Native American and Indigenous Philosophy



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Agnes B. Curry

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Native American and Indigenous Philosophy

AGNES B. CURRY, EDITOR

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Agnes B. Curry

UNIVERSITY OF SAINT JOSEPH, CONNECTICUT

In this newsletter we offer first an article by Andrea Sullivan-Clarke of Windsor University in Canada. In "Empowering Relations" she critically considers recent discussions of allyship and the limitations inherent in them, so as to build a less ethically naïve concept for allying work with indigenous peoples and communities.

We then offer three views of two recent books: Brian Burkhart's Indigenizing Philosophy through the Land: A Trickster Methodology for Decolonizing Environmental Ethics and Indigenous Futures and Shay Welch's The Phenomenology of a Performance Knowledge System: Dancing with Native American Epistemology. Both authors work to further the project of Native American philosophy, and their work intervenes into academic conversations in environmental philosophy, epistemology, philosophy of language, phenomenology, and performance studies. At the same time both books alert us to the alwaysalready-also political framing of these sub-disciplinary and interdisciplinary boxes that can fail to catch the accomplishments of Native thinking.

We start with Joseph Len Miller's review of Burkhart, Miller, of the University of Washington and Elon University, provides a chapter-by-chapter outline and scaffolding in terms of three key insights. Many readers should find this very useful for orienting readers to the specifics of Burkhart's project. Likewise, the questions Miller poses open to further conversation about the impact of a localized concept of philosophy on questions not just for environmental thinking but also metaethics. After Miller's orientation to Burkhart, Dennis McPherson and J. Douglas Rabb of Lakehead University orchestrate a dual look at some of the shared concerns animating Burkhart and Welch. Deploying some trickster methodology of their own, McPherson and Rabb point us to questions of both framing and reception. Finally, Lorraine Mayer of Brandon University provides some more exclusive focus on Welch's key moves, following the implications of the insight that for some knowledge systems, truth is metaphorical and embodied.

We look forward to further considerations of each book and other new work in Native American, American Indian, and Indigenous philosophy, along with your scholarly articles, discussions of teaching, etc.

SUBMISSION GUIDFLINES AND INFORMATION

We invite you to submit your work for consideration for publication in the Newsletter on Native American and Indigenous Philosophy. We welcome comments and responses to work published in this or past issues. We also welcome work that speaks to philosophical, professional and community concerns regarding Native American and indigenous philosophies and philosophers of all global indigenous nations. Editors do not limit the format of what can be submitted; we accept a range of submission formats including and not limited to papers, opinion editorials, transcribed dialogue interviews, book reviews, poetry, links to oral and video resources, cartoons, artwork, satire, parody, and other diverse formats.

In all cases, however, references should follow the Chicago Manual of Style and include endnotes rather than in-text citations. For further information, please see the Guidelines for Authors available on the APA website.

Please submit material electronically to Agnes Curry (acurry@usj.edu). For consideration for the Fall 2020 newsletter, please submit your work by June 15, 2020.

ARTICLE

Empowering Relations: An Indigenous Understanding of Allyship

Andrea Sullivan-Clarke

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Many non-Indigenous people naively assume that living in a post-conquest society entails living in a post-colonial one as well. Colonization, however, is an encompassing presence in the lives of the Indigenous people of North America. The effects of colonization linger, creating what Kyle Whyte describes as Our Ancestors' Dystopia Now.1 Federal policies, motivated by a settler colonial agenda, have comprehensively damaged the myriad of relationships (cultural, epistemic, familial, etc.) originating within the ancestral lands of Indigenous people.

What most non-Indigenous people fail to realize is that "colonization is war." As Whyte points out, the drive to

settle Indigenous land was "sustained, strategic, and militaristic." The colonizing strategies invoked against the Indigenous people

Include[d] both war-like violence and the tactics for suppressing populations that are used alongside belligerence, from assimilative institutions (e.g. boarding schools) to containment practices (e.g. reservations) to the creation of dependency (e.g. commodity foods).⁴

While some may claim that the policies of assimilation and the removal of Indigenous communities to reservations/ reserves remain part of our unenlightened past, we need not look far to find contemporary acts of aggression and examples of Indigenous sovereignty being met with threats of violence from militarized police and private security forces. In the fall of 2016, the #NODAPL (No Dakota Access Pipeline) water protectors faced threats of violence from the local police and security forces, evoking images of previous conflicts, such as the Oka Crisis, Burnt Church Crisis, Idle No More, Ipperwash Crisis, Gustafsen Lake Standoff, and Wounded Knee (1973).⁵ In 2019, headlines in the media reported a raid on the unceded lands of the Wet'suwet'en people in British Columbia by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. One disturbing feature—at least when one considers the Canadian government's supposed commitment to Truth and Reconciliation—was the creation of "exclusion zones," which prevented access to the media as RCMP officers dismantled two camps of Indigenous people protesting the placement of the LNG Coastal GasLink pipeline by Coastal GasLink, a subsidiary of TransCanada Corporation.7

Police actions and militarized responses in Indian Country are so numerous that forward progress regarding relations with one's colonizers seems virtually impossible.8 Other pernicious threats—such as revoking tribal recognition, contesting foster care placement laws, proposed reductions in treaty obligations, the failure to pursue cases of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, and the taking of Indigenous land—loom daily, profoundly affecting the lives of Indigenous people in North America. In order to eradicate the institutions of systemic oppression, contemporary Indigenous communities require long-term advocacy; I refer to this sustained support as allyship or being an ally. The concepts of ally and allyship, however, have come under scrutiny, and rightly so. Historically, the term has been misused. Given that the need for allies is great, how we define allyship for Indian Country is of critical import. In this paper, I discuss why being an active bystander is not sufficient for the needs in Indian Country and I present the failings of the current understandings of ally and allyship. As a solution, I offer a decolonized and indigenized concept suitable for the needs of the Indigenous people of North America.

An individual who wishes to support Indigenous people might act in a variety of ways. They might address an immediate need, and depending upon the circumstances, a response may be isolated or it may be of short duration. For example, an individual might provide a coordinated response to a threat of violence, such as inserting

themselves between the private security forces and the water protectors at Standing Rock. I refer to this type of support as being an active bystander. Unlike a bystander, who witnesses a situation but does not act, an active bystander "witnesses a situation [and] takes steps to speak up or step in to keep a situation from escalating or to disrupt a problematic situation."9 Active bystanders are positively motivated to preventing or addressing bias, prejudice, and threats of violence. Of course, the actions of active bystanders need not necessarily be immediate; their response may take place after an incident, such as when someone listens to a victim or provides them with medical care. 10 Although critical to the goals of social justice, the actions of an active bystander do not seem to have the sustained commitment I have in mind, nor do they have the investment (dedication for a particular individual or group). Generally speaking, active bystanders are not committed to act beyond the moment and once completed, it seems their work is done.

I take this to be the primary distinction between allies and active bystanders—we expect more from our allies. Active bystanders may not always be present and aware of oppressive situations—such as when the assaults to Indigenous sovereignty are kept private (through restricted media presence or behind doors of political committees/courtrooms). To overcome systemic oppression, Indigenous people would benefit from both active bystanders and allies.

The concepts of ally and allyship, however, are problematic. They suffer from overuse. A quick search at the library will reveal such titles as Earthworms and Their Allies, The Church's Natural Allies, and The Working Class and Its Allies. More importantly, their meaning is often ambiguous. For example, the concepts conjure up an association with military alliances, such as the Allies in WWII or the various alliances between the Indigenous nations and early colonial powers, like England or France. This conceptualization often assumes a shared or common goal, such as the defeat of Nazism or mutual protection and trade. Once that goal is attained, however, the alliance has little value. In a letter to George Washington, Chief Complanter of the Seneca Nation expresses his confusion and feelings of betrayal resulting from the alliance his people had with England and subsequently the colonies.11 Initially, the colonists demanded that the Seneca enter into an alliance with England. Chief Cornplanter notes, "When you kindled your thirteen fires separately [sic], the wise men that assembled at them told us you were all brothers, the children of one great Father who regarded also the red people as his children. They called us brothers and invited us to his protection."12 Yet, after the colonists secured their independence from England, the support of the Seneca was no longer needed. Their lands, however, were. According to Chief Cornplanter, "[Street of Niagara] . . . told us, that our Lands had been ceded by the King and that we must give them up."13 Previously, the Seneca were entitled to rents for land used/settled. After the war, their "allies" forced them to surrender all their land without compensation.

An additional worry associated with allyship is its propensity for epistemic injustice.¹⁴ For example, allyship

is ubiquitous within "queer politics and activism," and as Rachel McKinnon points out, it poses harm to individuals from socially marginalized groups, such as individuals in the transgender community.¹⁵ McKinnon's worry is that when individuals undergo training to be an ally, it becomes a part of their identity and when they "behave badly," they do serious harm to already vulnerable individuals.¹⁶

This type of allyship is often cultivated through some form of training, such as the Trevor Project or the Safe Zone Project.¹⁷ When allyship becomes part of an individual's identity, it can whitewash their failings and even embolden their estimation of their performance. For example, McKinnon identifies a form of epistemic injustice known as gaslighting, which is associated with the use of an ally identity. 18 Gaslighting is when an individual "doesn't believe, or expresses doubt about, a speaker's testimony," which prompts the testifier to question their experience of reality.¹⁹ Epistemic injustice affects members of marginalized communities whenever a hearer doubts the reliability of a speaker's firsthand account of a harmful experience or unjust treatment based on some aspect of the speaker's social identity.²⁰ The identity of the "ally" can come into play as well.

If an "ally" fails someone, as in McKinnon's example of a transgender person being mispronouned, the identity of being an ally can be used to discredit the victim's account of the harmful experience, and, worse, it can even be used to deflect the hearer's offense. For example, the hearer might respond with "Are you sure they did that? I know he/she is an ally" or "I don't believe that since they are an ally." According to McKinnon, the hearer has failed "to afford the first person (epistemic) authority of disadvantaged speakers its appropriate epistemic weight." The hearer privileges their own knowledge and fails the speaker by not accepting their account as credible even though it is a report of the speaker's firsthand experience. The set of worries associated with allyship as part of one's social identity is only the tip of the iceberg.

Recently, Indigenous activists condemn the development of an "ally industrial complex" (AIC), calling into question the motives and sincerity of its members.²² Individuals who are a part of the AIC exploit and commodify allyship in order to preserve and enhance their professional goals, reputation, and personal agendas.²³ Under the AIC, allyship is reduced to a purchasable identity, rendering it "ineffective and meaningless."24 Allyship borne out of the AIC permits the preservation of romantic ideals, such as being a savior to the oppressed victim, and can result in the tokenizing of the oppressed (by challenging their autonomy).²⁵ It encourages paternalism amongst allies: those with "official" training are granted a higher epistemic status than those who are actually undergoing the oppression. The existence of the AIC relies on oppression—something without which the "allies," and their capitalist venture, would no longer be needed. Thus, it is reasonable to ask whether individuals are genuinely motivated to end oppression.

Another worry associated with the ability to purchase the label of ally is that there is little to ensure that those individuals seeking ally status are actually sincere or even capable to serve as an ally. Training programs vary and there is reason to worry about the ability of these programs to sufficiently address the diverse issues and people in Indian Country. There are over 1,200 federally recognized Indigenous communities in the United States and Canada, and although some problems may be shared amongst colonized people, they often face diverse challenges. Sometimes, interests clash amongst the Indigenous communities. Training may be too general and not sufficiently detailed to enable someone to be a competent ally to a specific Indigenous community.

When considering the training of allies, the variety of motivations individuals have for undertaking training must be subject to critical examination. One's commitment to being an ally may be correlated with whether the individual independently sought out the training, the training was mandated by an employer, or there was an additional benefit/s associated with the training (such as whether it confers marketability in a job search, promotion, or provides additional compensation). In her critique of allies, McKinnon is quick to point out the swag—pins, buttons, and signage—often associated with being an ally. Thus, although there may not be a direct link between the motivation for undergoing training and an individual's sincerity as an ally, it is reasonable to question whether an individual's motivation is misplaced, as when an individual attends allyship training to be acknowledged amongst or even be thought morally superior to their peers. In short, completion of training does not guarantee a certain level of commitment.

Notably, training does not ensure cultural competency. Despite sincere intentions, an individual may fail, or they may acquire limited skills. In such cases, there will be times when harm is produced. The problem with allyship being construed as a social identity is that the harms may go unchecked or uncorrected. As was the case in McKinnon's example, the bad behavior may be excused, or even deflected, given that the guilty individual is known to be an ally. Excusing the behavior given one's social identity reduces the likelihood that the individual will learn to do otherwise. Instead, the bad behavior continues unchecked.²⁶

Not only does the concept of allyship suffer from commodification and abuse, upon closer analysis it also preserves colonial hierarchical structures. Some versions privilege the contributions made by individuals of the dominant social group. Take, for example, a version found in sociological research. It defines allies as "dominant group members who work to end prejudice in their personal and professional lives, and relinquish social privileges conferred by their group status through their support of nondominant groups."²⁷ This version renders the contributions from individuals from outside the dominant social group invisible.

Members from non-dominant social groups, such as Black Lives Matter (#BLM) and Veterans Stand for Standing Rock (VSSR), served as allies to the water protectors during the events of #NODAPL. Although many of their actions could be described as those of active bystanders—ministering to logistical needs and acting as human shields between the Sioux people and the militarized security forces—many served as allies as well. For example, members of VSSR initiated relationships with the water protectors at Standing Rock by attending prayer ceremonies and participating in rituals. Aware of the U.S. government's continued oppression of Native Americans, some members of VSSR sought to acknowledge past injustices and seek a way to move forward. The organizer of VSSR, Wesley Clark, Jr. noted "some veterans will take part in a prayer ceremony . . . during which they'll apologize for historical detrimental conduct by the military toward Native Americans and ask for forgiveness."

Members of #BLM in New York City served as active bystanders by "collect[ing] piles of donated items—including school supplies, tents, blankets, sleeping bags, medical supplies, and coats" to be delivered to Standing Rock.³⁰ Yet, other members of #BLM recognized that Standing Rock is only one in a multitude of issues facing colonized people in the United States. Tara Houska, national campaign director of Honor the Earth, identified the shared motivations behind joining the protest at Standing Rock, stating, "We know that our communities are not only targeted by police and killed at a disparate rate by police officers, we also know that our communities are targeted at a disparate rate by these projects."³¹ Historically colonized people have a shared starting point from which to cultivate their activism.

The relationship between Black and native activists has relatively recent historical roots. Wilma Mankiller, former chief of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma, described the shared problems of American Indian and Black families in the early 1970s. Indigenous families were relocated to the cities by the federal government and lived amongst Black families in the poorer neighborhoods, like Hunters Point, San Francisco. According to Mankiller, these groups shared similar experiences: poverty, high rents, unemployment, and broken families. 32 The afflicted communities organized responses to these problems through militancy and grassroots projects, such as creating "breakfast programs and alternative schools" for all members of the community.33 At Standing Rock, members of #BLM worked with the water protectors, sharing their prior experience of organization at the grassroot level as well as strategies for handling large protests, like that in Ferguson, Missouri.34 The #BLM NYC chapters continue to support Indigenous children through the collection of school supplies.³⁵ As a result of this relationship, members of #BLM and the Sioux nations are able to communicate their needs and support each other.

The history of Indigenous communities in North America is replete with instances of (to co-opt the title of McKinnon's article) allies behaving badly.³⁶ The actions of missionaries, national governments, and others who believed that "civilizing" the Indian was in their best interest resulted in a myriad of policies such a removal, assimilation, and termination. Then and now, Indigenous people endure the negative effects of those policies, which were often framed in terms of improving their lives. So how do these cases of "allyship" differ from the examples of #BLM and VSSR? I propose that these putative allies acted without attending

to the experiences, culture, and even the true needs of Indigenous people. Their efforts and the outcomes—whether intentional or not—ultimately preserved the social hierarchy and insulated them from critique. Their fundamental error as allies was failing to stand in the proper relation to the Indigenous people they claimed to serve.

The actions of the members of #BLM and VSSR are distinct from the above examples because their actions were those of decolonial allies—and it is their **relationship** with the Water Protectors that distinguishes them. In addition, the members of #BLM and VSSR were recognized by the Water Protectors as allies. Generally speaking, Indigenous people stand in relation to all things, as is evident in their creation stories and lived narratives. The knowledge of Indigenous people often stresses, or provides guidance for, the way for the people to be in the world. In "What Coyote and Thales Can Teach Us," Cherokee philosopher Brian Burkhart presents such a story.

Using a story of Coyote, Burkhart relates to the reader the lesson that Coyote did not learn. Yet, it is a lesson that Indigenous allies must learn. Coyote, in his anger to seek revenge on some prairie dogs that poked fun at him, failed to realize that his wishing for enough rain to flood the prairie dog town would adversely affect him too.³⁷ Simply put, Coyote did not recognize his connection to the world and, more importantly, his connection with the prairie dogs.

Relationships are a fundamental part of Indigenous philosophy; people stand in relation to everything in the universe—objects, other people, places, and spirits. As Burkhart describes, "meaning and value arise in the intersection between us and all that is around us."38 In this way, our actions put meaning and value into the world.³⁹ Thus, an Indigenous epistemology often includes a normative component—the universe is moral, and all of our relations provide knowledge as to how to live.⁴⁰ Insofar as the actions of allies are critical to the success of the relation, I propose that an Indigenized conception of allyship should be understood as a relationship that promotes the well-being of those being served.

To be an ally to Indigenous people is to embark on a relationship with the people; it is a relationship with the "We."41 It is not a commodity for purchase, although it does require investment. To stand in relation, individuals must know themselves while at the same time be willing to learn about the people with whom they enter into relations. Simply put, a decolonized understanding of ally requires an epistemic commitment. To counter the worry of paternalism, allies must respect the sovereignty of Indigenous people, which enables members of each group in the relationship to be epistemic equals. By doing so, allies can be guided and informed by Indigenous communities regarding future collaborations.

As we see from the examples at Standing Rock, the members of VSSR and #BLM were not necessarily from privileged groups and yet they served as allies. The social makeup of the membership of VSSR included a good number of military veterans from historically disadvantaged groups. Several of the members of VSSR were actually Indigenous people.

Reporter Adam Linehan states that while "many [members of VSSR] were motivated by a genuine desire to protect the Sioux people [...] Others were Native American themselves, appalled that government forces were doing to their own people what they themselves had done on the government's behalf in places like Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan."⁴²

Members of the VSSR cultivated relationships with the water protectors through their participation in communal prayers and ceremonies. They also showed respect by limiting their interaction with the media in order to privilege the voices of the Indigenous people at Standing Rock. When interviewed, Clarke acknowledged, "tribal elders didn't want him, or any other outsiders, leading a group of protesters. This was their fight [. . .] All of the veterans Clark had beckoned to Standing Rock would now have to take orders from the Sioux."⁴³ The recognition of tribal sovereignty must include respecting the firsthand experience of Indigenous people.

Being a decolonized ally does not mean that there may not be shared common interests, but it allows for learning from diverse experience. For example, some members of VSSR and the water protectors found common ground in the experience of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and sought healing together, as well as ways to help each other cope with the symptoms. ⁴⁴ From this example, we see the respectful exchange of information and support. Although these interactions may appear to be similar to the WWII type of allyship, there are notable differences—such as the willingness to reveal one's vulnerabilities.

The actions, rhetoric, and motivations of certain members of #BLM reveal similar commitments of a decolonial ally. Working together to overcome similar obstacles does not necessarily entail wishing well for the other, but it can bring marginalized/oppressed communities together to jointly improve their individual circumstances. Reporting on #BLM relations with Standing Rock, Ashoka Jegroo notes,

Much like the indigenous tribes they're supporting, Black Lives Matter activists from New York City see themselves engaged in a fight against state violence, oppression, and exploitation. For these activists, black and indigenous struggles are intimately tied together.⁴⁵

In this case, the activists from both sides—Indigenous and non-Indigenous—have a shared starting point from which to cultivate their activism. For example, Kim Ortiz, organizer of NYC Shut It Down, states, "we really need to stand in solidarity with the tribes out in Standing Rock because we know very well that all of our struggles are connected, and until we unite, we're never going to win."46 As marginalized members of society, #BLM did not surrender their privilege or advantage to support those at Standing Rock. Rather, they identified as colonized people seeking to show solidarity with Indigenous protestors, who also experience the negative effects of colonization. Both groups face police brutality, disproportional incarceration rates, and racism in society—the interactions amounted to a respectful exchange of knowledge to deal with a particular challenges, such as documenting inhumane treatment on social media to motivate a public response.

As mentioned previously, being an ally to Indigenous people requires learning their history, struggles, and needs. In addition, it requires knowing yourself. Whyte identifies a key issue that must be addressed in order to ensure the efficacy of non-native individuals to serve as allies: undermining the resilience of settler privilege.⁴⁷ Settler privilege, per Whyte,

means that some combination of one's economic security, U.S. citizenship, sense of relationship to the land, mental and physical health, cultural integrity, family values, career aspirations, and spiritual lives are not possible—literally!—without the territorial dispossession of Indigenous peoples.⁴⁸

Settler privilege prevents non-native individuals from comprehending the dystopian and post-apocalyptic realities their colonial lifestyle has thrust upon contemporary Indigenous people. 49 Whyte suggests that in order to decolonize their thinking, potential allies must surrender their romanticism of native people along with the whitewashing of history that has erased the unique experience of native people from social memory.⁵⁰ Examples of so-called "allies"-those who failed to check their privilege—were present at Standing Rock. Accounts in the news media describe the "trashing [of] camps, mooching donations and treating the anti-pipeline demonstration like a Burning Man-style festival for hippies" by non-natives at #NODAPL.51 Personal posts to Facebook cited in The Washington Times describe individuals who entered the camps, using food and resources "without any desire to participate in camp maintenance and without respect of tribal protocols."52 Primarily non-native "students, environmental activists and agitators," the actions of these individuals stand in stark contrast to the actions of the VSSR and #BLM.53 Although traveling a great distance and joining the protest for the environment, these individuals fail to understand their privilege and to recognize the actual living conditions of the protectors at Standing Rock. They did not stand in relation with the water protectors. (Given their trashing of the camps, it seems they failed to act as an ally to the environment as well.)

Potential allies must critically reflect on not only their motivations for being an ally, but they must be cognizant of their position in the social hierarchy. In this case, treating #NODAPL like a concert event, with its attendant cultural appropriations, compounds the damage done to Indigenous people. "Meaningful alliances aren't imposed, they are consented upon."54 An allyship borne out of investing in a relationship will value Indigenous people as equals, and not perpetuate a romantic ideal that deflects critical discourse.55

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NOTES

- Kyle Powys Whyte, "Our Ancestors' Dystopia Now: Indigenous Conservation and the Anthropocene," 206–15.
- See Scott Demuth and Michael Yellowbird, "Colonization Is Always War," 99–122.
- 3. Whyte, "Our Ancestors' Dystopia Now," 208.
- 4 Ibid 3
- Derrick Biso, MS, unpublished manuscript, University of Windsor, 2019 unpublished manuscript.
- See APTN 2019, https://aptnnews.ca/2019/01/07/rcmp-setting-up-exclusion-zones-for-public-and-media-as-raid-on-b-c-camps-start/ and https://newsmaven.io/indiancountrytoday/news/14-arrested-as-rcmp-and-military-breach-unist-ot-encamp-checkpoint-qRn5_8w6jkOtbHMYRh_AJA/.
- 7. Ibid.
- I use the term "Indian Country" to denote not only the geographical spaces related to the American Indians and First Nations people, but also the political spaces and issues that affect them.
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- See Mediation@MIT 2004, http://web.mit.edu/bystanders/ strategies/.
- Cornplanter, "To George Washington from the Seneca Chiefs," Letter, December 1, 1790, National Archives, accessed September 2018, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/ Washington/05-07-02-0005.
- 12. Ibid.
- 13. Ibid.
- 14. Coined by Miranda Fricker, epistemic injustice refers to the unfair treatment regarding knowledge attribution, particularly when communicating of knowledge. It often tracks gender, race, and other historically marginalized social categories.
- 15. Rachel McKinnon, "Allies Behaving Badly: Gaslighting as Epistemic Injustice," 167.
- 16. Ibid.
- See The Trevor Project, https://www.thetrevorproject.org/about/ programs-services/trevor-ally-training/#sm.000x3xcpd16r7cvd11 1czufnmjtb2, or The Safe Project, http://thesafezoneproject.com.
- 18. McKinnon, "Allies Behaving Badly," 168.
- 19. Ibid.
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- 21. Ibid., 170.
- Indigenous Action Media, Accomplices Not Allies: Abolishing The Ally Industrial Complex, May 4, 2014, accessed December 2018, http://www.indigenousaction.org/accomplices-not-allies-abolishing-the-ally-industrial-complex/.
- 23. Ibid., 1-10.
- 24. Ibid., 2.
- 25. Ibid.
- 26. There is something about allyship as a social identity that misdirects the focus. A person's behavior seems permitted given their status as an ally, but it really seems that how they

- perform for an oppressed group should be the focus. McKinnon seems to be driving at the same point by supporting the use of active bystander and by her comments regarding the use of pins, badges, posters, etc. See McKinnon, "Allies Behaving Badly," 167 & 174.
- McKinnon, "Allies Behaving Badly," 167. Originally found in Kendrick T. Brown and Joan M. Ostrove, "What Does It Mean to Be an Ally?: The Perception of Allies from the Perspective of People of Color," Journal of Applied Social Psychology 43, no. 11 (2013): 2211, accessed September 2018, doi:10.1111/jasp.12172.
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- 31. Ibid., 7.
- 32. Wilma Pearl Mankiller and Michael Wallis, Mankiller: A Chief and Her People, 154.
- 33 Ibid
- 34. Shannon Luibrand, "How a Death in Ferguson Sparked a Movement in America," CBS News, August 7, 2015, accessed January 5, 2019, https://www.cbsnews.com/news/how-theblack-lives-matter-movement-changed-america-one-year-later/.
- 35. Jegroo, "Why Black Lives Matter Is Fighting alongside Dakota Access Pipeline Protesters," 3.
- 36. See McKinnon, "Allies Behaving Badly."
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- 38. Ibid.
- 39. Ibid., 17.
- 40. Ibid.
- 41. Ibid., 25–26. See also Viola Cordova, "Ethics: The We and the I," 173.
- 42. Adam Linehan, "Why They Went: The Inside Story Of The Standing Rock Veterans," Task & Purpose, December 19, 2016, 24, accessed September 2018, https://taskandpurpose.com/went-inside-story-standing-rock-veterans/. One of the original organizers of the American Indian Movement, Dennis Banks, took inspiration from Japanese protesters, who demonstrated against their government's annexation of land to enlarge a U.S. military base. See the documentary A Good Day to Die: Dennis Banks and the American Indian Movement.
- 43. Linehan, "Why They Went," 9.
- 44. Sam Levin, "Army Veterans Return to Standing Rock to Form a Human Shield against Police," *The Guardian*, February 11, 2017, 2–3, accessed June 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/usnews/2017/feb/11/standing-rock-army-veterans-camp.
- 45. Jegroo, "Why Black Lives Matter Is Fighting alongside Dakota Access Pipeline Protesters," 7.
- 46. Ibid., 2.
- 47. Kyle Powys Whyte, "White Allies, Let's Be Honest About Decolonization," YES! Magazine, April 3, 2018, 2, accessed May 2018, http://www.yesmagazine.org/issues/decolonize/white-allies-lets-be-honest-about-decolonization-20180403.
- 48. Ibid.
- 49. It is important to note that settler privilege applies to all nonnative people. I wish to thank an anonymous reviewer for this point.

- 50. Whyte, "White Allies, Let's Be Honest About Decolonization," 4.
- Valarie Richardson, "Complaints Grow over Whites Turning Dakota Access Protest into Hippie Festival," The Washington Times, November 28, 2016, accessed January 4, 2019, https:// www.washingtontimes.com/news/2016/nov/28/complaintswhites-co-opting-dakota-access-protest/.
- 52. Ibid.
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- 54. Indigenous Action Media, 4.
- See Whyte, "White Allies, Let's Be Honest About Decolonization," 3-4.

BOOK REVIEWS

Indigenizing Philosophy Through the Land: A Trickster Methodology for Decolonizing Environmental Ethics and Indigenous Futures

Brian Burkhart (Michigan State University Press, 2019). 357 pp. ISBN-978-1611863307

Reviewed by Joseph Len Miller

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INTRODUCTION

As someone trained in contemporary, analytic, Western philosophy, Brian Burkhart's Indigenizing Philosophy Through the Land was delightfully challenging. However, it was a challenge for which I'm thankful and one I think most analytic philosophers should welcome. It's challenging not just because it's a style of philosophy that is unfamiliar in the Western canon (i.e., Indigenous philosophy), but most of the challenge lies in the book's vast scope. While Burkhart specifically names a number of historically important philosophers in his illustration of the traps and limits of Western philosophy, most of the challenge lies in the fact of how easily these criticisms apply to Western philosophy as a whole. While the latter half of the book focuses on decolonizing environmental ethics, the buildup to that discussion requires covering a good amount of Indigenous metaethics. Since metaethics itself spans Western topics including metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of mind, philosophy of language, etc. as they relate to ethics, this book covers an enormous amount of philosophical territory.

In the book Burkhart argues that relationships to the land not only ground Indigenous ontology, epistemology, and morality, but that this relationship is also the source for decolonizing academic philosophy and Indigenous futures. By focusing on the land and our relationship to it, Burkhart provides an excellent illustration of Indigenous philosophy that serves as a contrast to Western philosophy. Given that Indigenous philosophy is grounded in the land, emphasis and focus on the land can provide us with a framework for decolonizing environmental ethics.

Given the depth of this book's scope, and the incredibly rich illustrations offered therein, I would like to focus on three main contributions that I found to be particularly insightful. These are (1) the distinction between, and utilization of, delocalization and localization; (2) the introduction of Trickster Methodology; and (3) conceiving of ethics without appealing to value. Before discussing these topics, however, I would like to start with an unfortunately brief outline of the book.

BRIEF OUTLINE

Part 1 of the book is comprised of chapters 1–3, and focuses on the colonization of philosophy, whereas part 2, comprised of an interlude and chapters 4–6, is about decolonizing environmental thought and Indigenous futures.

With such little attention in academic philosophy being paid to both Indigenous philosophy and the relationship between people and the land, Burkhart begins in Chapter 1 by offering an explanation as to why Western philosophy has continually ignored these topics as a focus of philosophical investigation.

Chapter 2 focuses on decolonizing academia and indigenizing native studies. By clarifying the misunderstandings that early Indigenous scholars have concerning the works of Vine Deloria Jr., Burkhart discusses how some common practices and questions in Native studies are the result of coloniality. These include questions concerning authenticity, identity, identification, and sovereignty. Focusing on how epistemology, semantics, and ontology are rooted in the land (as Deloria Jr. does) would help to limit colonial influences on academia.

In Chapter 3, Burkhart discusses how ontology and epistemology can be understood as being rooted in the land by referencing Black Elk and the stories of Iktomi, the Spider Trickster. He then discusses how these approaches to ontology and epistemology work in practice. By contrasting Western ontology and epistemology with ontology and epistemology as rooted in the land, Burkhart continues to provide examples of the limits of Western philosophy (i.e., philosophy that doesn't recognize the land) in the forms of opposing, mutually exclusive binaries (e.g., propositions are either true or false in Western philosophy).

Part 2 begins with an Interlude that focuses on Iktomi's commentary on the history of Western environmental ethics. This commentary helps to explain why there's a distinction in Western philosophy between intrinsic and instrumental value and helps to set up the discussion in Chapter 4 regarding how we can have a system of ethics that doesn't rely on values. This is done by showing how we can avoid anthropocentrism, misanthropy, and the distinction between intrinsic and instrumental value.

The focus for Chapter 5 is about the metaphysics of morality rooted in the land. There's discussion about avoiding primitivism and hypocrisy in Indigenous morality, and about the roles of unity and completeness when assessing moral theories. Working through these requires changing our understanding of how a moral theory is structured

and functions instead of just offering an alternative moral theory.

Lastly, Chapter 6 is focused on how Indigenous morality can be seen as a kind of metaethical naturalism. There's an extensive discussion about what "natural" means regarding morality, with an emphasis on the role of relationships and reciprocity in Indigenous morality. Grounding morality in an Indigenous understanding and approach to science, Burkhart contends that morality is a natural enterprise.

Overall, this is a well-structured, engaging, and illustrative book that engages and encourages a lot of further discussions. It's a much-needed addition to Indigenous philosophy, metaethics, and environmental ethics. There's no way my brief summary can do justice to the rich contents therein, but I hope that I can do enough to excite curiosity given the book's scope and ambition.

THREE INSIGHTS: LOCALITY, TRICKSTER METHODOLOGY, AND ETHICS WITHOUT VALUE

I'd like to focus on three insights that appear throughout the book. Each of these insights is used to highlight some of the traps and limitations of Western philosophy. As such, I'd like to explain my understanding of these concepts, as well as provide some illustrations of how they work in the book.

1. LOCALITY

Throughout the book one of the key distinctions that Burkhart utilizes is that between locality and delocality. According to Burkhart:

Locality is being-from-the-land and knowing-from-the-land. I use "locality" as a term of art in this book as a way to reference the manner in which being, meaning, and knowing are rooted in the land. Locality as a root of being is a part of each of us and speaks through us and from our historical and geographical place in the world regardless of how our identity is constructed in relation to culture or nation.¹

Delocality is the attempt to understand meaning, being, and knowledge as "floating free from the land." Essentially, trying to understand these concepts as Western philosophy does involves delocality. Working with universal, abstract concepts require conceiving of subjects as having no relationship to land.

As Burkhart mentions in Chapter 1, since Western philosophy has focused on seeking abstract, universal concepts or principles, anything that is concrete and particular, like land, has been ignored. As part of the process of colonization, common concepts in Western philosophy are delocalized as they have come to be defined as being abstract and universal despite their being rooted in particular Western ideals. Given their roots in Western Europe, these concepts assume ideals and relations that are common to Western Europe. When applying these concepts to those not from Western Europe—i.e., Indigenous peoples—one easily falls into philosophical traps (e.g., thinking in terms of competing dualisms) and contradictions.

To illustrate this part of colonization, Burkhart mentions some key figures in the history of Western philosophy including Descartes, Kant, and Locke. For Descartes and Kant, key concepts in their arguments assume abstracted universality but identify universality in terms of Western concepts. Descartes' I in the cogito is identified as being a landless, cultureless subject. Anyone whose identity is bound with their land or culture—i.e., Indigenous peoples—is then not subsumed under Descartes' I (i.e., they're not a subject). Similarly, Kant's conception of rationality is defined in terms of "maturing" from an Indigenous (or "savage") worldview/ thought process to a Western worldview/thought process. In both cases, these concepts are defined in such a way so as to not apply to Indigenous peoples, thereby marking Indigenous peoples as non-human. As for Locke, although he proports to write a political treatise justifying property and land ownership, it's really just an attempt to justify settler colonialism and taking Indigenous land without consent. Since, according to Locke, each person owns their body and the labor associated with it, anything mixed with their labor becomes their property. To justify the taking of Indigenous lands, Indigenous peoples were thought of as hunter gatherers (ignoring thousands of years of farming practices) as existing in the state of nature. This would make Indigenous land free for colonial taking and would morally justify the taking of Indigenous lands. These are just three examples that serve to highlight how universal concepts in Western philosophy are delocalized. They are defined in Western terms that rely on, and reinforce, harmful characterizations of Native Americans, as well as perpetuate ignoring Indigenous philosophy and the land.

One of the most hopeful or inspiring things the Burkhart mentions is that locality can never be entirely removed. In the case of colonization, delocalized concepts and practices are used to try and replace Indigenous concepts and practices, but, since Indigenous concepts and practices (i.e., localized concepts and practices) result from a relationship to the land, those concepts and practices will never completely be removed from the land. Indigenous philosophy can be ignored but not removed.

2. TRICKSTER METHODOLOGY

Another interesting introduction in this book is that of trickster methodology. Trickster methodology is an approach to showing how certain concepts or methodological approaches lead to philosophical traps. With reference to Indigenous tricksters, Burkhart uses stories about Iktomi, the Spider Trickster, to illustrate the limits and delocalization of Western philosophy. As Burkhart describes it:

Indigenous tricksters teach their relatives about the contours of locality and so help them put their feet back on the ground so that they do not continue to fall into the holes. Indigenous tricksters walk both sides of locality and delocality. Through humorous and creative failings Indigenous tricksters, like Coyote, Jisdu, Raven, and Iktomi, are able to deconstruct the epistemology and ontology of delocality from the inside. More simply, a trickster like Iktomi can lead you to spin and wrap yourself in the same webs that he spins around himself. As the Spider Trickster, however, he can do this in

such a way that he will show you how you wrapped this web around yourself in the first place. This creates the space for you to be able to see how to get out of the web of your own making.²

This methodology allows one to step back and see the paths of their reasoning. Seeing how they arrived at their current epistemic location, as well as seeing where their thought-process is likely to lead, can help us to understand the contradictions and philosophical problems that we face. Acknowledging and understanding the historical structuring of these problems can help us to avoid them by tracing our way back to the point where the problem was created.

Stories involving Iktomi appear throughout Burkhart's book. One example that I'd like to discuss is Iktomi's "story of the Western Thinker/trickster and the Western understanding of land and value."3 In this story we hear the history of Western environmental ethics. Beginning with the Last Man thought experiment, we see why Western philosophy struggles to morally consider the land. Since there is no question in Western philosophy that humans have value, the last man clearly has moral standing. However, our intuition is that it would be wrong to destroy the earth. To explain this intuition, we make a distinction between intrinsic and instrumental value. Humans clearly have intrinsic value: they're valuable in and of themselves (without reference to anything else). This being the case, since other things have value to humans, their value is merely instrumental. Wrongness is always made with reference to humans.

Iktomi wonders why anyone would continue to listen to the Western Thinker after displaying such trickster logic (thinking that presented oneself as both the justification and conclusion of an argument). People have been ignoring Iktomi since time immemorial for just this reason.⁴

Eventually, the Western Thinker started to think that maybe the land itself has intrinsic value. Maybe non-human animals do too, maybe ecosystems as well. All of this is done, however, within the framework of the intrinsic and instrumental distinction. As such, explanations are offered as to what properties are required to have intrinsic value. According to Burkhart:

The Western Thinker wants to deny the intuition of the last man. He does not want to allow anything but instrumental value for the nonhuman world. The Western Thinker wants to limit the value of the nonhuman world to human-centered, instrumental value. The Western Thinker wants to think about the value of the nonhuman world within a pragmatic anthropocentrism, where the value of nature lies in its relation to the good life or human well-being.⁵

This story is told with interspersing reactions from Iktomi suggesting and identifying various tricks in logic along the way. By the end,

Iktomi wonders whether the Western Thinker has just followed his own trickster logic back to the same place where he started. Isn't he now back standing next to Aristotle facing the original question: Why is value human-centered?

This story shows us why the distinction between intrinsic and instrumental value arises, how it's utilized, and brings us back to the beginning so that we can wonder whether it's a distinction we need.

3. ETHICS WITHOUT VALUE

One way of avoiding the distinction between intrinsic and instrumental value is to remove value as the basis of ethics. "A nonvalue theory of ethics I define as any theory where notions of value do not play a significant role in determining what makes one act right and another wrong or play a role in grounding this determination."

By referencing Chief Seattle's claim that everything is sacred, Burkhart goes on to explain how ethics without value is conceptually understood. Understanding the concept of "life" as "the capacity for kinship," what counts as living expands drastically compared to the Western conception of life.

To say that life might be understood not as a property of things but as something that exists in the relationship between things belies two standard western philosophical assumptions. First, the space between things seems to be mostly thought of as a secondary aspect of our understanding because reality is primarily built up out of things in the Western philosophical narrative. The second philosophical assumption is seen in the standard move, which seems to arise, in a way, out of the first, of defining a notion such as "life," "value," or "right" by looking for a feature of a thing that does not merely indicate the presence of that thing but is what "life, "value," "right," and so on truly are. To claim that life is not a property that anything has, because it is not a feature of things, runs directly against some of the most standard Western philosophical assumptions.9

With this conception of life things like rocks, streams, ecosystems, nonhuman animals, etc. are considered alive. Being alive is a kind of relationship that things have to their surroundings. This helps to clarify and dispel misunderstandings/misreadings about the claim that everything is sacred. Everything, on this conception, has value since everything is sacred.

Everything that is alive is sacred and everything that is sacred is alive since both of these propositions reference being in kinship relations. Further, since every single thing, every grain of sand, is sacred, there are no levels of value. Everything has all the value there is. Everything is sacred.¹⁰

This eliminates the distinction between intrinsic and instrumental value. Instead of identifying humans as the focal point of value, then expanding value to other things that are relevant to us, if everything is alive, everything has value. If everything has value, then there's no need

to distinguish between degrees of value (e.g., intrinsic v. instrumental value). In other words, if everything has value, then nothing does—or the need for the concept disappears entirely.

Instead of a foundational model of value where there are things that have primary value (intrinsic value) and other things that have secondary value (instrumental value), there is a web of value. Things have value only in terms of this web. This is a way of thinking about value in locality. Connectedness or continuity is what gives a thing value. The amount of value that a thing has is not determined by its place on the web. . . . Yet if everything has exactly the same value—everything is sacred—value cannot form the basis of a moral theory."¹¹

Notice, this doesn't suggest the elimination of value, but it points out that it's not the basis of morality. With regards to environmental ethics, morality being relational eliminates the concerns about anthropocentrism as well as misanthropy, while also granting moral standing to nonhumans.

QUESTIONS

The main questions I have concern the audiences for this book. While I think this is something that most Western philosophers would do well to read, I wonder how Burkhart anticipates their response. Regarding trickster methodology, I'm concerned that showing someone the paths of their thinking (i.e., its history and structure) won't be enough to convince them to adopt a view that doesn't lead to the particular problems they face. Although, I'm not sure this is Burkhart's aim. If it is, though, facing certain problems, however seemingly insurmountable, may be more epistemically comforting than trying to alter or surrender the more foundational beliefs on which those problems depend. From the viewpoint of Western philosophy, the answer to the question, "Why should we decolonize environmental ethics?" may have to do more than appeal to insurmountable problems. Another way of articulating this concern is asking Burkhart whether this is intended to convince Western philosophers to adopt the Indigenous views being presented? If not, I could see the book as an example for early career Indigenous scholars for how they can decolonize philosophy and environmental ethics.

Another question I have concerning the audience is what they should take away, personally, regarding epistemic locality. As I mentioned earlier, it's easy to see how the concepts employed in the history of Western philosophy are delocalized, but where do we go from here? Localizing the concepts employed by western philosophers seems like it would restrict the scope of the arguments by those delocalizing those concepts. This may lead to epistemic humility, but it seems like delocalized concepts lead to a doomed philosophical enterprise. Is there any place in philosophy for universal concepts? Or is the search for these kinds of concepts inevitably doomed?

Lastly, as someone interested in metaethics, I'm interested in seeing how localized epistemology and ontology would

change discussions concerning contemporary positions in Western metaethics. It would be interesting to see how localizing ethical, epistemological, and ontological concepts would influence other metaethical views like expressivism (and other forms of non-cognitivism), non-naturalism, divine command theory, etc. Burkhart discusses naturalism, realism, and G. E. Moore's open question argument (see Chapter 5), but this discussion excited me to the point of wondering about the implications for other views. I imagine some of these views would be untenable with localized concepts, which, if Burkhart is right about localizing philosophical concepts, so much the worse for those views. However, I'd be interested to hear more about how an Indigenous metaethics would be situated among more Western metaethical views.

CONCLUDING REMARK

As stated in the beginning, given the ambition and scope of this project, my review can't do the book or Burkhart justice. The reason I focused on these three topics is because they are the basis for, or foundation of, many of the topics in the book. Understanding these ideas helps to not only understand a lot of the problems that Burkhart highlights, but they can also be used to identify problems beyond the explicit problems that Burkhart articulates. They also help to build a foundation for future Indigenous philosophy within academia. While this challenges the structure and many of the problems of Western philosophy, they are challenges that need to be addressed. Given the structure and scope of this book, I hope it's something that becomes required reading in courses on Indigenous philosophy, metaethics, and environmental ethics.

NOTES

- 1. Burkhart, xiv.
- 2. Ibid. xxiii.
- 3. Ibid., 167.
- 4. Ibid., 169.
- 5. Ibid., 176.
- 6. Ibid.
- 7. Ibid., 204.
- 8. Ibid., 194.
- 9. Ibid., 195.
- 10. Ibid., 200.
- 11. Ibid., 203-204.

Indigenous Philosophy, Locality, and Dance: A Joint Review of Shay Welch, The Phenomenology of a Performance Knowledge System: Dancing with Native American Epistemology, and Brian Burkhart, Indigenizing Philosophy through the Land: A Trickster Methodology for Decolonizing Environmental Ethics and Indigenous Futures

Shay Welch (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

Brian Burkhart (East Lansing, MI: Michigan University Press, 2019).

Reviewed by Dennis H. McPherson and J. Douglas Rabb

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In 2015 a comprehensive History of American Philosophy somewhat tentatively concluded: "It would not be misleading to say that American Indian philosophy is a 'new' field. Although Native American thinkers have been discussing and publishing on questions easily recognized as philosophical for centuries, few of these thinkers have carried out their discussion and writing in the context of the North American academy." In 2019 the publication of two books on Indigenous philosophy, the one by Shay Welch the other by Brian Burkhart, may well change forever the way philosophy is done in the academy.

"focuses on Indigenizing philosophizing through epistemic locality."2 He "engages and critiques the delocalized epistemological structure of Western philosophy in both history and current practice and in the context of broader Indigenous philosophical practices."3 He notes that "Indigenizing philosophy is then, in part, making it more active and dynamic. . . . In the context of Indigenous decolonial philosophizing, the context of this book, this philosophizing movement is a movement back to the land, regrounding our language, being, knowing, meaning, and so on back in the land."4 Burkhart draws on the work of Vine Deloria Jr., whom he considered his Elder and mentor and who was in fact the external consultant/examiner on his Ph.D. dissertation. As Burkhart explains, "One of the reasons that Deloria was so insistent that I complete a Ph.D. in philosophy, and in his constant encouragement of Native students to do the same was his sense of the need to underscore Native American philosophy with a deeper sense of its metaphysical and epistemological base. His belief was that Native American philosophy will always be seen as . . . representing the stage in human development in which superstition and ignorance reigned supreme . . . unless philosophers are given a bigger picture of the deeper unity and completeness of Indigenous philosophy through locality."5 This is exactly what these studies by Burkhart and Welch are intended to provide.

Welch draws extensively on Burkhart's book quoting passages at length. It is obvious that she is using a prerelease version of his book, which is listed in her "Bibliography" as "forthcoming." Sure enough, when his book was published, among the "puffs" on the back cover was one by Shay Welch, associate professor of philosophy at Spelman College, USA. Her book is, of course, very much more than a commentary on Burkhart. For one thing, her principal thesis is that "dance is the most unmediated and clearest mode through which to generate and communicate knowledge and Truth from the perspective of Native American epistemology." 6 Also, besides Burkhart, she draws on and quotes many of the newer generation of Native philosophies, such as Thomas Norton-Smith's The Dance of Person and Place.7 As she explains, "That my aim is to account for (an) epistemology within a Native American worldview substantiates why it is that I cite as extensively as I do."8 She draws on our own study, Indian from the Inside, on a number of occasions. Here we must make a couple of minor corrections. She writes: "In the chapter 'Dancing with Chaos: Phenomenology of a Vision Quest', McPherson and Rabb (2011) interview a Blackfoot Métis man named Douglas Cardinal to demonstrate how it is that supposed 'mystical' and 'magical' Native experience, typically discounted by Western culture and theory, actually shares common features with many other similar embodied phenomena."10 First, a very minor correction: The subtitle of our chapter is "Phenomenology of the Vision Quest," not "a" vision quest, though her take on it is probably an improvement. The major difficulty is that we did not interview Douglas Cardinal here, though we have sat in ceremony with him on more than one occasion. This interview is one he gave to a Canadian magazine, and we obtained permission to edit and publish the interview as it appears in our book. The interview was actually about Cardinal as architect. Cardinal insisted on explaining how traditional ceremonies, such as the vision quest, influence his work. An internationally recognized architect, he is responsible for, among many other things, the design of the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian in Washington D.C., and the Canadian Museum of History in Gatineau, Quebec, across the Ottawa river from Canada's neo-Gothic Parliament Buildings. Cardinal's work deserves at least a mention here because he is the architect of locality. His buildings look like they belong to the landscape, like they flow out of the ground and have, over thousands of years, been sculpted by the wind. Everything is circles and long flowing curves, giving the appearance of living graceful movement, as "always already being in motion" as Burkhart might put it.11

From the standpoint of Native epistemology and locality, Burkhart argues:

Our experiences are not of the world since they are as much in the world as anything else. . . . Every individual experience is a feature of the always becoming or unfolding of the world in locality, or a world that is always already in motion. The question is not does some experience actually map onto a world that is external from that experience, but how do I understand or continually remake my kinship relationship to an ever unfolding world, a

world that now includes this particular experience as a feature of it.¹²

As Welch explains:

Burkhart articulates the epistemological framework between land and knowing which he terms epistemic locality. The objective of epistemic locality is to recenter and reconnect knowledge to the land, as it has been torn asunder by and through the colonizing, de-localizing, abstract practices of theorizing within and through Western ideology. Knowing and identity are not abstract conceptions, they are, as he perspicaciously remarks, in and from the very dirt under your feet.¹³

Epistemic locality is as much about ethics as it is about epistemology or ontology. As Welch explains, "Primarily, the purpose of pursuing knowledge is to help guide individuals along the right path. Relatedly, knowledge has as its end the nurturing of relationships between individuals and community members, including non-human persons and the environment."14 Though neither Welch nor Burkhart use the exact expression "relatives not resources," 15 Burkhart can certainly be read as attempting to give philosophical depth to this cliché. He critiques moral philosophers from Aristotle to Peter Singer arguing, for example, that Singer's defense of vegetarianism constitutes nothing less than a reductio ad absurdum of Utilitarianism, at least from an Indigenous perspective. Burkhart presents and defends a kind of relational ethics in the context of a process philosophy. He draws positively on an expanded version of Martin Buber's I-Thou relationship to explain the Indigenous notion of kinship. Following Deloria, Burkhart references Alfred North Whitehead in explicating an Indigenous process philosophy. His arguments deserve close study. We can see his book being used in philosophy graduate seminars.

Welch, like Burkhart, is critical of the abstract nature and de-locality of much of Western philosophy; but also, like him, she draws positively on a number of Western philosophers to make her case. For example, she uses Gilbert Ryle's famous distinction between "knowing how" and "knowing that" in her discussion of procedural verses propositional knowledge, the former being most compatible with dance. She calls upon philosopher of cognitive science Mark Johnson, making considerable use of his discussions of embodied cognitive science. The fact that we are embodied beings has important implications for philosophy, suggesting that much of our abstract thought is unconscious and metaphorical in nature. Welch explains:

For both Native Philosophy and embodied cognitive theory, meaning is grounded in corporality. According to embodied cognitive theory, meaning is phenomenological and stems from embodiment in that it comes together for us through nonconscious and mostly unaware bodily perceptions of space, movement, and environmental qualities. . . . Movement, specifically, grounds our ongoing connection to and interaction with others and the world; it is what keeps us in touch with the world. 16

These notions of embodiment and movement prove fertile ground for Welch in her discussion of the role of dance in Indigenous epistemology and the Native narrative tradition. As she puts it: "Embodied cognitive theory provides crucial material for drawing the necessary connections to explicate in detail how dancing is a quintessential way of knowing in Native epistemology." 17

Trickster stories are an integral part of most Native American narrative traditions. As Welch puts it,

Traditional Native American and Indigenous storytelling serves many functions within a community. They are tellings of a people's origins, their relation to the land or water, the origin of the universe and stars and thunder beings, they relay cautionary tales about proper ethical behavior and the consequences of misdeeds and missteps. . . . Most importantly, they are metaphorical because most forms of education, formal and informal, are not comprised of directives that must be remembered and obeyed. The goal is for individuals, especially children, to eventually unravel the meaning of the stories in their own time and in their own way to guide them on their right path. . . . Burkhart analyses this marriage between metaphor and knowing through his development of the Trickster methodology. Indigenous tricksters, e.g. Coyote, Jidsu [sic. Jisdu? Jistu?], Iktomi, are our misbehaving or derpy relatives who, by leading-or rather, failing-by example, teach our kin about 'the contours of locality' so as to 'deconstruct the epistemology and ontology of de-locality from the inside."18

Burkhart's Trickster methodology is an integral part of his argument. He calls upon Iktomi, the Lakota Spider Trickster, though Coyote, Raven, and Jisdu, the Cherokee Rabbit Trickster, also make an appearance. We somewhat reluctantly invoke the Trickster from our local Ojibwa narratives, Nanabozho, Nanabijou, or just plain Nanabush. Our reluctance comes from the well-known fact that in our stories Nanabush never knows when to shut up. Nanabush has some questions for Iktomi. But first, Nanabush wants to commiserate with Iktomi about the time Iktomi was "chased with a hot fire poker when he tried to point out that seemed to be obvious bias against Native epistemologies. The Western philosopher slammed his fists on the table and proclaimed, 'we have a right to be biased. It's just the truth.' When Iktomi refused to submit, that's when the hot fire poker came out."19 Nanabush thinks that waving a hot poker is hardly the way to make a philosophical point. But s/he likes the indirect way Iktomi draws attention to the fact that some Western philosophers are actively hostile to Native philosophy. That said, Nanabush wants to ask, Why Indigenize philosophy? Burkhart rails against the attempt to Europeanize Indigenous land, where "the land itself is understood to be conquered; it is thought to become European land, as described by the names 'New England,' New York,' 'New Jersey,' and so on."20 Nanabush would like to add "Nova Scotia," in recognition of what Mi'kmaq kin have had to put up with. "New Scotland," but they wrote it in Latin just so we would not miss the European superiority. Nanabush thinks

that that is as silly as calling an Indigenous Law Degree a JID, a Juris Indigenarum Doctor. The Europeanization of Indigenous lands and concepts is ubiquitous. But Nanabush wonders if we should stoop to their level and go about Indigenizing things like philosophy. Does this not go counter to Indigenous pluralism and noninterference? The very last sentence in Welch's book concludes with the insight that "there are unproblematic incommensurabilities between Native American philosophy and Western philosophy."21 Everyone else talks about the "incommensurability problem." That's why Western philosophers cannot understand their Indigenous colleagues, or even believe that Native people would have a philosophy. Welch simply dissolves the incommensurability problem through Indigenous pluralism, polycentrism, kinesthetic knowledge, and so forth. There are unproblematic incommensurabilities! It makes Nanabush feel like dancing! Nanabush is tempted to claim that Burkhart is not really Indigenizing philosophy, he is rather engaged in Indigenous philosophizing, though Nanabush is willing to admit that that may well be the same thing.

Nanabush is pleased to see that Burkhart treats Elders like Black Elk, Lame Dear, and even Chief Seattle with philosophic respect and not ethnographic dismissal or ethnographic containment in which "Indigenous voices only have meaning as a form of ethnography, which would mean that the truth or value of their words is determined by the ethnographic authenticity of their words rather than truth or value in a broader sense."22 But Nanabush wishes Shay would stop using big unpronounceable words like "perspicaciously." Nanabush just likes a more colloquial writing style. That goes for the title of her book as well. Nanabush cannot believe that her publisher let her get away with the title that she used. Nanabush thinks her book deserves to be widely read but doubts that the title will contribute to that end. Nanabush also wonders why Brian insists on repeating an expression like "a world always already in motion" over and over again. Why can't he just talk about "the world unfolding as it will" while recognizing the agency of locality? Nanabush also thinks that the word "locality," itself, may be too abstract and general for the particularity of power and agency it is intended to capture. But Nanabush thinks s/he's thinking too much, and so is off to the local bar for beer and bannock.

Readers need to take seriously, and experience for themselves, the hilarity of Iktomi and the Trickster methodology. We have had the privilege of team teaching Native philosophy on Northern Indian Reserves. We think these studies in Indigenous philosophizing by Welch and Burkhart would be well received there. Students would certainly get the Trickster methodology. We have experienced more laughter in these classes than in any others that we have taught, anywhere. More tears too, which is why these studies are both needed and welcome.

NOTES

- Erin McKenna and Scott Pratt, American Philosophy from Wounded Knee to the Present, 295.
- Brian Burkhart, Indigenizing Philosophy through the Land: A Trickster Methodology for Decolonizing Environmental Ethics and Indigenous Futures, xxix.
- 3. Ibid.

- 4. Ibid., xxv.
- 5. Ibid., 228-29.
- Shay Welch, The Phenomenology of a Performance Knowledge System: Dancing with Native American Epistemology, 10.
- 7. Thomas Norton Smith, The Dance of Person and Place: One Interpretation of American Indian Philosophy.
- Welch, The Phenomenology of a Performance Knowledge System, 21.
- Dennis H. McPherson and J. Douglas Rabb, Indian from the Inside: Native American Philosophy and Cultural Renewal, 2nd ed
- Welch, The Phenomenology of a Performance Knowledge System,
 67.
- 11. For more on Cardinal, see McPherson and Rabb, Indian from the Inside, 60–82, and Cora J. Voyageur et al., eds., Hidden in Plain Sight: Contributions of Aboriginal Peoples to Canadian Identity and Culture, 217–18 and 360–67.
- 12. Burkhart, Indigenizing Philosophy through the Land, 246-47.
- Welch, The Phenomenology of a Performance Knowledge System,
 36.
- 14. Ibid., 33.
- 15. "Against the ecological crisis, the Indigenous suggest we understand land, water, and all living things not as resources but as relatives." Noisecat, Julian Brave, "The Great Law of Peace: What We Can Learn from a 500-Year-Old Haudenosaunee Constitution," 27.
- Welch, The Phenomenology of a Performance Knowledge System,
- 17. Ibid., 195.
- 18. Welch, The Phenomenology of a Performance Knowledge System, 76–77; Burkhart, xxii.
- 19. Burkhart, Indigenizing Philosophy through the Land, 56.
- 20. Ibid., 32.
- Welch, The Phenomenology of a Performance Knowledge System, 195.
- 22. Burkhart, Indigenizing Philosophy through the Land, xxi.

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The Phenomenology of a Performative Knowledge System Dancing with Native American Epistemology

Shay Welch (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

Reviewed by Lorraine Mayer

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Seldom, if ever, have I come across a book that stole my attention from beginning to end. Shay Welch's The Phenomenology of a Performative Knowledge System: Dancing with Native American Epistemology not only captured my attention but the way she weaves philosophical discourse with Native American discourse was fluid, comprehensive, and extremely educational. Shay takes our Native world and brings it straight to the heart of philosophy.

Few people, scholars included, recognized the significance of dance for Native Americans, reducing it to savage gyrations that required prohibiting banishment. The dance and the social, political, and spiritual reasons for conducting dances were meaningless to cultures without the sophistication for understanding dance at deeper philosophical levels. Welch tells us how dance, "whether as social or ritual performance, has always been a cornerstone of cultural practice and education and communal relationship strengthening." Shay brings Native philosophy to light with her mixed-blood heritage, her storytelling ability, and her unique ability to integrate Western philosophical methods with Native American philosophical methods. She teaches the reader dance as a mode of Native American epistemology—an epistemology of dance she sees being in solidarity with others as an act of resistance, both in the academy and on the stage as an urban Native American sky dancer.

Welch explicates an epistemology, specifically in terms of its being a performative knowledge system, by moving through the works of scholars, Dennis McPherson, Doug Rabb, Brian Burkhart, Thomas Norton Smith, and many others. In true pluralist form, she also introduces Monica Mojica, George Lakoff, Mark Johnson, Rosy Simas, and Steven Winter, again, among many others.

She cleverly weaves through cognition and metaphors to emotion, intuition, and storytelling and, of course, dance to demonstrate knowledge as performative. One of her goals is to demonstrate how Truth can be constituted by the performance of an action, rather than by mere statements. Borrowing the earlier work on metaphors by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, she is able to demonstrate action as knowledge, and the Native American epistemology of procedural knowledge as opposed to propositional knowledge. She skillfully weaves a Western analytic process with a Native American epistemology. For example, she is able to take Lakoff and Johnson's idea of movement as grounding connections and interactions with others to her pivotal theory of performative knowledge of dance as procedural knowledge. Shay is unique in that she does

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analytic analysis but with a decidedly Native American understanding of pluralism and interdisciplinary input through story.

Emotions and intuition also play significant roles in the development of her epistemology. She clarifies for outsiders what intuition or insight means for many Nations, moving from *Muntu* to *Usen* to *Great Mysteries*. Citing Robert Couture, she speaks to "a nonlinear way of knowing that oscillates between both analytic and metaphorical intuitions," which is often not understood by those outside Native traditions and understandings.

Shay addresses the significance of blood memory and the vison quest, how they play into a Native American epistemology. Citing Dennis McPherson and Doug Rabb's interview with Douglas Cardinal in "Dancing with Chaos: Phenomenology of a Vision Quest," and Monique Mojica's belief that "our bodies are our libraries," she discusses how vision quests and blood memory can create and give access to meaning.

Shay explains how "Native epistemology has been working with and through metaphors longer than Western theorists have recognized them as more than poetic whimsies." She tells us the most prevalent use of metaphor is found in our stories, whether oral, written, or danced. As a philosopher she recognizes the value of metaphor, but as a Native

American philosopher she also recognizes storytelling as valid, and a primary medium through which we come to know. Story, she argues, "operates through the oral tradition and relies on the sharing of pluralist individual experiences for knowledge construction." As part of her careful study and explication of story, she takes us to the world of Tricksters and stories as performativity. Shay herself has told a story of a Native American phenomenology as beautifully and enjoyably as any Native American storyteller. Yet her method of explication, while appealing, was still academically successful.

Shay Welch expertly constructs a Native American epistemology as she takes us through her journey to the phenomenology of a Performative Knowledge System while dancing with Native American Epistemology. Moreover, I thoroughly enjoyed her way of sashaying into chapters.

NOTES

- 1. Welch, 2.
- 2. Ibid, 64.
- Ibid., 65, quoting Monique Mojica, "Stories from the Body: Blood Memory and Organic Texts" in S. E. Wilmer, ed., Native American Performance and Representations (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press), 97.
- 4. Ibid., 76.
- 5. Ibid.