
Towards A New Mythology:

The Wisdom We Can't Do Without

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The vision once held out by the world religions - the equality of every person before the deity and in human society, peace and prosperity, and a universal brotherhood of life - is usually cited by their adherents as a partial justification of their existence and as the benchmark of intellectual accomplishments that distinguishes them from primitive peoples. As ideals, these goals are admirable, but are the doctrines, beliefs, and ethical systems of the great world religions capable of bringing about such conditions? Judging by their historical performance, we would conclude no.

-Vine Deloria, Jr.; *Spirit and Reason*

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For Ben and Garon:
May the world be healed.

Introduction

In short, there is no question of a new religion, but rather of redistilling the eternal spirit of religion...

-G. B. Shaw; Back to Methuselah

George Bernard Shaw and Friedrich Nietzsche both agreed that if humanity were to ever take the next step forward in social-cultural evolution there would need to be a complete re-evaluation of the human concept of "religion" and its role in human society. Nietzsche, by and large, wanted to scrap the whole concept and begin again without any kind of religious sensibility at all. Shaw, on the other hand, wanted to revamp the older traditions and extract the core, human 'truths' contained therein, with which to then build a new "Life" centered religion. Both men agreed that tampering with the inherited belief systems of the world would be damn tricky, and would get a person into a lot of interpretational trouble. This would inevitably lead to a lot of misrepresentation and confusion of how it is exactly that one can build a new "religion" out of all the conflicting religions of the past.

But there is also an inherent simplicity within the works that if brought out to the fore and built upon as a foundation, it could make a smooth transition from the old "religious" spirit into the new. That simplicity lies within the human being. It lies within knowledge of what a human being is, how human beings develop, and what human beings need to survive and prosper physically, mentally, and socially. At its core, Religion is a human necessity for it is one in the same the cognitive hands that order the pieces of Life and the conceptual glue that keeps those pieces together. "Religion" was and is about seeing and understanding Life in all its complexities and trying therein to give it all a meaning. Under all the only meaning to Life is Life. But that is often forgotten as the grand Visions of poets and the ceremonial dances of priests take over and obscure the view.

To get to the other side of "religion" - to get back to its roots as a Way of seeing and living - to get back to the life-centered, human-constructed system of seeing and ordering the world - to do this and understand this, one must go by the way of mythology. What is mythology? What are myths? They are the foundations of the human drama. They are the stories of our origins. Myths are about life and possibility. Myths are about pleasure and pain. Myths are our vainglorious and visionary attempts to explain what life is all about. Before there was "religion" there was myth. And now, after a few centuries we are

finally turning away from "religion." Now we turn back towards our roots and return to myth.

Life is life - stories are stories. We must, this time, remember not to confuse the two. Our explanations of life are not life, but they are necessary to life. We must take from this an understanding and create our myths and our new mythologies towards the unexamined heights of possibility. Hopefully these essays will help us on our way.

What does not exist
We must create:
Life,
A poem in our eyes.

Seeing and Not Seeing: A Cultural Theory On Language and Reality

In any term we can posit a world, in the sense that we can treat the world in *terms of it*, seeing all as emanations, near or far, of its light.

-Kenneth Burke; *A Grammar of Motives*

Kenneth Burke's work as a literary critic and philosopher can be seen as a response to Existential relativism and as a precursor to Derridian deconstruction. Within a 'relative' universe of social ideologies, Burke works towards the evaluative dismissal of any 'one' arch-ideological or metaphysical structure defining or substantiating the human condition. Burke works hard to disprivilege any 'authorial ground' that would seek to dominate any 'Other' 'authorial ground' and thus, as Jacques Derrida pronounced in "Signature Event Context," "give[s] to everything at stake in the operations...the chance and the force, the power of communication."¹ In Burke's universe this idea can be seen in his three structures of critical human communication and symbolic action: the 'conversational metaphor', the 'pentad', and the 'constitution.'

If the Post Modern can be characterized as an age of conflicting perspectives and ontological uncertainty, then Kenneth Burke would have to be recognized as one of the major theorists behind this problematical cultural movement. 'Problematical,' it could be said, for in truth the Post Modern has inherent flaws (as any system of thought does) and perhaps one of its most hampering ideological constructs has been its over-reliance upon relativity and uncertainty at the expense of forming evaluative means for direct action.² In this respect the Post Modern could be seen to have veered far from Burke's original vision of a 'New Rhetoric' producing 'symbolic action.' Perhaps then, one of the ways out of the Post Modern could best be found by retracing one of the ways in. So in taking Burke for our guide and following him through to the ends of his thought, we might find a conceptual model that would acknowledge and transcend the Post Modern (or at least see the possibilities on the other side of its uncertainty).

Friedrich Nietzsche once wrote that 'man is a rope, tied between beast and overman—a rope over an abyss...What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not an end.'³ A Burkean interpretation of this statement might read, 'humanity is a rope, tied between its biological nature and its symbolic nature—meaning humans as 'symbol using animals' vacillate between biological and symbolic systems of motivation and action. In

Burke's system human beings are not 'ends' either, but a perpetual 'means' of conflicting interests seeking self-fulfillment and communal solidarity. And central to the Burkean system is language forever binding together and separating humanity: language is the paradox and the prize of our species.⁴

Plato had once speculated that the 'Real' world was beyond our sensory ability to grasp it in all its glory. Thus language became for Plato's Socrates a means to bridge the gap between the illusory world of *doxa* and the ideal world of the 'Good.' Burke, in The Rhetoric of Religion, acknowledges the linguistic truth behind Plato's thought:

There is a sense in which the *word* for tree "transcends" the thing as thoroughly as does the Platonic idea of the tree's perfect "archetype" in heaven. It is the sense in which the name for a class of objects "transcends" any particular member of that class.⁵

But for Burke the idea of 'transcendence' in language remains problematic. He addresses this issue both within A Grammar of Motives where he discusses Locke's and Spinoza's use of 'Substance', and also within The Rhetoric of Religion where he uses the same concept summed up in the phrase "the paradox of the negative:"

Quite as the *word* "tree" is verbal and the *thing* tree is non-verbal, so all words for the non-verbal must, by the very nature of the case, discuss the realm of the non-verbal in terms of *what it is not*.⁶

Therefore, physical reality as a 'non-verbal' 'thing' is placed within a verbal system of language to be 'understood/known' (epistemology) by humanity, and is thereby placed and described "in terms of what it is not" (metaphysical reality, the oh so uncertain preoccupation of human beings, would then be either twice removed—as in the Medieval model where language describes the physical and the physical describes the metaphysical—or as a purely linguistic construct—as in the Post Modern model, toward which it seems Burke was more inclined⁷). In this sense, language becomes a 'screen' with which humanity views and knows 'reality:'

can we bring ourselves to realize just how overwhelmingly much of what we mean by "reality" has been built up for us through nothing but our symbol systems?...What is our "reality" for today (beyond the paper-thin line of our own particular lives) but all this clutter of symbols about the past, combined with whatever things we know mainly through maps, magazines, newspapers, and the like about the present?...[humanity] clings to a kind of naïve verbal realism that refuses to let him realize the full extent of the role played by symbolicity in his notions of reality.⁸

In Burkean terms language becomes a symbolic system of interpreting and knowing reality, but of course any system based upon 'interpretation' is a partial system. Therefore, our foundational interpretive systems of language used to create functional epistemologies inevitably develop "terministic screens:"

Even if any given terminology is a *reflection* of reality, by its very nature as a terminology it must be a *selection* of reality; and to this extent it must function also as a *deflection* of reality... We must use terministic screens, since we can't say anything without the use of terms; whatever terms we use, they necessarily constitute a corresponding kind of screen; and any such screen necessarily directs the attention to one field rather than another.⁹

Every symbolic/linguistic 'screen' that humanity creates to 'reflect' reality is, by the nature of language as distinct from reality, a *translation of reality*, which is to say a 'selection' of reality, which then has the qualification of being a 'deflection' of reality as well.

And now where are we? Must we merely resign ourselves to an endless catalogue of terministic screens, each of which can be valued for the light it throws upon the human animal, yet none of which can be considered central? In one sense, yes. For, strictly speaking, *there will be as many different world views in human history as there are people* [emphasis added].¹⁰

Our individual world views are governed by a specific bias inherent to the individual, which serves rhetorically as a psychological means to motivate and create meaning; a 'purpose' is woven within our linguistic construct of reality. And as individual views begin to be constructed into a language our selections of reality tends to move, in a certain light, beyond language into a "vocabulary of *ideas*."¹¹ And it is within this realm of 'ideas' where language seeks to not only describe reality, but to 'be' reality¹²: "the 'natural incarnation' of the idea...a secular esthetic equivalent of the Pauline formula for the word made flesh."¹³ In turn the 'word made flesh' becomes "a system of political or social ideas, framed and propounded for an ulterior purpose"—the 'word' becomes 'ideology'.¹⁴

Burke gives seven definitions of 'ideology' within The Rhetoric of Motives, but for our purposes here we will take just two of these which will serve for our functional definition of the word: "any system of ideas, aiming

at social or political action whereby those ideas, because they are by nature partial and thus to a degree a deceptive view of reality, represent a 'bias' geared toward satisfying a certain 'wish,' which can lead to 'interest-begotten prejudice.'"15 "Ideologists"16 translate the various, individual 'world views' into ideologies for social/political purposes whereby the ideology becomes a "culture."17 And a culture uses its ideology as its source of "identification," which thus allows the merging of the 'many into the one.'

Burke further complicates the idea of 'culture' (as a precursor to the likes of Stuart Hall and Dick Hebdige) whereby he acknowledges that there are "cultures within cultures, since a society can be subdivided into groups with divergent standards and interests. Each of these subdivisions of a culture may possess its own characteristic ideology."18 Burke states the same principle in psychological terms when he writes, "the so-called 'I' is merely a unique combination of partially conflicting 'corporate we's'" and thus the individual's ego serves as an 'integrator,' thereby facilitating a 'collective' identity:19 "In fact, 'identification' is hardly other than a name for the function of sociality."20 Burke explains our notions of 'idealism' in terms of this functional 'merger' process, which in the hands of 'ideologists' creates 'ideologies' for social unification.21

Of course implicit within any notion of 'identification' is its opposite notion of 'division' as both the social and psychological examples attest. The 'I' is a merger of several 'we's.' So within this seeming contradiction, "the individual's identity is formed by reference to his membership in a group...the individual is composed of many 'corporate identities.' Sometimes they are concentric, sometimes in conflict."22 The Marxist critique of 'Idealism' then begins with the "principle of division"23 in an effort to explore the merging/unification process to find any "interest-begotten prejudice," which in Marxist terms would be to "disclose (unmask) sinister factional interests concealed in the bourgeois terms for benign universal interests."24 Therefore a tension exists within any identification (social ideology or psychological ego) whereby the unifying 'idea' or 'I' struggles with its divisive factions, as each faction with their own interests vie for their place amongst the 'universal' motivation.

Of course this issue becomes even more complicated when the progression of time (History) becomes a factor: "when the emphasis of society has changed, new symbols [ideologies] are demanded to formulate new complexities."25

any principle can lead to vast absurdities, if only because principles persist and grow in popularity long after they have gained the end for which they were formulated. And in outlasting their original beneficent function, they take on a maleficent function, for instead of running counter to the situation which they were designed to correct, they may now be carrying to excess the situation which they served to bring about. Indeed, we might almost say that the predominance of a principle is per se evidence that this principle has outlived its usefulness.26

Burke seems to be almost reiterating a statement by one of Ibsen's characters made 50 years earlier: "A normally constituted truth lives, let us say, as a rule seventeen or eighteen, or at most twenty years; seldom longer...These 'majority truths' are like last year's cured meat."27 And part of the "maleficent function" of an 'outlived truth' derives from the fact that "the expression of past eras survive in fragments, and often without explicit reference to the situations in which it arose (but of which people were wholly conscious at the time)."28 Therefore, the emphasis of Burke's critique of 'idealism' veers from Marx in that it seeks to not just simply 'demystify' the identification and division process within an ideology, but to further evaluate the ideology's strengths and weaknesses in its historical context in order to critique it within a 'new' temporal context to see where its current relevancy lies. For in the Burkean dialectic, "Identity involves 'change of identity' insofar as any given structure of society calls forth conflicts among our 'corporate we's'...Change of identity is a way of 'seeing around the corner.'"29 Burke's critique of ideology then becomes a *methodology* for how one might see around the corner: to not only know, but try to predict and shape reality.

Burke creates an outline by taking a collection of sociological, behavioral, and psychoanalytical approaches in Permanence and Change, to explore the idea that ideologies are "orientations" to reality and implicit within our constructed orientations are ideas of "expectancy."

Orientation is thus a bundle of judgments as to how things were, how they are, and how they may be. The act of response, as implicated in the character which an event has for us, shows clearly the integral relationship between our metaphysics and our conduct. For in a statement as to how the world is, we have implicit judgments not only as to how the world may become but also as to what means we should employ to make it so.30

Within our constructions of orientation we bring in, to a large or small extent depending on one's theoretical background, a subjective 'tint'31 into our descriptions of reality. And it is within this *tint* whereby our values seep into our perception to inform on our judgments about what in fact we are seeing, and further what it means:

Stimuli do not possess an *absolute* meaning... Any given situation derives its character from the entire framework of interpretation by which we judge it. And differences in our ways of sizing up an objective situation are expressed subjectively as differences in our assignment of motive...

These relationships are not *realities*, they are *interpretations* of reality—hence different frameworks of interpretation will lead to different conclusions as to what reality is.³²

Therefore, within our ideologies as world-orientations we combine our interpretation of 'what is' with 'what we would have it be,'³³ and thus produce a 'meaning' for the sensory stimuli in any given situation, which in turn translates itself as a 'motive' for response (action). The problem comes, however, when we operate with "a faulty selection of means due to a faulty theory of causal relationships:

We thus have orientation discussible as either training or incapacity, depending upon its outcome in correct or faulty means-selecting. And our own judgments as to the adequacy of the means selected in any given instance might depend upon our particular sense of the appropriate.³⁴

So within our subjective notions of 'the appropriate' we build our orientations, which in turn provide a system of means-selecting, which in turn can be a way to see reality or can "function as blindness" (what Burke would call, borrowing a term from Veblen, a "trained incapacity"): "A way of seeing is also a way of not seeing."³⁵

Therefore, to come back to Burke's *methodology* for how one might see around the corner we must admit that an "orientation can go wrong," and thus we need to "go beyond a criticism of experience to a criticism of criticism," whereby we can "interpret our interpretations" to find how our various orientations/ideologies can see and not see the reality before us.³⁶ To do this we must first acknowledge that "the terms by which we communicate are always circumstantially founded," and that "we cannot compare mere verbalizations—we must also correlate the situations behind them."³⁷ And as Plato had once described our material reality as *doxa*—a world of flux and mutability—so too do we need to recognize that as our temporal condition change, our material condition also changes. Thus our orientations and ideologies must also change.

But how to do this? Burke solution involves a reorganization of our constitutions of reality—a 'new act' reinterpreting the old—and in his words, "all true thought is but recapitulation"³⁸ we find the reexamination of reality and our interpretations of reality within a 'perspective by incongruity:'

the backward looking of the "prophets" is coupled with a new principle of interpretations, a new perspective point of view, whereby the picture of "things as they *really* are" is reorganized...Indeed, what could *discovery* be but *rediscovery*?³⁹

The forming of this poetic perspective involves not only a reexamination of the old, but also a complete embodiment of the new:

And an artist who exemplified the gist of the entire cultural combination would embody an idea not reducible to certain of the factors, since the "idea" would be the grasp of that precise combination of factors, in precisely that proportion.⁴⁰

Burke seems to be describing a perspective that would capture any current zeitgeist, which would itself be a product of historical transformations and thus the "precise combination of factors" would include a knowledge of *how* and *why* we see the way we currently do and further how and why our ways of seeing evolved out of the past ways of seeing. In this sense there is balance of 'historicizing' the ideological orientations of the past to come to an 'essentializing' – an understanding – of the terminology of the present. The key seems to be to capture the 'essence' of an age "beyond the ideas" through a "mythic image."⁴¹ But what exactly is a "mythic image?" I would suggest that this term's meaning would be best described as *an artistic (formal) ethical argument (moral) delivered in a purposive social illusion* (creative fiction for symbolic action). Thus 'myth' could be attributed as the basis of all our major world religions and our metaphysical speculations (in their rhetorical formations), and thus 'myth,' it could be argued, is an essential component to human motivation and social cohesion. It is out of this tradition that Burke himself takes a 'myth' as the guiding light of his rhetorical endeavors:

the Jamesian "will to believe." It amounts in the end to the assumption that good, rather than evil, lies at the roots of human purpose. And as for those who would suggest that this is merely a verbal solution, I would answer that by no other fiction can men truly cooperate in historic processes, hence the fiction itself is universally grounded...Life, activity, cooperation, communication—they are identical.⁴²

And it takes not only a 'myth' to live by, but a language to communicate that myth and a rhetoric to make that illusion - that fiction, that myth - a reality:

For rhetoric as such is not rooted in any past condition of human society. It is rooted in an essential function of language itself, a function

that is wholly realistic, and is continually born anew; the use of language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols.⁴³

And thus Burke's "New Rhetoric"⁴⁴ is not only a way to talk, but a way to see how and why we talk, and further a way to find what our talk means, could mean, and should mean. The idea of "relationality" as opposed to "relativity" sees not only the relative equality of each ideological orientation's strengths and weaknesses, but puts the relative orientations within a larger scope. The 'relative' is stuck amongst the partisan squabbles of Burke's 'specific' level while the 'relational' rises to Burke's 'generic' level where the specific partisan biases are seen in the light of a more generic bias, and that generic bias could be, in the Jamesian example, the preservation and continued sustenance of human life, which taken one step further to a 'universal' level could be the preservation and continued sustenance of all life.

We could then argue that Burke's whole philosophy would be best summed up in his term "perspective by incongruity." "In a sense, all perspectives are 'perspectives by incongruity.' For they are obtained by 'seeing from two angles at once.'"⁴⁵ It is a philosophy of discussing "any single event in terms of a larger context, to seek the *whole* of which the event is a *part*... To think through a matter is to trace an ever-widening circle of interrelationships."⁴⁶ Hugh Dalziel Duncan writes in his introduction to Burke's Permanence and Change, "Burke demands that we become masters of many perspectives in order that we may understand one perspective."⁴⁷ It is here where Burke's philosophy seems to directly echo the earlier words of Ralph Waldo Emerson where in his essay "Circles" he wrote, "Our life is an apprenticeship to the truth that around every circle another can be drawn... There are no fixtures... Permanence is but a word of degrees."⁴⁸

Burke also talks about the various translations of the mystical/metaphysical 'ways' (*hodos*, *tao*, and *yoga*) as 'acts,' and thus "when Christ said, 'I am the way' (*hodos*), we could translate, 'I am the act,' or more fully, 'I represent a system, or synthesis, of the right acts.'"⁴⁹ Burke himself works toward presenting his 'New Rhetoric' as explaining, in Taoist terms, both the Many (*Te*) which are embodiments of the One (*Tao*) and the One (*Tao*) itself, which is the ultimate 'Way' penetrating and uniting the Many (*Te*).⁵⁰ Burke penetrates through the *Te* and thus helps explain the many embodiments (*Te*) of the *Tao* in an effort to combine them both into one expression: the dialectic held within an ultimate context.⁵¹

Burke's 'New Rhetoric' could then be called a recapitulation of dialectical reasoning for the 20th century and a response to the overly "scientific" reasoning of his generation (which perhaps carries over to our own as well). It is the placement of the relative as dialectical within an ultimate relational context:

The 'dialectical' order would leave the competing voices in a jangling relation with one another; but the 'ultimate'

order would place these competing voices themselves in a *hierarchy*, or *sequence*, or *evaluative series*, so that, in some way, we went by a fixed and reasoned progression from one of these to another, the members of the entire group being arranged *developmentally* with relation to one another. The 'ultimate' order of terms would thus differ essentially from the 'dialectical' in that there would be a 'guiding idea' or 'unitary principle' behind the diversity of voices... like successive position or moments in a single process... it represents not only itself, in its nature *hic et hunc*, but the universal essence of the development in its entirety (quite as bud, preceding blossom, represents not only its own concrete bud-nature, and its nature as incipient blossom, but also the fruit, the seed, and decline, and the futurity beyond that decline). And since any moment, here and now, would thus represent a developmental principle transcending the concrete particularity of any one moment in the series, here would be a kind of mystical unity, a oneness that both is and is not.⁵²

And how can this 'universal essence' be realized and where and what can its 'ultimate' context be? Some still think 'God' holds the 'ultimate' contextual position and some are moving towards an ecological/global model. The sway of history will show which camp proves the stronger, or perhaps will see a new 'god-term' introduced. But we would do well, perhaps, if we should work towards our solution with the utmost humility, as Burke's philosophy seems to demand of us. For again every way of seeing is a way of not seeing and reality is truly known by none. Thus "there is no place for purely human boasts of grandeur, or for forgetting that men build their cultures by huddling together, nervously loquacious, at the edge of an abyss."⁵³ It is then our hope that we should perfect our art of culture lest we should fall far into our neighboring depths, and never find our way out.

notes

¹ Derrida, Jacques. "Signature Event Context." Limited INC. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1997. 21.

² One favorite example of what we're calling here 'Post-Modern uncertainty' comes from Sylvia Plath's novel The Bell Jar (New York: Bantam Books, 1981):

I saw my life branching out before me like the green fig tree in the story... I saw myself sitting in the crotch of this fig tree, starving to death, just because I couldn't make up my mind which of the figs I would choose. I wanted each and every one of them, but choosing one meant losing all the rest, and, as I sat there, unable to decide, the figs began to wrinkle and go black, and, one by one, they plopped to the ground at my feet (62-63).

³ Nietzsche, Friedrich. Thus Spoke Zarathustra. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Penguin Books, 1978. 14-15.

⁴ "We don't need theology, but merely the evidence of our characteristic sociopolitical disorders, to make it apparent that man, the typically symbol-using animal, is alas! something special." Burke, Kenneth. "Terministic Screens." Language as Symbolic Action. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966. 50.

⁵ Burke, Kenneth. The Rhetoric of Religion. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970. 10.

⁶ *Ibid.* 18.

⁷ The Rhetoric of Religion attests to this general movement in Burke's thought seen here in his "Creation Myth."

In the beginning there was universal Nothing.
Then Nothing said No to itself and thereby begat Something,
Which called itself Yes.
Then No and Yes, cohabiting, begat Maybe.
Next all three, in a *menage a trois*, begat Guilt. (256)

⁸ "Terministic Screens." 48.

⁹ *Ibid.* 45, 50.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 52.

¹¹ As opposed to a vocabulary of words. A 'vocabulary of ideas' would include not only a vocabulary of words, but conflicting theories on how to use those words and what exactly those words mean. Burke, Kenneth. The Rhetoric of Motives. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969. 86.

¹² In an epistemological sense 'what we describe' is 'what we know' and 'what we know' is 'what is.'

¹³ The Rhetoric of Motives 89.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 89, 88.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 104.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 105.

¹⁷ Burke, Kenneth. Counter Statement. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968. 161.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 161.

¹⁹ Burke, Kenneth. Attitudes Toward History. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984. 264.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 266-67.

²¹ The Rhetoric of Motives. 108.

²² Burke, Kenneth. "Twelve Propositions." The Philosophy of Literary Form. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1973. 306-07.

²³ The Rhetoric of Motives. 108.

²⁴ *Ibid.* 102. Ideology becomes for Marx a 'deceptive' rhetoric, which "in being upheld by economic and social classes that got special advantage from them, and in being put forward as universally valid, thus protected factional interests in the wider, more general name of universal interests" (103).

²⁵ Counter Statement. 59.

²⁶ *Ibid.* 186.

²⁷ Ibsen, Henrik. An Enemy of the People. New York: Dover Publications, INC., 1999. 59-60.

²⁸ The Rhetoric of Motives. 111.

²⁹ Attitudes Toward History. 268-69.

³⁰ Burke, Kenneth. Permanence and Change. Berkeley: University of California Press, 184. 14.

³¹ "Speech in its essence is not neutral." *Ibid.* 176.

³² *Ibid.* 35.

³³ Burke later formulates this idea further in A Grammar of Motives: "men induce themselves and others to act by devices that deduce 'let us' from 'we must' or 'we should.' And 'we must' and 'we should' they deduce in turn from 'it is'—for only by assertions as to how things *are* can we finally substantiate a judgment" (336-37). This idea is the foundation of Burke's 'Constitution model': "A constitution is a *substance*—and as such, it is a set of *motives*" (342). Burke, Kenneth. A Grammar of Motives. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969.

³⁴ Permanence and Change. 9-10.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 9, 49.

³⁶ *Ibid.* 6.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 183.

³⁸ The Rhetoric of Religion. 284.

³⁹ Permanence and Change. 180-81. This same idea comes up in A Rhetoric of Motives where Burke writes, "the 'myth' might then be said to represent a forward-looking partisanship, in contrast with the backward-looking partisanship of the 'ideologies'" (200). The 'myth' that Burke is speaking about is a type of all encompassing Marxist 'end' that transcends history rather than the partisan ideologies, which are oppressive products of history.

⁴⁰ A Rhetoric of Motives. 145.

⁴¹ Ibid. 200, 202. "And the disciplined arrival at the mythic image through the dialectical transcending of sensory images and the dialectical critique of ideas, should be a protection against a merely literal interpretation of such a mythic image (202)... ideas would transcend sensory images, and mythic images would in turn transcend ideas (203).

⁴² Permanence and Change. 236.

⁴³ A Rhetoric of Motives. 43.

⁴⁴ Ibid. 43.

⁴⁵ Attitudes Toward History. 269.

⁴⁶ Permanence and Change. 230.

⁴⁷ Ibid. xv.

⁴⁸ Emerson, Ralph Waldo. "Circles." Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson. Ed. Stephen E. Whicher. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1960. 168.

⁴⁹ A Grammar of Motives. 15.

⁵⁰ Mair, Victor H. "Afterword." Tao Te Ching. Trans. Victor H. Mair. New York: Quality Paperback Book Club, 1998. 135.

⁵¹ Burke devotes some time to this topic in both of his seminal works. A Grammar of Motives (402-444) and A Rhetoric of Motives (183-189) are perhaps some of his most direct work on dialectic in general.

⁵² Rhetoric of Motives. 187, 190.

⁵³ Permanence and Change. 272.

The Mytho-poetic Tradition: What Should Not Be Forgotten

The ancient words from way back, the words of the grandfathers, the language that was there at the begging of time.

-Leonard Crow Dog (*Sioux medicine man*)

Where does one begin to address the human condition - past, present, and future - but through the mediated language of the past and the direct, lived experiences of the present? Both are locked in a fluid motion determined by traditions passed on through inheritance, or forced upon through conquest. Language and experience are funneled through the various means and ends of socio-political power to remain vitally intact only where the integration of the internal and external world find total expression through *a Way of life lived through a Poetic spirit*. The past must melt in the present and give way to the future. Continuity comes only through the mystical synthesis of the moment expressed in more than words, and acted beyond ceremonial significance. Eternity comes through continued Vision, and truth where the Vision is not forgotten.

Complications come, however, where the Vision falls below the comprehensive unity of a relationship¹, or where the freedom to exist becomes brokered through the laws of hierarchical systems of power.² Either way a "fall" manifests itself through the Manichean dualisms separating "Internal" from "External," "I" from "You," "Me" from "Not-Me," and "Us" from "Other." It is here, as William Blake represented in his poetry and art, where the constructed confines of a created universe binds all existence into a polarized "Good" and "Evil." It is here, in the wake of the atrocities of Imperialism, where Frantz Fanon articulated "the colonial world" to be "a Manichean world."³ Both bespeak the tyranny of a systematic identity placed upon a dynamic unity (be it metaphysical or physical), which in turn compromises the integrity of the whole through fractured understanding.

Thus "domination is achieved through a process of disavowal,"⁴ which sets up a personal and cultural process of responding to the designated "other" in terms of "identity or difference:"⁵ most often the difference is rejected and acculturated into the hegemonic "identity" of the dominate power. The integrity of a domination system is predicated upon clear delineations of "Me" and "Not Me." If the lines between the structural dualism of "I" and "Other" become confused, then a situation of "mutation" or "hybridity" exists where the "disavowed Other"⁶ becomes identified with. And where a questioning of the gap between "I" and "Other"

happens, the integrity of the Manichean duality becomes suspect. It is here where the "other" can hope to retain and reclaim a cultural space.

But the breach must be exploited through the combined efforts of all the marginalized and oppressed. Walls will fall only through a unified front:

The justification for our struggle was to erase all the images imposed on us, all the cultural differences, and the ethnic barriers, so that we Indians might understand each other in spite of different ways of expressing our religion and beliefs. Our culture is still the same. I discovered that all Indians have a common culture in spite of the linguistic barriers, ethnic barriers and different modes of dress.⁷

We can't afford now to have these national borders. We can't afford to have racism. We can't afford apartheid. It's one of those luxuries that we can't have now as human beings. We've got to think now in real terms for that 7th generation, and we've got to move in concert. We've got to sing the same song. We've got to have the same ceremony. We've got to get back to the spiritual law if we are to survive.⁸

But many of the oppressed, culturally dispossessed, and marginalized find themselves "trapped between"⁹ their traditional values and identity, and the imposed values and identity of the dominate culture. It is a state of paralysis and death where one thinks, "there has been something / that has disappeared...I'm not sure what it was."¹⁰ It is a state of loss in which one says physically and psychologically, "I couldn't go back."¹¹

But in fact, with much effort and strength of will, one can try to "go back" - one must go back: "Only where man feels himself to be heir and successor to the past has he the strength for a new beginning."¹² After awakening from "exile" to search the past in hopes of reclaiming an authentic presence within the future, one is then "forced to hold in tension beliefs that are not easily reconciled."¹³ In this situation one searches for the reconciler - for the unifier - for the "common culture" - for the "living religion" to re-install a "total tribal life" through which one can reinterpret the purposeful beliefs, which hold "the ultimate goal of all human existence."¹⁴ This process means more than a "manipula[tion]" of the "familiar symbols" of one's past.¹⁵ It involves *Vision* and *Wisdom*, which can only be found within that should never be forgotten - within the ancient traditions - within the sacred myths of humanity.

Myths involve fundamentally the "whole man" and seek to relate the "whole man" intimately within his environment.¹⁶ Myths reveal a "metaphysical truth" which means

Myth is a form of poetry which transcends poetry in that it proclaims a truth; a form of reasoning which transcends reasoning in that it wants to bring about the truth it proclaims; a form of action, of ritual behavior, which does not find its fulfillment in the act but must proclaim and

elaborate a poetic form of truth.¹⁷

In this sense, *myth* is "the full content of human knowledge:" "a knowledge capable of providing a context for human maturity and personality formation," through which the "ultimate goal of all human existence" is explained.¹⁸ This idea of a fundamental human wisdom grounded in a knowledge of "Life" informs Joseph Campbell's approach to the power of myth as human "being."

People say that what we're all seeking is a meaning for life. I don't think that's what we're really seeking. I think that what we're seeking is an experience of being alive, so that our life experiences on the purely physical plane will have resonances within our own innermost being and reality, so that we actually feel the rapture of being alive.¹⁹

Therefore, within the mythological world, one sees "life as a poem and yourself participating in a poem" speaking with a "vocabulary in the form not of words but of acts."²⁰ It is the vitality of the *myth*, wherein *the integration of the internal and external world find total expression through a Way of life lived through a Poetic spirit*. This is the Wisdom and the Vision of the ancients and of the indigenous peoples past and present. This is the "truth" of all human experience, which is the unity of life held in a metaphorical song kept within the living. Visionary traditions of the poet, the faith-keeper, the shaman, the griot, the bard, the hakawati, the medicine man, the story-teller, and the artist.

William Blake believed that "As a man is So he Sees."²¹ Blake thought himself "under the direction of Messengers from Heaven"

I hear a voice you cannot hear that says I must not stay
I see a hand you cannot see that beckons me away.²²

These messengers gave Blake a "Vision of Light,"²³ which imparted to Blake a divine duty:

nothing is necessary to me but to do my Duty & to rejoice in the exceeding joy that is always poured out on my Spirit...the joy that the world cannot conceive...[to] See Visions, Dream Dreams, & prophecy & speak Parables unobserv'd & at liberty from the Doubts of other Mortals.²⁴

Blake, as Visionary, lived his own mytho-poetic truth in a reality haltingly

expressed through his poetry and paintings to other human imaginations. Blake was one who sought out the "spiritual" truths of human experience and helped keep the Visionary "song of Life" alive for new generations.

Rigoberta Menchu wrote, "In the mountains, it's the one furthest ahead who decides the path: he opens the way for others to pass"²⁵ - thus is the duty of the spiritual Visionary who leads all of humanity through the mountains of Life. "With the Spirits the Holy Man may commune always," said Chief Piece of Flat Iron of the Oglalla Sioux, "and they teach him holy things."

The Holy Man goes apart to a lone tipi and fasts and prays. Or he goes into the hills in solitude. When he returns to men, he teaches them and tells them what the Great Mystery has bidden him to tell.²⁶

The Visionary seeks a glimpse of the "Unity" of "God" in order to lay a foundation for human beings to better understand the "meaning" of Life:

God has made different religions to suit different aspirants, times and countries. All doctrines are only so many paths; but a path is by no means God himself. Indeed, one can reach God if one follows any of the paths with wholehearted devotion.²⁷

Each Visionary personage and the "God" he/she describes are all only "pointers of a way"²⁸ towards the greater understanding of Life - all articulating a Way of life lived through a Poetic spirit - all distilling the Wisdom, which is the "truth" that should not be forgotten.

Oren Lyons, the Faithkeeper of the Turtle Clan of the Onondaga Nation of the Haudensaunee, links this poetic "truth" to the ceremonies of his people:

Our people were always spiritual people - religious people...There's a process, it's an old one, and so thanksgiving comes as a natural way, as being. It's part of life. It's not something that you do occasionally. It is something you do all the time.²⁹

There is for Lyons a "spiritual law" - a "spiritual center" - (linked to the "Tree of Peace," which came from the Haudensaunee messenger, The Great Peace Maker) and this law resembles the Eastern 'law' of Karma - of actions and consequences - which works within the natural rhythms of Life and serves as a "reference point" for human beings in living their life from generation to generation. The myths of Lyons's people seek to reiterate this "reference point" - this "spiritual center" - which is at once the purposeful meaning of their lives and their duty in living life. This "spiritual center" articulated in the old, old Visions of The Great Peace Maker still

resonate very powerfully within Lyon's life and the life of his people: "Sometimes the most real things you can't see."³⁰

Leonard Crow Dog opened a telling of the creation of the sun by saying,

This story...It came to me in a dream during a vision quest. It is a story as old as the beginning of life, but it has new understandings according to what I saw in my vision, added to what the grandfathers told me - things remembered, things forgotten, and things re-remembered. It comes out of the World of the Minds.³¹

The Visionary expressions of each age are a combination of the present with the past, seeking a new distillation of the sacred for future generations. The essence of a myth is always reinterpreted through the heart of its speaker. Myth accumulates the lived experiences of those who carry it within, and through the telling it seeks to reproduce a "truth" of life that should not be forgotten. Dick Fool Bull retold the tale of Wounded Knee as a narrative of a young nephew and his uncle. The "Old Unc" told the children to "look and remember."³² And thus is the real essence of all myth: tales of those who looked at life and remembered. 'Truth' being, as in the ancient Greek sense (*aletheia*), the opposite of forgetfulness (*lethe*). What is true is what should not be forgotten. Thus is the Visionary mytho-poetic story, which is life. "As long as there is one to sing," Oren Lyons has said, "and one to dance, one to speak, and one to listen Life will go on...Life will go on."³³ And as long as there is there is human life there will the myths created by the Visionaries who "looked" and carried and distilled by the people who remembered.

notes

- ¹ "In the beginning is the relation" through an "I-You" reciprocity, but over time has since fallen, according to Martin Buber, into the world of "I-It." I and Thou. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Touchstone, 1970. 78. "for modern, scientific man the phenomenal world is primarily an "It"; for ancient - and also for primitive - man it is a "Thou." Frankfort, H. and H.A. et al. The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man. Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1946. 4.
- ² Power as "the multiplicity of force relations... forming a chain or a system... whose general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies... power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society." Foucault, Michel. The History of Sexuality: Volume I. Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage Books, 1978.
- ³ Fanon, Frantz. The Wretched of the Earth. Trans. Constance Farrington. New York: Grove Press, 1963. 41.
- ⁴ Bhabha, Homi K. "Signs Taken for Wonders." The Post-Colonial Studies Reader. New York: Routledge, 1995. 33.
- ⁵ JanMohamed, Abul R. "The Economy of Manichean Allegory." The Post-Colonial Studies Reader. New York: Routledge, 1995. 18.
- ⁶ Bhabha, Homi K. "Signs Taken for Wonders." The Post-Colonial Studies Reader. New York: Routledge, 1995. 34.
- ⁷ Menchu, Rigoberta. I, Rigoberta Menchu. Trans. Ann Wright. London: Verso, 1984. 169.
- ⁸ Lyons, Oren. with Bill Moyers. The Faithkeeper. Films for the Humanities & Sciences, 1997.
- ⁹ Deloria, Jr., Vine. Spirit and Reason. Golden: Fulcrum Publishing, 1999. 311.
- ¹⁰ Edmo, Ed. "There Has Been Something." These Few Words of Mine. Blue Cloud Quarterly, 1985.
- ¹¹ Edmo, Ed. "After Celilo." Talking Leaves: Contemporary Native American Short Stories. Ed. Craig Lesley. Dell Publishing, 1991. 72.
- ¹² Jahn, Janheinz. Muntu: An Outline of the New African Culture. Trans. Marjorie Grene. New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1961. 18.
- ¹³ *Ibid.* 318, 315.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.* 317, 13.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.* 206.
- ¹⁶ Frankfort, H. and H.A. et al. The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man. 6.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.* 7-8.

¹⁸ Deloria, Jr., Vine. Spirit and Reason. 5, 13.

¹⁹ Campbell, Joseph with Bill Moyers. The Power of Myth. New York: Anchor Books, 1988. 1.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 65. One is reminded here of Walt Whitman's "O Me! O Life!:" "That you are here - that life exists and identity, / That the powerful play goes on, and you may contribute a verse." Walt Whitman: Complete Poetry and Collected Prose. New York: The Library of America, 1982. 410.

²¹ Blake, William. "Letter to Rev Dr. Trusler: Aug 23, 1799." The Complete Poetry & Prose of William Blake. Ed. David Erdman. New York: Anchor Books, 1988. 702.

²² Blake, William. "Letter to Thomas Butts: Jan 10, 1803." The Complete Poetry & Prose of William Blake. Ed. David Erdman. New York: Anchor Books, 1988. 724-25.

²³ Blake, William. "Letter to Thomas Butts: Oct 2, 1800." *Ibid.* 712.

²⁴ Blake, William. "Letter to William Hayley: October 26, 1803" and "Letter to Thomas Butts: April 25, 1803." *Ibid.* 737, 728.

²⁵ Menchu, Rigoberta. I, Rigoberta Menchu. *Ibid.* 29.

²⁶ Chief Piece of Flat Iron to Natalie Curtis. The Indians' Book. qtd. in. Joseph Campbell. The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology. New York: Penguin, 1987. 243.

²⁷ Ramakrishna. The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. qtd. in. Joseph Campbell. The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology. New York: Penguin, 1987. 463.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Lyons, Oren with Bill Moyers. The Faithkeeper. Films for the Humanities & Sciences, 1997.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Crow Dog, Leonard. "Sun Creation." American Indian Myths and Legends. Ed. Richard Erdoes and Alfonso Ortiz. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984. 129.

³² Fool Bull, Dick. "The Ghost Dance at Wounded Knee." American Indian Myths and Legends. Ed. Richard Erdoes and Alfonso Ortiz. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984. 484.

³³ The FaithKeeper. *Ibid.*

A Way of Seeing

A song is prevalent,
faithful to continuance,
the purity is a nuance,
the memory, this certain way.

-Elizabeth Woody (*Wasco Poet*)

The African Novelist and self taught Cultural Anthropologist Bessie Head once wrote of the native African, "His whole world is his religion and he is a religious man." She was paraphrasing John S. Mbiti and went on in her essay to quote from his book, African Religion and Philosophy:

Wherever the African is, there is his religion: he carries it to the fields where he is sowing seeds or harvesting a new crop; he takes it with him to the beer party or to attend a funeral ceremony...In traditional religions there are no creeds to be recited; instead, the creeds are written in the heart of the individual, and each one is himself a living creed of his own religion. Where the individual is, there is his religion, for he is a religious being. It is this that makes Africans so religious: religion is in their whole system of being.¹

Bessie Head was trying to emphasize the "spirituality" latent in everyday life, which is everywhere accessible to those peoples who are in accord with it. And what is spiritually accessed by indigenous peoples around the world seems lost to the civilized except through storyteller-poets who have somehow retained a mystical understanding of the world:

'Who are you?' people asked. 'I am the dreamer and storyteller,' they replied. 'I have seen life. I am drunk with the magical enchantment of human relationships. I laughed often. The big, wide free world is full of innocence...' But what happens to the dreamer and storyteller when he is born into a dead world of such extreme cruelties that no comment or statement of love can alter them?...Where is that wedge of innocence and laughter that resolves so many human ills?...For largeness of heart is what we need for a civilization and big, big, eyes, wide enough to drink in all the knowledge of the heavens and earth.²

Bessie Head echoes the words of William Blake, "as man is so he sees." The poet sees the beauty and innocence of the world around and lives within that sacred center. This allows the poet to access the sacred within life and, thereby, become and live the sacred - "drunk with the magical enchantment." Such is the potential reality of life. Such is the poet's Vision.

But there are those indigenous native peoples around the world who can still see poetically and experience the sacred as an everyday reality. Tribal rituals and stories have preserved this ancient Vision, which expresses in the Nuu-chah-nulth language "Hishuk Tsawalk," "everything is one; everything is connected."³ But this Vision, to the eyes of those who do not see spiritually, seems but a fancy or a metaphysical illusion. William Blake once wrote, "The tree which moves some to tears of joy is in the Eyes of others only a Green thing that stands in the way."⁴

The Western world, and Western Science in particular (as it has become the dominant ideology driving Western society), has become that type of perceiver who sees the natural universe as just a "thing," and in its technological 'progress' has lost sight of the Visionary essence, which moves unseen behind all life: "Any damn fool can treat a living thing as if it were a machine."⁵ And thus there is a "difference," Tom Happynook believes, "between knowledge and information."⁶ Western science has always gone after piecemeal "information" instead of a more holistic "knowledge." Vine Deloria, Jr., in concurrence with the proposition of this dichotomy writes, "the white [Western] man has ideas, the Indian has visions."⁷ Vision being a holistic approach to life. Vision being a holistic "knowledge." Vision being what is necessary to apprehend the complex reality, which is the phenomenon and event called Life.

Oregon State University Philosophy Professor Kathleen Dean Moore once drew the conclusion that Western philosophy - heavily influenced by Aristotelian analytics and "scientific" rationalism - "is not about life. Philosophy is about ideas. Life and ideas are not the same."

I went looking for a discipline where the essential value was clarity. I found it in western philosophy...Everything I wrote was clear to the point of vanishing. Objective, abstract, precise, and never, ever about life...the range of possible subjects narrowed: the easiest things to write clearly about are the simplest, and nothing in real life is simple...Many of the ideas that remained were reduced by isolation - unrecognizable, fractured from the lives of real people. In the end, they didn't matter.⁸

The "white man's ideas" - Western Science and Philosophy - seems starkly inadequate set against the complex reality which is called Life. "Indians believed," as Deloria, Jr. wrote, "that everything that humans experience has value and instructs us in some aspect of life... we cannot 'misexperience' anything; we can only misinterpret what we experience... so we must be alert and try not to classify things too quickly."⁹ This "knowledge" of experience exists as the Native American "science of wholeness"¹⁰ or "science of relations."¹¹ It is a Visionary way of seeing and understanding the world, which Western Science has heretofore rejected. But it is a Vision the Western world "badly needs"¹² if this earth is to sustain its balance.

The Native American "science of wholeness" or "science of relations" is a "world view shaped by reciprocity and spatiality."¹³ It is a world view, which sees the environment as "not a place of divisions but a place of relations, a place where cultural diversity and bio-diversity are not separate, but are in fact interdependent... the natural world is a complex web."¹⁴ The Native American world view arranges its knowledge in a "circular format, which is to say, there [are] no ultimate terms or constituents of their universe, only sets of relationships."¹⁵ And every relationship was "established" upon "personal relationships between and among other forms of life."¹⁶ The human being was no more important than the wolf or the fish or the tree or the mountain: all had their place, their meaning and role to fulfill, and as a unity were considered "family."

Western science, however, works within a "severely restricted" and impersonal "arena" and therefore does not ask "complete questions of nature" - "may not even be asking relevant questions."¹⁷ And Western science seems to often jump to conclusions about what it finds within its narrow searches of irrelevant questions:

Western science prematurely derives its scientific "laws" and assumes that the products of its own mind are inherent in the structure of the universe. But American Indians allow the process to continue, recognizing that premature analysis will produce anomalies and give incomplete understanding.¹⁸

A root concept of "dominion" and "control" is inherent within these localized questions asked of nature manifested in the very heart of Western science, which is founded upon the "acts of naming."¹⁹

Naming nature is the special business of science. Theories, models, and descriptions are elaborated names. In these acts of naming, the scientist simultaneously constructs and contains nature - "according to the relation and perspective he chooses."²⁰

Western science derived an inherited process found in the Book of Genesis whereby dominion over the natural world comes through the naming of its multifaceted

When dealing with the ordering of complex natures (representations in general, as they are given in experience), one has to constitute a *taxinomia*, and to do that one has to establish a system of signs... *taxinomia*... treats of identities and differences; it is the science of articulations and classifications; it is the knowledge of *beings*.²¹

But as Spinoza pointed out in the 17th century, the "system of signs" (language) that Western minds had created was incapable of truly apprehending reality because what could be represented through a "system of signs" (language) would be a 'negative' representation conveyed in terms of 'what it is not.' A positive definition ('what it is') could never be known or represented through human language. A being could only be. Thus was "God" for Spinoza: the Ultimate, Un-definable Unity, which was 'Being' and 'Life.'

And such is what the indigenous and Native peoples around the globe are trying to make Western minds understand: you cannot "know" Life, you can only live Life. Thus "the old Indians," as Vine Deloria, Jr. wrote, "were interested in finding the proper moral and ethical road upon which human beings should walk. All knowledge, if it is to be useful, was directed toward that goal:"

The real interest of the old Indians was not to discover the abstract structure of physical reality but rather to find the proper road along which, for the duration of a person's life, individuals were supposed to walk. This colorful image of the road suggests that the universe is a moral universe. That is to say, there is a proper way to live in the universe: There is a content to every action, behavior, and belief. The sum total of our life experiences has a reality. There is a direction to the universe, empirically exemplified in the physical growth cycles of childhood, youth, and old age, with the corresponding responsibility of every entity to enjoy life, fulfill itself, and increase in wisdom and the spiritual development of personality. Nothing has incidental meaning and there are no coincidences.

The wise person will realize his or her own limitations and act with some degree of humility until he or she has sufficient knowledge to act with confidence. Every bit of information must be related to the general framework of moral interpretation as it is personal to them and

their community. No body of knowledge exists for its own sake outside the moral framework of understanding. We are, in the truest sense possible, creators or co-creators with the highest powers, and what we do has immediate importance for the rest of the universe. In the moral universe all activities, events, and entities are related, and consequently it does not matter what kind of existence an entity enjoys: The responsibility is always there to participate in the creation of reality.²²

The basis for the Native American "science of wholeness" or "science" of relations" is reciprocity of identity and actions within a relative universe of equally autonomous, but inter-related parts. This idea, however, also has roots within the Western tradition (which is often overlooked by many), expressed most fully perhaps in the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Martin Buber. Buber said, writing of the "True community,"

All of them [the people] have to stand in a living, reciprocal relationship to a single living center, and they have to stand in a living, reciprocal relationships to one another...A community is built upon a living, reciprocal relationship, but the builder is the living, active center.²³

The "active center" for Native Americans is that 'sacred space' whereby the mystery of the world and the unity of Life is revealed and made manifest. The "active center" and the "sacred" are Life itself apprehended in its total unity.

And if the indigenous and Native universe is "moral or has a moral purpose" then it must be maintained that this moral universe "is alive."²⁴ The universe itself is here seen as a living 'being,' and thus composes the heart of the "active center" of a people or of an individual. In this organic concept "all things are related," and so "responsibility for maintaining the harmony of life falls equally on all creatures:"²⁵

Life is better understood as a tapestry or symphony in which each player has a specific part or role to play. We must be in our proper place and we must play our role at the appropriate moment. Mutual respect in many ways is a function of a strong sense of personal and communal identity.²⁶

The essence of the underlying unity and reciprocity of Life is carried through the art and song of the people, danced through the various rituals, and lived as the sacred words (Logos - the Word) ever composing the unending poem, which is Life. Or as Walt Whitman characterized this essence using a metaphor of a "powerful play:" "That you are here - that life exists and identity, / That the powerful play goes on, and you may contribute a verse."²⁷ Such is "knowledge" or indeed, "wisdom." And thus, such is "truth" (that which should not be forgotten). To the indigenous or Native mind - to the Visionary - to the poet - to all who open their eyes to really see - this is all one ever really "knows" of Life, and all one really ever needs to know.

notes

¹ Mbiti, John S. African Religions and Philosophy. qtd. in. Head, Bessie. "African Religions." A Woman Alone. Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1990. 51, 53.

² Head, Bessie. "Epilogue: An African Story." & "God and the Underdog." *Ibid.* 101, 50.

³ Happynook, Tom. "Securing Food, Health and Traditional Values through the Sustainable Use of Marine Resources." Speech given at Oregon State University on April 11, 2001.

⁴ Blake, William. "Letter to Rev Dr. Trusler: Aug, 23 1799." The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake. New York: Anchor Books, 1988. 702.

⁵ Deloria Jr., Vine. Spirit and Reason. Golden: Fulcrum Publishing, 1999. 13.

⁶ "Securing Food, Health and Traditional Values..." *Ibid.*

⁷ Spirit and Reason. *Ibid.* 15.

⁸ Moore, Kathleen Dean. Riverwalking. Lyons & Burford, 1995. 141, 142, 144.

⁹ Spirit and Reason. *Ibid.* 46.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 40.

¹¹ Happynook, Tom. "Securing Food, Health, and Traditional..." *Ibid.*

¹² Deloria, Jr. Spirit and Reason. 16.

¹³ Tinker, George E. "An American Indian Theological Response to Ecojustice." Defending Mother Earth: Native American Perspectives on Justice. Ed. Jace Weaver. Orbis Books, 1996. 163.

¹⁴ Happynook, Tom. "Securing Food, Health, and Traditional..." *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Deloria, Jr. Spirit and Reason. 48.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 54.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 45, 12.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 14.

¹⁹ Tinker, George E. "An American Indian Theological Response to Ecojustice." *Ibid.* 159.

²⁰ Keller, Evelyn Fox. Reflections on Gender and Science. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995. 17. Keller is critiquing Western Science on the grounds of gender and within the complex of Western Science itself, yet she parallels the Native American critiques on some key issues. Keller writes that "knowability and objectifiability need to be relinquished" and that the "concept of order" needs to replace the older, "coercive, hierarchical, and centralizing" concept of "law" (149, 132).

²¹ Foucault, Michel. The Order of Things. New York: Vintage Books, 1970. 72, 74.

²² Spirit and Reason. 43-44, 46-47.

²³ Buber, Martin. I and Thou. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Touchstone, 1970. 94.

²⁴ Spirit and Reason. 49.

²⁵ *Ibid.* 52.

²⁶ *Ibid.* 51.

²⁷ Whitman, Walt. "O Me! O Life!" Walt Whitman: Complete Poetry and Collected Prose. New York: The Library of America, 1982. 410.

About the Author

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"A poet is all I am, and all I want to be."