

CAT TRACKS

by Chim Blea

THE ARROGANCE OF ENLIGHTENMENT

I have heard it said that a wise man can find wilderness in a courtyard garden, can see a grizzly bear in a hothouse flower. Perhaps. Perhaps an enlightened woman or man can find such natural peace, such wildness in the mundane, such gladness in an artificial world. Such an ability is doubtless healthy. It allows one to rise above the tawdry mess of civilization, to find unity with nature even when that natural unity has been destroyed. It brings peace, contentment and serenity. It prevents ulcers and high blood pressure.

But what does it do for the wilderness? What does it do for the grizzly?

Where is the real world? What is reality? Is it within ourselves? In our minds, our consciousnesses? Is reality only what we perceive? Are our minds paramount? Or is reality apart from our heads? Is the real world out there? Independent, autonomous, sovereign? Not ruled by human awareness? Is the grizzly in our heads or is she out there in the Big Outside – rooting, snuffling, roaming, living, perceiving *on her own*? Is wilderness merely our attitude toward it or is it greater, far greater, than ourselves and our perceptions of it? Do we create reality or does reality create us? Is it “I think, therefore I am” or “I am, therefore I think”?

Important distinctions. And I fear that too many of us who seek after wisdom and enlightenment fail to see that the external reality of the Redwood is far more important than our enlightened attitude towards it, that the wilderness is greater than we and thereby greater than our illuminated view of it.

Some time ago, as I recall, someone wrote in to *Earth First!* criticizing the Dear Ned Ludd column on the grounds that secret monkeywrenching was not uplifting. That if one destroys destructive machinery one

should do it in the open in some kind of holy manner. Poppycock! Here the confusion is made complete. The results of protecting the Earth are not important, it is the enlightenment or the uplifting from it which count. What arrogant religiosity! What a mad delusion to think that one's pretentious mental gyrations are more important than the reality of actually protecting a 2,000-year-old Redwood or a 1,000-pound grizzly or an unpeopled wilderness that is a nation unto itself!

I fear that those who argue for the process of action rather than the results are corrupted by a delusion of an afterlife. Christian, Buddhist, pagan, whatever – those suffering from the arrogance of enlightenment evidently see Earth as merely a way station in the eternal progress of their soul, that *they* in this life are what is important and not the Earth. But if you want heaven – it is here. Walk through an aspen grove on a bright autumn day. The gold in that light is more real than in the streets beyond the Pearly Gates. If you seek total union with the cosmos, float a river, drift into rvertime, let the rich red of the San Juan or the crystal of the Salmon make you part of All. If it's Valhalla you desire, stand with your bold friends before a bulldozer and then eat, drink and make merry with them in victory celebration afterwards! And reincarnation – yes, that, too. Your atoms are of the everlasting rocks, will become buzzard, weasel, dungbeetle, worm and on for eternity after your simple brain sleeps. Heaven, Nirvana, Valhalla, everlasting life – it's here and now. It's in the *real world*, the world in which we find ourselves at this moment. We need nothing more than this paradise in which we were born.

B. Traven wrote “This is the real world, muchachos, and you are in it.” How true. The world exists independently of us.



When a tree falls in the forest and no man is there to hear it, it still falls, the shock waves still echo from one cliff to another, the bears and the birds still hear, and life goes on. Only an arrogant fool could think otherwise. We can sit in perfect peace and contemplation in our manicured gardens but if there are no grizzlies in the Big Outside, there can be no grizzlies in our flowers. And if, after the last Redwood is cut, we are able to say, “Ah, but I had an enlightened appreciation for the essence of Redwoodness,” then our words will be the sound of one hand clapping. If we discourage others from acting with boldness in defense of the wilderness because their hearts are not yet pure enough, then we become Quislings to life.

Do not misunderstand my words. I seek after wisdom and enlightenment, too. I go alone into the wilderness in quest of visions. I sit in high windy places and listen to the powers of the Earth. But I do not delude myself with my own self-importance. I do not for a moment pretend that I am any more than an insignificant speck in this rich, voluptuous, living Earth. I do not puff myself up so that I enthrone reality within my skullbox. It is out there. In the Big Outside. And my action in defense of it – raw, rank, brawling, and boorish as I may be – is vastly more important than all the enlightenment with which I can swell my head in the instant in which my consciousness exists.