

Red Wisdom: Highlighting Recent Writing in Native American Philosophy

Abstract

This paper surveys four seminal texts of Native American Philosophy from the last decade through the lens of Indigenous intellectual sovereignty. Indigenous intellectual sovereignty is articulated as a complementary dualism that positively negotiates the seeming conflict between the Indigenous intellectual and the connectedness of meaning and value in tribal sovereignty. This complementary dualism of individual and community is seen throughout the highlighted texts. Vine Deloria Jr. and Daniel Wildcat's *Power and Place: Indian Education in America*, for example, shows that Native concepts of power and place both unify and individuate. Power not only moves humans individually but also forms the connections and relations of the human community and natural environment. Place is not only individuating in its geographic specificity but also unifying in creating a relational entanglement of everything. Similar examples are highlighted in Anne Waters' edited *American Indian Thought: Philosophical Essays*, Viola Cordova's *How It Is*, and Thomas Norton-Smith's *The Dance of Person and Place*.

Keywords

intellectual sovereignty, assertion of tribal values, Native American philosophy, purposeful transformation of Native stories, Indigenous education.

Indigenous intellectuals are in, what Robert Allen Warrior calls a »struggle for sovereignty« (Warrior 1992: 18).¹ This sovereignty, he describes as »a way of life« which is »not a matter of defining a political

¹ R. A. Warrior, »Intellectual Sovereignty and The Struggle for An American Indian Future,« *Wicazo Sa Review*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 1992, pp. 1–20.

ideology. It is a decision, a decision we make in our minds, in our hearts, and in our bodies to be sovereign and to find out what that means in the process« (*ibid.*). Jack Forbes views intellectual sovereignty as an aspect of self-determination, which includes »living a self-determined life which respects the rights of self-determination of all other living creatures« (Forbes 1998: 12).² This way of life emphasizes »the development of an attitude of profound respect for individuality and right to self-realization of all living creatures,« [...] and to »not impose [our] will on other [people]« (*ibid.*).

Intellectual sovereignty in practice, then, includes the capacity to speak one's voice without the forced assimilation of that voice to some dominant paradigm or dominant voice. But as Vine Deloria Jr. points out, the very fact that my voice exists as a voice in contrast to some dominant voice is itself a recognition of sovereignty. He writes, »[f]ew members of racial minority groups have realized that inherent in their peculiar experience on this continent is hidden the basic recognition of their power and sovereignty« (Deloria 1970: 115).³ In the simple act of being targeted for assimilation into a dominant group, the capacity and distinctiveness of that group is recognized.

Deloria understands sovereignty and the recognition of sovereignty as existing primarily in the community and requiring constructive group action. »The responsibility that sovereignty creates,« in his view, »is oriented primarily toward the existence and continuance of the group« (*ibid.*: 123). In demanding sovereignty, minorities are taking the first steps in confronting the false consciousness of individualism in the United States. Tying sovereignty to individuals through intellectual sovereignty, Deloria worries, means that »Indians are not going to be responsive to Indian people, they are simply going to be isolated individuals playing with Indian symbols« (Deloria 1998: 28).⁴ »Tribal societies,« he argues, »were great because [...] [p]eople followed the clan and kinship responsibilities, took care of their relatives, and had a strong commitment to assisting the weak and helpless. Those

² J. D. Forbes, »Intellectual Self-Determination and Sovereignty: Implications for Native Studies and for Native Intellectuals«, *Wicazo Sa Review*, Vol. 13, No. 1, 1998, pp. 11–23.

³ V. Deloria, Jr., *We Talk, You Listen: New Tribes, New Turf*, New York: Macmillan, 1970.

⁴ V. Deloria, Jr., »Intellectual Self-Determination and Sovereignty: Looking at the Windmills in Our Minds,« *Wicazo Sa Review*, Vol. 13, No. 1, 1998, pp. 25–31.

virtues need to be at the center of our lives as actions and not somewhere in our minds as things we believe in but do not practice» (*ibid.*: 28).

Deloria's assertion of tribal values should not be confused with unchanging traditionalism. Tradition according to him must be created and recreated as a part of the life of a community as it struggles to exercise its sovereignty. The power of tradition, he claims, is not in its form but in its meaning and adaptability to new challenges. We must be careful, he points out, not to reify tradition and fail to understand the true power of it. »Truth,« he writes, »is in the ever changing experiences of the community. For the traditional Indian to fail to appreciate this aspect of his own heritage is the saddest of heresies. It means that the Indian has unwittingly fallen into the trap of western religion« (Deloria 1999: 42).⁵

The path of struggle for the Indigenous academic through intellectual sovereignty is then mired in faulty footfalls. It appears that one is always in danger of succumbing to the false consciousness of Western individualism, as Deloria describes it, but also in danger of reifying the concepts of culture and nation to the point of losing the individual critical lens that makes one an intellectual in the first place. What appears to be a tension between the individual and the group is in fact not a tension at all. This non-binary (non-mutually exclusive) dualistic intertwining (comparable to the Yin and Yang of Chinese philosophy) of the individual and collective, of the particular and general is part of the very nature of the universe and goes to the very heart of being human. The being or spirit of a human is both a kind of individual essence and a kind of universality. In the Lakota language, we see it in the terms »nagi« or »nagila« (spirit or little spirit) and »nagi tanka« (big spirit). Human beings have two sides: one is very small and very specific (our own individual spirit), while the other is very big and in a sense universal (the intertwining of our own spirit with the big spirit). Thus, what seems like a tension between the individual and the group, the particular and the general, is really just a feature of reality and of human beings in particular and so ought to be a feature of any Indigenous intellectual enterprise and not something such an enterprise should seek to avoid in the first place.

⁵ V. Deloria, Jr., »Religion and Revolution Among American Indians,« in *idem, For This Land: Writings on Religion in America*, New York: Routledge, 1999 [1974].

In Native American philosophy as well as in Native storytelling and ceremony, we are always working back and forth between those two sides, trying to find a balance for health, for harmony, or for meaning. Perhaps intellectual sovereignty could be thought of then as a way of *being yourself in the way that you know how*. This combines both the being of our spirit's human journey but also the teaching of our community and the respect, reciprocity, and kinship that Deloria worried would be absent from too individualistic of an intellectual enterprise. Native American philosophy then combines the original creative act of philosophy with the cultural teachings and stories as expressed in an Indigenous context. This provides Native philosophy with a cultural context through an Indigenous framework rather than through the often »otherizing« framework required in academic work on Indigenous peoples. In this way, Native philosophy also serves to exercise a larger constructive cultural sovereignty through the individual but beyond the individual as well.

Intellectual sovereignty, as articulated in this way, is expressed in the recently developed field of Native American philosophy in the Western philosophy academy. Intellectual sovereignty is not only a decolonizing methodology of Native American philosophers; it is a regulative ideal. Native American philosophy often uses the methodology of intellectual sovereignty in the manner of its thinking and presentation. As such, it operates with an attitude of respect for the self-determination of all other living creatures and seeks to develop, in Jack Forbes' words, »an attitude of profound respect for individuality and right to self-realization of all living creatures« (Forbes 1998: 12).

In addition to intellectual sovereignty, Native American philosophy operates around the following methodologies and principles of Native American philosophy:

1. Native American philosophy works with and tells stories.
2. Native American philosophy is original, innovative, creative, and active. Even basic human creation and creativity is on a continuum with creation and creativity on the most cosmic levels. Creation is nothing more than the manifestation of power, movement, and energy. Creation, whether from a Creator or human act of creation, follows the same form in all instances (Cajete 1999).⁶

⁶ G. Cajete, *Native Science: Natural Laws of Interdependence*, Santa Fe: Clear Light, 1999.

3. Native American philosophy shows but does not present arguments per se. It opens up a space for a reader/listener to find meaning and understanding but does not make or declare truth or meaning for them. (This is another way of putting the regulative ideal of intellectual sovereignty as described by Forbes).
4. Native American philosophy reads and speaks language, even the English language, in the manner of Indigenous languages: dynamic with multiple layers of meaning for every word. Action, process, and transformation shape the layers of meaning in any given word.
5. Native American philosophy understands thinking, even supposedly separate academic disciplines such as philosophy, as intertwined with broader cultural practices and narratives. Thus it does not focus solely on the words and arguments of specialized academics but examines just as much the so-called »common« narratives and practices. This thinking/practice hybrid is also used as a regulative ideal of Native American philosophy.
6. Native American philosophy focuses on meaning and understanding (more aspects of movement and transformation in an Indigenous context) rather than on truth or proof.
7. Native American philosophy focuses on all aspects of human understanding in the circle of the four directions (example of the four directions in relation to human beings: the heart, mind, body, and spirit), and views understanding as both a momentary aspect of this circle and a never-ending movement of the circle itself. Knowing and understanding are never-ending dialectics of the four directions dynamic.
8. Native American philosophy adapts stories and presentations to the listener. It purposefully transforms ideas into those that can best be understood and most easily related to by the listener.

In what follows I will highlight four important texts of Native American philosophy published between 2001 and 2010, starting with *Power and Place: Indian Education in America*. Deloria and Wildcat offer their 2001 *Power and Place* as a »declaration of American Indian intellectual sovereignty and self-determination« (Deloria, and Wildcat 2000: ii).⁷ So instead of operating on the model of »sensitizing« educa-

⁷ V. Deloria, Jr., and D. R. Wildcat, *Power and Place: Indian Education in America*, Golden, Colorado: Fulcrum Publishing, 2001.

tors and administrators to the »plight« and »special needs« of Indian students, Deloria and Wildcat recognize the so-called »problem« of Indian education as itself »an affirmation – a living testimony to the resilience of American Indian cultures« (*ibid.*). On that basis, they envision a »truly American Indian« or indigenized education paradigm grounded in the concepts of power and place (*ibid.*). Power is the »living energy that inhabits and/or composes the universe,« while place is the »relationship of things to each other.« Power is both individuating as well as unifying. As the authors observe, power both »moves us as human beings« and »inhabits or composes« all of the connections or relations that form the immediate environment« (*ibid.*: 22–23). Place is more than geographic; it is the relational entanglement of all things that produces an epistemology of »intimate knowing relationships« (*ibid.*: 2).

The life-force energy or spirit that things contain and the relational intertwining of their existence »produce personality« (*ibid.*: 23). Knowing and being are thus intimately personal, not only for human beings but for all the things that human beings are in relation to and might have knowledge of. Personality, as a basic substratum of knowing, indicates an epistemology that is personal, moral, and particular. Indigenous education that is based on intimate, personal, and moral relationships creates knowledge that is grounded in »respect, not of orthodoxy,« »the completion of relationships,« and »appropriateness« (*ibid.*: 21–24). The authors finally claim that if we »carry the message« that the universe is »personal« and »spiritual« rather than »of matter that has accidentally produced personality« we are capable of producing personalized knowledge that is »more realistic« as well as sustainable (*ibid.*: 28).

In *American Indian Thought: Philosophical Essays*, the second of the important texts I will highlight, Anne Waters edits a landmark volume of essays on American Indian philosophy.⁸ One unique feature of this collection is that the authors are American Indian and many have PhDs in philosophy. This achievement marks a significant point of transformation in the continual evolution of Native American intellectual sovereignty. The twenty-two essays cover a wide range of sub-topics – American Indians and philosophy, epistemology and science,

⁸ A. Waters (ed.), *American Indian Thought: Philosophical Essays*, Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing, 2004.

math and logic, metaphysics and phenomenology, ethics and respect, social and political philosophy, and esthetics. This ambitious collection offers a distinctive examination of the »Indian thought-world,« where the goal of the collection is to articulate »a different way of looking at and being in the world.« Authors present this difference by contrasting Western philosophy, which is seen as abstract, anthropocentric, binary, dualistic, incomplete, and »I-centered« with Native philosophy, which is seen as holistic, contextualized, relational, personal, concrete, and »We-centered« (Waters 2004: xv). Vine Deloria, Jr. in the first essay, »Philosophy and Tribal Peoples,« raises important questions about the possible relationship between these »two worlds.« In line with the worries Deloria has raised previously, he is concerned with the manner by which »Indian thought« and »Indian identity« will be related. He ponders the fact that as »American Indians [...] request entrance into this professional field, the vast majority will have virtually no experiences of the old traditional kind. The majority of them will begin in the same place as non-Indians wishing to write on American Indian philosophy. The difference will be in the degree to which Indians take their own traditions seriously and literally« (*ibid.*: 3–4).

The authors of *American Indian Thought* examine and complicate this relationship between Indian thought and Indian identity. The sometimes essentialist-seeming dichotomy between Western and Indian thought-worlds actually serves to enhance the power of this work by raising provocative questions for Western philosophers and students of philosophy as well as American Indians and students of Indigenous intellectual sovereignty. V. F. Cordova, for example, articulates the complexity of the interdependence of »I« and »We.« Basing morality in an »I« of false-consciousness individualism creates the necessity of externalizing morality in order to deter problematic individual human behavior; while basing morality in a dynamic »We« that understands the individual through a non-binary dualistic intertwining with the community internalizes proper modes of conduct in appropriate and respectful relationships (*ibid.*: 173–181).

In total, this collection creates, for the first time, a critical as well as comprehensive dialogue between Western and Indian philosophies. It transforms the classic relationship between the two and marks a turning point in Indigenous intellectual sovereignty by analyzing Western philosophy through the lens of a Native worldview.

Where Vine Deloria Jr. is considered the grandfather of Native

American philosophy, Viola Cordova should be considered its grandmother. As recently as 1990, there had never been a Native American to receive a PhD in philosophy. Cordova became the first in the early nineties. I met her in the late nineties when I was a philosophy PhD student. She mentored and inspired my philosophical thinking through endless hours of conversation until her untimely passing in 2002.

In her way too short philosophical career, Cordova did not publish extensively or teach in one place for more than three years because she did not want to become »stale« and come to embrace the »arcane rules of academic life, publishing just to publish, teaching just to teach« (Moore et al. 2007: xiii). *How It Is*, the third important work of Native American philosophy I will highlight, is a posthumous monograph brilliantly stitched together by Kathleen Moore, et al. from Cordova's unpublished work.⁹ Cordova organizes her thinking around three fundamental questions that any philosophy (Western, Native or otherwise) has to address: »1. What is the world? 2. What is a human being? 3. What is the role of a human being in the world?« (*ibid.*: 83) Regarding the world, she tackles issues of origins, the relationship of matter and spirit, time, and the role of language and culture in shaping human understanding of and being in the world. Human beings, she argues in a Native context, are deeply relational, where the individual and the group are essentially intertwined. The relational intertwining of human beings and human communities is also to the land, to place, and in a particular ecological niche. The nature of human beings and human communities then gives rise to particular moral responsibilities. »I am good,« she argues, »in order to maintain« the proper relationship with my community (*ibid.*: 184). »I must be mindful of what I do to my environment,« she further claims, »because I am dependent upon it« (*ibid.*). In all, this seminal work of Native philosophy has a storytelling and poetic power that reaches well beyond traditional philosophical argumentation. In the book's Coda, Cordova writes, »[a]ll of the descriptions I have mentioned, of the Universe, of the Sacred, of human beings, have relevance in our daily lives.« Cordova's words serve not only to make us think but to help us find our path toward being better human beings, being better relatives« (*ibid.*: 231).

In *The Dance of Person and Place*, the fourth and most recent text

⁹ K. D. Moore, J. Peters, T. Jolola, and A. Lacey (eds.), *How It is: the Native American Philosophy of V. F. Cordova*, Tucson, Arizona: University of Arizona Press, 2007.

of Native American philosophy I will highlight, Thomas Norton-Smith attempts to demonstrate the legitimacy of an American Indian world version.¹⁰ Using resources from Nelson Goodman's constructivist philosophy, he argues that »Western and American Indian world versions make equally legitimate, actual worlds« (Norton-Smith 2010: 1). Norton-Smith borrows Goodman's view that »there is a plurality of internally consistent, equally privileged, well-made actual worlds constructed through the use of very special symbol systems – true or right-world versions« (*ibid.*: 23). A version is true, according to Goodman, »when it offends no unyielding beliefs and none of its own precepts. Among beliefs unyielding at a given time may be long-lived reflections of recent observation, and other convictions and prejudices ingrained with varying degrees of firmness« (*ibid.*: 33). Truth, in Goodman's sense, then is a kind of acceptability in terms of beliefs and precepts already given or what Goodman calls »ultimate acceptability« (*ibid.*).

Goodman then acknowledges – without knowing or understanding – the cultural bias of his concept of truth through the manner in which ingrained convictions and prejudices form the backdrop for what is a well-made actual world. Goodman shows a lack of awareness of this bias when he uses a Native story as an example of how false world versions yield »ill-made,« »unmade,« or »impossible« worlds (*ibid.*: 43). Norton-Smith takes this aspect of Goodman's philosophy to task on many fronts. One of them is the concept of valid deduction, which is »among the most explicit and clear cut standards of rightness we have anywhere,« according to Goodman. Norton-Smith, in turn, points out that »valid deduction within classical two-valued semantics as a criterion for acceptability of a version biases Goodman's account against Native versions and worlds« (*ibid.*: 44). Trading on Anne Water's essay »Language Matters: Nondiscrete, Nonbinary Dualism« in *American Indian Thought*, Norton-Smith articulates the nonbinary, complementary dualistic logics of Indigenous thought. These logics are nonbinary in denying the case that »for any proposition *p*, either *p* is true or *not-p* is true, but not both,« and denying the case that »for any object *o* and property *p*, either *o* has *p* or *o* has *non-p*, but not both« and complementary in holding that »it may be the case that something is both *p*

¹⁰ T. Norton-Smith, *The Dance of Person and Place: One Interpretation of American Indian Philosophy*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010.

and *not-p* at the same time and in the same sense, without one excluding the other« (*ibid.*).

Chapters 4 through 7 of *The Dance of Person and Place* articulate four additional aspects of Native world-ordering that must be accounted for in a larger sense of true world-versions and non-biased ultimate acceptability: relatedness, an expansive concept of persons, semantic potency of performance, and circularity. The first, relatedness as a world-ordering principle, frames knowing as a performance and the truth of a performance as »respectful success in achieving a goal« (*ibid.*: 64). This world version »constructs a moral universe that is interconnected and dynamic, a world in whose creation human beings participate through their thoughts, actions, and ceremonies« (*ibid.*: 75). Verification of knowing as performance occurs through the »direct experience« of respectful success (*ibid.*: 69). Verification on this account is »inclusive,« where Goodman's »Western method is exclusionary« (*ibid.*). »[N]o experience – even the uniquely personal or mysteriously anomalous –,« says Norton-Smith, »is discarded in formulating [an American Indian] understanding of the world« (*ibid.*). »[V]isions, dreams, intuitions, and other sorts of experiences that transcend the merely objective and replicable,« Norton-Smith points out, »can count as genuine evidence« in a Native world version (*ibid.*).

The second Native world-ordering principle, an expansive concept of persons, is framed by the story of Coyote, Iktome (the Spider), and Iya (the Rock). In the story, Coyote gives Iya his thick woolen blanket only to steal it back after he realizes that he is cold without it. Iya chases Coyote down and rolls over the now flattened Coyote, giving the final words of the story »what is given is given« (*ibid.*: 82–83). Following Ross Poole's analysis of the Western history of the concept of personhood, which reaches the conclusion that personhood is not an essential feature of being human (Poole 1996)¹¹, Norton-Smith claims that in a Native world version, human beings are not essentially persons, but rather spirits in human form who can become persons »by virtue of their participation in social and moral relationships with other persons« (*ibid.*: 86). »[M]oral agency,« he claims, »is at the core of the Indian conception of personhood,« which makes Coyote, Iktome (the Spider), and Iya (the Rock) all persons in a Native world-version (*ibid.*).

¹¹ R. Poole, »On Being a Person,« *Australian Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 74, No. 1, 1996, pp. 38–56.

The third Native world-ordering principle, the semantic potency of performance, shows that beyond »Goodman's constructivist view that linguistic versions of the world [...] make worlds by identifying, categorizing, and ordering sense experience, [...] in American Indian traditions the performance of other sorts of unwritten symbols becomes the principal vehicle of meaning and world-constructing process« (*ibid.*: 97–98). Black Elk's sacred vision haunts him until he is able to perform that vision as a ceremony. As Black Elk states, »a man who has a vision is not able to use the power of it until after he has performed the vision on earth for the people to see« (*ibid.*: 99). »Symbols, like Black Elk's vision,« Norton-Smith claims, »are largely impotent until Black Elk performs with them in the ceremony« (*ibid.*: 116). The vision performance, like acts of prayer, storytelling, singing, dancing, naming ceremonies, and gifting ceremonies, categorize, order, and even transform, on Norton-Smith's articulation of Native world-ordering. Performance even creates identity in a Native world version as Creek medicine man John Proctor says »[i]f you come to the stomp ground for four years, take the medicines and dance the dances, then you are Creek« (*ibid.*: 94).

The final Native world-ordering principle of circularity frames Indian world versions in contrast to the linear ordering principle that frames Western ones. These different world ordering principles account for, on Norton-Smith's view, »the Western preoccupation with time, events, and history« against »the Native focus on space, place, and nature« (*ibid.*: 122). For example, Norton-Smith writes: »Indians consider their places to be of greatest significance, whereas Westerners find meaning in the progression of events over time« (*ibid.*: 120). This gives rise to the conflict between »the *sacred event* in Western religion and the *sacred place* in Indian religious traditions« (*ibid.*: 121). The manner in which a Native world version is constructed around space and time arises from the circular world-ordering framework. Circularity orders the temporal, spatial, communal, social, epistemic, and religious world of Indian people. Knowledge is created and maintained through repetition. Ceremonial power is created and maintained by repetition. Even sacred places, »where Native people are obligated to return again and again at specific times to perform ceremonies of gratitude and renewal for the good of human and non-human persons alike are ordered by temporal and spatial circularity« (*ibid.*: 138).

The Dance of Person and Place successfully demonstrates that

Western and Native world versions are equal but it also unwittingly seems to show that a Native world version outstrips a Western one. Native world-ordering as articulated by Norton-Smith can account for a Western world version as well-made in a Goodmanian constructivism but a Western world version cannot account for a Native world version as well-made. Perhaps Norton-Smith merely understates the conclusion of his demonstration, but it appears more likely that his lack of commentary on the greater limitations of a Western world-ordering arise from his non-critical embracing of the linguistic constructivism of Goodman. Norton-Smith's insistence that there is no real world but only the worlds we construct through language and symbolic acts creates a dualistic binary between independently real and constructed or made worlds. It appears then that a Native world version ultimately outstrips the very nature of the linguistic and constructivist variety of world-making that Norton-Smith trades upon. To speak of a way that the world is, even in negative terms as not real but constructed, is to stand in conflict with the Native world version that Norton-Smith attempts to articulate. To speak of a mind or human independent world in contrast to a humanly made or constructed world is to force a dichotomy between humans and the world, between language and being that only functions in a Western world version and conflicts with the possible Native world version Norton-Smith is trying to articulate.

Unless we can understand Norton-Smith's linguistic constructivism in terms of circularity, relationality, nonbinary dualism, and so on, we would be forced to conclude that the content of this book outstrips and in some ways contrasts the form. This contrast can be instructive, however, in indicating that the very notion of a linguistic world-making process cannot account for the complexity and dynamism of an American Indian world. For example, Norton-Smith describes the Lakota pipe used by Black Elk as a symbol that is »largely impotent until it is performed.« Norton-Smith articulates the power of performing the vision or of praying with the pipe, but the limitations of speaking of these performances as symbols undermines the meaning of their power (*ibid.*: 98). When I put the pipe bowl and stem together and begin to sing the pipe-filling song and place the sweetgrass smudged tobacco into the bowl, this is not a symbol. It does not represent; it creates. This creation literally opens a conduit of power or energy between the spirit world and material world. The same is the case of the performance of Black Elk's vision. In order to bring the power of Black

Elk's vision from the invisible energy flowing all around and through us (that we call the spirit world) into the material world, it must be performed. It must be made manifest, transformed from the unmanifested vision into the manifested action. This performance, like connecting the bowl and stem of the pipe, opens a conduit of power between the spirit world (the unmanifested) and material world (the manifested). To limit the creative power of these performances to the concept of a symbol is to cripple our understanding of the Native world.

Overall, much of the criticisms of these four texts arise from misapprehension of the nature of the methodologies used. If one is looking for argument and proof as expected in a Western academic context, then one might well criticize storytelling and circularity. If one is looking for clear and literal explanation, one might then criticize metaphor and indirectness. Once the nature of the methodologies is known, it makes these criticisms seem out of place, however. It appears as nothing more than criticizing one for having a different approach. The ways that these criticisms of methodology rather than of content hide themselves in what seems like common sense content-criticism is illuminating. One such criticism of these works is that they essentialize and overgeneralize Native and Western thought. This criticism is quite common and seems like common sense. On reflection, it should seem clear that the concepts of essence in a metaphysical sense and generalization in an epistemological sense are quite meaningless in the context of the Native methodologies articulated. Simply put, there seems to be little meaning to the charge of essentialism or overgeneralization in (as only one small piece of the Native methodology) a nonbinary dualistic logic where what is true and what is false and what is specific and what is general (the human being and the community, for example) are dualistically intertwined and so searching for knowledge is finding meaning or balance between the two sides or »two-faces« of »truth« as Black Elk puts it (Niehardt 1932: 149).¹²

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¹² J. G. Niehardt, *Black Elk Speaks: Being the Life Story of a Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux*, New York: William Morrow and Company, 1932.