

## **Being Nature's Mind: Indigenous Ways of Knowing and Planetary Consciousness**

by

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Since 1999, I have participated in the Language of Spirituality dialogues between Native Americans, scientists, and linguists, which are held in Albuquerque, NM, every summer. During one such dialogue, a number of the Native American participants told long, winding stories, seemingly unconnected to the topic at hand. Finally, one of the Anglo physicists lost his composure and began criticizing the proceedings: "Let's get beyond just telling stories," he said, "and get down to a real discussion. Let's really get into it and sort out what is good and what is bad about Western science and Native science." What he had heard so far had not qualified for him as a "real discussion." The response, from the Native Americans present, was not the direct, confrontive type of argument that he was seeking, but instead, more stories, even more long and winding, which then elicited another outburst from the impatient physicist, who felt that his earlier plea had been ignored.

What was happening here? It was a failure of communication at the meta-level between people with different models of what constitutes proper social behavior and the correct way to get one's opinion across. The physicist, in being direct, critical, and confrontive, was breaking every rule of Native American social interaction. The Native Americans could not directly tell him that without also breaking their rules. Their way to show him that he was in the wrong and had something to learn was through indirect stories which he was expected to be able to "hear" and apply to himself. Their response of more stories, which to them was a highly refined, polite, and indeed, ethical response to his social insult, seemed to him to be insulting.

At the beginning of every Language of Spirituality dialogue, the moderator, Leroy Littlebear, tells us that in dialogue, we should set aside our tacit infrastructures, our

currently held beliefs about reality, in order to listen deeply for whatever words, ideas, feelings, or perceptions surface in us during the experience. However, as the above story illustrates, becoming aware of and setting aside one's own tacit infrastructure is easier said than done. In my studies of Native American thought and my friendships with Native American elders, scholars, and students, I have begun to discover how deep the cultural divide is between the Western European approach to life and the Native American one. The differences include one's earliest childhood experiences, how one's identity is born and grows, how one structures the world through language, how one experiences one's body, how one experiences connection to other people, creatures, and the land, and how one decides to take or refrain from action, among other things. These differences reside very deeply inside our lived experience, and are usually not accessible to consciousness without concerted introspective effort, helped along with jolts of cross-cultural miscommunication.

I am beginning this article with an emphasis on the differences between the two cultures, not because I think the chasm unbridgeable, but because I think it should not be bridged too easily or superficially. Carl Jung once warned that Western people who take up Eastern spiritual practices run the danger, first, of doing those practices inauthentically, since they are not beginning with an Eastern psychic structure, and secondly, of using those practices to avoid the real psychological work they, as people with Western psyches, need to do to ever become ready for higher spiritual practice (ctd. by Kelly). I believe that the same warning applies to modern urban people who take up Native American practices. I am glad that there is growing interest in Native American thought because I believe it is a deep and subtle source of wisdom which the planet needs; however, it will serve no one to have Westerners appropriate Native ceremonies or practices and act them out while staying completely within Western ontological assumptions and Western psychological experiences. A more radical deconstruction of

the Western mind is required in order for Europeans to finally begin to see into another way of being and other ways of knowing.

In this article I will explore how deep tacit infrastructures get created, how cultures train children in perception, and how a culture's ontology, ethics, and epistemology is self-perpetuating. I begin by looking at George Lakoff's analysis of the differences between conservative and liberal worldviews for two reasons: first, his work gives a good illustration of what I call the epistemological circle, how childrearing both grows out of and perpetuates certain egoic structures and ways of knowing. Second, since both the conservative and liberal worldviews which Lakoff delineates still share some underlying Western assumptions about the nature of reality, his work also serves to show that there is a deeper difference than many Westerners realize between even a liberal, ecological Western perspective and indigenous ones. I will then look at three descriptions of Native American ways of knowing and how they are connected to ethics and practices of childrearing. My goal is to help readers from any culture begin to become aware of how deeply embedded our cultural modes of perceiving are and how different they may be from those of other cultures. This type of self-reflexive awareness is necessary for true dialogue and can also be facilitated by dialogue. Even more importantly, I believe it is now crucial for members of the dominant Western culture to begin to see how current global environmental, social, and political problems have sprung from the Western tendency to think in terms of discrete units and how we have largely lost the ability to see connected, interwoven patterns of motion.

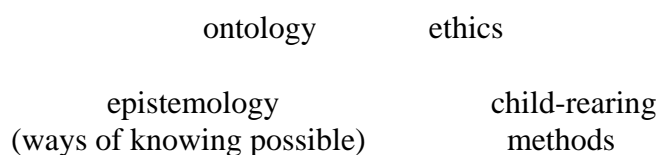
### **Conservative and Liberal Views of the Family**

I recently attended a lecture by George Lakoff in which he explained his analysis of the different underlying moral systems of the conservatives and the liberals in America (as written about in his book, *Moral Politics*). He stated that both groups envision the nation as a family: the conservatives hold a strict father model of the family, whereas the

liberals hold a nurturing parent model of the family. As he discussed, the differences in these underlying metaphors go a long way to explaining how each side can believe so strongly in the morality of their position though holding such different views on specific issues. The conservatives, however, according to Lakoff, are much more aware of the consistency of their worldview and thus put it forth as a self-consistent morality, whereas the various liberals and progressives are not as self-aware and fail to emphasize the underlying moral reasons behind their positions on issues. Lakoff's work is to help the political left join the dialogue at the meta-level, more aware of their own underlying assumptions and the moral power of their position.

I am excited about Lakoff's work for two reasons: first of all, I tend to agree with the political left and would like to see them articulating their own worldview with more moral integrity; but more importantly, I think it is extremely important now that many groups and peoples of the world learn to dialogue together at a meta-level. We need to become more aware of the tacit infrastructures from within which we speak. We need to also become aware of how deeply those unconscious assumptions have shaped us and continue to shape our ability or lack of ability to see the "other" and to take in the world in a new way.

Tacit infrastructures get translated into parenting practices, which then structure the psyches of the children, resulting in adults who excel in certain ways of knowing but have disabilities or dampened sensitivities for other ways of knowing. I call this connection between a culture's tacit infrastructure, their childrearing practices, and the resulting sensitivities (or lack of sensitivities) "the epistemological circle," and envision it as follows, where each part of the circle supports the others:



egoic structure  
of the child

Thus, a culture's ontology, or belief about the nature of the world, leads to a certain ethics, part of which includes how children are treated. How a child is treated influences what kind of egoic structure is built in the child's psyche, which in turn influences how the child takes in the world (the sensitivities or ways of knowing available to that child). How the world is or is not taken in, what is or is not noticed or apprehended, then supports the reigning set of beliefs about the nature of the world. In this way, a culture reinforces and perpetuates its own perceptions of the nature of reality, much of it at an unconscious level.

According to Lakoff, the main belief which underlies the strict father model of the conservatives is the belief that the world is a dangerous place. Another key assumption is that children are born bad and must be made good. Through external physical discipline, they can learn internal discipline, that is, the ability to make themselves do things they don't want to do but which are necessary for becoming strong, self-reliant, competitive, and independent, all highly regarded qualities in this worldview. This is a quick summary of a complex set of ideas, however, one can see immediately that these assumptions about the world as dangerous and humans as naturally bad have a long history in Western thought, usually expressed theologically as the fallenness of nature and the doctrine of original sin. I would contend that the strict methods of childrearing which have grown out of such beliefs have certainly shaped, and one could even say damaged, the psyches of children raised under them. The egoic structure which arises from repressive parenting is what Catherine Keller, in her book *The Broken Web: Separation, Sexism, and the Self*, calls a "separative ego," one with rigid boundaries, which is defended against taking in information from one's own body and emotions, the parts of one's experience which were not allowed to be felt. It is a split psyche, which

then experiences itself as split off from the body and from the world, and which relates to itself, to other people, and to nature in a controlling and dominating way, rather than in a reciprocal and relational way.

According to Lakoff, the assumptions about the world underlying the nurturing parent model of the liberals are more benign, but in my view they are still very Western when compared to Asian or indigenous thought. Lakoff stated that progressives assume that the world should and can become better. They also assume that children are born good and should be made better. The parents are responsible to nurture their children and turn them into nurturers, people who can both empathize with and act responsibly toward themselves and others. This parenting model emphasizes open, two-way communication, fairness, and maximal freedom. It is not permissiveness, because it includes protection and direction, but is less authoritarian and controlling than the strict father model. The psychic structure created by this kind of parenting would be a more fluid one, open to both the contents of one's own psyche and to the feelings and perspectives of other people. Persons with this more relational egoic structure would be more available for dialogue and negotiation rather than relying on repression and domination.

The nurturing parent model is thus a more benign form of a Western worldview than the strict father model, however, it is still very Western in one key way: the belief that the world can and should be made better by humans. In contrast, an underlying assumption of ancient Asian thought as well as of much Native American thought is that the world is already harmonious and self-balancing. The human role is not to shape it, even in a benign and nurturing way, but to align oneself with it. Thus, modern liberals who are concerned about the environment and who are beginning to identify with Native American thought should be cautious in assuming that they really understand Native American thought. It is easy to filter the words of Native teachers through a nurturing parent model of reality and think that you mean the same thing. The actual differences between Native thought and Western thought are much deeper, akin to the differences

between Eastern and Western thought, and require a deeper death of the Western ego in order to be apprehended.

### **Native American Epistemologies**

In this section I will describe three models of ways of knowing from the Diné, the Yup'ik, and the Cree and Ojibway (Anishinabe) cultures. There is wide variety among Native American nations, however, when contrasted in a general way to Western ways of knowing, some broad commonalities can be seen. For example, each of these ways of knowing depends on a more open and fluid egoic structure than is common in European cultures and is connected to methods of childrearing which provide that more relational ego.

According to David Begay and Nancy Maryboy, writing from the Diné perspective, Native American epistemology begins with the assumption, from experience, that everything in the cosmos is connected and that all physical bodies and all minds are expressions of a deeper spiritual essence (Begay and Maryboy 277). Since the human mind is part of a whole, interrelated cosmic process, it can enter into an awareness of that process. In their conclusion of a discussion of Diné epistemology, Begay and Maryboy state that “this epistemology cannot be fully conceptualized in terms of an individual person. The mind, body and spirit is intrinsically interrelated with the cosmic whole” (323). I begin my discussion of Native American epistemologies with that quotation because it highlights such a deep assumption in Western thought, that humans are individuals knowing a world out there. If modern humans stay within that assumption, they cannot even begin to understand Native ways of knowing. Instead, invert the primacy of the individual and begin to conceive of all individuals as arising out of a greater process that they exist within. How that greater process shows up in the consciousness of the various individuals is the knowledge of the whole process coming through the individual.

Begay and Maryboy try to give Western readers a sense of Diné epistemology by explaining some Navajo terms, such as *dzil* (mountain). Whereas in English this term has purely physicalistic connotations (“a land mass higher than a hill” (Webster’s, ctd. in Begay and Maryboy 282)), in the Diné meaning it refers to a whole set of relationships and the ongoing movement inherent in those relationships. These relationships include the life cycles of the animals and plants which grow at different elevations, the weather patterns effected by the mountain, as well as the human’s experience of being with the mountain. All of these processes are dynamic, so one can speak of the *dzil nanit’a*, or the movement of the mountain. Begay and Maryboy explain this term as “the dynamic interrelationship and kinetic processes that regenerate and transform life” (288). Since this motion of the mountain is not separate from the entire cosmic process, one can only really come to know the mountain by learning about “the kinetic dynamics of the whole” (288), usually through years of study and ceremonial practice. Through such study and practice, a person can enter into close knowledge of the mountain and also knowledge of what the relationship is between the mountain and human consciousness. Begay and Maryboy state that “according to traditional thinking, *dzil nanit’a bee nitsisikees*, the holistic movement, as conceived through the mountain, is the human consciousness” (291). The human is closely related to the mountain because both exist at the center between Mother Earth and Father Sky. The mountain thus has the power to teach and to heal: “its very essence is the healing process.... The mountain itself is medicine” (296). The interconnection between the mountain and the human is expressed as *dzil bii’ iistiin* (usually translated as “the inner form of the mountain”). Begay and Maryboy conclude “thus the mountain is consciousness and consciousness is the mountain” (297).

How does a person come to the understanding of the close connection between the human and the mountain? Begay and Maryboy discuss intra-subjectivity, entering into a oneness with the mountain:



. . . one has to take one's mind inside the mountain and become one with the mountain. Only then can one see the psyche (*dzil bii' iistiin*) of the mountain. The human mind becomes aware of the intrinsic relationship as one with the mountain. One can look back at the human with the mountain's mind, which is the human mind. (315)

I have purposely chosen this quotation and the previous ones because I thought they might be confusing to non-Native readers. I do not understand them completely myself. But it is clear to me that the traditional people with whom Begay and Maryboy spoke knew something about the possible qualities of human consciousness which they learned by becoming one with the mountain. Also, this practice of knowing through intersubjectivity is not unique to the human-mountain relationship. Although that is the main example discussed in their dissertation, Begay and Maryboy have told me that it can be applied to any aspect of the natural world.

Let me emphasize that such oneness between the human mind and the natural world is not the naive, prepersonal oneness of an undifferentiated infant (Wilber 31). It is the ability to enter into another part of the cosmic whole, an ability which takes many years of practice. Begay and Maryboy state that the Diné are just as capable of thinking objectively as Western people and of using their language to make objective statements. However, they are also always aware of "an intrinsic subjective relationship which is not nullified by an objective statement" (314). The capacity of intra-subjective knowing is not done unconsciously or automatically, and it does not preclude Western ways of knowing. It is an added capacity of awareness, not a primitive one.

In his book, *The Way of the Human Being*, Calvin Luther Martin also discusses this ability to enter into the consciousness of another part of the whole. He tells many stories of boundary crossings from the Eskimo, Yup'ik, and other tribes, stories in which a person departs from the human realm and lives as another animal for a year or two, then returns to teach the other humans how to respect and relate to this animal. He advises his

Western readers not to analyze such a story or categorize it as fiction, but to put it on and wear it, as one wears a parka, to live inside it for awhile until they can begin to hear the spirit (*yua*) of the story (2). If approached with openness, these stories can begin to teach us about another way of knowing the world:

Something else, too, may happen: the story might seem to be thinking you rather than your thinking it. This is a potent thing and it is a legitimate thing, totally against common sense but nonetheless real. Don't reject it; this is how an Eskimo would perceive such a story: it has *yua*. (3)

Thus he warns, at the outset, that Westerners often can't hear the teachings of these boundary crossing stories because they don't know how to listen to them. All of these stories are about kinship. They are about learning to look at the human from the perspective of Seal, Whale, or Fox. And as Martin reports, people introduced themselves to him by saying, "I am Puffin," or "I am Killer Whale," not simply "I belong to the clan of . . ." (34-37). This sense of kinship extended to experiences of mutual respect. He notes that one woman was not afraid to go jogging on the back roads where bears were often encountered because her late husband had been a Bear. The bears, therefore, protected her (37). Another story tells of a great chief who was a Bear. When he died, a number of bears came out of the woods to the road as a truck brought his body up from the dock, some of them even standing up as the truck passed by (37). Thus, these stories of kinship and connection are about real relationships of reciprocal respect, not just isolated human imaginings. In fact, from this perspective of relationship and respect, the behavior of environmental biologists at work in this region is troubling to many of the traditional people. Catching, tranquilizing, and branding the bears, pulling their teeth to calculate age, and putting radio collars on them to track their movements are all considered by the biologists to be necessary for species preservation. They need data and see this as the only way to get it. They wouldn't think to ask the Bear people, the ones who know and feel the bears, because such a way of getting information isn't scientific.

But the older people warn that this research is disrespectful, that it is “playing” with the bears, and that it will cause the bears to go away (108-113).

Martin points out that these two epistemologies, the way of kinship and the way of science, spring from two different ontologies, the ontology of trust and the ontology of fear (205). Fearing that the earth will not provide leads to ways of knowing which have the goal of manipulation and control. But a core belief and experience in Native America is that the earth does provide bountifully to those who relate to it with respect. All the hunting stories are about animals who choose to give themselves to the hunters who behave respectfully (9). Hunting begins first in the mind, by contacting an animal through song (the medicine hunt). One then asks permission to take some flesh; when permission is granted, it is a gift from the animal of its robe (67). Its spirit lives on and must be honored through ceremonies of gratitude. Balance in the world is maintained when everyone lives within an ontology and an ethic of gift-giving:

In a world where everything breathes with life, has motion, is intelligent with thought, and is kinsman, equilibrium can work only when everything is exchanged as a *gift*, rather than through theft, strategem, or “main force.” As, for instance, when an animal being gives itself freely, with full permission, to needy human brethren. And where humans keep their demands on these other beings modest, approaching them in ceremony that speaks of the original and everlasting kinship. (62)

Some stories tell of hunters who cannot find game, but the problem is not the abundance of the animals; the problem is the hunter’s lack of perception. These stories point to a participatory understanding of reality. If we see the world as a place of gift, where the earth and the beings on the earth are fond of humans and want to help them, we will experience its abundance; we will be able to “participate in the conversation of the Gift” (79). If we see it as a place of fear, we will begin grasping, and what we grasp for will elude us. As Martin says, “The real issue lies in what physicists call the problem of

measurement: whether we start . . . by measuring the world in fear or in trust” (205).

Thus, these Native stories show a clear awareness that human attitudes and behavior have a role in calling forth the face of reality which we see (86).

According to Martin, what Europeans brought into this land of the ontology of the Gift was the experience of fear (168). Martin hypothesizes that one reason that alcohol took such hold on the Native American community was that it helped people to deal with this new experience of fear. He tells many stories of early contacts and early proselytizing in which a worldview based on fear is being taught (171). In both historical accounts and in interviews with friends, Martin discovered the connection between alcohol and fear (174, 123). Another source of fear was the epidemics which were so traumatic in the Pacific Northwest that the “Great Death” still cannot be spoken about by many of the older people (129). This new experience of the world as, at root, a place of fear rather than of generosity, did as much to interrupt and take away Native ways of knowing as the proscriptions against practicing the ceremonies, since the epistemology of entering into the world depends on an attitude of trust.

Rupert Ross, a Canadian lawyer who has worked most of his life on the northern reserves in Ontario, also writes about the sensitivity and open attitude required to learn what he calls “pattern-thought,” the ability to take in vast amounts of information from the natural world (70). He tells of how, after many summers of working as a fishing guide on one of the lakes, he began to have the ability just to know, by the “‘feel’ for the day,” where the fish would be biting, an ability which only the experienced guides possessed (72). At first he would take in the “‘feel’ for the day” somewhat consciously, noticing variables like cloud cover, wind direction, temperature, and humidity, and then, through imagination, putting himself in the possible fishing spots with these variables in mind. But eventually, after years of memories had built up, he simply felt called by certain spots in a way that happened quickly, without conscious effort (73). The spots were emotionally charged because of memories of good fishing there on a similar type of

day in the past. Ross calls this ability “a very complex and compacted form of reasoning,” even though the person doing it cannot consciously explain all of the data they are processing (74). It feels like simply a hunch or even a voice, telling one where to fish. The information feels “received” (79).

Ross notes that hunter-gatherers had to depend on this kind of pattern-thought for survival. They had to have the mental capacity for accurate prediction and be able to discern the best time for action; for example, they had to know, not only that the berries were ripe, but that they were as ripe as they would get this year (77). Hunting especially required the skill of being able to know where the animals would be, to enter into the mind of the animal, so that one could be in a position to receive them. Elders who had lived in the same region for many seasons were valuable resources of knowledge because they had so many patterns stored in their memories (80).

From his experiences of living for many months in northern Ontario and then returning to a city, Ross also realized that such pattern-thought depends on a kind of open, receptive sensitivity which is often shut down in people living in noisy, fast-paced, urban environments. In the city, he became overwhelmed because he could no longer close off his senses to all of the stimuli (93). He writes:

I couldn't wait to get back out of the city, to be able to let my guard down again, to return to a posture of openness, curiosity and welcome. It is a wonderful psychological stance to be able to maintain towards the events of each day, a stance of open welcome instead of guarded denial, and it leads to a sense of involvement with life rather than intentional (and necessary ) distancing from it. The urban environment's constant overstimulation of the senses cannot help but cause us to *limit* the use of our senses, to intentionally shut ourselves down. In that sense, we adopt a guarded stance towards life rather than an open one, and we become less than we could be. (93-4, emphasis his)

Ross sees this type of receptive pattern-thought as the basis for Native American ethics, for the way they educate their children, and for their experience of the spiritual quality of all life (78). One main ethical rule which Ross experienced was the injunction against ever giving direct advice or direct criticism. This rule was more understandable to him when he began to understand pattern-thought. This way of knowing gives knowledge which feels received, a kind of guidance. Since it does not seem to originate from one's self, how can one be criticized for it? And advice is given indirectly, in the form of stories, because everyone is practiced at drawing their own conclusions (79). Likewise, children learn by close observation, not by being verbally taught. They need to become careful observers so they are expected to learn by watching the adults. Ross also notes that this type of knowing leads to a focus on motion and change rather than on static things, since it is the extreme subtleties of change which must be noticed on a moment by moment basis when surviving in the wilderness (82). Thus, the aliveness of all things, the rivers, the air, the plants, and the animals, are directly experienced. Using the different kinds of air as an example, Ross explains:

Each of those kinds of air becomes familiar, experienced and known. They bring messages. They “speak.” When you know things because you have *felt* them, you know them as alive, as having their own life, their own spirit. It is not that cute (or dangerous) little spirits live in them like cartoon characters; it is that they *have* spirit and, fundamentally, *are* spirits. (83, emphasis his)

And since this type of thinking involves “imaging” oneself in other locations, and in other minds, one daily has the experience of a spiritual plane parallel to the physical one, in which communication regularly happens (84). Thus, one ethic is not only to express no anger, but to live with an attitude of such acceptance that one does not feel angry, since, on the spiritual plane, such anger is communicated (84).

### **An Ethic of Balance Rather than Goodness**

All of these descriptions show a way of knowing that requires an open, receptive, and trusting attitude and a sensitivity to minute and subtle variations. This way of knowing requires an “influenced” psyche (to use Catherine Keller’s word), one with fluid boundaries, sensitive to influences from the living world: in short, a highly relational ego (Keller 92). This relational way of knowing also leads to an awareness of the aliveness of all parts of the web of life and to a resulting ethic of deep respect which carries with it the principle of non-interference (Ross 12). The goal of life is accommodation and respect rather than manipulation and control, and this challenge of “observing and understanding the workings of the dynamic equilibrium of which they [are] a part,” and then acting in harmony with it, is an ongoing challenge which offers a lifetime of exhilarating growth in wisdom and awareness (Ross 92).

The ethic of non-interference extends not only to the more-than-human world but also, of course, to other humans, and especially to one’s children. Martin mentions that early records of contact between Europeans record how tender the Native Americans were to their children and how much affection the children received (72). The Native Americans, on the other hand, were shocked at the harshness with which European settlers treated their own children. Ross notes that parents often allow their children great freedom of choice in all aspects of life (16). There is no teaching, no praise, no punishment, and certainly no criticism. The child is expected to observe the adults and learn by watching (16). When I asked a Diné friend of mine, James Altsisi, what it was like to grow up with so much freedom, he said, “It was hard. It felt like a lot of responsibility. You had to figure it all out for yourself.” I encounter that same attitude of non-interference, a hesitancy to give advice, when I ask Diné friends about what I should wear to a ceremony, whether I should bring a friend, or how I should behave. The answer is usually, “It’s up to you.”

Ross makes an explicit connection between Native American childrearing practices, their positive expectations of human behavior in general, and their belief in humans' ability to heal and grow. He calls this attitude "the doctrine of original sanctity," a belief in the innate goodness of human nature, as opposed to the doctrine of original sin which still underlies many parenting methods (especially the strict father model) and the penal code in Western cultures (169). In his work as a Crown attorney in northern Ontario, Ross became aware of huge differences in how the Cree and Ojibway communities treated criminal offenders compared to their normal treatment at the hands of the Canadian (British) judicial system. The elders who participated in the sentencing focused on what kind of counseling and treatment the person needed in order to change the inner state of mind which led to the harmful behavior (167). They never spoke about the past crime and never warned the person that worse was in store for them if they kept up this behavior. Their focus was on healing and teaching, rather than punishment, and Ross finally realized that it was because they believed all persons capable of living and acting in harmony (168). Any deviation from harmony was the result of ignorance or illness, not an evil nature. The British system, on the other hand, seems to have no faith in the ability of humans actually to grow or to change their inner states of mind. The emphasis is on controlling the external behavior and threatening them with more extreme punishments if their behavior is not controlled (168). Ross noticed that in the Native communities, in both parenting and in helping criminal offenders, the goal was always to preserve the self-esteem of the person and never to alienate them from the community (172). Since the criminal act was already a sign of division and disharmony, the person should not be further alienated by being sent to jail, but should be forgiven and helped to reconnect with a good path in life (173).

I prefer to call this the doctrine of balance rather than sanctity, since "sanctity" is such a dualistic term. In the West, at least in the dualistic version of Christianity, we have tended to divide the world, and ourselves, into good and evil in a way which sees



the split as irreconcilable (Tarnas 130-36). The goal then becomes to achieve perfection by eradicating, repressing, or controlling the parts of the world or ourselves that are called evil. As it plays out in the strict father model of the family, this dualistic thinking perpetuates divided psyches through child-rearing methods that emphasize control rather than acceptance. In the nurturing parent model of the family, though the techniques are more benign, there is still an emphasis on shaping the child.

In Native American thought, nature and human nature are not considered good in any sweet or perfect way; they are both seen as complex dynamic processes which are self-balancing. There is so much trust in the natural growth of children that they are allowed to make mistakes, even grave ones, in order to learn (Ross 20, 43). They are not impinged upon or shaped, even by praise, because that would cause their attention and perceptive sensitivities to narrow. A child focused on pleasing the adults around it is not as completely open to the authentic truth of its own perceptions and proprioceptions (internal body awareness) as a child who is given such radical acceptance and freedom.

Thus the epistemological circle can clearly be seen here: a relational ego leads to the abilities of relational ways of knowing, which leads to a relational ethic, which leads to a way of child-rearing that gives the child enough space and self-esteem to develop the open, relational psyche necessary for a deeply relational way of knowing the world. The child's earliest experience is one that builds trust. From that place of security and trust, the child then naturally expands his or her relatedness, to other humans and to the wider cosmos, in a process of expansion of connection which continues throughout his or her lifetime.

### **Planetary Consciousness**

I hope that the above discussion illuminates my opening caution about Westerners appropriating Native American ceremonies and practices. The ways of knowing discussed above are elementary: they are practiced and expanded throughout a lifetime

of ceremony. Furthermore, most ceremonial practices are embedded in a context that includes belonging to a family and clan, knowing the language, and living in the land from which the ceremonies arose. The language, songs, and ceremonies are a part of the land, as the human group is a part of the greater kinship between all the local creatures. Thus, any superficial abstraction of a ceremony or ritual from its context in a real sense violates the ceremony and can rightly be called cultural or spiritual colonization.

Those caveats having been mentioned, I think, and many of my Native teachers and colleagues agree, that bridge-building and dialogue now needs to begin, if done in a genuine way, with a real appreciation on the part of the Europeans for the gulf which they need to travel within themselves in order to be ready, at last, to see and hear the subtle knowledge, wisdom, and awareness which is held and practiced by the peoples indigenous to this land. This bridge-building is now being called for by the planet itself. (I would suggest that anyone who thinks that they have individually chosen to pursue a knowledge of indigenous ways for their own personal fulfillment is still thinking in limited Western egoic terms.) I see the dialogue between Native Americans and Europeans as part of a planetary shift, a move towards greater human self-reflexive awareness as a species and possibly towards integration of the various modes of consciousness developed by different cultures into a synergy we cannot yet imagine.

I do believe that the ways of knowing described above are human potentials which are accessible for those of other cultures. The deep spiritual and psychological growth work that has been done by many in the Western culture over the past few decades is the kind of reparenting which can restructure the psyche enough to allow for other ways of knowing to become possible. In fact, I see the whole cultural phenomenon of therapy as a planetary occurrence, a human expression of our hunger for connection with the real, the kind of connection which we need in order to come back into balance with other planetary systems. It might make therapy more powerful to begin to see it in such an eco-centric rather than ego-centric light, as cosmological therapy. If our own

healing and inner reconnection is understood as a planetary activity--one might even call it the self-healing of the planet--then we are already making the Gestalt shift to understanding the individual in a more connected way and to creating ceremonies of healing that would be helpful in reconnecting modern urban people to each other and the greater earth community.

Such cosmological therapy is not just about our own human needs, however; I believe it truly is called forth by a planet which is out of balance and which needs the recovered sensitivities of open, trusting humans in order to move forward. In particular, I think that the dominant Western culture needs to realize that the problems which have occurred under its sway will not easily be solved using our normal objective, analytical habits of thought. As Einstein said, you cannot solve a problem with the same mind which created it. Complexity theorists from both the scientific and sociological perspectives have pointed out that many Western attempts to solve complex problems, such as plans for managing ecosystems or well-intentioned development projects which try to bring more food or clean water to needy areas, create new problems because the designers of the projects do not have the ability to see all the factors involved or the system of interconnectedness (see *Homeland Earth*, by Edgar Morin, and the last chapters of *How the Leopard Changed Its Spots*, by Brian Goodwin). As Brian Swimme teaches, before taking more action, we need to become aware of how our minds have been shaped, by both evolution and culture, or the action we take will simply perpetuate the current state of affairs.

For those from the Western culture, this may mean questioning our assumption that management and control are what is needed as well as beginning the deconstructive and reconstructive psychological work necessary to open up to Gestaltic and relational ways of knowing. It may mean having the humility to realize that there are other ways of knowing just as, and in many ways, more valid than Western science. Vine Deloria, Jr., reports that in 1919, a missionary interested in how the Sioux elders would

respond to scientific ideas recorded that “the Western Sioux believed that each being, a rock for instance, is an actual community of persons with ample locomotion among themselves” (Deloria, Jr., 42). Furthermore, this idea was based on “the belief that not a few of their people actually had the ability to see into and through a rock, discerning its make-up, similarly as we look into a community or grove of trees” (42). The elders found that the ideas of physics and chemistry matched their view of things and they were open to the European’s talk of progress, yet they pronounced the scientific view inadequate: “Not bad or untrue, but inadequate to explain, among many other things, how man is to find and know a road along which he wishes and chooses to make this said progress unless the Great Spirit Manitoo by his spirit guides the mind of man, keeping human beings just and generous and hospitable” (43). This split between science and ethics, which the Sioux elders immediately grasped, has been disastrous to the Western world. As complexity theorist Edgar Morin emphasizes, knowledge is always circular; we now need the humility to see that our science is never in reality split off from values, and that our supposed objectivity is a way of seeing which colors what we see. From complexity theory, cognitive science, and postmodern thought, we are getting the message that mind and world are embedded and that we are in a participatory universe where how we know is just as important as what we know. Maybe those in the dominant culture can now begin to recognize the true subtlety of the indigenous awareness of how important the human role is in sustaining the harmony of the cosmos.

We live in an exciting time, where the interaction between different cultures has the potential to bring all of us into more consciousness about how we both structure and take in reality. We also live in a perilous time, a time which needs this new level of cultural self-awareness in order to survive. Thus the dialogue between cultures is crucial and it is especially important that the dominant culture begin to listen more humbly and

respectfully to those cultures which still embody the relational ways of knowing which have atrophied in the West.

Out of this dialogue may come a kind of consciousness that is now difficult for any of us to imagine. One of my Native American teachers, Ghyontonda Mota, once told me that I must learn to be both a part of the circle of life and tangential to it at the same time. Soon after that, I heard Robert Thurman, the great Tibetan scholar, say that we must bring together the Asian sense of the whole and the Western sense of the parts. I believe that in these dialogues we are groping towards a resolution of what seems like a paradox from within either worldview, and that getting to that resolution will require the kind of growth in consciousness which the planet needs. Out of this dialogue may come new planetary humans, humans with what Jean Gebser calls integral consciousness, able to move between worldviews and use the whole range of perceptive abilities necessary for the next stages of life on earth.

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