

METAPHYSICS: INTERSECTING WESTERN AND NATIVE IDEAS

BE SUPERIOR: AN INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE CONFERENCE

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INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE/TEK

- All societies, in one way or another, lay claim to a territory. Within that territory, a culture arises from a mutual relationship with the land. Hundreds of generations of Blackfoot have come and gone on the northwestern plains since before and after the melting of the glaciers from the last ice age. The Blackfoot, in their long relationship with their traditional territory have developed a unique culture manifested by their mutual relationship with the land. “Aboriginal ways of living in intimate contact with the earth and experiencing its powers firsthand over thousands of years reinforced an awareness of the indissoluble link between humans and the soil.” (Dormaar and Barsh)

INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE/TEK

- TEK is knowledge handed down through oral traditions and “...It includes a system of classification, a set of empirical observations about the local environment, and a system of self-management that governs resource use.”(Battiste and Henderson) TEK “...is the expression of the vibrant relationships between the people, their ecosystems, and the other living beings and spirits that share their land.” (ibid)
- TEK is a science. But, in order to understand it, one must know the paradigms upon which it is based.
- Let’s compare Western and Blackfoot paradigms...

WESTERN METAPHYSICAL PARADIGMS

- PERCEPTUAL STAGNATION: ‘This is the way God made it...His work is perfect’
- EXISTENCE CONSISTS OF MATTER: Space is a place for material objects that humans can sense
- MOST EVERYTHING IN THE COSMOS IS INANIMATE EXCEPT HUMANS & ANIMALS
- TO COME TO KNOW WE MUST ISOLATE

WESTERN METAPHYSICAL PARADIGMS

- ONCE KNOWN, ONE CAN MOVE ON: ‘Been there, done did it’
- MAIN REFERENCE POINT IS TIME
- SOCIAL VALUE RAMIFICATIONS: Bigger, faster, newer, higher, singularity, linearity
- A PRODUCT OF WESTERN PARADIGMS IS: AGE OF REASON

THE AGE OF REASON

- THE AGE OF REASON CAME INTO EXISTENCE DURING THE 16TH CENTURY IN EUROPE. IT WAS A PARADIGMATIC, IDEOLOGICAL, AND PHILOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT.
- IT IS ABOUT RATIONALISM: A BELIEF THAT YOU CAN COME TO KNOW OR ARRIVE AT TRUTH STRICTLY THROUGH REASON AS OPPOSED TO FAITH, RELIANCE ON THE PAST, INTUITION, AND METAPHYSICS.
- IT GAVE RISE TO DEISM: WE CAN COME TO KNOW EVERYTHING THROUGH OUR GIFT OF REASON FROM GOD.
- GOD MADE AN ORDERLY UNIVERSE AND IT IS GOOD AND BEAUTIFUL. “GOD DOES NOT PLAY DICE.....” (EINSTEIN)

RAMIFICATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE AGE OF REASON

- THE AGE OF REASON, IT SEEMS, WAS A COUNTER MOVEMENT TO THE OLD ESTABLISHMENT OF THE DIVINE RULE OF KINGS AND RELIANCE ON TRADITION.
- IT ATTEMPTED TO SUBJECT ANYTHING AND EVERYTHING TO RATIONALISM.
- IT DID AWAY WITH THE SUBJECTIVE AND DEALT WITH ONLY THE OBJECTIVE.
- IT DID AWAY WITH EMOTIONS AND FEELINGS. FOR INSTANCE, WOMEN WERE TOO EMOTIONAL TO BE SCIENTISTS AND LEADERS.
- SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE CAME INTO BEING.

THE SCIENTIFIC METHOD IN THE AGE OF REASON

- MYSTICISM, MIRACLES, GHOSTS, AND THE LIKE WERE FROWNED UPON.
- MEASUREMENT AND, HENCE, THE ROLE OF MATHEMATICS BECAME THE FOUNDATION OF THE SCIENTIFIC METHOD.
- EXPERIMENTATION AND PURE REASON CAN BRING ABOUT KNOWLEDGE. FOR INSTANCE, THE HIGGS PARTICLE. THE SCIENTISTS SAY, 'THROUGH OUR REASONING (FORMULA) THE HIGGS PARTICLE SHOULD BE OCCUPYING THIS SPACE AND IT'S WEIGHT SHOULD BE THIS'.
- THERE IS NO ROOM FOR ANYTHING THAT CANNOT BE MEASURED NOR IS THERE ROOM FOR SUBJECTIVITY.

CHALLENGES TO THE AGE OF REASON

- VON GOETHE'S SCIENCE IN THE LATE 1700'S AND EARLY 1800'S DID CHALLENGE THE PRINCIPLES OF THE AGE OF REASON. ONE CAN SAY HE WAS A FORERUNNER OF QUANTUM PHYSICS. HE HAD A SPIRITUAL APPROACH TO SCIENCE. FOR HIM, THE OBSERVED AND THE OBSERVER INTERACTED.
- GOETHE'S SCIENCE WAS ABOUT WHOLENESS, INTEGRATION OF OTHER FIELDS LIKE ART, AND NOTIONS OF QUALITY.
- THEN IN THE EARLY 1900'S, QUANTUM PHYSICS CAME ON THE SCENE. IT IS ABOUT UNCERTAINTY, PARTICLE/WAVE DUALITY, NON-LOCALITY, CONSTANT MOTION, PROBABILITY,
SPIRITUALITY (JEREMY HAYWARD).

NATIVE SCIENCE AND THE AGE OF REASON

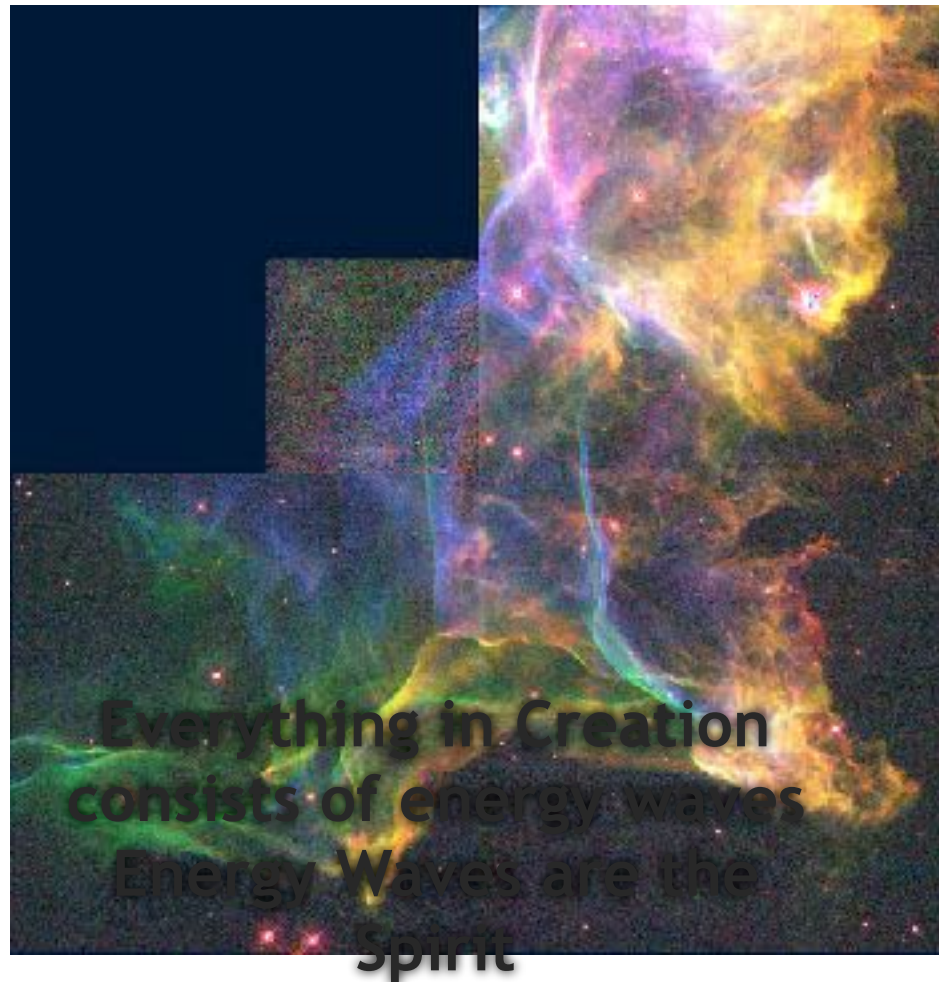
- THE AGE OF REASON WAS IN FULL BLOOM AT THE TIME OF COLONIZATION OF NORTH AMERICAN INDIANS.
- BECAUSE NATIVE SCIENCE WAS ABOUT WHOLENESS, SPIRITUALITY, WAVES AS OPPOSED TO PARTICLES, EVERYTHING BEING ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS, AND EVERYTHING BEING ANIMATE, IT WAS TOTALLY DISCOUNTED BY THE RATIONALISTS.
- BECAUSE IT WAS NOT ABOUT MEASUREMENT AND MATHEMATICS, IT WAS NOTHING BUT MYTHOLOGY. IT WAS NOT TAKEN SERIOUSLY. **BUT LET'S TAKE ANOTHER LOOK....**

Constant Flux



**Constant Flux: Everything is
in Constant Motion**

Energy Waves



Everything is Animate



Everything in Creation is
Animate and imbued with
Spirit

All My Relations



Everything is Related:
All My Relations

Renewal



Space/Place



Indian Thought is
About Space
Referencing

LANGUAGE IS PROCESS/ACTION



Indian Language is Process
Oriented

MANIFESTATIONS OF THE NATIVE PARADIGM IN AND WITH THE LAND

- FOR INDIANS, THE ENSOULMENT OF THE LAND IS A WEB OF RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE EARTH, ANIMALS, PLANTS, INORGANIC MATTER, AND THE COSMOS. IT IS CAPTURED IN THE STORIES, SONGS, AND CEREMONIES.
- FOR DAVID ABRAM, EVENTS HAPPEN ***SOMEWHERE***. EVENTS BELONG TO THE PLACE AND TO TELL THE STORY OF EVENTS IS TO LET THE PLACE SPEAK THROUGH THE TELLING.

ENSOULMENT OF THE LAND IS A SACRED RESPONSIBILITY

- LAND IS A VERY IMPORTANT REFERENT IN THE MINDS OF NATIVE PEOPLES. THE LAND IS 'MOTHER': IT CANNOT BE SEPARATED FROM THE ACTUAL BEING OF INDIANS. ACCORDING TO CAJETE, 'NATIVE PEOPLE EXPRESS A RELATIONSHIP TO THE NATURAL WORLD THAT COULD BE CALLED "ENSOULMENT". THE ENSOULMENT OF NATURE IS ONE OF THE MOST ANCIENT FOUNDATIONS OF HUMAN PSYCHOLOGY. ENSOULMENT MUST BE PAST ON TO THE YOUNGER GENERATION

MANIFESTATIONS OF THE NATIVE PARADIGM IN AND WITH THE LAND

- FROM THE ABOVE, ONE CAN CONCLUDE THAT IT IS THE PLACE THAT DETERMINES WHO YOU ARE. ANNE WATERS OBSERVES, “AMERICAN INDIAN IDENTITY AND WORLDVIEW, A HISTORY OF PLACE CONSCIOUSNESS, PRESERVED THROUGH ORAL HISTORY, MANIFESTS DISCRETE GEOGRAPHICAL PLACE SYMBOLS WITHIN CONSCIOUSNESS THAT PROVIDE A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF

MANIFESTATIONS OF THE NATIVE PARADIGM IN AND WITH THE LAND

- ANNE WATERS, cont”d: ...IDENTITY AS PLACE. AMERICAN INDIAN CONSCIOUSNESS, AND HENCE, AMERICAN INDIAN IDENTITY, IS COGNITIVELY OF, AND INTERDEPENDENT WITH, OUR LAND BASE.”
- A LOSS OF NATIVE IDENTITY MAY BE THE LOSS OF THE STORIES, SONGS, AND CEREMONIES THAT HAPPEN AT CERTAIN PLACES.

AXIOLOGY OF BLACKFOOT CULTURE

- IN SCIENCE: TIME AND SPACE BEING THE SAME, NON-LOCALITY, HIGGS PARTICLE, SPACIAL DIMENSIONS
- IN ECONOMICS: SUSTAINABILITY
- IN PSYCHOLOGY: MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS
- IN LAW: ORAL HISTORIES
- RELATIONSHIPS: DEALING WITH COMPLEXITY

PERCEPTUAL STARTING POINTS

- **WESTERN: Chaos over Order** (God does not play dice: Einstein)

Verses

BLACKFOOT: Order over Chaos

(Culture is the

attempt to
bring the
about order from
chaos: you cannot
separate culture from
science)

bring
the

WESTERN & NATIVE SCIENCE

	<u>Western Science</u>	<u>Native Science</u>
•		
• Consciousness:	affects reality	affects reality
• Matter/Objects:	space curvature	descriptions
• Time:	space/time continuum	just is
• Matter:	particle/wave duality	wave
• Reality:	no deep reality	subjective
• Cause/effect:	paradox	all cause/ effect
• Perspective:	reductionist	wholistic
• Method:	experiment/proof	observation
• Knowledge:	cumulative	renewal
• Language:	Binary/math	process/action

BUT WHERE IS WESTERN METAPHYSICS TAKING US?

- WE, AS HOMO SAPIENS, ARE WE BETTER OFF AS A RESULT OF IT? IS IT REALLY ADVANCING THE REASON FOR OUR EXISTENCE? (IF WE EVER STOP AND THINK ABOUT IT.)
- IS OUR CURRENT METAPHYSICS JUST ANOTHER PASSING PHASE?
- MAY BE THERE ARE OTHER METAPHYSICS THAT WE SHOULD TAKE A GOOD LOOK AT.

Western and Native Science

- Western Science is largely aimed at exploration.
- Native Science is aimed at sustainability..
- Remember ‘renewal’? That part of the paradigm that speaks to sustainability.

WESTERN AND NATIVE SCIENCE

- The lesson to be learned is that we live in a very narrow spectrum of ideal conditions: conditions required for our existence. If we are going to survive as a species we must maintain and renew those conditions. Otherwise, we will be part of a passing phase!
- What is missing right now, in a Western dominated world, is ‘ceremony’ and respect for the environment and ecological balance.

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION

- The TRC provides to all of us a ‘wake up call’.
- Reconciliation requires a synergetic approach to relationships. It cannot be an imbalanced approach.
- It is time to take a hard look at our ‘standard models’: where are they taking us?
- TRC allows us the luxury of stopping to reflect.