

Running Log of Discussion Questions

THE OTHER SIDE OF EDEN: HUNTERS, FARMERS, AND THE SHAPING OF THE WORLD,
BY HUGH BRODY

Opening

- What are the 3 pivotal ideas that Brody puts forth at this early point in the book?

One: Inuktitut

- A. Describe Inuit treatment of children. What beliefs underlie this? Explain the case of school children who were falling asleep and missing class, and clarify how this case elucidates traditional Inuit approaches to childrearing.
- B. Why does Brody say that Inuit homes are “as much campsites as modern homes” (p.36). What does this signify to Brody?
- C. What does Anaviapik’s episode of cursing tell us about Inuit culture?
- D. As many have noted, Inuits have many words for snow. How does this link up with the debate over whether there can be cross-cultural communication? What is Brody’s opinion on the question of the intertranslatability of language?
- E. Describe Anaviapik’s efforts to navigate the dog-sled team from Pond Inlet to Arctic Bay. What does it tell us about his knowledge of the landscape and the nature of life in the Arctic tundra? Compare this with Brody’s own failed attempt to navigate the landscape, describe earlier in the chapter.

Two: Creation

- F. How, according to Brody, are the biblical stories of creation a summary of human pre-history? Does it seem reasonable to you that the Bible is simply an accumulation of oral stories, passed down through the generations, which depict the human shift to agriculture? What scenes and characters support this view? What are some of the negative outcomes of agriculture that these biblical stories point to?
- G. Does Anaviapik’s trip to England show Brody that his friend has an innate (in-born, unerring) ability to navigate within *any* environment?

Three: Time

- H. When Jimmy and Brody when hunting, why did Jimmy not shoot? What does this tell us about hunter-gatherer attitudes toward their prey? How do people like the Dunne-za believe they are connected with the animals they hunt (p.126-7)? How is this relationship different from the control and conquest that agriculturalists exercise over nature? Do you think Brody romanticizes hunter-gatherers or do you agree with his analysis about their more symbiotic relationship with nature?
- I. What is the Bering Strait theory? Why did the Cree woman believe this was an “Archaeologist’s myth?” (P.109)
- J. What does Brody mean when he says that “Material well-being depends on knowing, rather than changing, the environment?” (P.112) What are some other central features of the hunter-gatherer way of life?
- K. What does Brody mean when he refers to the “geographical conservatism” intrinsic to hunter-gatherer systems? How does he compare hunter-gatherer expansion to that of agriculturalists?
- L. Does Brody believe that Anaviapik and Jimmy are human beings from some other, more remote time, or are they his contemporaries? Is one more modern than the other?
- M. Describe the bootleggers who come to the Dunne-za reservation. Do you tend to feel as Brody does—angry at the kind of destruction his trade could cause, or do you tend to agree with the bootlegger’s comments? Is this yet another example in a long history of farmers exploiting hunter-gatherers?
- N. Describe the fatalism and impatience that characterizes many peoples’ reactions to contemporary hunter-gatherers. Which do you think is more “real”—their view or the supposedly “romantic” view of Brody?

Four: Words

Five: Gods

Six: Mind

ECOCIDE: A SHORT HISTORY OF THE MASS EXTINCTION OF SPECIES,
BY FRANZ BROSWIMMER

Introduction

- What is meant by the term “The Sixth Extinction”? List some of the alarming statistics that Broswimmer gives to substantiate his claim that “The earth is losing species at a rate unparalleled in human experience (p.1). How is “mass extinction” different from “background extinction”? What makes the current mass extinction different from earlier ones?
- What does Broswimmer mean by the term “ecological realism” (p.5)? In what ways are ecological realists discredited and why?

1–The Human Odyssey: From Biological to Cultural Evolution

- What is the “Megafauna Extinction” that Broswimmer talks about? When did this occur? How does this conflict with the vision of hunter-gatherers that Brody offers us?

2–Problematic Society–Nature Relations Before the Modern Era

- What is the “Neolithic Revolution”? What does he mean when he says that “The problem was not merely intrasocial in nature but, most important, also interspecies.”?
- What were some of the ecological blunders of antiquity?

3–The Modern Assault on Nature: The Making of Ecocide

4–The Planet as Sacrifice Zone

5–Ecocide and Globalization

Epilogue