

THE CHEYENNES

by Emilio G. Chavez

for

AMERICAN INDIAN LAW

Harvard Law School

Prof. Rennard Strickland

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INTRODUCTION

This paper seeks to describe the major institutions of the Cheyennes and to arrive at an understanding of their law or, more broadly, of their ethos. The institutions that will be described are the tribal organization, the family and the role of women, (briefly) property, "education" loosely defined, religious ideas and ceremonies and finally ethics and philosophy will be discussed. It is hoped that toward the end of this paper some broad themes of the Cheyenne people will be developed, and the relevance of what we can learn from the Cheyennes will be brought out.

The reason I chose to study the Cheyennes was that I wanted to learn about a brave and hardy Plains tribe, a tribe of warriors who faced seasonal changes and who were nomads. I was totally ignorant at first, and though I am now still far from knowledgeable, I have achieved some acquaintance with a fascinating and lovable people, and through them, of Indians at large. I have taken some steps into the world of Native America and all that it has to teach us. In the following pages, an overview of Cheyenne law and institutions will be presented, but the spirit of the Cheyennes will also be allowed to shine through. I found it teaches a law higher than black-letter law.

TRIBAL ORGANIZATION

The Cheyennes as a tribe possessed two organizational groups that regulated their life: the Council of Forty-Four and the military societies. The Council was made up of the tribal chiefs and "formed the formal facade of government in the tribal constitution, and had the real powers."¹The military societies were theoretically subordinate, but politics and overlapping in functions resulted in this not always being the case.

In general the picture, as between the tribal chiefs and the soldier chiefs, is one of mutual deference --and of careful politics. The former had the weight of seniority and social recognition of their position and wisdom on their side (for it was deemed more honorable to be a tribal chief than to be a chief of a soldier society). The latter were in a strong position, however, for they were the men of direct action, and those to whom most of the fighters bore peculiar allegiance.²

"The Council of Forty-Four was a self-perpetuating body of tribal trustees; each chose his own successor. Each generation saw a double turnover of the Council, tenure of the chieftainship being ten years. In the winter of each tenth year, word was passed among the bands that there would be a chief-renewal the coming spring."³Interestingly, one member of the Council is said to have always been an alien Indian, a Dakota, thereby giving representation to the Cheyenne-Sioux.⁴

Soldiers, other than military society leaders, were not barred from chiefship in the Council of Forty-Four. This was necessary, of course, if the quality of the Council was to be held at a high level. But a soldier chief was never permitted to be a tribal chief at the same time. When a soldier chief was selected by the tribal Council to fill the place of a deceased head chief (one of the five priest-chiefs)... he automatically retired from the leadership of his society and gave up all affiliation with his military brethren. The Cheyennes reiterate that the appointment of tribal chiefs is elevation to a position of responsibility to the entire tribe. We interpret the rule which separated the supreme tribal and the military chieftainships, preventing the vesting of the powers of the two types of office in any one individual, as a constitutional device designed to forestall undue accumulation of power by any special interest group.⁵

In order to be a chief, a man must possess good qualities. "No standard of conduct is more clearly fixed than that the chief must not be angry --that he must be aloof from personal irritation."⁶This tradition caused some men, unsure of their tempers, to refuse the office. Also the chief must be a model of generosity, a quality, as we shall see later, much esteemed among the Cheyennes.⁷Again, this obligation led some to consider the office too burdensome. Once chief, a man could not be removed. One of his chief functions was initiating camp-moving, with the help of a "crier" to announce the decision.⁸

One of the functions of the soldier bands was to see that the camp moved promptly, according to the order of the chiefs. They also led the marching column.⁹ "In addition to (this), and determining thereby the time and place of the communal hunt, it is seen in the crier's words that the naming of the soldier society which was to undertake the direction of the camp-moving and the control of the hunt was a function of the Council."¹⁰

The communal hunt took place in the summer months. "Then and only then were members of any particular (military) society (save the Dog Men) to be found living in the same encampment. At other seasons of the year they were divided throughout the many scattered bands and camps into which the tribe was broken."¹¹

The soldier bands were the following: Fox Soldiers, Elk Soldiers, Dog Men, Red Shields or Bull Soldiers, Crazy Dogs, Bowstrings and Chief Soldiers. "These soldier bands included a large number, but not all, of the able-bodied and ambitious men of the tribe, from youth to old age. They were the organized military force of the camp, and acted as its police force. To them was intrusted the enforcement of the orders of the chiefs. Since, in the Indian camp, public opinion was the ruling force, and since the soldiers constituted a majority of the bravest and most influential men in the tribe, the soldier bands were often consulted by the chiefs on important matters

relating to peace or war."¹²

Other functions of the soldier bands were the enforcement of no-hunting orders. "If anyone started out for this purpose (to hunt), he was followed and brought back, and if he did not submit promptly, he was likely to be well whipped, and perhaps even some of his property might be destroyed."¹³

The ceremonies were in charge of one or more soldier bands. If the man who made the Medicine Lodge belonged to a soldier society, that society had general charge of the ceremony. From this it sometimes resulted that several soldier bands might be in charge of a Medicine Lodge, the different Medicine Lodge makers belonging to different soldier societies. Men of the different soldier bands sang for the dancers on each of the four nights, and each morning the crier called through the camp what soldier band was to sing that night.¹⁴

The responsibility of being chief of a soldier band was great. "The position was understood to be one of such danger that death was always to be expected --a soldier chief was chosen to be killed. Only a man at all times ready to face death could be selected for this office. The soldier chief possessed a high sense of the dignity of his position, and if he thought he was not treated with the consideration due him, he was ready to demand his rights."¹⁵

The Red Shields seem to have been elected, and were mostly elderly men. It signified a great honor, and if a young man

were chosen, he would be one of the most promising ones in the camp.¹⁶

The Dog Soldiers were the rearguard of the marching column. "The Dog Soldiers were under more severe discipline than the other soldier bands, and usually kept very much by themselves. Made up largely of especially brave men, and on this account looked up to by the tribe, they were often arbitrary, and not infrequently insisted that the whole camp should do as they wished. They were also more disposed to war against the whites than the others, and when the rest of the tribe was quiet and peaceful, they often started out on raids and war-parties, and were joined by other young men who did not belong to the band, but who wished to make names for themselves."¹⁷

Among the Cheyennes there were certain men known as Hohnühk'e, a word which conveys the idea of doing precisely the reverse of what is said. They were called Contraries. There was no band or guild of these: they were merely individuals bound by certain beliefs. They were, however, braves of much importance, and were often intrusted with serious duties --even with leadership-- in battle. For this reason it may be proper to speak of them in this place. There were usually two or three Contraries in the tribe....

These Contraries acted by opposites. If they wished to signify assent, they said "No." If one requested a Contrary to go away, he came nearer. If asked to ride, he walked....

A man became a Contrary because he feared the thunder. He carried a peculiar lance which was the especial property of the Thunder, and a Contrary had no fear of being struck by lightning.¹⁸

When a man felt that he must become a Contrary, he tried to take over the position from someone who held it. For this he was obliged to pay a large price...

A Contrary might not associate on terms of equality or familiarity with the rest of the camp. He might not joke, nor have a good time, but was obliged always to be alone and apart. People might visit his lodge, but they were expected to do so with dignity and decorum, moving slowly, and not remaining long.

...A Contrary might be in a crowd only during a fight, when all were charging. In the camp he was always alone --often on a distant hill by himself....No one became a Contrary by choice; but from the warning which came to him there was no escape.

...Men who for many years had been Contraries have spoken to me with great feeling of the hardships of their office...¹⁹

Regarding the military societies it may be said in conclusion: "Though the policing of the buffalo hunt has been frequently remarked by Lowie, Wissler, and others as the primary duty of the police officers, their duties as keepers of the public peace during tribal gatherings appear as important as regulation of the hunt."²⁰ These police duties included settling disputes, punishing offenders and maintaining order in the camp.²¹

WOMEN AND THE FAMILY

Women had a relatively high position among the Cheyennes. Their main source of influence was informal, through their husbands if these were chiefs. Their husbands would listen to their opinions.²²

The women had prominent parts in the ceremonies, although they couldn't dance with the men and were forbidden to dress certain kinds of skins.²³ The women were involved in the caring and harvesting of crops, and apparently for this reason they play an important part in the earth worship ceremony, carrying sod in a manner representative of the Creator when he made the earth.²⁴

Four young women belonged to each soldier band. These girls of "good family" would join the soldiers in their festivities, but travelled with their families when the camp was moving. They sometimes cooked for the soldiers. The girls usually would resign the honorable position when they got married.²⁵

"While it was not common for women to go on the war-path with men, yet they did so sometimes, and often showed quite as much courage and were quite as efficient as the men whom they accompanied."²⁶

The position of the Cheyenne woman in the marriage bond had considerable strength. In the first place, there is her near guaranty of status. Consider the amazing concept, "daughter-wife," immediately supra.

Its use (or invention) means that she who lives in a man's lodge and has sex relations with him is a "wife" almost by virtue of the lack of any term like "concubine" to give her a lesser status. This has its bearing also in the pressures toward the regularization of elopement. The legal disabilities which a woman suffered were few, while there were effective positive checks against malicious cruelty on the part of the husband, for such was good ground for divorce; and in the case of Last Bull's sister, this was made the occasion of depriving the husband of his inheritance from his wife.²⁷

If a suitor wanted to marry a certain girl, his family, through a female intermediary, proffered a first gift of horses, and if the girl's family accepted, the troth was bound. The courtship which had taken place before this usually lasted four or five years, so that the parties knew each other well. The girl legally had no voice in the matter, but in reality these things would be discussed in the family. The first legal authority was the eldest brother, then the parents and then the rest of the male members of the family.²⁸

Elopement, a serious offense against the girl's family, was sometimes done in order to escape a displeasing marriage arrangement. Often a reconciliation would not be long in coming. This defiance of a brother's authority by elopement might sometimes result in protest suicide, the brother not being able to do much more.²⁹

"The relatively strict morality of the Cheyenne women and their famed chastity carried deep into the marital situation. Adultery seems to have been exceedingly uncommon. An indication of its rarity lies in the fact that though all informants stated that a man cut off the braids or nose of an adulterous wife, yet the total of mutilated women known to them was one; and that was a case where the penalty was incurred not for adultery, but for refusal to go with a husband of the brother's choosing."³⁰

Chastity of unmarried Cheyenne girls was legally sustained by the inviolability of the chastity belt (Chapter VII) and by a rigid social opinion. Among the Cheyennes even intramarital sex abstinence of husband and wife was ideally esteemed. Mention of this is made by Mr. Grinnel, who noted, "It was long the custom that a woman should not have a second child until her first child was about ten years of age."... "The people talked about it and praised the parents' self-control."³¹

Such action was not compulsory, many families having numerous children, but the ideal was there. The rationale was to "give the first child a chance." Contraceptives were not used, and abortion was definitely prohibited. The rigid abstinence was fortified by a holy vow. The abstinence "took on the character of a great sacrifice to Maiyun... It gained a general sort of blessing for the first child, as well as making possible undivided parental attention."³²

The submission of strong men to such usage (not being fed by his wife as punishment for her being kicked accidentally by his horse) as this indicates the semi-legal, indeed legal, rights of the woman and of her family that she be treated fairly in the contractual wedlock.

Yet, in spite of such checks, the balance of legal prerogatives weighed in favor of the men. While a woman could leave an adulterous husband (her family accepting this as a ground for divorce), she had no regularized legal right to punish him, nor could she prosecute the correspondent for alienation of affection. The husband, on the other hand, enjoyed these privileges with embellishments.

First, a husband could divorce his wife on the drum --a great disgrace for any woman. And he could do it without important cause.

Drum-divorce was a public divorce, which notified everybody that the husband was giving a quit-claim to all his rights in the woman.... Dancing to the drum, he hit it with the stick. Boom! "I throw away my wife." If he threw the stick among the men, whosoever it struck was bound to take the wife.³³

We now come to the legal muddle that, as we see it, grew out of the normal Cheyenne sexual repressions. The wife who was suspected of being unfaithful by her husband (theoretically, the wife who four times erred) could be "put on the prairie" or "be made a free woman." Her husband invited his military society confreres to a "feast" on the prairie. The pièce de résistance of this stag party was his wife, who was made the victim of a mass raping. Thereafter, if she survived, she was to be free game for any man --in effect, an outlaw.³⁴

"A loose woman among the Cheyennes was without social status."³⁵

PROPERTY

The law regarding property among the Cheyennes is not very extensive and was not very developed. A major reason for this is that they were, or, after the arrival of the horse in the eighteenth century, became, nomads who could not and did not have many possessions to tug around.³⁶ However, even before the coming of the horse, "the only possessions of the Plains tribes, except food and clothing, were their dogs, and their arms and implements of stone and wood."³⁷

Prior to 1600 the Cheyennes were a simple food-gathering people who lived in the lake country near the headwaters of the Mississippi. Shortly after the opening of the century they began moving westward until they came to the Missouri River in the Dakotas. Here they settled into earth-lodge villages and took to tilling corn in the manner they learned from the Arikara tribe. Toward the end of the eighteenth century they were moving again, this time out into the Plains to become a nomadic horse tribe.³⁸

Their main possession was the horse, which they gave away as gifts or in exchange for goods, but the Cheyennes were not a possessive, materialistic or acquisitive people.

There was a great obligation to be generous.³⁹ "When a man died, all of his property not placed with him --and often that of his father and even of his brothers-- was given away, and to people who were not his relatives.... Then the lodge was torn

down and given to someone, and soon everything was gone, and the widow perhaps retained only a single blanket with which to cover herself."⁴⁰ Widows who wanted to go all the way in displaying grief gashed themselves, cut their hair and left camp protected only by a blanket. "Gradually, her friends, or her husband's relatives, began to move out around her until, after they had absorbed her into their own social life and provided her with new equipage, she could be induced to return to the community."⁴¹

"Appropriation of another's property seems not to have been too uncommon. Calf Woman says that lots of times she heard the crier haranguing about the loss of an article by somebody, asking anybody who found it please to send it back."⁴² "If it was not brought back, nothing was said. That is, unless it was something the owner wanted badly."⁴³

A "private-property" system seems to have been, in strict law, rather clearly established, as a basic aspect of organization. Rights are clear in respect to killed buffalo, war loot, and horses. This is true of articles of use, of ornament, of manufacture. Gift was, as to the article given, certainly largely in the owner's discretion. But one must speak cautiously. There were certainly family pressures to give, and not to give; and their extent and meaning are not clear.⁴⁴

"Other doubts lie in the field not of property, but of obligation, to give not particular things, but something, or to give

aid and succor. Here one suspects a rather deep-cutting difference. One suspects a general obligation to be beneficent, which is intensified in the tribal chief by his position, in the bereaved by mourning practice, and among the soldier societies by the incidence of flagrant destitution or emergency."⁴⁵

SOCIALIZATION

"The Cheyennes began to mould the individual en gros to the role he was to play in adult life, from the very early months of childhood."⁴⁶

"When the lodges were put up the boys used to stand in line, and the older girls asked them to choose their mothers. Each boy selected the girl who should be his mother, and they played together. The girls played in this way until they were pretty grown up, fourteen or fifteen years of age; but the boys gave it up when they were younger, for they strove to be men early, and usually soon after they had reached their twelfth year they began to try to hunt buffalo, killing calves as soon as they could ride well and were strong enough to bend the bow....(")⁴⁷

At adolescence, the hortative power of the old men was turned upon the boys individually by their grandfathers and en gros in the speeches of the criers. These moral preachments were effectively backed by pervasive attitudes which marshalled social and supernatural sanctions --both implicit and explicit. The youth who was not respectfully silent in the presence of the elders, who made noises in the lodge, suffered not only direct reproof, but ran the risk of bad luck.⁴⁸

"But positive sanctions were also lavishly used in shaping another and often conflicting phase of character. There were goals of adult glory for the boys who reached the ultimate of Cheyenne good --success in war by reckless individual exploit."⁴⁹ So, too, when young men followed the advice of their fathers in offering a good buffalo-kill to an old shaman, the shaman went to the carcass, and in accepting it performed a short sanctifying ritual in which he blessed the boy and his family. Returning through the camp, he called aloud that he had received a buffalo gift and had performed the ceremony. Here, too, the youth received public credit."⁵⁰

"(A) man's past misdeeds, especially those of violence, rose up in every new dispute, to color the level of his opponent's demands and action, even at times to switch the outcome in law."⁵¹

RELIGIOUS IDEAS

"The Cheyennes say there is a principal god who lives up above --Heammawihio--..." (the Wise One Above).⁵² He was the creator; he first of all was addressed in prayer, and to him the first smoke was offered. The man who prayed looked upward, and perhaps held his hands toward the sky, saying, "I am poor, and in need; help me" --to food, health, long life, success in war, or whatever it might be that he especially desired."⁵³ There is another beneficent god living under the ground.⁵⁴

"Next after Heammawihio the power of the earth is named in prayer. It is implored to make everything grow which we eat, so that we may live...." "The great power put the earth here, and must have put us on it. Without the earth nothing could live. There could be no animals nor plants. The father of life taught us this."⁵⁵

"When Heammawihio first made people, he made them to live. When they died they were to be dead for only four nights, and then they would live again. After a little time the Creator found that this would not do. It would have made people too brave, and they would have done too much killing. That is why now people die forever."⁵⁶ "At one time Heammawihio was with the people on earth. He it was who taught them how to make stone arrowpoints, and knives of stone and bone for cutting.... He told them that the animals, the buffalo, the elk, and the deer --all the animals that are on the earth --and the birds of different kinds, were for them to kill and subsist on."⁵⁷

"After Heammawihio had been ^{long them} with ~~and~~ had taught them how to live, he told them that he was going up to the sky, that he would watch over them, and that when they died they should come to him; while they were on earth they might have much trouble, but when they died all would go up into the sky and live with him."⁵⁸ Heammawihio also told them that there were other peoples also armed whom they would meet, and a different people living on the other side of "the big water" who would cross over one

day."There would be wars, and many people would be killed."⁵⁹

At death, all go to where Heammawihio lives, "excepting only those who have killed themselves. Brave and cowardly, good and bad alike, go there. All who have died are equal. After death there is neither reward for virtue nor punishment for sin."⁶⁰

The Cheyennes believed in ghosts and in spirits which dwelled in waters and in certain high bluffs.⁶¹ They also believed that certain animals possessed special powers, such as the deer, the elk, the beaver, the skunk and the bear. Eagles, owls and other birds also have power. Most revered of all, though, was the buffalo.⁶²

The Cheyennes had two great mysteries:

The medicine arrows and the buffalo hat are the two cherished talismans handed down to protect the Cheyenne and the Suhtai, to give them health, long life, and plenty, and strength and courage to conquer their enemies. The ceremonies of renewing the arrows and of unwrapping the sacred hat are two of the most important practised by the tribe. The ceremonies of the Medicine Lodge and of the Massaum are others of great importance.⁶³

On the spiritual side, the Cheyenne's life was hedged about by a multitude of barriers of ritual and custom. If his beliefs demanded that he should do things that were worthy, it seemed quite as important that he should abstain from things forbidden and believed to bring bad fortune. The Cheyenne prayed constantly and offered many sacrifices to propitiate the

unseen powers and enlist their help. He practised charity, for from earliest youth he had been taught to be kind to his fellow men, to feel sympathy for the unfortunate and to make efforts to assist them. It often costs civilized man a struggle to carry out the precept to love his neighbor, but the Cheyenne did kindly, friendly, or charitable acts of his own free will, and took no credit for them. Yet he lived in constant fear of doing some forbidden thing which would bring him bad luck.⁶⁴

The Cheyennes cut pieces of their skin as a sacrifice to obtain success when going to war, or when they found themselves in situations of great difficulty or danger. They would offer to the powers the most precious thing they had, their own flesh and blood. Other such practices were done ^{during} ceremonial events, often as fulfillment of promises.⁶⁵

The midsummer ceremony of many Plains Indians, which is commonly called the Medicine Lodge, bears its own name in each tribe by which it is practised. The term Sun Dance comes from the Sioux, since they call one feature of the occasion "sun-looking dance," or the dance where they look at the sun.⁶⁶

The so-called torture, the most striking feature of this ceremony, was not really part of it, but an individual act.⁶⁷ The Medicine Lodge consisted of dancing, body-painting and the eating of spiritual food, and was a very fun affair.⁶⁸

"The Massaum ceremony, also called the Animal Dance, Buffalo Dance, Crazy Dance, and Foolish Dance ... is sometimes

spoken of as the ceremony during which people act as if they were foolish or crazy."⁶⁹ It lasts four days,⁷⁰ and is related to the Contrary Society, which takes part in it.

The Contrary Society with its many members appears to have no connection with the Contrary warrior who carries the thunder-bow, yet it bears the same; ...it has some relation to the thunder. ...In this society by their actions and words members attempt to reverse things, to do the opposite of what they are supposed to do; they back into and out of the lodge; and sit on the ground upside down.... They are fun-makers, and their absurd actions are enjoyed and applauded by the people.⁷¹

The greatest hero of the Cheyennes is Sweet Medicine, about whom are told marvelous and moving stories. He instituted the Massaum or Crazy Dance, and brought the medicine arrows.⁷² "Standing On The Ground established the Medicine Lodge."⁷³

When murder had been done, a pall fell over the Cheyenne tribe. There could be no success in war; there would be no bountifulness in available food. "Game shunned the territory; it made the tribe lonesome." So pronounced Spotted Elk; so assent all Cheyennes.

There is thus a branding synonym for "murder" in Cheyenne, (a word), putrid. Such was the murderer's stigma. With murder a man began his internal corruption, a disintegration of his bodily self which perhaps contrition could stay, but never cure. About the killer clung the murderer's smell, an evil mantle eternally noisome to fellow men and the sought-after animal denizens of the plains.⁷⁴

The tribe purified itself by renewing the Medicine Arrows, a sacred ritual. These were a social binder, connected with punitive and absolvent measures.⁷⁵ "The killing of one Cheyenne by another Cheyenne was a sin which bloodied the Sacred Arrows, endangering thereby the well-being of the people."⁷⁶ "When violent emotions were brewing, 'the thought of the Arrows kept lots of people back'."⁷⁶ "Murder was crime, sin, and tort to the Cheyennes: sin first, crime second, and private wrong, third."⁷⁷ Exile or banishment was the usual penalty, and it was not for life, but till the stench had sufficiently gone away.⁷⁷ "Thus Little Wolf, though a murderer, remained in law a chief ... To him the murderer's stigma stuck, nevertheless, and because of it he could not touch his lip to the pipe with other men. From that fatal day on, he did not eat from other men's bowls."⁸⁰

If there was sufficient provocation to murder, banishment did not necessarily follow;⁸¹ also in the case of accidental killing.⁸² Forced-suicide was murder,⁸³ as was abortion.⁸⁴

THE SPIRIT OF THE CHEYENNES: CONTINUED

I will finally point out various ideas that will serve to characterize the Cheyennes before beginning the last part of this paper, which will be a reflection on what we can learn from the Cheyennes.

Once the Shield Soldiers had given an order that no one was to shoot a buffalo until the signal had been given. Two

boys disobeyed and were seen riding among the buffaloes. The soldiers chased them, shot their horses down from under them and whipped them. Their guns were also smashed. After this was done, the boys were told that now they knew what happened when one disobeyed the orders of the police. The soldier chiefs then saw that the boys received new horses and guns.⁸⁵

The rehabilitation of the miscreant hunters by the very police who had despoiled them is not to be looked upon as a freak happening, for this is reported as a widespread practice of the Plains Indian police. If people had to be punished, it was done for the good of the commonweal. Nevertheless, it ran against the generosity grain of a Plains Indian warrior to leave a fellow citizen in straitened circumstance. So long had these men, who were police of the moment, been trained in helping the poor and destitute, that after meting out punishment they meted out goods. The lesson having been driven home, they were satisfied.⁸⁶

Sometimes the sanction for misconduct was to require the sponsoring of a ceremony. "The sole pressure in such a sanction was its cost. To pledge a Sun Dance or other ceremony was a great honor to the giver; the ceremony was always a delight to the tribe. The sanction was not, therefore, so much a penalty imposed upon the individual as it was a sort of super-restitutive payment to the society at large...."⁸⁷

Pawnee was a repentant Southern Cheyenne who had been quite a rascal as a young man.⁸⁸ He was beaten by Bowstring Soldiers

for having stolen two horses. "When they had finished they took all my food and went off with the horses, leaving me alone on the prairie, sore and destitute, too weak and hurt to move." High Backed Wolf, a young chief, saw him and took him to his camp, where he said: "This is the first time since I have become a big chief that I have happened upon such a poor man; now I am going to outfit him. Until he is fixed up, I shall ask no questions. Then we shall learn how he came to be naked. I am not going to ask you to give anything unless you wish to do so. I know this man. He is a great smoker. But I shall give him no smoke until he has first eaten." (Pawnee says that "In my own mind I said, 'I'd rather smoke first.'") He ends his story thus: "Though I came to be a chief of the Fox Soldiers among the Northern people, I never amounted to much with the Southern bands. Those people always remembered me as a no-good.

"You boys remember that. You may run away, but your people always remember. You just obey the rules of the camp, and you'll do all right."

"It was regarded as an evidence of bravery for a man to go into battle carrying no weapon that would do harm at a distance. It was more creditable to carry a lance than a bow and arrows; more creditable to carry a hatchet or a war-club than a lance; and the bravest thing of all was to go into a fight with nothing more than a whip, or a long twig --sometimes called a coup-stick." 89

"The Cheyenne warrior wished to be killed, if at all, on the broad level prairie, where everyone could see him. When he died he did not wish to be covered by earth, but preferred to lie out on the prairie where the birds and the animals might devour his body, and his remains might be scattered far and wide."⁹⁰

WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM THE CHEYENNES: ETHICS AND PHILOSOPHY

We can view the Cheyennes as a privileged people before the coming of the white man. They were a close tribe, a people of great imagination who had developed a rather wise "legal system" (that cramping term!) and who had a spacious and bountiful land in which to roam and hunt.

This state of affairs did not and probably could not last long. People, other people, are born, grow, arm themselves and conquer. New cultures and civilizations seemingly inevitably arrive, and ethics has not ever sufficiently tempered might to satisfy anyone, especially the conquered. Yet, the cry of the oppressed and downtrodden is heard, keeping flickering the flame of conscience, and we can say that if willpower to do good does not increase, moral knowledge does, and the criteria by which to judge actions becomes clearer and ^{more} obstreperous. And so it is with the Cheyennes, as they continue to demand justice and as their way of life, especially as it was when it flourished, becomes known and admired. We then learn not only the great

values and the fascinating lifestyle they developed, but also what was destroyed of such a people. And though we can't --it is unrealistic-- go back to the eighteenth century, we also cannot fail to hear the voice of the Cheyenne and to be confronted with his story.

What was the world like in which these fellow human beings, these Cheyennes, lived and unfolded their character? It was the world of the Plains, a land of plenty, of wide-open space and of many animals which provided good food and fine furs. It was also a land which required toughness to survive, especially in the long, cold and harsh winter months, where game ceased to abound and the tribe had thus to scatter in many directions. For the Cheyennes had taken up the life of the hunter, perhaps had had to; but in any case, it was an adventurous life, with something of the reckless in it. It was also the life of the warrior, which in addition to bravery and the many skills of horse-riding and arrow-shooting and lance-throwing, required a different mind-set from more sedentary, routinery and predictable people. In other words, a certain free-spiritedness was necessary, a refusal to do the comfortable and easy and boring, a certain craziness that wanted to subsist not for its own sake, by working hard and soberly (like a Puritan), but in order to play hard, to feast and to be able to start all over when need be, or even when it needn't be.

Such was the life of the nomad, Indian-style.

The first characteristic then, of the Cheyennes, is their lack of acquisitiveness, of detachment from material possessions except possibly those of great sentimental value. Their way of life did not permit hoarding, even though additional stores would have come in handy in winter. Often a Cheyenne would give away his only valuable property, his horses, in toto, when despair or grief struck. Indeed, a Cheyenne would give his own flesh to show his disponability to Maiyun. He would also always be ready to share with his fellows, even if they belonged to alien tribes.

In fact, the main characteristic of the Cheyenne is magnanimity, a great spirit. It seems that the only faults they recognized have to do with failure or refusal to be magnanimous, to be generous or brave. They seemed to have been --perhaps still are-- a tolerant people. The "halfmen-halfwomen", men who had taken up the ways of women, were very popular and special favorites.⁹¹ There was even room for Contraries, who did everything backwards.

Another characteristic is the bravery and the spirit displayed by the Cheyennes, and their self-display. Here the person had ample space in which to manifest himself/herself, to raise-up his or her personhood, to be admired, but not narcissistically or in an alienating way before people who are just spectators unknown and unloved, but within something of a fa-

mily, or intimate, setting. Again, this may be possible only in a tribal situation, but perhaps such is the only viable way to live, as opposed to a high-rise condominium. Each "exhibitionist" in a Cheyenne dance is free to let all his urges for recognition and admiration be out in the open, but he is confident that he will be accepted, and at the same time the tribal structure and tradition is such that he will be kept in line, so that others have their chance, too. The balance then struck between individual and society is admirable, people being free to be themselves but educated in such a way as to prevent excessive preoccupation with self and obsession/compulsion to "shine" by out-dressing, out-doing, out-buying or out-consuming others.

We should learn from this privileged group who developed qualities that are very difficult to nurture now, when population growth and technologization have brought depersonalization and distancing among people. We do not ^{have to} --in fact, may not be able to-- continue on this road of unlimited, irrational, unhealthy growth in many of the wrong areas, such as in gadgets and methods of transportation which are incompatible with limited resources and which answer to individualism and the insidious, capitalist and greedy notion that more, bigger and faster is better. We cannot go back to the past, when populations were smaller and when mankind was younger and also knew less. A certain kind of progress is not only unstoppable, it

has its virtues and advantages. We have improved our knowledge of medicine, have provided ways of feeding ourselves better (and much worse, too) and have generally gone in the direction of providing for higher numbers of people, specialized and living in urban settings. But the mistakes are becoming glaring to many, the deficiencies in mental and emotional and spiritual and intellectual life amidst the monstrous hypertrophy of plastic and steel, and the destruction of our land and the corruption of our very air. The Indian is the most powerful voice of man less-corrupted, of man when he was freer and closer to nature and to himself, when he could read with less blurred vision what creation was saying. We have grown and advanced in the path of history --or so I believe, in the conviction that the evolutionary unfolding of matter and its emanations, i.e., life and psyche, represent a progression not only in complexity, but in value, to be being better than not to be-- but this advance has not been unilateral or homogeneously good. We have specialized in certain areas to the neglect of others which are now crucial to our survival: ethics, which teaches the cooperation and solidarity of the members of our species (or love of neighbor); philosophy, which directs the mind to ultimate truths and which is necessary for the proper utilization of libido residual after physical and labor activities, and which this society seeks to obliterate through the use of drugs; and the spiritual, which is reverence for that which is grander

than ourselves, which evokes awe in us.

The Cheyennes were a spiritual people, and still are. They did not look coldly at nature, at the Earth; they respected it, were in tune with it. They were not an arrogant, self-enclosed people who presumed to control all things technocratically to the extent of being blinded to the botch they were making of it. The Cheyennes, for all their bravery and display, were a humble people who cried, "I am poor, and in need; help me." They were also a proud people, in the best sense of the word, not afraid to fight or to leave even in a Trail of Tears. They were not a niggardly people, anxious for the needs of the future, but a courageous, confident people, who labored in order to enjoy life, not slaves to greed and materialism.

In all these things we can learn from the Cheyennes. They live on in very changed circumstances. They also cannot go back. But their life was cruelly disrupted, even destroyed, by the white man, including well-meaning but stupidly misguided ones. The sins of the conqueror are not forgotten, the people "always remember." The haughty raise their empires of steel on the blood and backs of the weak, but they have always been brought down. Where is Rome, and Nazi Germany? The Indians in America are part of our conscience, part of those parts of our reason that we are blind to. They are a reminder of the transgressions of our fathers. They are a warning which the wise will listen to.

FOOTNOTES

CW= The Cheyenne Way, Llewellyn and Hoebel, Univ. of Okla. 1941.
CI= The Cheyenne Indians, George Bird Grinnel, Yale, 1923-vol.II.

1. CW 67 (page)
2. CW 91
3. CW 73-74
4. CW 76
5. CW 102
6. CW 78
7. CW 79
8. CW 89
9. CI 53
10. CW 90
11. CW 101
12. CI 48-49
13. CI 54
14. CI 217
15. CI 51
16. CI 62
17. CI 71-72
18. CI 79-80
19. CI 85-86
20. CW 109
21. CW 109
22. CW 78
23. CI 104-105
24. CI 258-259
25. CI 50
26. CI 44
27. CW 181
28. CW 169-170
29. CW 172-174
30. CW 187-188
31. CW 261
32. CW 262
33. CW 185
34. Hoebel, The Law of Primitive Man (Harvard 1954) p. 168.
35. CW 210
36. CW 232
37. CI 1
38. Hoebel, op. cit., p. 128.
39. CW 235
40. CW 212
41. CW 217-218
42. CW 226
43. CW 226
44. CW 233

- 45. CW 235
- 46. CW 240
- 47. CW 242
- 48. CW 246
- 49. CW 246
- 50. CW 247
- 51. CW 266
- 52. CI 88
- 53. CI 88
- 54. CI 88
- 55. CI 89
- 56. CI 90
- 57. CI 90
- 58. CI 91
- 59. CI 91
- 60. CI 91
- 61. CI 96
- 62. CI 103-105
- 63. CI 192
- 64. CI 193
- 65. CI 212
- 66. CI 211
- 67. CI 211
- 68. CI 264ff.
- 69. CI 285
- 70. CI 287
- 71. CI 204-205
- 72. CI 344ff.
- 73. CI 345
- 74. CW 133
- 75. CW 134-135
- 76. CW 132
- 77. CW 135
- 78. CW 118
- 79. CW 133ff.
- 80. CW 85
- 81. CW 143
- 82. CW 137
- 83. CW 161
- 84. CW 118-119
- 85. CW 112-113
- 86. CW 113-114
- 87. CW 125-126
- 88. CW 6-9
- 89. CI 30-31
- 90. CI 22
- 91. CI 39