The Promise and Perils of an Ethic of Stewardship

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The 1970s were a turning point for Americanist/anthropological archaeology in many respects. The emergence of the New Archaeology is usually cited as instituting an optimistic age of self-consciously scientific practice, dedicated to the pursuit of internally defined, anthropological goals the significance of which was marked by their generality: the understanding of long-term cultural processes operating on a scale well beyond the lifeworld interests of individual agents and localized cultural traditions. Understood in these terms, archaeology may have seemed a safe haven from the pressures then transforming sociocultural anthropology, and, in fact, in my second year of graduate school in the late 1970s a classmate who had been passionate about ethnography made the switch to archaeology for just this reason. He had come to the conclusion that he would rather work with subjects who were safely dead; the live ones, he said, were just too much trouble, demanding that you account for yourself, for your interest in their lives, for what you were going to do with anything you learned about them. The dead ones didn’t talk back.

This view was by no means without precedent. No less a statesman and archaeological forebear than Thomas Jefferson held that “the dead have no rights” (as quoted by Thomas 2000:52, 209), and certainly a great deal of archaeological research has proceeded on this assumption (for overviews of this history see Thomas 2000; Watkins 2000). A currently practicing bioanthropologist quoted by David Hurst Thomas makes the underlying principle explicit: “Ancient skeletons belong to everyone”; they are “the remnants of unduplicable evolutionary events
which all living and future peoples have the right to know about and understand” (2000:209–210). The extension of this principle to all prehistoric and historic remains affirms the conclusion that, absent the subjects themselves, no contemporary community-specific interests can trump the interests of humanity or society as a whole. More to the point, no “living culture, religion, or interest groups, or biological population” (as quoted by Thomas 2000:209) can justify restricting the research mandate of scientific experts who have the necessary skills and knowledge to make the best use of surviving “remnants” as evidence. In this spirit, my classmate saw archaeology as one area of anthropology in which one could (still) proceed on the assumption that the chief value of the cultural material under study lies in its evidential significance; the more general the problem on which it bears, the greater the significance.

By sharp and, in the view of my classmate, worrying contrast, cultural anthropologists were facing the complexities of a double life, as Pels later described the ethical tensions inherent in ethnographic practice (2000:146). The rights of human subjects were taking center stage: federal funding agencies were requiring institutional research board reviews for all research involving human subjects, nonmedical as well as medical, and even fields that did not deal with human subjects were under pressure to take seriously the human, social implications of their work and establish effective mechanisms of self-regulation. The Committee on Scientific Freedom and Responsibility established by the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) in the late 1970s concluded, after reviewing the ethics standards of its affiliated societies, that scientists in a range of fields could not continue business as usual; if they did not develop detailed codes of conduct backed by mechanisms of enforcement, they could expect the imposition of highly restrictive external regulations (Chalk, Frankel, and Chafer 1980:101; Wylie 1999). By 1980, when the AAAS report appeared, the American Anthropological Association (AAA) had had a code of ethics in place for nearly a decade. Galvanized into action by concern about allegations that anthropologists had played a role in mission-oriented (counterinsurgency) activities in South America and Southeast Asia (Berreman 1991:39–42), the AAA had adopted principles of professional conduct that made respect for research subjects and their well-being a paramount responsibility for anthropologists. No matter whom my classmate chose to study he understood that, as an ethnographer, he would have to negotiate his research agenda—his practice, his publications, his professional identity—not only with the sponsors of his research and his professional colleagues but also with an expanding array of nonacademic interests and with research subjects who were increasingly prepared to return the ethnographic gaze. This was unacceptable to him. As he understood the mission of scientific inquiry, whether physics or anthropology, it should be uncompromised by parochial interests, values, and demands external to science. In this he embraced the tenets central to science policy in the United States after World War II; pure science had to be insulated from practical concerns even though its costs (in a number of senses) were ultimately justified by its anticipated social benefits.2

In retrospect, however, it is a profound irony that my classmate should have seen archaeology as safe from controversy. The 1970s were pivotal for archaeology not only because they marked the zenith of enthusiasm for scientific goals and disciplinary identity but also because the conditions of archaeological practice were beginning to change dramatically and in directions that required just the kinds of external accountability he had hoped to escape. Native Americans were mobilizing, and one target of their activism was the desecration of sacred sites and burials by archaeologists; American Indian Movement (AIM) activists, tribal leaders, and traditionalists all made it clear that the nameless ancients were, in fact, their ancestors and the archaeological record their cultural heritage. In 1971 AIM shut down excavations in Welch, Minnesota, and took over a Colorado State University anthropology lab (Thomas 2000:198–199; Watkins 2000:7–8); through the 1970s tribal groups began to use historic preservation legislation to assert legal control over archaeological resources on their lands (Ferguson 1990), and expansive analyses of Native American heritage rights were appearing in Native American journals and in legal reviews (Watkins 2000:9–13). By the late 1970s several archaeologists had published assessments of the situation, calling on colleagues to take seriously the “protest themes” voiced by First Nations activists (Johnson 1973). Relations with Native Americans had been identified as one of a half-dozen pressing issues that defined the agenda of a special conference entitled “The Future Direction of Archaeology” sponsored by the Society for American Archaeology (SAA) (McGimsey and Davis 1977; Watkins 2000:11). Although the direct subjects of archaeological research might be dead, descendant communities with an interest in these subjects were very much alive.

In the same period conservation issues took on particular urgency for archaeologists; the destruction of archaeological sites and material had escalated at an alarming rate in the postwar era, not just as a
in 1992, the magnitude of this sea change was clearly evident. Two key developments are emblematic of how deeply the conditions of archaeological practice had changed. Accountability to Native American interests had been legislated in 1991 with the passage of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA); this meant that few archaeologists could avoid dealing with descendant communities. And by 1992 the dominance of the cultural resource management industry had been established. "Over 20 times as much money [was being] allotted to CRM as to institutional or academic research" (Stark 1992:49), and, as a consequence, a majority of practicing archaeologists found themselves rendering professional services that were (for some) highly lucrative in a structurally adversarial environment; they were multiply accountable to employers, clients, employees, and a range of publics, as well as to the discipline and the internally defined research goals of archaeology. As Miriam Stark described the situation, "archaeology [was] no longer the exclusive domain of the scholar" (1992:53). The decision by the executive board of the SAA to set up a committee that would review its existing statements on ethics issues and chart a course forward reflected an appreciation that, like it or not, these legal and economic realities were forcing archaeologists to redefine their priorities at a fundamental level.

**Stewardship in Formation**

Despite these pressures for change, there has been stiff resistance in some quarters to any reassessment of the values and commitments that have traditionally defined archaeology as a research discipline—a science and a subfield of anthropology. Brian Fagan addressed this issue directly in a column he published in Archaeology in 1993. Although "basic research is important to the vitality of our discipline," he said, he was dismayed by the extent to which archaeologists continued to regard anything but narrowly specialized academic research—anything to do with “teaching, conservation . . . resource management, and the administering of the archaeological record” (1993:15)—as a marginal secondary interest. The vision of archaeology that was so compelling for my graduate classmate—a research discipline driven by its own internal cognitive values, uncompromised by the demands of accountability to external interest groups—was still (and continues to be) a powerful force in the archaeological community. Lynott and I encountered just the kinds of resistance Fagan described when we applied to the National Science Foundation (NSF) for support for a meeting of the
SAA committee and its advisers. Although the Ethics, Values, and Society panel endorsed our proposal and ultimately secured funding for it, the Archaeology Division declined to cosponsor it on the grounds that its funds should not be diverted from primary research to secondary concerns such as disciplinary ethics. As one member of the Archaeology Division panel later told us, he did not see how a project concerned with issues of external accountability could be relevant to the substantive, scientific interests of archaeology.

When this meeting of the SAA ethics committee was convened in November 1993, it had the support not only of NSF but also of the National Parks Service and the Policy Institute for Cultural Resources at the University of Nevada–Reno, where the meeting was held, and it included not only members of the SAA ethics committee but also a number of advisers to the committee: Native American representatives, an archaeologist who worked with commercial salvors, archaeologists active on ethics issues in diverse subfields and parts of the world (for example, classical and European archaeology, Mesoamerican and Australian archaeology, underwater and historical archaeology), and representatives of other archaeological societies (among them the Archaeological Institute of America [AIA], the Society for Historical Archaeology [SHA], and the Society of Professional Archaeologists [SOPA]). The aim of this meeting was to set an agenda for future work on ethics issues within the SAA. Although the point of departure for discussion was an assessment of existing SAA ethics policies and statements, it was not our aim to formulate new ethical principles; indeed, we took it to be an open question whether this was a useful initiative under the circumstances. In the event, however, it was at this meeting that the proposal for an ethic of stewardship was drafted. It emerged, initially, in the context of a discussion of how archaeologists should respond to looters, collectors, and a range of commercial interests in the archaeological record. Midway through this first session of the workshop Leigh Jenkins (Kuwanswsiwma), then the director of the Hopi Nation Cultural Preservation Office, identified a number of ways in which the issue of resource protection, as we had conceived it, was fundamentally at odds with tribal values. For example, if the Hopi wanted to receive restitution for damaged sites or repatriate stolen objects, they were required to attach a monetary value to sacred objects and places, which might violate conventions of secrecy and impose a system of valuation that fundamentally misrepresented what was at issue. He described a case in which a sacred Hopi kachina had been repatriated from a collector who had bought it from a member of the Hopi tribe. The basis for the Hopi’s case against the collector was that no individual had the right to alienate this kachina; it was the common property of all the members of a secret society to which the seller belonged.

Jenkins drew no particular lesson from this account; he left it to the assembled archaeologists to think through its implications for the issues they had been discussing. After a pause Christopher Chippindale observed that, as director of an anthropological museum in the United Kingdom, he was deeply frustrated by pressures to assign a commercial value to its collections for insurance purposes; like the Hopi, if for very different reasons, he regarded them as priceless. By requiring curators to assign monetary value to this material, the legal and economic framework in which they worked betrayed its real significance and obscured their responsibility as stewards holding it on behalf of the larger society. Several other museum-affiliated archaeologists concurred with reference to collections held in the Americas. Other participants reflected on ways in which archaeologists had succumbed to the imperatives of a collecting mentality, and still others expanded on this point, insisting that the scope of stewardship extended not just to extant collections but to all the records associated with archaeological research and to in situ archaeological resources. We broke for lunch, and that afternoon several participants returned with the draft of a statement on what an ethic of stewardship involved and the recommendation that we break into working groups to consider the implications of stewardship ideals for various of the issues we had been discussing. When I later had occasion to read James Tully’s account of constitutional pluralism (on which I draw, below, for an analysis of stewardship), I was struck by the parallels between Jenkins’s intervention and the description Tully gave of a story told by the Haida artist Bill Reid about his sculpture *The Spirit of Haida Gwaii* (Tully 1995:33):

Like all great Aboriginal storytellers [Bill Reid] refuses to provide answers to the questions raised by his story. This would defeat the didactic purpose of storytelling, which is not to set out categorical imperatives but to develop the listeners’ ability to think for themselves. Elders tell stories in a manner that encourages and guides listeners to reflect independently on the great problems of life that the story presents to them. ... The test of understanding is ... how they go on in various circumstances to conduct their life in light of what they have learned from reflection on the story. ... There are a multitude of ways of being guided.
I do not know if we went on in any of the ways Jenkins might have hoped, but go on we did. His story about repatriation was a pivotal intervention, changing the tone and certainly the direction of what had begun as a quite diffuse discussion. Where there had been much skirmishing around tightly circumscribed points of disagreement—who counts as a looter; what distinguishes legitimate from illegitimate collecting practices, the entanglement of museums with the antiquities trade—his reflection on a deeper conflict of values focused attention on issues that everyone knew we had to address but no one knew how to approach.

As adopted by the SAA in 1996, the stewardship principle, the first of eight "principles of archaeological ethics," specifies that the primary responsibility of archaeologists is to serve as caretakers of and advocates for the archaeological record, to ensure its long-term conservation, and to promote uses of the record "for the benefit of all people" (SAA 1996:451). The next two principles set out a requirement of accountability, according to which archaeologists must actively consult and if possible collaborate with all groups affected by their research (principle 2), and a broad responsibility to avoid activities that contribute to the commercialization of the archaeological record (principle 3). Subsequent principles affirm commitments to public education and outreach, responsible training and practice, timely public reporting of archaeological findings, and the preservation of archaeological records and materials (1996:452).

Reactions to these principles took roughly three forms. Many welcomed them as a promising response to the rapidly changing conditions under which archaeologists were then working; they saw the principles as a new departure that, at its most ambitious, began to articulate a new, substantially broader vision of the goals and responsibilities of archaeology. Others rejected them out of hand for essentially the same reason. By explicitly acknowledging and, indeed, putting primary emphasis on public accountability, these critics objected, the SAA ethics committee had capitulated to external pressures that would deeply compromise the integrity and autonomy of archaeology as a research enterprise. At just the moment when we should have staunchly defended the core ideals of scientific, anthropological archaeology, we had drafted a set of principles that mentioned "scientific study" just once (as an interest compromised by commercialization [principle 3]), that required archaeologists to negotiate their research interests with "all parties" who might be said to have an interest in the archaeological record (principle 2), and that enjoined archaeologists to put their "specialized knowledge" about "human behavior and culture" at the service of these diverse publics (principles 1 and 4).

To my mind, however, the most challenging criticisms took quite a different tack. In an invited commentary on the draft principles Larry Zimmerman voiced a concern that a number of others had expressed privately: that these ideals of stewardship represented no significant break with the entrenched values that underpinned conventional practice (1995:65). They simply reaffirmed, in different language, the very assumptions of privilege—of access to and control over archaeological sites and materials—that we should have been questioning. By unilaterally declaring themselves stewards of the archaeological record, archaeologists were essentially foxes setting themselves up to guard the chicken coop (Wylie 1996:181). Clearly, then, the concept of stewardship as presented in the 1996 SAA principles was at least systematically ambiguous if not also, as Zimmerman suggested, strategically contradictory.

It is not surprising that the SAA principles should have embodied such internal tensions. One lesson reinforced by our review of existing statements on archaeological ethics was that they were always responses to specific problems; however much they were intended to reach beyond the particularities of current practice, they were deeply structured by the conditions of their production. For this reason we emphasized the point—in discussion and in print, and in urging the SAA to establish a standing rather than an ad hoc committee on ethics—that the principles we proposed should be treated as provisional: not just open to but requiring continuous reassessment and revision as conditions of practice evolved. It is in this spirit that I revisit them. I first consider in more detail the background against which these principles were formulated and then close with a critical assessment of competing conceptions of stewardship.

**Significant Truths, Conservation, and Professionalism**

Archaeologists have established their professional, disciplinary identity by exploiting a series of contrasts with nonanthropological, nonscientific interests in the archaeological record (Denning 1999): initially nineteenth-century antiquarian and twentieth-century commercial interests and subsequently a range of (merely) descriptive, particularistic interests. The common denominator here is that the excluded or contested practices are characterized by a preoccupation with the object. The archaeology that was being institutionalized in North American
museums and universities at the beginning of the twentieth century was distinguished, above all else, by a commitment to approaching archaeological material as a record of the cultural past whose significance lay in its informational content (as evidence), not its aesthetic or sentimental or commercial value. Writing in 1908, Edgar Hewett made the case that archaeological research required much more than "the [mere] recovery and study of material"; indeed, it required practitioners to go beyond the "recital of events" and undertake an investigation of "their genesis" (1908:595). By 1913 Roland Dixon felt confident in declaring that "the time is past when our major interest was in the specimen"; archaeologists were chiefly concerned "with the relations of things, with the whens and the whys and the hows" (1913:565). A few years later Clark Wissler endorsed, as the "real, new archaeology," a form of practice characterized by the "reasoned formulation of definite problems" and the application to them of systematic, explicitly scientific methods of investigation (1917:101). Its hallmark was its pursuit of evidence specifically relevant to the questions central to anthropology, "the science of man" (1917:100).^\textsuperscript{5}

It is striking that, in this early, formative literature and in virtually every subsequent North American debate about disciplinary goals and identity, the distinctive anthropological and scientific mandate of archaeology is defined in terms of what Philip Kitcher describes as "significant truths" and in opposition to a shifting gallery of others (within and outside the discipline) who fail to pursue or to realize significant understanding. As Kitcher puts this point, "there are vast oceans of truth that aren't worth exploring" (2001:148). Commonsense appeals to the ideal that the sciences search for truth are not enough, on their own, to define what it is to be a science; "the sciences are surely directed at finding significant truths" (2001:65), and the difficult question is what counts as significance. If there is any consensus of principle in anthropological archaeology it is that knowledge of the contents of the archaeological record is not, in itself, significant, however rich or appreciative it may be; what archaeologists seek is an understanding of the cultural past that produced this record. The themes evident in arguments for the first "new archaeology" of 1908–17 are reiterated by successive generations of North American archaeologists who repudiate not only outsiders who continue the tradition of nineteenth-century antiquarians—looters, dealers, and collectors who destroy potential evidence in the pursuit of profit or personal satisfaction—but also a range of insiders: not-fully-anthropological or scientific archaeologists for whom the description and systematization of archaeological data has become an end in itself (see, for example, Kluckhohn's [1939] critique of "narrow empiricism") or whose culture-historical reconstructions are little more than redesctheses of temporal and spatial patterning in the record (see, for example, the New Archaeologists' critiques of traditional archaeology in the 1960s and 1970s [Wylie 2002:61–66]).

These commitments are explicit in the first position statement on ethics developed by the SAA, the "Four Statements for Archaeology" published by the Committee on Conduct and Standards in 1961 (Champe et al. 1961:137). The authors begin with a definition of archaeology: "Archaeology is a branch of the science of anthropology ... [a scholarly discipline] concerned with the reconstruction of past human life and culture ... Its primary data lie in material objects and their relationships [systematically collected and documented]. Value attaches to objects so collected because of their status as documents, and is not intrinsic."

They go on to specify, in general terms, what archaeologists must do to make effective use of their data as a record, and they condemn any practice that compromises the evidential value of archaeological data, especially practices such as the buying and selling of artifacts that "usually result in the loss of context and cultural associations" (1961: 137). The by-laws of the SAA, drafted in 1977 and revised in 1997, define the objectives of the society more generally: the first stated objective is "to promote and to stimulate interest and research in the archaeology of the American Continents" ([1977] 1995:17). Although these objectives set out no explicit definition of what counts as archaeological research, it is clear in several subsequent clauses that the mandate of SAA archaeologists is to do scientific, anthropological research defined, as in 1961, oppositionally. They are to "operate exclusively for scientific and educational purposes," to counteract any nonarchaeological interests that threaten the destruction of archaeological resources or, indeed, any "loss of scientific knowledge and access," and to "aid in directing the ... efforts [of all those interested in American Archaeology] into scientific channels" (objectives 4, 8, and Postscript [SAA (1977) 1995]). One key difference from the 1961 statements is the appearance of a new professional and ethical obligation: the second objective is to "advocate and to aid in the conservation of archaeological resources," a clause that appears (in one form or another) in virtually every archaeological statement of objectives or ethical code drafted after the early 1970s.

The centrality of a commitment to "significant research" is particularly striking when one considers what these SAA statements do not
do. The committee that drafted the 1961 statements had been formed in response to growing concern that, with the dramatic postwar expansion of archaeology, informal mechanisms of self-regulation were no longer effective; it was becoming necessary to codify professional standards, to define "who an archaeologist was and what that person was qualified to do," as McGimsey put it in retrospective discussion (1995:11). In the event, this committee chose not to develop a code of conduct or any very specific mechanisms for enforcing the principles it set out; in particular, it chose not to establish requirements for professional standing. It acknowledged that many of the most conscientious, productive members of the SAA were committed avocationals who had never been formally trained or professionally employed as archaeologists; there was a strong predisposition to avoid any guildlike rules that might draw a line between professionals and nonprofessionals. Archaeology was thus conceived as a calling, not only or necessarily a profession, and the SAA as a scholarly society, not primarily a professional association. The later objectives make this commitment to inclusiveness explicit; the fourth is to "serve as a bond among those interested in American Archaeology, both as professionals and nonprofessionals" (SAA [1977] 1995).

The SAA revisited the question of professional standards in the mid-1970s, under pressure from a number of members who, taking stock of the impact on the field of cultural resource management, forcefully argued the need to institute a register of professional archaeologists, a formal code of conduct governing their practice, and grievance procedures to enforce this code. A committee on codes and standards was set up to do this, but the SAA executive board declined to act on its recommendations, citing the threat of legal and financial ruin if self-regulation went awry and a concern that any systematic distinction between professional and nonprofessional members would change the character of the society. In 1978 members of this committee founded an independent society for professional archaeologists, SOPA, which has been reconstituted, twenty years later, as the Register of Professional Archaeologists (RPA), jointly supported by the SAA, the SHA, and the AIA (McGimsey, Lipe, and Seifert 1995). For many the motivating concern was that, with big money at stake and a regulative structure that puts archaeologists on the front line in ensuring compliance with heritage legislation, both contract archaeologists and their employers need clearly specified, collectively endorsed guidelines that set out what professional archaeologists can and cannot do. Although the ultimate goal of cultural resource management is to serve a broadly conceived (social, human) interest in understanding the cultural past, in practice it applies the tools of archaeological investigation instrumentally, as a technology of recovery and documentation that is to varying degrees disconnected from the anthropological and historical problems they were designed to address. Good archaeology of the kind envisioned by generations of "real, new archaeologists" is expensive, and, in a competitive lowest-bidder environment, the economic realities of cultural resource management practice often mean that there is not even adequate funding for storage and preservation, let alone for analysis and publication that goes beyond the requirements of descriptive reporting on the contents of the endangered archaeological record.

The SOPA code, now implemented by the RPA, makes these tensions explicit. Archaeology is defined, first and foremost, as a profession: "The privilege of professional practice requires professional morality and professional responsibility, as well as professional competence, on the part of each practitioner" (SOPA 1991:7). The goals of science figure chiefly in the clauses that specify standards for research performance. Professional archaeologists have a responsibility to "design and conduct projects that will add to our understanding of past cultures," and effective design is understood to require a "scientific plan of research" (9). They are also expected to keep up with developments in their field and to report the results of their work to "colleagues and other interested persons" (10). Although SOPA clearly endorses an overarching commitment to seek significant truth about the cultural past, this defining disciplinary goal is embedded in a complicated network of competing responsibilities to a range of stakeholders: clients and employers, employees, colleagues, students, and the public at large, as well as the field of archaeology itself (7–8).

When Lipe (1974) proposed that archaeologists should embrace a "conservation ethic," he was responding to the situation created by the compliance industry as much as to the widespread destruction of archaeological resources that gave rise to cultural resource management. He argued that salvage archaeology should be conducted only as a last resort and that when it was unavoidable, those engaged in such work should strenuously resist pressures that might compromise the research value of their work: "piling up data for its own sake, proving the obvious, archaeology by rote—are all pathways to stagnation" (1974: 243). "Salvage archaeologist[s]," he said, should be mindful that they were "also working for the whole profession" (234); the challenge was to find ways to "make a research contribution on the basis of a site or set of sites selected . . . by circumstance" and to recover data that would
be relevant to future research problems without knowing clearly what these would be (231). If cultural resource management was practiced with a "strong primary problem orientation," Lipe was confident that the demands of compliance could be reconciled with (and even be made to serve) the scientific goals of the discipline. But his chief emphasis was on the need for all archaeologists to embrace a conservation ethic—to take "responsibility for the whole resource base" (214)—and to recognize that this would require them to forgo the excavation of sites that were not threatened if there was any possibility of meeting "the data needs of a problem" through the use of existing collections or the excavation of sites within "the available pool of [those] requiring salvage" (213). The rationale for circumscribing the pursuit of significant truth in this way was not, however, a concern that archaeological interests must be weighted against other interests in the record; it was to ensure that future archaeologists would have a database with which to work. Lipe reinforced this primary commitment to the goals of scientific archaeology in a later article, "In Defense of Digging" (1996), in which he argued that he had never intended to foreclose all "consumptive uses" of the resource base; "an archaeology without excavation is one that cannot fully achieve its potential social contributions" (1996:24), which he characterized as "the production and dissemination of new information about the past based on the systematic study of the archaeological record" (23). The trade-off imposed by Lipe's conservation ethic is not between archaeological and nonarchaeological interests but between the long- and short-term research interests of the archaeological community.

Divergent Models of Stewardship

Considered against this background, the stewardship principles drafted in 1993 (adopted in 1996) clearly build upon the conservation ethic that had already taken shape in North American archaeology. At the same time, however, a commitment to stewardship requires archaeologists to be accountable not just to the current and future interests of archaeological research but to "the full range of publics and stakeholders whose heritage this record is" (Lynott and Wylie 1995); in this it represents a significant expansion upon and, on some construals, a break with the principles of conservation and the paramount commitment to the research goals of archaeology articulated by previous statements. Just how radical a shift this is and what it entails was the focus of much discussion at the Reno meeting. The position paper on stewardship reflects the tenor of this discussion, noting that a (self-ascribed) mandate to serve as stewards "does[ ] not establish any presumption of ownership or control over archaeological resources"; appeals to the goals of science should not be assumed to displace all other interests, and when archaeologists do pursue their disciplinary interests "they have a responsibility to ensure that their research benefits the public[s] in whose trust archaeological material is held, documented, preserved and sometimes exploited" (Lynott and Wylie 1995). As Zimmerman observes, however, there remains an implicit presumption that archaeological expertise establishes a privilege of oversight (1995:65–66); the language of public trust, which archaeological research is assumed to serve, is juxtaposed with an acknowledgment that the interests of the publics in question are by no means congruent with one another nor convergent on any common, transcendent set of values where archaeological sites and material are concerned. The range of responses provoked by these principles testifies to this transitional instability; they embody the contradictions they were meant to address.

These contradictions are inherent not just in principles of archaeological stewardship but also in the complicated legacy of thinking about stewardship as a guide for action more generally. In the context of environmental ethics, the idea of an ethic of stewardship originated in religious doctrine that represents man as "God's deputy," a kind of farm manager, Passmore suggests, responsible for protecting the divine creation and perfecting its "beauty, usefulness, and fruitfulness" (1974:30, 31). The challenge has been to determine how a secular ethic of human responsibility for nonhuman nature can be motivated and authorized. If we cannot confidently appeal to a divine authority, do we then invoke some presumed universal interest of all humanity? Or perhaps the more concrete but speculative interests of future generations of humans? Or some more prosaic combination of anthropocentric interests and virtues, for example, loyalty and benevolence, as Welchman (1999) has suggested? The impulse inherent in the concept of stewardship is to seek some reference point, some foundation that transcends local, individual interests on which to base its claims. In an archaeological context this impulse, reinforced by the legacy of a deeply entrenched commitment to significant inquiry, is to appeal to a distinctively rational, panhuman interest in a particular kind of knowledge about cultural past: the kind of knowledge that scientific, anthropological archaeology is best fitted to provide. This presupposes the theology of the scientific faithful, as Kitcher (2001:3, 9) describes it: that the sciences at their best provide accurate, authoritative knowledge
that transcends practical values and localized interests, knowledge that has intrinsic value for all people, whether it directly benefits them or not, and that "represents the apogee of human achievement."

Deployed in the context of intra- and intercultural conflict between fundamentally different ways of valuing archaeological material/cultural heritage, the appeal to a transcendent public interest in scientific knowledge of the past shares many elements of the "residual imperialism" inherent in modernist conceptions of constitutional negotiation (Tully 1995:43). On Tully's account, constitutional modernists assume that there must be some unique, universal standard of rationality, often modeled on scientific rationality (185), that is strictly neutral with respect to contesting cultures, a standard that all parties will embrace if only they free themselves from the bonds of parochial custom and establish themselves as the proper subjects of universal principles of formal equality, undifferentiated with respect to need or interest (60). Tully objects that this fiction of universalism—this "imperial fable" about the "universality of the guardians and the institutions they guard" (93)—is itself specific to a particular colonial, imperialist context and is founded on highly questionable assumptions about the evolutionary superiority of those cultures that embrace, incompletely as it turns out, just the ideals of rationality that are presumed to be necessary for forming modern constitutions and running modern democracies. Appeals to a public interest made within the framework of this fiction are appeals to the interests that all citizens would have, counterfactually, if they were to transcend the dogmatic conventions of lesser cultural forms.

As stark a caricature as this may seem, claims along just these lines have been made in opposition to NAGPRA and, indeed, to any assertion that archaeologists should be prepared to compromise the pursuit of scientific, anthropological goals out of respect for the interests of stakeholders who understand the cultural past and value archaeological sites and material in fundamentally different ways. Consider Geoff Clark's sharp opposition to the claims of "various pseudo- and anti-science constituencies" (1998:22) that challenge the scientific worldview he embraces and that, he says, threaten to undermine all the accomplishments of Enlightenment rationality, science having been instrumental in "achieving the modern world" (22). "We all lose," he argues, "if for reasons of political expediency, Indians rebury their past" (24); to accede to repatriation—to accept that the ethnic and religious beliefs of Native Americans should be considered "on an equal footing with science" (24)—is to capitulate to a "demon haunted world" (1996), a family of worldviews characterized by religiosity, obscurantism, and ignorance that are "curious survivals of earlier cognitive evolution" (1998:22). A commitment to "reasoned inquiry," to the antidogmatic, self-correcting practice of scientific inquiry, is a commitment to the pursuit of systematic, empirically grounded knowledge of a "generalized human past . . . part of a universal heritage not circumscribed by ethnic or cultural boundaries" (24).

Virtually every element of this argument is open to question if not patently unsustainable, from the assumptions about cultural evolution to the claims about the transcendent status of scientific knowledge. I make these arguments as an epistemological conservative; I endorse a modest realism (Wylie 2002:97-195), and I have argued for a moderate pragmatic objectivism in archaeological contexts (Wylie 2000). In other words, I believe that systematic empirical inquiry can and frequently does establish reliable, precise, explanatorily probative knowledge of an independently existing reality, social and historical as well as physical and natural. In Kitcher's language (Kitcher 2001:11-28), science establishes truths about the world, albeit truths that are understood always to be open to reassessment and revision. In this the diverse and evolving methodologies of critical scientific inquiry are immensely valuable, but I see no reason to conclude that this insulates the scientific enterprise or its products from political, moral, and social scrutiny, much less establishes that scientific interests have a transcendent value that takes precedence over all other interests. As suggested earlier, the key point here is that scientific inquiry is a search not for truth as such (or, more modestly, for empirically credible knowledge as such) but for significant truth (or knowledge). And the assessment of significance is inherently project- and practice-specific: "objective explanation goes on in the sciences, but only against the background of our questions and interests" (Kitcher 2001:75), which are diverse and shifting, conditioned by a wide range of factors. The contextual factors that constitute significance include everything from the internal intellectual dynamics of the research tradition itself, through changes in the conceptual and technical resources available for inquiry that are both internal and external to the research tradition in question, to more strictly external factors such as the practical considerations mediated by funding initiatives, the hegemonic interests of a dominant elite, or the transient Zeitgeist of an era. In this sense "moral and social values [are] intrinsic to the practice of science" (Kitcher 2001:66; see also Longino 2002:124-144).
I also see no reason to assume that, even if the goals of science did transcend local (culturally specific) interests, they should take precedence over (all) other values and interests. We acknowledge that scientific inquiry must be constrained by respect for the rights and interests of human subjects and by concern with more indirect consequences for those who are affected by but are not the subjects of inquiry. In this it is recognized that (scientific) knowledge is not categorically good (or bad); even the most obviously beneficial knowledge comes at a cost. Kitcher makes this case with reference to biomedical research (the Human Genome Diversity Project) and argues that the issue is not whether scientific knowledge is a good (or bad) thing as such but whether its costs and benefits are equitably distributed (2001:181–197), an issue that is especially salient in the case of archaeological and anthropological inquiry that concerns Native Americans.

Finally, I see no reason to accept the claims about cultural evolution central to Clark’s argument or the conclusions he draws from them. Why should we assume that communities or cultures that do not grant priority to scientific interests are inherently inferior to those that do? Centrally at issue here is the most all-encompassing of questions: what makes for a high-quality life. Surely such lives can take a great many different forms, only some of which (or some aspects of which) are well served by the pursuit of scientific goals. Perhaps more to the point, why should we assume that the unevolved, parochial values rejected by Clark will disappear with proper education as those who embrace them realize fully modern rationality and assimilate an idealized set of universal human values? As the constitutional pluralist Tully observes, the cultural and social diversity that obtains both within and between modern states has by no means withered away, despite no end of efforts in this direction. Native Americans are just one among many examples that subvert modernist ambitions and expectations; they sustain distinctive cultural traditions and forms of self-government that are internally complex, dynamic, and shaped both in interaction with and in opposition to dominant Euro-American cultures that have done everything in their power to dispossess and annihilate or, alternatively, assimilate them. This resilient and proliferating pluralism throws into relief the parochial nature of modernist ideals; as Tully argues, these are anything but transcendent, emerging in and sustained by highly specific conditions of cultural dominance and opposition. But such pluralism does not necessarily undermine the viability of constitutional negotiation; Tully delineates a rich historical tradition of intercultural negotiation that has thrived on the margins of constitutional modernism and that takes the recognition of cultural difference as its point of departure (1995:99–140).

Taking these various lines of argument into consideration, I see no brief for according professional archaeologists the status of stewards responsible for the archaeological record in any sense that presumes that they have unique standing in the service of a generalized social, human interest in knowledge of the cultural past that conforms to their identity-defining, scientific and anthropological goals. This is not to say that what archaeological inquiry offers is trivial, of only marginal interest. Archaeologists have a developed tradition of skill and knowledge, a commitment to systematic empirical research that contributes enormously valuable understanding of the cultural past and, by extension, of our diverse contemporary selves. Archaeology is the only basis for learning about the vast majority of human ancestors who are lost to memory and history or, indeed, about many aspects of the lives that are otherwise remembered and recorded (Wylie 2002:205). And, in the way of anthropology generally, archaeological insights can very effectively make strange what we take for granted, recovering alternatives to and contingencies in the history of dominant cultural and social forms that we tend to reify, to naturalize. Of course, archaeology is not always used for these purposes, as nationalist appropriations make plain (Kohl and Fawcett 1995; Trigger 1984, 1989). What is at issue in cases such as these is often not so much deliberate misrepresentation as “epistemic asymmetries” (Kitcher 2001:97): the risk that ambiguities of evidence and interpretation will systematically favor those reconstructions that reinforce existing social and political inequities. Nonetheless, archaeology is one of the technologies of inquiry that can cultivate the kind of intercultural vision that Tully recommends as an essential condition for effective intercultural negotiation.

Collaborative Stewardship

If the concept of stewardship is to play any useful role in navigating the conditions of practice that are reshaping archaeology, it must be construed not as a matter of wise management on behalf of an abstract higher interest (that of science and, by extension, society or humanity) but as a matter of collaborative, negotiated co-management among divergent interests (including archaeological interests) none of which can be presumed, at the outset, to take precedence over the others. This is by no means a novel suggestion; the recommendation that stewardship be considered a joint venture was prominent in the Reno discussions.
and has been advocated by a great many others, albeit in quite different senses (for example, Ferguson 1990, 1996; Forsman 1997; Goldstein 1992; Nicholas 2000; Spector 2000). A common theme in these recommendations is that archaeologists must be prepared to make a case for pursuing their goals as co-participants in an open-ended process of negotiation in which all the questions that Clark forecloses—who should be involved, what interests are legitimate, how these interests should be weighed—are on the table. To specify what is entailed by stewardship in this spirit, I draw inspiration from Tully's account of intercultural constitutional negotiation, which in many key respects converges on the practices instituted by archaeologists and Native Americans who have established productive collaborations.

The first of three requirements set out by Tully (1995:116) is that negotiation should begin with a recognition of difference, not the presumption that difference obscures an underlying (rational, universal) framework that is neutral with respect to diverse cultural values. As Tully describes this requirement of mutual recognition, it is a matter of ensuring that all parties to the dialog “speak in their own language and customary ways,” that “each listens to the voices of the others in their own terms” (24), that they “participate in their diverse cultural forms [and develop] a form of intercultural understanding that does not presuppose a comprehensive [neutral] language” (57). The ability to do this effectively, “to change perspectives—to see and understand aperceptively,” is something participants acquire “through participation in the intercultural dialogue itself” (25). The need for this kind of communication—for the kind of sustained engagement necessary to build trust and understanding, sometimes across acrimonious differences—is pivotal to virtually every recommendation for collaboration that has been made by Native Americans and archaeologists alike. Beyond this, Tully outlines a process by which negotiating parties articulate for one another just what identity-significant values are at stake in the conflict under negotiation; he characterizes this as a matter of establishing “continuity.” This many Native Americans do as a matter of course when entering negotiations with archaeologists, and it is, in essence, what archaeologists recommend when they insist on the need to communicate clearly and publicly exactly what their goals are as archaeologists—what their interests are in archaeological sites and materials.

Mutual recognition and arguments of continuity provide a framework in which to negotiate accommodations that take account of, if they do not fully satisfy, the interests of all involved, subject to the principle that “what touches all should be agreed to by all” (Tully 1995:122). Any closer specification of what joint stewardship involves—of the conditions under which it thrives and of practical guidelines for its implementation—will require the analysis of cases that illustrate the various forms that “best-practice” stewardship can take. This is a strategy for moving beyond the polarized debate over repatriation and the control of cultural resources that is already evident in much recent literature on the prospects for fruitful collaboration between Native Americans and archaeologists (for example, Swidler et al. 1997; Dongoske, Aldenderfer, and Doehner 2000; Watkins 1999, 2000).

Archaeologists may worry that, without the anchor of universal values—without the possibility of appeal to values that trump all other interests—they stand to lose all access to archaeological sites and materials. Certainly the cost of doing business in the way it has been done will be the loss to archaeologists of some important research opportunities. But the growing literature on what becomes possible when archaeologists “make every reasonable effort, in good faith,” to develop ongoing working relationships with “affected groups” (SAA 1996:451) suggests that there is much more to be gained than lost. What my graduate classmate failed to realize was just how much a research tradition can be enriched by sustained interchange with values and interests that lie outside its insular boundaries.

Notes

1. This was 1977–78 at the State University of New York in Binghamton.
2. I draw here on Kitcher's assessment of the arguments developed by Vannevar Bush in a report on science policy published in 1944. With a primary focus on defending the idea of pure science and no detailed account of the value of such inquiry for society, “the institutional framework of the report is one in which scientists are left free to pursue their own curiosity but simultaneously saddled with the task of advertising their research as potentially satisfying the untrained preferences of the public” (2001:141).
3. Forums for debate and discussion of these principles were organized at a number of regional and national meetings of archaeologists in the two and a half years before they were adopted by the SAA. One of these, a plenary session at the 1994 annual meetings of the SAA, resulted in a widely circulated special
report of the SAA that included papers by participants in the 1993 Reno meeting explaining the rationale for each of the original six principles as well as a number of critical assessments and commentaries by contributors who had not been involved in drafting the principles (Lynott and Wylie 1995).

4. Our point, in emphasizing the need for continuous and systematic reassessment of these principles, was not just that their conditional nature should be recognized but that their elaboration and refinement cannot be treated as an end in itself. The importance of clearly articulated statements of disciplinary goals, standards, and guidelines should not be trivialized; the authors of the AAAS report of 1980 (Chalk, Frankel, and Chafer) give a clear account of the functions they serve and the liabilities faced by professional groups that lack them. But, as they also point out, the formulation of such statements is not an adequate response, on its own, to the problems they address. There is no guarantee that instituting explicit statements of principle or even a formal code of conduct will be a force for positive change. Moreover, once codified, such principles are always vulnerable to manipulation, cynical application, and subversion; they are no proof against unethical, exploitative, self-serving behavior. To be effective, ethical principles and guidelines must be embedded in a broad network of institutions and practices—a disciplinary culture—that reinforces robustly responsive, accountable forms of professional practice.

That said, codification can be an important locus for disciplinary change in some contexts, at some junctures; the development of principles of stewardship in the SAA may be such a case. We were acutely aware, however, that the process of debate—the public articulation of issues and ideals occasioned by the proposal of an ethic of stewardship—was at least as important as the product of our deliberations. And we were concerned that, if this impetus was not to stall, much more would be required than the writing (or updating) of codes and principles. In this spirit, the standing committee on ethics that the SAA executive board established in 1996 has put a great deal of energy into developing conference sessions, workshops, publications, curricula, and educational materials that keep these issues alive and expand their reach within the discipline and beyond. See, for example, the ethics textbook recently assembled by the SAA Ethics Committee (Zimmerman, Vitelli, and Hollowell-Zimmer 2003:xi–xii) and the proposal put forward by the SAA's Task Force on Curriculum that an ethic of stewardship and related principles of professional ethics should be the defining core of the archaeological curriculum at both the graduate and the undergraduate level (Davis et al. 1999:18–9; Bender and Smith 2000).

5. These historical antecedents are discussed in more detail in the first section of Thinking from Things (Wylie 2002:25–40).
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