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LANGUAGE MATTERS: NONDISCRETE NONBINARY DUALISM

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The difference is in the promotion, so to speak. A non-Native poet cannot produce an Indian perspective on Coyote or Hawk, cannot see Coyote or Hawk in an Indian way, and cannot produce a poem expressing Indian spirituality. What can be produced is another perspective, another view, and another spiritual expression. The issue, as I said, is one of integrity and intent.

["The Great Pretenders" by Wendy Rose, in *The State of Native America: Genocide, Colonization, and Resistance*, ed. M. A. Jaimes-Guerrero, Boston: South End Press, p. 416.]

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I use gender as an example to explore a nondiscrete ontology of being. To recognize that gender as it is known today among colonized American Indian nations mirrors a notion of gender among American Indigenous cultures five centuries ago may be misleading. Deconstructing contemporary dominant American gender notions against a background of an alternatively conceived ontology of Being through America's Indigenous languages proves fruitful in explicating why and how gender need not be an essentialized concept. This chapter first clarifies an important distinction between a discrete and a nondiscrete binary dualist ontology. In fulfilling the European colonial project in the Americas, a hypersensitively bounded infrastructure of Eurocentric ontology desensitized the nondiscrete[1] binary[2] dualist Indigenist thought. Euro-Americans, while exploiting the people, land, and resources of the Americas,

comprehended, of their experiences and encounters with Indigenous people, only what could be conveniently characterized via their Eurocentric ontology. An ontology of binary, or discrete, dualist logic operated as the colonial framework that deeply embedded Euro-American thought and language, and a Eurocentric perspective about Indigenous people, on the North American continent. Eurocentric nonunderstandings, and hence misunderstandings, of precolonial ontology, rationality, beliefs, customs, and institutions of people indigenous to the Americas has been filtered through this overlay, or template of interpretation.

Euro-American institutions, including educational institutions, have placed many nonunderstandings about Indigenous people into the context of Euro-American-embraced conceptual categories. These categories signify a discrete (limited and bounded[3]) binary dualist[4] worldview. This worldview continues to operate as a template into which all Euro-American interpretations of Indigenous thought and being are recorded. Hence, much of Indigenous philosophy is not easily accessible, though some accessibility is possible via language analysis and the semantics of contemporary speakers of Indigenous languages. (Descendants of America's Indigenous people, and Euro-Americans cannot simply step into a world in which nondiscrete binary dualist logic is a diversely functional lived ontology.) Moreover, the Euro-American binary system of dualist thought empowered and facilitated the misinterpretations of the Indigenous nondiscrete binary dualist worldview; many of these misinterpretations remain active in contemporary scholarship.[5]

Imposing a closed binary ontology on to Indigenous ideas obstructs communication/meaning systems, to such an extent that, for good reasons, Indigenous ideas and vision have largely remained closed to outsiders. The seemingly cognitive inability of some Euro-Americans to acknowledge a different ontological system, represented by Indigenous thought, continues to perplex and befuddle many American Indians.[6] It has historically been in this context of blinded Euro-American vision that many American Indians have been denied the learning/use of Native languages; and in this way have sometimes been prevented from safeguarding ancient sacred knowledge. This theft, or stealing of Native language, and with it, sacred knowledge, led to many painful losses that remain unhealed today. The losses create gaps of understanding of the Indigenous worldview and ontological being in that world. Retaining sacred knowledge would have nourished Indigenous people during half a millennium of painful colonization. Yet it was denied to most of those American Indians that survived the genocide.

Many American Indigenous nondiscrete notions of nonbinary, complementary dualist constructs of the cosmos have been diminished and obscured by colonization. A nonbinary, complementary dualist construct would distinguish two things: (1) a dualism (e.g. male/female) that may appear (in a binary ontology) as opposites or things different from one another in some important respect; and (2) a nonbinary (complementary) syntax that puts together such constructs without maintaining sharp and clear boundary distinctions (unlike a binary system). The maintenance of the rigid distinct boundaries of binary logic enable (though may not necessitate) an hierarchical value judgment to take place (e.g. mind over body, or male over female) precisely because of the sharp bifurcation. A nonbinary (complementary) dualism would place the two constructs

together in such a way that one would remain itself, and be also a part of the other. In this way, an hierarchical valuing of one being better, superior, or more valued than another cannot be, or rather is, excluded by the nonbinary logic. Organizing, complementary ideas of an Indigenous ontology still survive within the ontological horizon of nonbinary, nondiscrete, dualist languages. Complementary dualisms can be found today among such diverse Indigenous people as the Ahnishinahbaeotjibway in Canada,[7] to the Mayan in South America;[8] consider also the Diné metaphysics of the Southwestern USA.[9]

Noncomplementary, or binary dualist constructs have rigid boundaries that do not interact, or "cross over," to other constructs. In the English language, and in Western thought the concept "good" if used together with the concept "evil" is such that one can diminish aspects of the other. Something may be good or evil, but not both at the same time and place, without diminishing the other. They need not be equal in the joining, but rather have the potential for one to be superior to the other. Hence, "good" and "evil" may not overlap, nor may there be any ambiguity in the meaning of one in relation to the other. Things, including actions, must be either good or evil, but not both.[10]

For another example with a different twist, consider an instance of the color black and the color white coming into contact with one another. Physically, as with paints, a gray appears, obliterating the black and white boundaries; ontologically, a conflict or struggle ensues, each construct vying for its own showing and placement over that of the other! This is why, in Western thought, it is important to keep sharply divided dichotomies bifurcated with rigid, clear boundaries operating at the margins. These boundaries are what enable value judgment to be applied to the two constructs; that is, the value of one over the other can be achieved only if they do not mix.

Western metaphysics derived from classic Greek thought seems to manifest this bifurcatedness (binariness) of dualist thought; concepts are truncated with sharp, clearly unambiguous, boundaries. This allows Plato, for example, to play word games with some tightly bounded binary dualist constructs, such as "like" and "unlike." To elaborate this point, consider the Humpty Dumpty theory of binary dualism in European thought that reaches back to Greece. In the history of Western philosophical thought since Plato's fracture, not a single philosopher has been able to put back together the universe for the Western world!

Plato created a notion of reality, or "truth," that was static, of the mind, being always in the abstract;[11] he redefined the common notion of material substance to be "the unreal," changing, always becoming a different physical illusion. The "true" became an object of worship, existing in total abstraction from the physical bodies of the universe. The physical became an object of derogation and want, drawing attention away from the realm of "the true." This particular way of being and conceiving reality embedded a structure of hierarchical value: the true was to be embraced as the (nonchanging) form of the "good"; and the formless, constant flux in the universe of matter was to be rejected as "evil". Objects were "evil" because they drew attention away from the "purity" of abstract mental thought; the flux competed to "tie down" thought in the world of matter, but was destined to lose the battle.

These tightly bounded, clearly differentiated modes of being, good and evil, competed for human attention in continual struggle through human experience. And when the realm of form, of the good, won out, the privilege of dwelling in the "land of the forms" was granted in an afterlife. But when the evil, the objects in the realm of the physical, won the competition for attention, great human suffering was to be the consequence, in a land of insurmountable grief "down below" the earth, in an afterlife.

Via Neoplatonism, and through the Middle Ages, Plato's notion of "good" was transformed into a personal Christian "good" named "God" in the creation of a tripartite flat world: the "forms in the abstract heavens – total good-God" were constructed securely up above the earth; and "the physical in the concrete hell – total evil-Devil" were constructed securely down below the earth. The only way to attain human peace or harmony living in the "earthly domain" (the alleged flat surface in between the "heaven and hell of good and evil") was via prayer, or mentally dwelling in the land of the heavens. Neoplatonic thought cemented Platonic metaphysics in Europe, and served well the purposes of the medieval clergy. They turned their backs on the poor, and spent their time communing with their personal (good) God.

In this context, the only way to attain "human perfection" was through abstract thought. Anything that was not abstract thought, such as physical being or physical pain, was to be denied the status of real.[12] Pain, in such forms as flagellation, and physical torture, was believed to lead a person to a state of mind where he or she might exist in complete abstraction. The value hierarchy of a binary dualist thought that valued abstract reason above physical pleasure enveloped the cosmology of the "great chain of being," the "Christian hierarchy of being," and the King commanding through divine right, bringing into being divine plans.

In the fifteenth century, European perceptions and beliefs cemented this Eurocentric metaphysic and ontology of value hierarchy, supported by the two pillars of binary dualism. Western culture lacked any historical understanding about how to live in balance and harmony (complementarity) with diverse metaphysical ideas and beings such as it encountered in the Americas. Europeans had learned no tolerance for difference, much less the ability to survive living with (mother) earth. Europeans were their own products of colonization. They arrived in America knowing how to live only as servants, prisoners, peasants, and soldiers; they were alienated from being in the world. They continued a centuries-old colonial imperialist project (their descendants continue to benefit from it).

When Europeans arrived in the Americas, they found a culture where respecting diversity was integral to survival and living in harmony. Europeans showed an intense lack of respect for diverse cultural ways. Their behavior suggested a psychological necessity to impose colonial European culture, with all of its superior/inferior linguistic distinctions, upon Indigenous people. In this way, any conceivable opportunity for dialogue, or communication between the two cultures, was obliterated. In some instances, the very same families who learned from Native people how to plant, harvest, and survive the cold winters, were forced to leave the area.

America's Indigenous people had a history of creating harmony among diverse communities through political relations.[13] The histories of these relations are many,

and are articulated through the oral history of many Indigenous groups. On the North American continent, both intercultural and intracultural relations had long histories of communal respect. Indigenous people found a metaphysical place in the structuring of the cosmos for "all our relations," within the history of "the original peoples."[14] Upon the arrival of Euro-Americans, a completely different mode of communicating, and being in the world, was imposed.

The ontological structures of Indigenous people precluded a coherent dialogue with the newcomers. Europeans, having "purified" the mind, and "corrupted" the body, had no sense of physical rootedness to any land, nor responsibility to self, or other relations. Everything in European thought was filtered through a value sieve, and Indigenous people, because different, were not within the realm of positive value for the newcomers. These Euro-Americans had left behind any remnants of their own sense of place, of geographical roots of being, in Europe. As they gazed upon the land and the bounty of Indigenous foods and resources, they immediately laid claim to America's shores for themselves.

Complicitly, hyper-bounded, value-laden, binary dualist constructs of being were projected on to Indigenous people: first, by sharing interpretations of individual actions; then projecting their interpretations on to groups of Indigenous people. Unable to tolerate difference in ways of being, Europeans disrespectfully labeled Indigenous people uncivilized, inferior, dirty, ignorant, savage, primitive, etc. Thus, in ignorance, and at play in their own binary dualist logic system, the belittling of Indigenous people in the colonial mind made colonizers feel superior to the colonized. And if they were superior, then, their logic told them, Indigenous people were inferior, and if inferior, less than fully human. In this way, by ontologically denigrating the "other" to be of a lower nature in a hierarchy of being, individuals in the south, like DeSoto and his metal-clad warriors and human-eating dogs, could brutally slaughter Indigenous people throughout Las Floridas.

Simultaneously, the Spanish Conquistadores, in what was to become Mexico and South America, acted on similar constructs of Indigenous people, who were seen as "other," which meant not human in the gaze of the Spanish. Enslavement of Indigenous people was justified by a Eurocentric ontology (of being) manifested in the King's orders. Europeans acted as though they believed it were all in accord with a "divine" plan of the universe. The debates at Valladolid were about whether Indigenous beings in the Americas could be considered "human" or not.[15] If the natives were human, then we had "souls" and had to be saved by being "Christianized." On the other hand, if we were not found to possess humanity, then the Spanish were free to enslave us as they would any other creature of their nonhuman world. This debate in Spain clearly shows how an hierarchically structured ontology can be used to manipulate any type of different being in the world that is not seen, through the colonizer's gaze, to suit the plans of a colonial empire.

Thus brutal genocidal treatment of America's Indigenous people, at the hands of colonial Europe, is related to the ontological structure of the European colonial mindset. By the time of "point of contact" among Indigenous people with Europeans, an entire binary dualist worldview of consistently non-equal hierarchical power

structures was in place in Eurocentric thinking. This mindset brought with it ideas about a male role as culture bearer in the world, and a female role as culture destroyer in the world. It brought with it ideas about humanity: an upper ruling class, rational and close to deity status; a middle military or overlord class, less rational, more emotional, and capable of some rule over the lower class; and the lower, intensive-labor class, as perceived by the imperial gaze, considered to be incapable of rational thought, and unable to rule over its own appetitive desires.

It was from this vantage point of human nature, and the European binary dualisms of ontological being in the world, that the newcomers brought a theistic worldview of value hierarchy to America's shores. The Eurocentric ontological depiction of a disconnected, bounded, rational, cultured male father creator of the universe, stood in antithesis to (what was seen Eurocentrically as) an unrestrained, unbounded, irrational, raw female mother-nature destroyer of the universe.

And so (it came to pass that) in the Americas men stood over women, imperialists over the colonized, citizens over the enslaved, adults over children, similarly abled over differently abled, those who inherit over those who do not inherit (a lie of) a pure race stood over mixed races, completing the Eurocentric hierarchy of winners over losers, and the valued over the disvalued, empowered over disempowered. All things of the world had a place in this hierarchy of being, and of differing values, according to the types of being, as classified by the rulers' ontological structure of power.

These strange and unreal constructs of hierarchical value were built into the ideology of Euro-Americans and American Indigenous communities through the benefiting of colonizing enterprises of religion, education, commerce, etc. From the land of the Salem witchcraft trials, to the missions enslaving California's Indigenous people, missionaries, politicians, businessmen, and the landed gentry played a key role in maintaining this hierarchical Christian ideology. It was well suited to colonial enterprises of trade in goods and people. Thus, Euro-Americans sanctioned genocidal activities that created chaotic ruptures in Indigenous ontology.

Upon Spain's acknowledgment that Indigenous people had souls, the means of converting Indigenous people to Eurocentric theism played into the colonial project. But because Indigenous people were not easily converted, methods were employed to "kill the Indian and save the soul."[16] These methods included torture, starvation, killing, burning, stealing land, children, wives, or family, enslavement, confinement, denial of languages, threat of diseases, or rape and plunder of homes, burning of crops and people, and disruption of any vestiges of humanity, until Eurocentric theism, in exchange for life or the survival of the community, was proclaimed and witnessed. Even now, after the signing of treaties, the smallpox blankets, the piles of American Indians lying in deep trenched graves, after the removals of the genocide remains, the lynchings, rapes, thefts of children, alcoholic drugging of entire communities, and denial of cultural languages and sacred practices, a genocide continues in the name of religious freedom, citizen protection, assimilation, and, most important, free trade.

It was in this way that it occurred. In this way agents of Euro-American colonial theism wrenched Indigenous ontological constructs (embedded in the linguistic structures and thinking of the Indigenous mind) from Indigenist thought, causing a contin-

ental shake-down of the Indigenous worldview. This ontological destruction was but one more notch on the belt of an ideology that worked to maintain power over "others." These cultural extortions resulted in great losses for Indigenous people, in our families, communities, and belief systems. In this psychological dismembering, which was eventually fueled by forced migrations, our fractures of ontology became chasms needing to be filled, gaps in the thought process.

THOUGHTS ABOUT NONBINARY DUALISM

Among the gaps, however, there remained kernels of ontology: ideas about ways of being in the world; and ideas about ontological relationships in the world. Our stories held understandings of Indigenous human science, technology, relations, and our sacred place in the world. The embedded ontology of the Indigenous worldview has survived for people who have had little else. Their metaphysics and epistemology remain intact among Indigenous people of the Americas.

Hence the colonial project of dismembering the ontology of Indigenous thought successfully failed! American Indigenous nondiscrete notions of nonbinary, complementary dualist constructs continue to exist. Though in some places they are diminished and obscured by colonization, Indigenous ontologies are very active, even if sometimes in the more isolated regions of the Americas. These organizing, complementary ideas, still living within the ontological horizon of a nonbinary, nondiscrete dualism hold much information for our future. And it is to this horizon that many American Indians (and environmentalists advocating sustainable development) are looking, for a renaissance of American Indian thought. These ways of being, in an ontological Indigenous realm, remain as practical, accessible, and pragmatic tools of understanding our place in the world which is, of course, a place of responsibility to "all my relations."

For many Indigenous people, the importance of order and balance, as well as a proper (moral) behavior, are part of the cosmological understanding of our universe. If one is out of balance with metaphysical forces, or out of balance within oneself, sickness will appear and remain, until the universe, and the person in that universe, is again in balance, or ordered. The structures of the cosmos are like the structures of the mind, in that everything must be balanced and nurtured properly in order for the universe, and us, to survive. So, also, in Indigenous thought, dualism embraces difference in principle, not as division but rather as complementarity.

In Diné (Navajo) thought, for example, because the breath of life (air) is constantly being exchanged in the universe, from the cosmos and to the earth, breath plays a central role in complementary metaphysical thought. Not only is breath that which is life-giving, but smoke, as manifesting aspects of breath, operates as the medium for air to reach the sky, the cosmos, as do words when spoken or sung. The exchange of breath is important because all things in the universe are related through air, and all are made of the same basic elements. Just as we take in air to breathe, so also we let out breath, giving back to that from which we take. In Diné thought, for example, earth, air, fire, and water are the basic elements of the entire cosmos. These elements are continually in

a give-and-take relationship in the universe as spirit (energy) infuses everything. Thus, upon death, after air is released from the body (given back), the body will decompose into the elements, giving itself back to that from which it was created.[17]

In Zuni thought the Twin War Gods are also known as the Evening Star and the Morning Star. The twins embody the principle of dualism, as manifested not in a binary, but in a nonbinary, or complementary state of being. Hence a complementary dualism of life force and death are held together ontologically, just as they are in real life.

"Twins incorporate not only the principle of duality but also that of balance, being... more than complementary yet less than isomorphic: both are of a piece, perceivable as separate but, in truth, inalienable. The Twins share a single breath of life that animates them both separately and together, providing a model for the Zuni in which to cast other perceptions of the natural and created universe as being all of a piece."[18] Metaphysical space, however, is operative also as moral space; hence the providing of breath of life, via singing or talking, back to the universe fulfills a moral connection of the nurturing of everything in the universe.

GAPS OF MEANING

As a young American Indian undergraduate philosophy student in New Mexico, I harbored a deep desire to do well in logic. Euro-American professors wanted philosophy students to believe that logic courses presented to us the opportunity to "master" the methodology of philosophy, that the very structure of human philosophical thought would be revealed to us in our study of logic. It was only later, in graduate school, when I proved lengthy deductions, and contemplated meta-theoretical logic problems, that I began to take seriously my outsider intuitions about the field of logic. Our understanding of philosophy was supposed to be different after that first logic course. It was. Since that time I have taught some 63 course sections of logic and critical thinking. And yet I still struggle, in everyday common discussion, to articulate my discomfort with the discrete binarism of some dualist thought systems.

In 1992, while at a community college in New Mexico, at the suggestion of Terry Abraham, an American Indian (Laguna Pueblo) special-needs psychological counselor and administrator, I began working on a project to identify why many Indigenous students were having difficulty passing logic courses. They were opting to "drop out" of the classes. At that time I did not think their problems would be connected to my own ontological issues of binary logic systems. And yet this work also became an opportunity to gain a better understanding and clarification of my own experience.

And so I began, in small ways, to investigate, and change, the nature of the logic course I taught. Early in the semester I incorporated Native American Studies content into examples used to explain the structure of informal fallacies.[19] The level of Native American student interest, enrollment, and attendance was considerably increased. American Indian students began showing up at the classroom door, and wanting to know who I was, and how they too could enroll or sit in for the course.

Later in the semester, I also changed my method of introducing formal logic. To eliminate anxiety and stress related to learning a symbolic system, I suggested to students that working with binary logic systems could be thought of as a game of imaginary binary dualities; that these dualities need not relate to world structures. I put special emphasis on the fact that binary dualities, or binary concepts, are used to work with imaginary, non-organic thought processes, such as computers. This analogy to computers seemed to make a big difference. We were merely studying the processing pattern of electrical impulses in computers. I emphasized that such structures, as we imagined them, could be thought of as, but were not believed by everyone to be, the structure of ideas embedded in belief and thought systems of the human psyche. I was teaching students a way of reasoning that humans or machines could use, but in a way that did not establish discrete binary logic as a more fundamental (or more valued) ontology than their own, which should replace their own, or which they would have to engage in in lieu of their own.

With these two changes, adding Native content and analogizing to computer thinking patterns, changes in Native American grades were dramatic. The motivation and enthusiasm of Native American students was beyond my imagination. For I had discovered that in leaving the box of ontological tools open, all students could more quickly grasp the intuitive, creative problem-solving of conceptual pragmatic manipulation.

It was from this experience and standpoint that I commenced to think more deeply about researching the ontological, epistemological, and metaphysical systems of peoples indigenous to the Americas. Changing my teaching methods was the prelude to uncovering an ontological infrastructure of American Indian scientific speculation. As I continued my research, I began to discover how the assumed Western European binary dualism, embedded in what came to be known as Western philosophy (at least as far back as Aristotle), was not the same ontological system as, for example, Mayan (nonbinary) dualism. This revelation changed not only my approach to teaching all of my courses, but my research methods, and the very meaning of my work as a philosopher. No longer was I primarily interested in ethics and social and political philosophy, but more to the point, in the underlying ontology of my own Indigenous thought patterns that created a cognitive environment from which I viewed Eurocentric metaphysics, epistemology, and worldview.

In 1996 I was invited to keynote a conference at the University of Oregon; the conference theme was "Engendering Rationalities." As I began to contemplate what the expression "engendering Rationalities" might mean in the context of a women's (feminist) philosophy conference, my mind's eye drifted to the concept of what the paradigm case of rationality is for the Western European world (and *a fortiori* by colonization, for most of the world). In my pondering I realized the same gaps of ontology were in the the framework of binary dualist logic that was embedded in the non-process ontology of feminist thought: male/female; masculine/feminine; good/bad.[20] And in this context I remembered the importance Adrienne Rich attached to the "lesbian continuum" in *On Lies, Secrets, and Silences*,[21] and how this model had never really been incorporated into conceptual categories of native gender. Naomi Zack's

work about racial and ethnic affiliations, and how race concepts are ontologically limited and bifurcated, came to mind as well.[22]

I then thought about static bifurcations of the discrete binary (bounded) dualities of essentialisms in contemporary feminist thought and recent race theory: male/female, masculine/feminine, man/woman; black/white, Indian/non-Indian, Hispanic/not-Hispanic, Asian/non-Asian, etc. These discretely bifurcated and essentialized concepts suggested a way of being in the world that might run contrary to some Indigenist ontology we find remaining in American Indian languages. And the problem seemed to be not so much that "language has gone on a holiday," but rather, that deep structures of Indigenous thinking about ontological relations in the world conflicted with the discrete binary logic inherent in Euro-American reflection about relations in the world.

Critical feminist theory, like critical race theory, pleads for a reconsideration of these categories. And some people have already begun this important work. But perhaps reconsidering race and gender categories will further require us to radically reflect on the possibility of altering our ontology. I have no idea how this could be done, but it seems that it might be a possibility.

One of the common laments Caribbean women brought to race theory toward the end of the second movement was the question: Why can't I be Black *and* Hispanic? This issue pointed us in the direction of critically analyzing all contemporary American race categories. Paula Gunn Allen, also American Indian (Laguna Pueblo), in raising issues about race in the women's movement, brought to our attention the American Indian women's critique of Euro-American feminist historicity and situatedness. Paula, in asking "where are the red roots of feminism?" directed attention not only to a gap of analysis, but to the very denial of human relationship in the world. These two questions fuse together in asking "what are the roots of this language/these ideas, that deny my being in the world?" Or, more aptly put, "who are these people who want to control, through language use, who I am?"

The point here is that history directs us to a time when there did exist a difference of ontology. With this different ontology, there existed a difference of ways of being in the world. This difference of Indigenist thought is cashed out in notions about personal and social identity. Epistemic red roots, for example, once existing in words like autonomy, liberty, respect, and equality (in American Indigenist thought), could not be separated from ideas about freedom, responsibility, and peace.[23] This loss of language meaning is a loss of conceptual ontology; it is a loss of a way of being in the world; it is a loss of ways of relating in the world; and in its concrete manifestation it is a loss of personal, social, cultural identity, or self.

Understanding the permeability of Indigenous constructs of ethnicity, or gender, may assist feminist theory in understanding certain womanist assumptions of indigenism. Indigenous women doing feminist social engineering and healing need to be understood as living two different types of identities: first, the identity of a being in a language that knows only a nondiscrete dualist ontology; and second, the survival identity, imposed by the highly discrete and bifurcated dualist logic of colonial Europe in the Americas. This second identity is molded in the logic and language of colonization; the identity is constructed in a fixed, racialized, and biologized criterion of identity; it is a

political identity that works to protect those in power. It is used to announce the presence of a discretely gendered person. When critical theory fails to recognize very different identities of American Indian women, the result is a misunderstood articulation of Indian gender and ethnic identity.

Gendered identity standpoints of the dominant culture become for American Indian women a colonial template, dictating what our reality is supposed to be; it is stamped on us both by a colonial language and by ontology. Colonization has placed American Indians in certain ontological standpoints of perspective, yet it is sometimes from our traditional ontologies of perspective that we see and respond to how others see us. Though we have been forced to participate in a colonial game of "picture, picture, who has the picture," in reality we know there are many pictures, just as there are many different genders and ontological structures in the world. What we don't know is why feminist theorists don't "get this."

Many Indigenous gender categories are ontologically without fixed boundary. They are animate, nondiscrete, and grounded in a nondiscrete and thus nonbinary dualist ontology. That is, the ontology, as animated (continuously alterable), will be inclusive (nonbinary) rather than exclusive (discretely binary), and have nondiscrete (unbounded) entities rather than discrete (discretely bounded) entities. In this way, it is possible to have a nonbinary (nondiscrete) dualist thought system, or a nondiscrete binary dualist thought system, of gender. Understanding how a nondiscrete ontology of gender operates, and being able to imagine it, may be a crucial step toward comprehending the gender[24] politics of American Indian women.

The ontological gender difference, made manifest in linguistic difference, discloses a way of embracing our world. This embracing reflects deep ontological alterity. The overlapping categories of Indigenist ontology create an experience of the world distinct from, but in every way equal to, the Western European ontology of discrete bounded entities. This alterity gives rise to a different worldview, from which a very real standpoint comes into being. This standpoint discloses a difference of politics. It signifies a manifest site of change that it would have been necessary to undergo, in the process of adapting to ontological gendercide within the American Indian genocide in the Americas. For many, because the genocide of Indigenous languages was never metamorphosed, this nontransformed ontological site reflects a nondiscrete, inclusive, living, nonbinary dualism, inclusively celebrated in articulations of "all my relations."

Because ontological difference can give rise to metaphysical difference, Indigenous concepts of gender may sometimes stand outside a sharply demarcated ontology of binary, dualist thought. That American Indians have, against incredible odds, maintained this different ontology is a marvel and a wonder. The presence of this ontological memory suggests that a vital malleability and animation of gender worldview may be preferred by Indigenous people over a categorically fixed, sharply bifurcated, limiting worldview. If this is the case, we can expect to encounter a general shift in disciplines that engage Indigenist thought and ontology; they will need to move toward comprehending a continuum of binary, nondiscrete, dual metaphysical systems. However, the first site of interpretation may be those systems embracing cross- and multi-disciplines, cultures, methods, and dimensions.

An Indigenous manifold of complexity, resembling a world of multifariously associated connections and intimate fusions, might not be expected to give way easily to a metaphysics of sharply defined (bounded) and limited, (discretely) binary dualist constructions of gender. Nor may such yielding serve our situated survival in an actively complex, continuously changing, and hence precarious metaphysical world. But identifying and naming diversely intertwined active gender ontologies (multigender ontologies) may turn out to be a prerequisite for understanding gender worldviews as they have developed in the Americas. This may especially be true for American Indians.

GENDER BECOMES

Henry Sharp, in "Asymmetric equals: Women and Men among the Chipewyan" (Sharp 1995), notes how fuzzy logic appears in the Chipewyan (Ojibwa) language.

> One legacy of the history of the development of our [*sic*] language [English], and the role of binary thought in our philosophy, is the assumption that categories are discrete . . . that they are discrete bounded entities. A and not-A cannot be the same. Chipewyan categories are, to a far greater extent than is the case in our culture, nondiscrete. . . . Chipewyan symbolic logic is not binary. A and not-A can be the same, or, since neither A [n]or not-A have discrete boundaries, they can overlap. It is the case of fuzzy logic in which the degree of resemblance between categories can be zero.[25]

Sharp claims that if colonial categories are discrete (discretely bounded entities), then it may be exceedingly difficult, in such a value system, to think about categories and not assign an hierarchical relation. In Western thought hierarchy exists between every linked A and not-A. This is because emotional (affective) reasoning that parallels rational (inferential) thought "projects hierarchy onto categorical differences."[26]

Sharp goes on to note that gender is a cultural construct "imposed on the phenotypical expression of the chromosomal diversity present in human beings" (1995: 68) Because there is a variety of genetic construction of the human species in the biology of sex, binary categories need not necessarily arise. Moreover, as there is variation in genetic construction of the human biology of sex, binary cultural categories ought to be demonstrated rather than assumed. This burden falls upon Western Eurocentric culture, and will need to use genotypes, as well as phenotypical expression.

Euro-American culture, in order to explain binary sex/gender categories, will likely have to first presume discretely fixed categories, essentialized (tied down) as ahistorical, and unchanging throughout time and place. This presumption might exclude other possible sex/gender speculations about historical, temporal, and regional cause-and-effect inferences with respect to gender role. As example, comprehending interactive and complementary, nondiscrete dual gender categories could be a function of a specific history of a human group in a particular temporal or geographic region.

A Chipewyan perspective of gender explanation, as a particular instance of general explanation, requires linking alternate explanations together, thus combining a context

of many illustrative factors without reducing them to a single concept of cause and effect. Contrast this with the "modern" scientific enterprise of seeking singular (tied down) necessary and sufficient conditions of explanation, as found in the history of Western European and Euro-American culture. The framework "is a triadic system, involving male, female, and a third category/context in which male/female is not relevant."[27] This third category retains the rudimentary ambiguity of nonfixed categorization: "who and what the being is is not knowable from what it is, but only from what it later became."[28] Male and female cannot be presumed; the nature of the cause/effect relationship between adult and child may be the equivalent to gender classification, that is, it is something one attains.

In some contexts male may be an achieved status, and female an ascribed, rather than achieved status. For example, the Chipewyans do not distinguish between physical and supernatural causality; cause and effect are one. *Inkoze* is a Chipewyan concept that describes the "collective knowledge of supernatural causality."[29] Males must achieve the status of maleness by attaining *Inkoze*. They do so by displaying behavior appropriate to having the knowledge of *Inkoze*. To have *Inkoze* is to attain respect; it is achieved via performance. Prior to attaining *Inkoze*, men do not have gender. Because women already have respect and status, ascribed via teaching skills, women do not need to perform in order to attain *Inkoze*.[30] In sum, Sharp tries to show how gender relevancy can be interculturally context-laden. Yet historical records of gender relevancy may depend upon a logic of the recorder's ontological understanding of a particular event, as well as that recorder's attitude and ability, to understand *Inkoze* ontology.[31]

Thus we see that the concept of gender can be malleable, and differs not only across cultures, but can be context-dependent within a culture. Gender constructs can be used to interpret the meaning of behaviors appropriate to, for example, menstrual taboos for young women, and root-oven taboos for young men. Lillian A. Ackerman, in "Gender Status in the Plateau" notes that among Plateau Indians, once children matured, taboos were not so strict, as measures could be taken to neutralize gender influence.[32] Understanding gender construct in Indigenous America may require not only non-discrete malleability, but that constructs be understood in appropriate personal, social, political, economic, domestic, spiritual, or even sexual contexts. At it best, understanding will not be uni-definitional or a-contextual.[33]

GENDER STATUS

The gender status of American Indian women is an important issue to raise in the context of social, cultural, and political relations. Much ink has been spilt during the several years since the second wave of the feminist movement in trying to prove that the Confederacy created by the Iroquois Nations (Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca, and in the early eighteenth century, the Tuscarora), dating back as far as AD 1000, was a matriarchy. Admittedly, the clan system of the Haudenoshaunee was matrilineal; but this does not necessarily translate into a matrifocal or matriarchal framework. Again, the discrete binary imposition of Western European logic has

assumed that if a culture is not patriarchal, it must be matriarchal, and if not patrilineal, then matrilineal. In making claims about aboriginal people, Western European scholars have not been able to conceive egalitarian societies with protean (a Delorian word) binary constructs.

Joy Bilharz notes that the status of Haudenoshaunee women in the Confederacy has been continuously debated from 1851 to the present.[34] Bilharz claims that men cleared the land, and women worked it, and it had to be abandoned every ten to twenty years for more fertile soil, timber reserves, and animal access. What we are not told by Bilharz is whether the men/women and male/female constructs were polymorphous. Nonetheless, any notion of ownership of the land was always ephemeral. In this context both horticulture and hunting were complementary (and value-equivalent) activities. And although we don't know the nature of the gender constructs, because a concept of geographical space was associated with gender, the

> Iroquois world divided into complementary realms of forest and clearing... the former being the domain of men, the warriors, hunters, and diplomats, and the latter the domain of women, the farmers and clan matrons.[35]

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, many things changed for Iroquois women. The eventual reliance upon Euro-American trade for metal tools and cooking pots, the presence of alcohol, to abet genocide, that lessened a sense of community, the preclusion of traditional roles by new responsibilities of nontraditional ways, the eventual transition from a matrilineal extended-family household to a patrilineal nuclear-family household, and the mirroring, in the mid-nineteenth century, of contemporary Euro-American values and customs, created a somewhat different Seneca Nation of American Indians. Significantly, these events did not defeat Indigenous values and customs, though they contributed to the waning of women's traditional tribal power. "Women were disenfranchised: only males could vote, and only males could hold office."[36] It was not until 1964 that Native women were again enfranchised, and took up empowering political roles in housing, education, employment, and political councils. The current renaissance of Indigenous people's culture can at least partly be attributed to the rebuilding of women's traditionally powerful tribal roles in an urban context. Bilharz maintains that women still hold control over the "clearing," or public policy, outside the home.

Gender construction appears malleable in at least some American Indian cultures. The Chipewyan concept of a gender-becoming, or the acquiring of *Inkoze* by the performance of stepping out from a third, enigmatic gender construct, evidently appears to be, from a Euro-American worldview, a unique and unconventional slant on gender. Yet Chipewyan gender notions present only one among multifarious Indigenous gender roles.

Another example of a variegated, nondiscrete gender identity can be seen in the Taino peoples, at one time from the Southeastern United States. Taino have rites for girls and boys upon attaining puberty; they generously grant young adults an autonomous option of gender selection. And a further illumination of Indigenous gender

autonomy can be gleaned from the notion of the "manly-hearted" women (*ninaupos-kitzipxpe*) among the Blackfoot, and the *nadlee* of the Southwest. In Diné thought, the *nadlee* remains a mixed-gender status – the hermaphrodite, mythic trickster and creator, highly coveted, and always treated with respectful awe – which dignifies the marvel of creation and all relations. I can think of no similar concept in Euro-American thought.

Various supplementary examples could be cited. The presence of traditionally admired gendered beings endures. Peoples indigenous to the Americas and elsewhere suggest that we can secure at least one credible inference about differently gendered beings. That inference is this: that cultural values of at least some Indigenous people have continued to offer exceptional sanctuary to an attitude about gender that cherishes a wide arena of personal autonomy and freedom. This sanctuary has been exceptional because it has withstood over 500 years of cultural attack.

Alice Kehoe explains the importance of autonomy as a context for gender roles:

> What really matters to a Blackfoot is autonomy, personal autonomy. Blackfoot respect each person's competence, even the competence of very small children, and avoid bossing others. People seek power to support the autonomy they so highly value. Competence is the outward justification of the exercise of autonomy. If a person competently engages in work or behavior ordinarily the domain of people of the other sex, or of another species, onlookers assume the person has been blessed, either uninvited or through seeking by spiritual power to behave in this unusual manner. A woman who wanted to go to war, and there were many such, was judged as a man would be by her success in counting coup [counting winnings] or seizing enemy weapons.[37]

CONCLUSION

The colonization of the Americas brought severe penalties for anyone exercising an opportunity to exert individual gender autonomy. The previously known cultural exuberance of autonomous gender decision and polymorphous constructs became significantly erased by tightly defined, delineated, and discrete European and Euro-American gender roles. To transgress the hypersensitive boundary in the presence of the colonizer was to flirt with death.

Feminists have argued that European gender roles, via rigid and discrete boundary constructions, have limited the human experience of sex and gender potentials. Certainly we do not find among Indigenous people of the Americas a utopia of sex and gender roles, any more than we find a romanticized matriarchy, in which women are worshiped as the center of the world. And yet, even when some cultures may appear to have women at the center of a cosmos, it is not yet clear how under- and over-determination affected interpretations of what passed for gender dichotomy in the eyes of the beholder. Certainly in the Americas, the ontology of translation as practiced by Euro-Americans did not adequately sustain the ontology of Indigenous thought. It appears that it is as difficult to define gender among Indigenous people today as it is to define other discrete binary dualist concepts carried within Western European ontology.

Although I would disagree that a common ontology stands behind Western European and American Indigenist thought, there is still some common ground here. If concepts of personal autonomy and equality are linguistically interdependent in Indigenist languages, this may help explain something about ambiguous and multigendered identities and humanly lived relations. And if this is the case, then gender may be a more kaleidoscopic and protean concept than Euro-American culture has yet to imagine.[38]

NOTES

1 An earlier draft of this chapter used *polythetic* and *monothetic* rather than *discrete* and *nondiscrete*. *Poly* – meaning "many-contained" rather than *mono* – meaning "one-(self)-contained." Monothetic logic would be one-place predicate logic (monadic); polythetic logic would require many-place predicate logic (polyadic). I later switched to using the distinction between "discrete" and "nondiscrete" binaries for clarity.

2 A *binary* system has a base of two, and everything is expressed using only two symbols, e.g. a binary logic system of computer programming uses only the digits "0" and "1"; and all programs are created using only these two symbols. Another example would be binary stars (sometimes referred to as double stars), where two stars revolve around a common center of gravity; there are never more than two, and each remains within the common gravitational pull, yet retains its own boundary. In binary logic systems the two values are the "true" and the "false" and all meaning is put into this value system. By contrast a nonbinary system may have bases of three or more, and may or may not be open to emergent change, e.g. a deontic logic system would use a value of the "true," the "false," and the "unknown," and meaning would be put into these categories.

3 Val Plumwood refers to the "boundedness" of the logic of colonization and oppression as being part of a dualism (or binary opposition) that constructs conceptual identity in terms of exclusionary contrasts, e.g. male/female. She indicates that feminist psychology has a term that she will use to designate the "gulf" inherent in dualised (note the *s* in the word "dualised") categories. The term is "hyperseparation." Plumwood indicates that the hyperseparation is a form of identity constructed by maximum exclusion from the "other's" qualities which, she adds, are conceived as inferior. Val also notes that Marilyn Frye claims that the members of dualized (note the *z* here) classes assume they are both hyperseparated from "others" (who constitute the opposition), and also homogenized, i.e. very like one another in one's own group (Plumwood 1998; Frye 1983). "Dualize" means to make or consider dual.

4 A "dualistic" system (of or based on dualism) is a system composed of two parts, or kinds, like or unlike. Hence, dualism *per se* does not give rise to unlikes (opposites), nor to the "inferiority" of one in relation to the "other." For example, a dualist ontology might hold that reality is composed of two elements, mind and matter, but need not make these kinds exclusive of one another, nor place value on one to the exclusion of the "other." Thus the privileging of "mind" over "matter" as we see manifest in some forms of rationalism, is not a natural byproduct of dualism, but rather the product of a value intentionalism; similarly for a theological dualism holding that there are two antagonistic principles in the universe, the "good" and the "evil." Of particular note is the fact that members of colonizing groups generally do not see themselves as members of a colonizing group but, rather, only as "superior to" the "others."

5 See for example Jacobs, Thomas, Lang (1997).

6 Throughout this chapter I use "American Indian" to refer to Indigenous people of the Americas (North, Central, and South) and their descendants. Thus an American Indigicentric perspective is used analogously to the notion of a Eurocentric, Africentric, and Euro-Americentric perspective; i.e., it is seen from the "eyes of" Indigenous people of the Americas.

7 Wub E Ke Niew, in *We Have the Right to Exist: a Translation of Aboriginal Indigenous Thought* (1995: 236) has referred to this as an "unresolvable dualism in their [English] language... Because I cannot conceive of a language with dualism, I use notions of binary and nonbinary to expose an important distinction here."

8 See Michael Ripinsky-Naxon (1998). He discusses one of the roles of a "shaman" as bringing together the abstract idea with the concrete reality: "The Maya principle of polar biunity finds, in many ways, an intellectual resonance in Niels Bohr's 'principle of correspondence' in which a single entity can be both matter (a particle) and pure energy (a wave); its nature is determined by its behavior at a given moment of observation. The observation of such physical behavior is subject to laws, formulated by Werner Heisenberg in his Uncertainty Principle, that are an inescapable property of the universe... such cosmological systems are not, in essence, incompatible descriptions of the world" (1998: 155). Vine Deloria, Jr., has remarked to a similar effect, in *Spirit and Reason* (1999), that it may be possible to replace the Western word "Spirit" that was imposed upon Indigenous thought, with "energy" and reconcile at least some of Western scientific thought with American Indigenous thought.

9 "In Navajo they say like, whatever that goes on within your world it is moving. It is just like a flow, everything is in flow. There are no solid objects or anything. Everything... goes through transformation. It goes through manifestations. There is wear and tear, there is, but there is no addition or there is no loss to anything. It is just a transformation. You are in that. You are participating in that, so everything is alive. So that is how the Navajo would interpret (Hanson Ashley, Sonto, Arizona, July 27, 1993)" (Schwarz 1997: 18); cf. p. 93 regarding pairings of contrasting but complementary components to make a whole (where each half is necessary) in the web of interconnectedness formed by relationships in the universe, with self and all relations.

10 In binary dualist logic, if something appears to be both good and evil, rigid boundaries must be marked out to clarify which one is to be dominant. Time and place function as language markers in the English language in such a way that something cannot both be and not be in linear time or geographical space. What is commonly known as "Indian time" on the other hand, is measured by events, and because events can recur, the "same" event may be in many places, or occur in many times.

11 As I use the concept "abstract thought" it means thought apart from any particular instances or material objects as semantics.

12 Wub E Ke Niew (1995: 219).

13 See Williams (1997).

14 Both the phrases "all our relations" and "the original peoples" have deep structural meaning in Indigenous cultures. Indigenous people of the Americas' philosophical thought generally incorporates an acknowledgment of "the" people, in origin stories, as human people, as distinct from different kinds of people, like animal people, tree people, etc.

15 See Hanke (1959). Although the humanity of Indigenous people of the Americas was at issue in the Valladolid debates, other issues also provided impetus for the colonization of the continents: Vitoria (Francisco de Vitoria at Salamanca) denied the right of mistreatment of

Indigenous people; Vitoria also argued that to prevent Indigenous people of the Americas from denying trade to Europe in a world where "God" had intended all nations to trade, any nation or group had a divine right to conquer America in the interests of uninhibited trade. Vine Deloria discusses this in *God is Red* (1994), and notes that "the doctrine that the pope had been given total control over the planet by God was soon secularized into justification for European nations, definitively Christian, to conquer... Once the doctrine became secularized, it was impossible for anyone to question its validity" (1994: 277).

16 As quoted from Hanke (1959).

17 Consider: "the daily occurrence of the dawn as the sun returns symbolizes the continuation of time and of life itself. Dawn (associated with the white and the East) is one of the four cardinal light phenomena, along with the blue of day-sky (associated with the South), the yellow of evening twilight (West), and the black of darkness (North). Each of these four light phenomena serves as a guide to people's movements and activities (Griffin-Pierce [Navajo-Diné] 1988)." In Williamson and Farrer (1997: 284).

18 Epilogue to Williamson and Farrer Mescalero Apache (1992: 285).

19 When *Red Earth, White Lies* (1995) by Vine Deloria, Jr. was published, it became the perfect medium of text examples to use to teach about how modern science was rampant with informal fallacies!

20 And in this context I remembered the significance of the "lesbian continuum" in Adrienne Rich's *Lies, Secrets and Silences*; Naomi Zack's work about racial and ethnic affiliations, and how race concepts could ontologically limit and bifurcate; and Maria Lugones' presentation in 1983 about our need to unwrap conceptual frameworks.

21 See Rich (1979).

22 See Zack (1995, 1997, 1998).

23 Se Wub E Ke Niew (1995), and Weatherford (1989).

24 Recent texts that have attempted articulations of Indigenous multigenders include: Roscoe (1983), Roscoe (1998), and Jacobs et al. (1997).

25 Klein and Ackerman (1995: 68).

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid., p. 69.

29 Ibid., p. 66.

30 From an American Indian multigendered perspective, it might make sense that a multigendered person would need to attain *Inkoze* (which is a concept we find in many Indigenous communities); but I have not yet thought about this very much.

31 Ibid., p. 67.

32 Ibid., p. 95.

33 See Tafoya, "Principle of Uncertainty," in Jacobs et al. (1997), p. 198.

34 Bilharz, "The changing status of Seneca Women," in Jacobs et al. (1997), p. 102.

35 Ibid., p. 103.

36 Ibid., p. 109.

37 Kehoe, "Blackfoot persons," in Jacobs et al. (1997), p. 122.

38 See the bibliography at the end of this volume for some of the works by Alice Kehoe and Bea Medicine that might begin to help clarify gender in Native North American Communities.

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