

moiety and clan relationships that inform the tattooing of crests and their integration into the customs of the potlatch. With an emphasis on the sacred and ceremonial embeddedness of tattooing within the cultures, we are shown the worldview that informs the plateau area understanding of the spiritual realm. He rounds out the chapter with a look at the revival of practices once again. This allows for a glimpse into what caused the virtual extinction of tattooing among native cultures around 100 years ago and for the contemporary voices to once again be heard.

Moving further south, Krutak continues his narrative through the remaining chapters in progression, moving eastward to finish with the woodlands peoples. His framework permits us to anticipate the content but with intriguing surprises that bring us to a new understanding of topics such as adoption practices and the importance of material culture. The main marks that Krutak leaves on his readers are not only an understanding of the diverse tattoo traditions of the indigenous peoples of North America, but an indelible mark of how identity is formed and reinforced through the practice of marking the body. Through each chapter, he builds a platform of thoughtful examinations of native culture formation, constructed from individual threads of complex issues of gender, taboos, spirituality, medicine, warrior culture, status, and power, and even the importance of dreams to indigenous cultures, all through the discourse of tattooing. It is a gentle reminder of the holistic nature of identity expression to not only the ancestors but also contemporary native people.

“Tattoo Traditions of Native North America. Ancient and Contemporary Expressions of Identity” begins to fill the void in the global record of traditional tattooing practices. Pulling together historical records and illustrations, Krutak balances the predominant outsider authority with contemporary indigenous voices. This volume provides a depth of cultural understanding rarely seen in conversations about tattooing in North America.

Rhonda Dass

Laidlaw, James: *The Subject of Virtue. An Anthropology of Ethics and Freedom.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014. 258 pp. ISBN 978-1-107-69731-7. Price: \$ 29.99

As an undergraduate I decided between philosophy and anthropology as majors, finally settling on anthropology for its positivist methodology in addressing life’s “big” questions. Philosophy seemed to me a fascinating but impractical world of ideas hampered by a database rooted in a narrow Western worldview. In the intervening years – after years of fieldwork in Sudan and North Africa – I engaged with ethics and anthropology in 1990 as a guest of Dartmouth College’s Institute for the Study of Professional Ethics and resident philosopher Bernard Gert who was intrigued by my words in the fellowship application that American anthropology’s code of ethics was silent on the matter of informed consent. I spent a year as a fellow discussing philosophy, religion, and anthropology sponsored by the college’s Rockefeller Foundation. In 1993, I published an article, “Anthropology and Informed

Consent. We Are Not Exempt” and in 1998 the first language on informed consent was introduced into the AAA Code of ethics.

Unsurprisingly, the major questions and ideas we debated nearly a quarter-century ago are still with us, as the present work attests to their durability and timelessness. However, American anthropology has habitually avoided philosophy and instead wrung its professional hands over controversies and matters of public science, e.g., the alleged ill-treatment and representation of indigenous peoples in the Amazon in the controversy after the publication of “Darkness in El-Dorado” (Tierney. New York 2000), and over anthropology and the military Human Terrain Teams which employed social scientists in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Each time such conflicts erupt, American anthropology turns to its code of ethics, often revising its language and/or format. It is just one mark of the difference in discourse between European and American anthropologists that codes of ethics are not addressed at all in Laidlaw’s treatise.

Instead, eternal questions of what is virtue and how to live a virtuous life; morality, freedom, and responsibility and others are treated in six chapters by the author, an early advocate for an anthropology of ethics. Discussed in the various chapters of this work are ideas of a Western “us” and an exotic “them”; of universalism and relativism; of the distinction between morality and ethics; and other subjects that are treated in the context of a prodigious reference to anthropological classics and a host of younger scholars, including Mahmood’s study of piety and feminism in Cairo (Politics of Piety. Princeton 2005) and Robbins’ work in Papua New Guinea and Melanesia (Becoming Sinners. Berkeley 2004).

Laidlaw asks “what is the place of the ethical in human life?” and he responds that this is not just an academic question, but a matter of how one should live. The book’s stated goal is to set out a groundwork for the anthropology of ethics, a field that has been developing over the past several decades. He draws upon major philosophical traditions from Marx to Durkheim, to Mill’s anthropology and morality, to Westermarck’s “ethical relativity.” Of relevance is Durkheim’s notion of morality as “the social,” embedding morality in social relations over an emphasis on the individual that is so much a part of “rights” and morality discourse in the West. Laidlaw generally rejects Durkheim’s moral collective and its opposition to the “natural” individual, which can be seen as inhibiting anthropological examination of the ethical dimensions of the moral life (Strhan, Review of “An Anthropology of Ethics” by J. D. Faubion [2011]. *Anthrocybib* 2013). Rather, his intellectual predilections follow Durkheim to Mauss and thence to Foucault and Bourdieu. These social theorists’ ideas address knowledge and power as a means of social control and are often lumped together as “post-modernist.”

Laidlaw argues that Western concepts, such as “Us and Them” represent a false, illusory opposition (33). Instead of being misguided by such metaphysics, anthropologists should be working as partners with the people whom they study in developing together well-formulated

questions and concepts (41). This method does not require a guru but collaborative engagement, and my own writings have also suggested that collaboration yields not only better ethics but better research (Collaborative Anthropology as Twenty-First Century Anthropology. *Collaborative Anthropologies* 1.2008). A mark of success would be indicated if an anthropology of ethics engages with a steadily expanding circle of philosophical approaches, obviously not only European. Sadly, Laidlaw does not elaborate here about these non-European alternatives although there is an energetic emerging literature here as well (Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa*. Gnosis, Philosophy and the Order of Knowledge. Bloomington 1988; Gordon, *Existensia Africana*. Understanding Africana Existential Thought. New York 2000).

Laidlaw reviews the Boasian tradition in American anthropology arguing that Boas was not a relativist, but his students were, notably Benedict. Relativism, he argues, should not extend to morality. Drawing on the fieldwork of Williams (2005) and Abu-Lughod (2002) he argues that in the ethnographic situations with which most anthropologists today are familiar, it is “patently far, far, far too late for relativism,” which is to say that nowhere in the world today is there a society entirely cut off from the West, and indeed “our histories are intertwined in complex and far-reaching ways” (27 f.).

Cultural relativism is a major concept addressed in the book, discussed as a “mirage.” He argues that in this globalized world relativism is “a mirage” as inter-relationships among peoples and nations is the norm (23–32). Arguments for cultural relativism always depend on a form of absolutism that anthropologists do not embrace, thus few really believe or practice relativism. Today cultural relativism is largely deployed as a “cultural critique” to the dominant discourses of Western culture. For anthropology the last hurrah of relativism came with Geertz’s distinguished lecture in 1983 at the American Anthropological Association entitled “Anti Anti-Relativism” in which he argued that the idea of bounded cultures is a contemporary fiction. Scheper-Hughes’ studies of global trafficking in human organs (31) represented another pioneering work of anti-relativism based on the human rights ground that relativism blunts the anthropologist championing ethical practice.

My brief article “Cultural Relativism and Universal Rights” (*The Chronicle of Higher Education* 1995) addressed a sensitive issue of female circumcision (in Western discourse female genital mutilation, FGM) as a harm so severe that it trumps cultural relativism by reference to universal human rights. This article has been reprinted in both anthropology and philosophy textbooks, however, more so in the latter I should add (in: Sommers and Sommers, *Vice and Virtue in Everyday Life*. 2013). What is noteworthy is that it has probably been read more by philosophy students than by anthropology ones. Engagement with ideas of universal human rights has led me to explore cross-culturally meaningful ideas about harm, a fundamental tenet of professional codes of ethics.

Chap. 5, “Taking Responsibility Seriously,” is perhaps the best for the teaching of anthropology. Laidlaw ques-

tions why anthropologists have historically doubted that they should engage seriously with ethics. Has it been a fear of moving away from the primary responsibility to the social communities we study, or to the secondary responsibility to the Western ideal of the individual? The illustration of the case of the “Actor-Network Theory” in which agency is not reserved for humans but for nonhumans, is perhaps the best, – albeit counter-intuitive – example of deciding whether or not to engage as an ethically conscious researcher-actor in the field.

This self-imposed “serious” responsibility – which is after all the primary context in which ethical responsibility resides – is explored, unexpectedly in the colonial and early postindependence research of venerable British social anthropologists. The work of Evans-Pritchard, Lienhardt, and Gluckman in various African contexts, including the Sudan where I have spent five years as a researcher, is surprising for this modernist treatment of ethics. For this reviewer, the theoretical and pedagogical value of these ethnographies is remote, as the overriding context for life in these societies has been fundamentally transformed by the very “postmodern” factors extolled by Laidlaw such that they are rendered useful only as historical cases. Failure to acknowledge the realities of the contemporary Nuer and Azande – continuously under threat during decades of civil war and currently in jeopardy as the new Republic of South Sudan is facing another round of interethnic conflict – is a significant flaw. I am reminded of the old critique of social anthropology as “a-historical” for its ignoring of the colonial context in which these studies were carried out.

The last chapter, “The Reluctant Cannibal” revisits cannibalism, one of the many taboo subjects for which anthropology has a “professional weakness” (219 f.). Laidlaw takes the bait and after pages of ethnographic description of the form of cannibalism described for the Wari of Brazil’s Amazonia he argues that the practice is not what separates “us” and “them” but rather it suggests a shared humanity as their respectful and compassionate consumption of dead relatives brings “comfort and relief to the aggrieved” (223). It is this example that Laidlaw uses to end his book with the suggestion that we reflect about how anthropologists can learn from this practice: “it tells us that we were mistaken when we believed we knew that ‘eating people is wrong’” (224).

Laidlaw is an influential advocate for developing an anthropology of ethics, a field that is admittedly theoretically weak. Until this work, anthropologists have turned to philosophers such as MacIntyre and in my work, Gert (*Morality. A New Justification of the Moral Rules*. Oxford 1988), for a grounding in theories of the moral values and rules. Laidlaw relies heavily on Foucault and is a critic of Durkheim, but a clear and accessible theory for an anthropology of ethics remains elusive. Indeed, in an allied subfield, the question as to whether there is a “moral anthropology” has been raised only recently (Fassin 2008).

The Eurocentric base of ethical discourse in anthropology remains self-evident and this work does not substantially loosen its grip despite its wide citation of works of anthropology and ethnographies. The longstanding

questions of “whose ethics?” and “ethics for whom?” persist as the enterprise of anthropology continues to be overwhelmingly Western, although the demographics of younger fieldworkers is changing slightly. Indeed, Laidlaw acknowledges that contemporary anthropology is inevitably ethnocentric. Nonetheless, this ambitious work remains one for philosophers and philosophical anthropologists, and not for anthropologists primarily concerned with practical ethics.

However, public discourse on subjects such as the ethics of politicians, truth in advertising, and a host of medical issues, such as the right to die, are more popular than ever and are featured in major media outlets. This speaks to a larger public mission for anthropologists engaged with ethics that has not been met.

Laidlaw and I would likely agree that much work remains to be done on the subject of anthropology and ethics. For example, systemic study of indigenous concepts of morality and ethics is a long-awaited field of work. Poignant remarks, such as that of the Crow Indigenous American leader Plenty Coups that “nothing happened” after their conquest and subordination (135), were uttered to mean that nothing could count as an event or ethically noteworthy action after this cataclysm. This tantalizes the anthropological imagination and begs us to research, document, and analyze ethical systems outside of a Western framework. I would have enjoyed a more thorough treatment of the north Indian Jains’ unique system of an ethics of nonviolence and nonattachment where Laidlaw has conducted his research.

Finally, although codes of ethics may be viewed as outside of the philosophical purview of this work, it would have been helpful for Laidlaw to “weigh in” on the subject as both professional anthropologists and students must engage with institutional, national, and international codes in their studies and research. In the end, we want such treatises to instruct as well as to engage our intellect, the latter which this work certainly accomplishes.

Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban

Lipset, David, and Richard Handler (eds.): *Vehicles. Cars, Canoes, and Other Metaphors of Moral Imagination*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2014. 214 pp. ISBN 978-1-78238-375-8. Price: \$ 95.00

This edited volume compiles a set of original ethnographic case studies focusing on the diverse ways vehicles that convey people through geospatial territory and also convey metaphorical meanings and constructions of the moral. Contrary to the introduction’s claim that “the signifying value of vehicles, as a whole category, seems to have gone unrecognized up to this point” (3), the burgeoning interdisciplinary mobilities’ literature on the intersections of transportation, society, and material culture has not been insensitive to the symbolic and metaphorical meanings of vehicles as a broader category, much less ignored what specific vehicles signify in specific social contexts. But while there has been plenty of attention given to *what* vehicles signify, there has been little given to *how* vehicles signify, which is precisely where this book

comes in, drawing on a number of theoretical and comparative propositions about how vehicular metaphors create meaning and are operationalized in a range of ethnographic contexts.

One of the book’s primary theoretical arguments is that the cultural work of vehicle metaphors is to help people work through some moral *lacunae* “in response to which something figural is done to imagine that transportation across the missing relationships is possible, if not necessarily secure” (13). The emphasis here is thus not so much on understanding the everyday embodied experiences of getting around using vehicles or the political-economic and infrastructural conditions under which vehicles operate, but in exploring the notion that involvement with vehicles is always rooted in shifting and equivocal viewpoints about morality and the moral journey of life itself. This book aims to show that those processes are productively complicated and dense, primarily by demonstrating ethnographically how certain vehicles – cars, Melanesian canoes, and rebuilt WWII warplanes, which is an admittedly limited range – are symbolized and metaphorized on multiple levels, providing both a means through which people can make sense of their place in their immediate social worlds, and – through their service “cross-culturally as master-signifiers of the moral” – help them work through the uncertainties, alienation, indeterminacy, equivocation, and ambivalence about moral matters that are part and parcel of social lives in any community.

The book is divided into three sections, each exploring how vehicles are used to construct the moral. The first section on “Persons as Vehicles” focuses on how people in two distinct cultural contexts sort out who they are and their relationships and obligations vis-à-vis others through vehicle metaphors. David Lipset describes how among the Murik people of Melanesia the canoe serves as a master metaphor through which human bodies can be thought of as canoes; canoes can be thought of as human bodies; and canoe metaphors enable consideration of moral agency in a rapidly changing social order. A chapter by Richard Handler follows that, in intellectual history mode, couples a reading of Erving Goffman’s famous analysis of traffic codes and personhood with description of early-twentieth-century American driver’s manuals, the goal being to describe the co-construction of persons, cars, and streets in the United States during a particular historical period.

The second and third sections of the book – “Vehicles as Gendered Persons” and “Equivocal Vehicles” – are the most lively and engaging sections of the book, where the quality of the ethnographic description is strong and the authors generally offer compelling insights related to the volume’s concern with the intersections between morality, metaphors, and vehicles. In the second section, Kent Wayland discusses how the artistic reproduction of sexualized female imagery on the nose art of restored WWII-era American warplanes exists as a means through which multiple, complicated social phenomena – shifting gender politics, the violence of war, and male intimacy with machines – are negotiated and given a “choateness” that is otherwise elusive. This section also has one of two chap-