³ such as water and rocks. This moral maxim is culturally familiar to me as someone who is a part of both my mother's Sámi culture as well as my father's Irish culture where consideration of so-called "natural objects," including and especially rocks, is practiced in everyday contemporary life, such as Sámi *siedis* featured in the second epigraph from Rauna Kuokkanen (Sámi). However, via the "surely, you don't mean rocks?" question raised unremittingly at philosophy conferences, I have realized the extent of the gulf in misunderstanding by the field of philosophy when it comes to moral responsibility toward so-called "natural objects."

To be clear: I *do* mean rocks. Or more specifically, I mean to clarify that the relation-measure in Kinship Ethics generates moral responsibility toward all members of the moral community (anything in relation to any other thing),

including human-animals, other-than-human-animals, and so-called “natural objects” such as trees, water, and rocks. While my argument in this paper can stand for any so-called “natural object,” I focus on rocks for two reasons: first, because rocks represent the largest misunderstanding in philosophy when it comes to moral responsibility, or in other words, because rocks are the *hardest sell*, and second, because of my own cultural familiarity with the moral value of rocks. In short, the gulf between what I know to be true and what is reasonably acceptable to argue in philosophy is the widest when considering rocks. I aim to speak to that gulf here.

Therefore, my focus in this paper is rocks. When I say rocks, I mean the solid mineral material that forms parts of the earth’s surface, otherwise known as pebbles, boulders, or a mountain range. Specifically, my aim in this paper is to detail the kind of moral responsibilities that humans have toward rocks within the ethical framework of Indigenous Kinship Ethics. This responsibility is complex and contextual—like all moral responsibility—but complexity is not a compelling argument to dismiss ethical obligation. To do this work, I provide a brief overview on Kinship Ethics and the relation-measure in Section 2. In Section 3, I detail the pluralistic moral responsibilities that human agents have to so-called “natural objects” such as rocks, including an example of Sámi *siedi* gifting practices in Section 3.1. In Section 3.2, I expand the conversation on the moral responsibilities that so-called “natural objects,” such as rocks, have toward human agents through a model I refer to as *two tiers of humility*. Finally, in Section 4, I connect the rock-responsibility view presented in this paper to contemporary moral issues in Indigenous Environmental Justice.

2. THE RELATION-MEASURE IN KINSHIP ETHICS

Kinship Ethics is a family of ethical theories united by the central role kinship plays in determining right action. Indigenous Kinship Ethics is one variety of theory within the broader Kinship Ethics orientation which specifically engages Indigenous conceptions of kinship as a guide for right action.⁴ Indigenous conceptions of kinship provide ethical guidance derived from origins distinct from kinship conceptions rooted in the queer relationality of Queer Kinship Ethics, for example, or caretaking in Feminist Care Ethics. When I refer to the *relation-measure* of Kinship Ethics, I mean the standard for moral community membership and with that, moral responsibility, based on relatedness. The relation-measure asks: Is a thing/being/entity in relation to any other things/being/entity? If the answer is yes, the thing/being/entity in question has moral value and is a member of the moral community due to its relatedness.

The moral community is a network of moral responsibility. I take being a member of the moral community to mean that I have moral responsibilities toward those other members, and that those other members have moral responsibilities toward me. While philosophers have accepted moral responsibilities toward animals (for example, to disavow animal cruelty) as increasingly reasonable over the past fifty years, it is still puzzling for many philosophers to think about human agents having moral responsibility to so-called natural objects, such as trees, water, and rocks.⁵ It is further puzzling to think about trees, water, and rocks

having moral responsibilities toward human agents. Questions abound. For example, Do I have a responsibility to all rocks, all trees, all water? Is the moral responsibility I have to a tree identical to the responsibility I have to my human family member? How do I know if a rock is fulfilling its moral responsibility to me? In the following Sections 3–3.2, I begin to answer these questions by honing in on what reciprocal moral responsibilities between rocks and human agents look like.

3. A HUMAN AGENT’S MORAL RESPONSIBILITY TO ROCKS

Once I started focusing specifically on rocks two years ago, friends and colleagues sending bits of “rock theory” my way. A dear friend and writer, Adam Swanson, emailed me sections of Ticht Nahn Han’s reflections on the Diamond Sutra in Buddhism, which details rocks as “beings without thought” and “beings not totally without thought,” as well as what respectful relations look like with these beings. My sister-in-law Lauren sent me a text that read “That person is my rock—as a common saying to express how supportive and reliable someone is!” Patricia Johnson-Castle (Inuit), a colleague and friend from the University of Minnesota’s workshop for American Indian and Indigenous Studies, pointed out the central feature of rocks in the 2022 academy-award winning film “Everything Everywhere All At Once” when another workshop member had a still from the film with the subtitled dialogue “Be a rock” as their Zoom background. Once I began to pay attention, it was apparent that information on the moral value of rocks was everywhere. In this section, I explicate what it means to fulfill or not fulfill the moral responsibilities human agents have toward rocks in Indigenous Kinship Ethics.

The moral responsibilities human agents have toward rocks is grounded by where the responsibility is derived from—relationality. Moral community membership and moral value derived from relatedness is based on a metaphysical understanding of the connection of all things. Patty Krawec (Lac Seul First Nation Anishinaabe) illustrates one way of thinking about the connection between rocks and the human when she contends: “When I say that the land is my ancestor, that is a scientific statement. . . . Stones are also our relatives. Whatever I eat has taken up nutrients from the ground, including minerals, and the land itself becomes part of me.”⁶ Krawec offers one micro example of a connection between rocks and humans through the food chain as a way to illustrate the many and ultimate connections between all entities. It is this network of connection which grounds reciprocal moral responsibility and provides both evaluative and prescriptive guidance on how to act rightly (and wrongly) toward rocks.

McGregor writes about the Anishinaabek concept of *mino-mnaamodzawin*, loosely translated from the eastern dialect Anishinaabe language as ‘living well with the world.’ McGregor details *mino-mnaamodzawin* as “encompass[ing] the well-being of other ‘persons’ . . . although there are many paths to achieving it (Borrows 2016:6).”⁷ When McGregor clarifies that “there are many paths to achieving” living well, she affirms Indigenous Kinship Ethics as a moral pluralism. That is to say that there is one clear wrong but

many ways to do right by rocks, depending on who you are, which rocks we are talking about, the cultural context, the land upon which these decisions are being made, etc. The wrong in Indigenous Kinship Ethics is violating the relationality that imbues all life with meaning. Therefore, I commit a moral wrong against rocks when I violate the dignity of or fracture reciprocity between these entities and myself, or between those entities and other entities. Due to the morally pluralistic nature of Indigenous Kinship Ethics, committing wrongs (or *not* living well) according to Indigenous Kinship Ethics is altogether a clearer task than living well and doing rightly. Anything that violates reciprocity through excessive taking such as acts of subjugation or patterns of exploitation violates a criterion of living well in Indigenous Kinship Ethics.

What it looks like to positively live well and act rightly by rocks in Indigenous Kinship Ethics is more complex. Looking again to McGregor, living well in Indigenous Ethics means to “consider the critical importance of mutually respectful and beneficial relationships among not only peoples but all our relations” through reciprocity which “continually strive[s] for balance.”⁸ In practice, reciprocity and actions which reflect consideration for an entity’s dignity will look differently according to context. Philosopher Brian Burkart (Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma) refers to this contextual application of living well in Indigenous Kinship Ethics as *Land-Based Locality*.

Burkhart maintains that a universalizing way for a thing-in-relation to live well is through doing and meaning making according to the specific context of a particular relation with the land. There are multiple ways to live well and act rightly, and those ways to live well according to one’s relations are understood only through getting to know those relations, including and especially the relation a moral agent has to land. Indigenous Kinship Ethics includes a universalizable wrong of exploitation and fracturing relational reciprocity; however, the normative right in Indigenous Kinship Ethics is only universalized in specificity to one’s land-based locality. McGregor’s ways of living out *mino-mnaamodzawin* is grounded in Anishinaabe land and culture. My own specific ways of living well will depend on the lands and cultures of both my Sámi and Irish ancestors, as well as looking to the leadership of the Dakota and Anishinaabe peoples upon whose land I currently reside/occupy in what is called Minnesota.

If living well and doing right by rocks can only be practiced in land-based specificity, how does a human agent go about discovering what one’s own contextually right action looks like? I can offer two instructions for discovering what living well looks like in practice by looking to scholars of Indigenous Kinship Ethics such as McGregor (2018), Burkhart (2018), Krawec (2022), Wildcat (2009), Yunkaporta (2020) and Yazzie and Baldy (2018). First, to practice “living well” in land-based locality means the following:

- 1) paying attention to one’s relations, and
- 2) investing in one’s relations/divesting from exploitation.

Paying attention is hard work. I like the word choice of “paying” in the phrase “paying attention” as a reminder that attention is a form of resource and currency.⁹ To whom and what I pay attention are the relations in which I invest. I can pay attention to who I am, where I come from, the land upon which I live, the history of that land and the Indigenous peoples who are the traditional and contemporary stewards, and the many ways that I am bound up in relations. It follows that the more I know about my next-door neighbors, for example (what they like, dislike, what is important to them, who counts as family), the better neighbor I will be to them. If I know that their three grandchildren spend the night every other Thursday, then I can consider that schedule when planning my next raucous backyard party as a way to show respect and care for both the relationship I have with my next-door neighbors and the relationships my neighbors have with their children and grandchildren. Paying attention as a way to be a better neighbor, or relative, works the same way for rocks.

There is a third and essential component of living well in land-based locality: community. The work of paying attention and the work of investing in relations and divesting from (even complicit) participation in exploitation and marginalization is hard work that cannot be done alone. So to practice “living well” *well* in land-based locality means the following:

- 1) Paying attention to one’s relations,
- 2) Investing in one’s relations/divesting from exploitation, and
- 3) Growing this ongoing work in community.

One single human agent cannot hold all perspectives on the many relations of this world. We need to do this work of attention with others to help us check for opportunities to pay attention that we might have missed or help support us in accountability processes as we work to divest from exploitation.

Anthropologist and friend Esther Liu recommended Elizabeth Povanelli’s 2021 *In Between Gaia and Ground* as an example of paying close attention to rocks. I find the shift in perspective striking in this passage and here I quote Povanelli at length:

One can also see how skin—or perhaps at this point, we can say a sack that holds something that operates in relation to itself—also provides a crucial imaginary for the difference between organic skin and rock surfaces. Skins, or sacks, are protective covers; surfaces are simply the place where this comes to an end. This difference ramifies into subsequent ones like the legalities of the difference between murder (possible with human life), killing (with animal life), and destruction (inorganic objects). Without these insides or outsides, murder, killing, and destruction weave into and out of each other. If a rock is a rock qua rock or the soil is soil qua soil, then from its point of view humans are merely a moment on the

journey and travels of minerals. In producing us, they maintain themselves insofar as we will return to their condition. In other words, the assertion that the self-repair of life has a different status than the inert passivity of nonlife allows the latter to be treated very differently than the former. But rocks use gravity to sack themselves, or gravity sacks rocks; the more gravity, the denser the rock is. To unsack these various formations of rocks requires other sacked materials—whether the chemicals that frack shale or diamonds that cover drill tips.¹⁰

Through paying attention to rocks, Povanelli is able to trouble the distinctions Western paradigms have set up between “life” and “non-life,” and the subsequent justifications of the differences between murder, killing, and destruction.

Povanelli’s troubling of the differences constructed between human-animals, other-than-human-animals, and rocks is indicative of how “becoming kin,” as Krawec analyzes, “often begins with having difficult conversations, and being willing to listen to the things marginalized people, the ones we are so used to helping, have to say can be difficult.”¹¹ This kind of paying attention allows a human agent to invest in relations, which often requires divesting from (even passive) participation in exploitation and subjugation. For example, “We cannot talk about restoring our relationship to land without talking about restoring the land to relationship with the people from whom it was taken,” Krawec assesses.¹²

3.1 SIEDI

There is a beach in Tanafjord at the top of the world in Sápmi, the northernmost region of the fennoscandian peninsula, where egg-shaped pebbles audibly sing in chorus as they wash back up the shore with the arctic tide. Roughly 320 miles southwest of Tana, the Enron Polku trail rises [thirty meters] above the tundra landscape to look out over the boreal forests of Lapland. A little more than halfway up the accent, there is a Scots pine tree that is over seven hundred years old, surviving at least five forest fires in the region. In between Tanafjord and the centurion Scots pine is the Äijih island in Lake Inari, a towering rock formation in the middle of the lake, one of the over two hundred islands in the largest lake in Finland, which is a well-known *siedi*.

I offer one example of relationality with rocks—the reverential role that *siedi* rocks hold in Sámi culture, both in Sápmi and in the Sámi-American diaspora—to detail the kinds of moral responsibilities to rocks that Indigenous Kinship Ethics commits us to in pluralistic ways. In the arctic Indigenous culture of the Sámi peoples, *Siedi* are sacred sites, typically large stones in the landscape where vows are made and offerings are given.¹³ In the Sámi worldview, it is an important and regular practice to spend time with and give gifts to certain rocks known as *siedis*. Not all rocks are *siedis*, although it is important to morally consider all rocks as relatives, just as it is important to consider the seven-hundred-year-old Scots pine and the conical signing pebbles as having their own relations. *Siedis* are unique in that they are a site of give-back ceremonies for all of the abundant natural world. Perhaps this is because although

the centurion Scots pine will eventually decompose back into the earth, the rocks have and will see it all. They are one of the oldest relations.

Kuokkanen frames gifting to *siedi* as a practice of respect for the land:

Siedis are considered an inseparable part of one’s social order and thus it is an individual and collective responsibility to look after them. . . . I suggest that [giving to *siedis*] rather is a voluntary expression of a particular worldview that reflects the respect of and intimate relationship with the land. The Sámi *siedi* practices, like many other gift practices concretely contribute to the well-being of an individual and a community. They represent relation and constant engagement with the living world and keep its abundance in motion with the help of gifts.¹⁴

Sámi anthropologist Tiina Äikäs maintains, “the relationship between a *siedi* and a human [is] a reciprocal one.”¹⁵ The “natural” world sustains all human and other-than-human life, and human agents give back to *siedis* in gratitude for this sustenance. The reverential role that *siedis* play in contemporary Sámi culture—both in Sápmi and in the Sámi-American diaspora—demonstrate one example of what rightful relations with rocks look like in the context of land-based locality.

3.2 RETHINKING RECIPROCITY WITH TWO TIERS OF HUMILITY

Rocks are a part of reciprocal moral responsibility with human agents. In addition to the moral duties human agents have to rocks, this reciprocal moral responsibility means that rocks have moral responsibilities to humans, albeit how a rock acts wrongly by me is unknowable to a human agent. In this section, I aim to expand the conversation on how rocks fulfill their moral responsibilities to human agents with two considerations: first, I argue that a model of what I call *two tiers of humility* assuages concerns for knowability of moral responsibilities from rocks, and second, I refer to Kuokkanen’s theorizing of give-back ceremonies to assert that while unknowable in specificity, human agents have good reason to believe rocks have already fulfilled all moral responsibilities toward human agents.

First, I argue that a model of what I call *two tiers of humility* assuages concerns for knowability of moral responsibilities from rocks. While some philosophers argue for a separation of moral agents and moral patients¹⁶ to mitigate the unknowability of how, for example, a rock, acts rightly or wrongly, I disagree with this view on grounds that it erases agency from beings deemed nonrational by human agents. Instead, I prefer framing a *two tiers of humility* view of agency in a discussion on reciprocal moral responsibility. In the two tiers of humility view, the first tier is comprised of beings which I think I can surmise what their moral responsibility looks like in action (such as other human agents¹⁷). The second tier consists of beings whom the specifics of acting out their moral responsibility seems to be beyond my surmising (rocks, a river, babies). The two

tiers of humility view is indicated by the fact that a limit to human understanding does not prove an absence of the metaphysical moral responsibility, only that a human agent could not understand the shape of that responsibility in the same ways we think we can with members of our own human species. Agency is maintained for all parties in the two tiers of humility view; it simply takes more humility on the part of human agents to acknowledge the agency of beings such as trees, water, and rocks by accepting a limit to human knowledge.

Brian Burkhart (Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma) offers that when considering the relationship between human agents and non-humans, "I must see myself as an agent, but not an active agent in relation to passive things but an agent among agents" because for Burkhart, recognizing the agency in non-humans "is part of coming to terms with what I am in concrete locality. What I am is a thing-in-relation and not an isolated thing that can come into relations or not."¹⁸ Burkhart illustrates the reciprocal responsibility between human and non-human agents in Indigenous Kinship Ethics.

Rocks, as members of the moral community, can fulfill their reciprocal responsibilities because "all beings have the potential to realize *mino-mnaamodzawin* . . . *mino-mnaamodzawin* recognizes that other beings or entities in Creation also have their own laws (natural laws) that they must follow to ensure balance."¹⁹ McGregor recognizes the moral duties of beings such as rocks as nonidentical to the duties that human agents have. The moral responsibilities that rocks have toward human agents is specific to their rock-ness and context, and can be interpreted as following "natural laws."

Second, I refer to Kuokkanen's (2006) theorizing of *give-back ceremonies* to assert that while unknowable in specificity, human agents have good reason to believe rocks have already fulfilled all moral responsibilities toward human agents. Kuokkanen suggests that:

the notion of the gift is one of the structuring principles of many Indigenous peoples' philosophies. The understanding of the world which foregrounds human relationship with the natural environment, common to many Indigenous peoples, is manifested by the gift, whether give-back ceremonies and rituals or individual gifts given to the land as a recognition of its abundance and reinforcement of these relationships. While these gift practices are often very different from one society and culture to another, the purpose of giving is usually alike: to acknowledge and renew the sense of kinship and coexistence with the world."²⁰

From Kuokkanen's analysis, we can see that give-back practices such as Sámi *siedi* gifting "concretely contribute to the well-being of an individual and community."²¹ Kuokkanen describes the practice of gifting to *siedis* as a give-back ceremony that is common to many Indigenous cultures. By taking Kuokkanen's theorizing seriously, we can understand that a human agent's act of "giving-

back" recognizes the gifts that a human agent has already received from so-called "natural objects" such as rocks. A human agent would not be alive at a juncture to give thanks unless gifts from the natural world had already sustained that human agent's life.

Kuokkanen distinguishes gift practices and give-back ceremonies from gifts within a system of capitalist economic exchange. Instead of a goal of accumulation present in ethos of indebtedness or "tit for tat" reciprocity, giving back to the earth in the Sámi worldview foregrounds gratitude for the abundance of the land which has already sustained all life.²² Kuokkanen is careful to apprehend that "this is not romanticization: the relations Indigenous peoples have forged with their environments for centuries are a consequence of the living off the land and the dependency on its abundance. They are a result of a relatively straightforward understanding that the well-being of land is also the well-being of human-beings" therefore "the land itself . . . [is] considered equals that need to be respected and honored rather than endlessly exploited."²³

Give-back ceremonies are predicated on a worldview that recognizes that humans are only alive, with family, and able to flourish as a direct result of the natural world including rocks being the glue of the earth and water as integral to all life. Therefore, within a give-back paradigm, rocks have always already fulfilled their duties to human agents.

In brief, I do mean to commit us to expansive reciprocal responsibility where human agents are morally responsible to rocks, and rocks are morally responsible to human agents. For "if these reciprocal obligations and duties are enacted," McGregor argues, "then balance is achieved."²⁴ The two tiers of humility view and the give-back paradigm help shape a conception of rock-responsibility where rocks do have responsibilities to human agents, although what those responsibilities look like in practice is unknowable to human agents.

4. IMPLICATIONS: NATURAL RELATIVES AND INDIGENOUS ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

In this last section, I discuss the implications of moral responsibility to so-called "natural objects" such as rocks in both personal and political spheres. I am especially interested in how a discussion on the moral responsibilities that human agents have to rocks come to bear on global conversations in Indigenous Environmental Justice.

First, the personal: each human agent has moral responsibilities to rocks, and that human agent has the potential to fulfill or not fulfill those responsibilities. An individual from any cultural background has the potential to live well with all of one's relations. However, I want to stress here that I do not mean that non-Sámi human agents should start leaving gifts at rocks like the Sámi practice of *siedi* gifting, for example. This would be an inauthentic attempt at paying attention to one's relations and would instead reflect paying attention to someone else's particular relations, not to mention cultural appropriation which fractures relationality as a practice of exploitation. Instead, I mean that one should look to the patterns of 1)

paying attention to one's relations, 2) investing in those relations/divesting from exploitation, and 3) growing this ongoing work in community, to derive one's own land-based way to live well with rock relations. Additionally, the rock-responsibility view presented in this paper requires protecting other entity-to-entity relations as a part of living well. That means living well includes acts of solidarity with Indigenous water protectors, for example, as a way to protect the relations water has to all other beings on this planet.

The Water Protection movement within Indigenous Environmental Justice is one exemplar of the results of paying attention to one's relations with so-called "natural objects" and investing in those relations. As Melanie Yazzie (Diné) and Cutcha Risling Baldy (Hupa, Yurok and Karuk) celebrate:

From the Oceti Sakowin protecting the Missouri River from contamination from the Dakota Access Pipeline, to the Māori declaring that the Whanganui River has rights akin to those of Humans (Roy, 2017), water is seen as an ancestor and a relative with agency within this network of life, one who deserves respect, care, and protection.²⁵

Yazzie and Baldy connect paying attention to and investing in water as a relation to the emerging political success of water protection worldwide. They go on to spell out how water protection policies present an:

accountability to water view [which] envisions and enacts an ethos of "living well," which Harsha Walla (2013) points out defies "the capitalist and colonial system's logic of competition, commodification, and domination. . . . Living well requires "interdependency and respect among all living things."²⁶

Yazzie and Baldy emphasize the role of water protection predicated on connection and respect among all beings as a requirement of living well. My hope is that we can look to the work of Indigenous water protectors and philosophers such as Yazzie and Baldy²⁷ when discerning what living well with rocks can look like in a contemporary moral context.

When it comes to rocks, one such contemporary moral context is the minerals in the ground of the Sámi city of Kiruna on the Swedish side of the borders of Sápmi. For those who are unfamiliar with the history of rocks in Kiruna, here is a brief summary: The Swedish mining company Luossavaara-Kiirunavaara AB (LKAB) manages a mine that began operations mining iron ore out from "underneath" Kiruna in 1898. Since 1898, the LKAB mine has removed 950 million tons of iron ore. So much iron ore that in 2004 the Swedish court declared that the village of Kiruna would have to be relocated further away from the mine due to buckling of the ground underneath the village. Then in 2020, a 4.9 Mw magnitude earthquake went off in the footwall of the mine; this earthquake was not produced by natural causes, but instead, by mining.²⁸

In January 2023, LKAB announced they had discovered twenty million tons of rare earth minerals adjacent to the mine, including lanthanum, lutetium, lanthanum, cerium, praseodymium, neodymium, promethium, and samarium; all minerals needed for the production of iphones, wind turbines, and electric cars.²⁹ Swedish Minister for Energy, Business, and Industry Ebba Busch has heralded that "the EU's self-sufficiency and independence from Russia and China will begin in the mine," as there are no current deposits of rare earth minerals outside of control of Russia and China.³⁰

Spokesperson for LKAB Jan Moström has conferred

We are already investing heavily to move forward, and we expect that it will take several years to investigate the deposit and the conditions for profitably and sustainably mining it. We are humbled by the challenges surrounding land use and impacts that exist to develop this into a mine and that will need to be analysed to see how to avoid, minimize and compensate for it. Only then can we proceed with an environmental review application and apply for a permit

according to the press release from LKAB's website, which cites cooperation with Swedish government officials as the news of the newfound deposit went to press.

Taking a closer look at Moström's statement, the "land use and impacts" which Moström feels "humbled by" are the 10,000-year-old traditional reindeer migration routes of the Indigenous Sámi people, which are protected under the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Assuming generosity that LKAB sincerely wants to "avoid, minimize and compensate for" the destruction of Sámi way of life, the use of the "and" conjunction of that statement communicates clearly that mineral extraction in Kiruna will continue with or without right relations with the Sámi of the area.

How do our moral responsibilities to rocks come to bear on the Kiruna mine both past and present? What does "living well" with rock relatives in Kiruna look like in this pivotal moment? I leave these questions for the focus of future work. However, I mean to highlight here the necessity to pay attention to rightful rock relations as a pressing moral problem in contemporary ethics.

5. CONCLUSION

The relation-measure in Indigenous Kinship Ethics counts any thing in relation to any other thing as a member of the moral community. Therefore, human agents have reciprocal moral responsibilities with all things in relation. This reciprocal moral responsibility means that I have moral duties to rocks and that I can act wrongly toward these so-called "natural objects" when I violate the dignity of or fracture reciprocity between these entities and myself, or between those entities and other entities. Living well, or acting rightly by rocks, looks different in practice according to a human agent's land-based locality. One example of living well with rocks according to land-based locality is the gifting to *siedi* rocks in Sámi culture. This example

provides one illustration of the general requirements to live well, which include 1) paying attention to, 2) investing in one's relations/divesting from exploitation, and 3) growing this ongoing work in community. Another example of living well in relation to so-called "natural objects" on a larger scale is the emerging political protections for water that Indigenous Water Protectors have led worldwide over the past forty years. Examples like water protection can help guide our thinking through kinship with rocks in pressing contemporary moral contexts such as the Kiruna mining dilemma.

NOTES

1. McGregor, "Living Well with the Earth: Indigenous Rights and the Environment," 10.
2. Kuokkanen, "The Logic of the Gift: Reclaiming Indigenous Peoples' Philosophies," 261.
3. I use the term "natural object" following Andrew Brennan, *The Moral Standing of Natural Objects*, to denote things like rocks, trees, and water, even though all objects are natural.
4. In this paper, I provide only the most succinct overview on Kinship Ethics and the relation-measure. For a more in-depth version of my own overview, see O'Loughlin (forthcoming). In addition, see Deborah McGregor, Rauna Kuokkanen, Melanie Yazzie (all of whom I cite in this text) as well as Kyle Whyte, Brian Burkhart, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, Daniel Heath Justice and more.
5. Richard Sylvan's 1972 Last Man Thought Experiment acquainted analytic philosophy with the intrinsic moral value of trees.
6. Patty Krawec, *Becoming Kin*, 137.
7. McGregor, "Reconciliation and Environmental Justice," 10.
8. LaDuke, *Last Standing Woman*; McGregor, "Reconciliation and Environmental Justice," 10.
9. Lakota and Dakota scholar Kaylen James theorizes an intervention on the term "paying" in "paying attention" and suggests we think about attention as something we "gift," as in "gifting attention" (forthcoming).
10. Elizabeth Povanelli, *In Between Gaia and Ground*, 128.
11. Patty Krawec, *Becoming Kin*, 148.
12. Patty Krawec, *Becoming Kin*, 131.
13. Turi, *An Account of the Sámi*; Itkonen and Koskimies, *Inari Sámi Folklore*; Kuokkanen, "The Logic of the Gift."
14. Kuokkanen, "The Logic of the Gift," 161.
15. Äikäs, "What Makes a Stone a Siedi, or, How to Recognize a Holy Place?" 14.
16. The moral agents and moral patients view holds that rational agents have moral responsibilities toward both other rational agents, as well as "moral patients" which are broadly defined as beings without rationality who are worthy of moral consideration from rational agents, but do not have moral responsibilities toward rational agents. One example of the moral agents vs. moral patients divide is between human-animals and other-than-human animals. See Evelyn Pluhar, "Moral Agents and Moral Patients."
17. Though I am probably wrong about this surmising anyway.
18. Burkhart, *Indigenizing Philosophy through the Land*, 292–93.
19. McGregor, "Living Well with the Earth," 19.
20. Kuokkanen, "The Logic of the Gift," 255–56.
21. Kuokkanen, "The Logic of the Gift," 263.
22. Kuokkanen, "The Logic of the Gift," 265.
23. Kuokkanen, "The Logic of the Gift," 263.
24. McGregor, "Living Well with the Earth."
25. Melanie Yazzie and Cutcha Risling Baldy, "Introduction: Indigenous Peoples and the Politics of Water," 1.
26. Yazzie and Baldy, "Introduction: Indigenous Peoples and the Politics of Water," 2.
27. In addition to the work of Melanie Yazzie (2017 interview) as well as Yazzie and Baldy, see Deborah McGregor ("Traditional Knowledge: Considerations for Protecting Water in Ontario"; "Living Well with the Earth"; "Mino-Mnaamadzawin"); Cutcha Risling Baldy ("Water Is Life: The Flower Dance Ceremony"); Winona Laduke (*To Be a Water Protector*); and Kyle Whyte ("Indigenous Women, Climate Change Impacts, and Collective Action.").
28. Reuters, "Sweden Reports Its Biggest Ever Quake Caused by Mining in Arctic," May 18, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-sweden-quake-idUSKBN22U1QW/>.
29. "Why an Arctic Treasure Is Spurring Hope and Dread," *The Journal*, January 30, 2023, <https://www.wsj.com/podcasts/the-journal/why-an-arctic-treasure-is-spurring-hope-and-dread/349B258C-BABD-4FC7-8302-F53C43CCB382>.
30. "Europe's Largest Deposit of Rare Earth Metals Located in Kiruna Area," LKAB, January 12, 2023, <https://lkab.com/en/press/europes-largest-deposit-of-rare-earth-metals-is-located-in-the-kiruna-area/>.

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An Indigenous Abolitionist Ethics of Care

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INTRODUCTION

What is the relationship between abolition and decolonization? And how can Indigenous philosophies and practices foster both? What might be the components of an Indigenous abolitionist ethics of care? Hupa scholar Stephanie Lumsden explains, "prison abolition politics are indispensable to tribal sovereignty" because abolition necessitates "the dismantling of all violence done to communities by settler colonialism" and "entails a commitment to a future in which communities are safe and healthy."¹ By settler colonialism I mean "a structure not an event," as Patrick Wolfe clarifies; it is that which "strives for the dissolution of native societies" as well as "erects a new colonial society on the expropriated land base," not as a one-time occurrence but as a continual configuration.² In terms of the settler colonial carceral state, we might also understand carcerality to be a structuring force rather than a single moment.³ In order to further connect the stakes of abolishing prisons and police with the stakes of decolonization, in this paper I illuminate the ethics of care that inform an Indigenous abolitionism, which I identify as: (re)claiming relationality, building movements of solidarity, ensuring bodily and community sovereignty, delegitimizing settler law, defining mending and safety on one's own terms, and fostering cultural resurgence. Finally, I end by arguing that further articulation of an abolitionist ethics of care—that builds up and restores capacities⁴ of Indigenous individuals, communities, and nations—also affirms Indigenous futurity.

While I draw from Indigenous scholars across Turtle Island, as well as so-called Australia and New Zealand, I also recognize the need for cultural specificity in this work. Just as criminologist Chris Cunneen asserts, "the praxis of decolonialism cannot be universally prescribed and will be differentiated along a range of axes, determined by historical and contemporary contingencies," so too must abolition be nonprescriptive.⁵ Instead, I encourage readers to think of these Indigenous abolitionist ethics of care as *descriptive* rather than *prescriptive*, as possible articulations of ways in which we might practice abolition and decolonization from our particular locations. In this spirit, I endeavor to describe the abolitionist elements and throughlines that I have noted across a diversity of locations, contexts, and Native nations. At the same time, I do not wish to be prescriptive, because I affirm the sovereignty and self-determination of

all Indigenous peoples to experiment, collaborate, and find what works best. This is what Coulthard and Simpson refer to as grounded normativity, or "Indigenous place-based practices and associated forms of knowledge."⁶

ABOLITION AS A DECOLONIAL PROJECT

The present-day movement for abolition takes its name from the project to abolish slavery in the United States—still an unfinished project due to the Thirteenth Amendment.⁷ The Thirteenth Amendment bans slavery and "involuntary servitude" in the United States; yet it includes the clause "except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted." Hence, slavery and involuntary servitude are still legal so long as they are solely inflicted as punishment for a convicted crime. This also means that the pursuit to abolish slavery is ongoing. Despite the etymology of the term emanating from the location of the US settler state, the movement for police and prison abolition has nevertheless come to be relevant across a multitude of geopolitical contexts.⁸

Abolitionism tells us that policing, prisons, and punitive justice lack both efficacy and compassion, that these practices are rooted in racialized terror;⁹ these structures are an outgrowth of settler colonialism;¹⁰ and they are misogynist, ableist, classist, homophobic and transphobic.¹¹ The present-day overrepresentation of Indigenous peoples in the criminal punishment systems of settler states, such as the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, confirms that such systems function as tactics of removal, exclusion, marginalization, destabilization, dispossession, erasure, control, and death.¹² As Yavapai/Chiricahua Apache legal scholar Grace Carson writes on Turtle Island,

Policing and incarceration of Native people has taken place from the moment our lands were colonized. Not only was the genocide of Indigenous people enacted by the State—a literal policing of who did and did not have a right to be alive on stolen land—but our people were forced into detainment in boarding schools, our spirituality and languages were policed so that our culture would be erased, and our movements have historically been met with violence by police and military. This policing and incarceration of Indigenous peoples still takes place in what is now known as the United States.¹³

In light of these historical and contemporary violences, the ethical implication of abolition draws on a concern for the welfare of all bodies, at all levels—individual, collective, geographic—affected by carcerality.¹⁴ The "object of abolition," according to Harney and Moten, is "[n]ot so much the abolition of prisons but the abolition of a society that could have prisons."¹⁵ In other words, abolitionists reject a social system that sees the practices of threatening, confining, controlling, maiming, and killing people (who may or may not have caused harm) as a legitimate and desirable form of redress.¹⁶ At the same time, abolition's advocates know that it is not a single event based in diminishment nor absence. Instead, abolition must be thought of as an addition, transformation, alteration, reordering, creation, and substitution to our present