Fixico, Donald
2003.
The American Indian
Mind in a Linear World

1

"INDIAN THINKING" AND A LINEAR WORLD

"Long, long ago the Muscogee Creek people lived in a dark misty fog and they were cold. They felt along the walls of something damp and realized they were moving upwards. Slowly they emerged from the Earth and the fog blinded them. Unable to see and stricken with fear, the people and even the animals cried out until the wind blew away the fog so that they could see. Perceiving animals and people to be equal, the Creeks named groups of people after animals and called them clans. The savior wind became the highest recognized clan.[1] In all four cardinal directions, the forces of fire confronted the people, and they had to make a decision. From the south, a yellow fire faced the people, a black fire burned in the west, a white fire was aflame in the east, but the people chose the red and fire from the north.[2] The fire of the north warmed the people and provided light over the world and enabled the plants to grow, so that the Muscogee Creeks learned to respect all of the elements for life and they celebrated the harvest of the green corn (busk) in ceremonials. Should the people fail in their respect for nature and forget the busk ceremonies, the people would disappear from the land and it would fall beneath the waters of the ocean. The Muscogee Creeks stressed the importance of community and generations of ceremonials reinforced it. As the ceremonies became ritualized, the Muscogees developed ceremonial laws to maximize the community's confirmations of successful ceremonies, and thus the way of life of the Creeks was the correct way."[3]

Muscogee Creek myth, 1922

* * *

"Indian Thinking" is "seeing" things from a perspective emphasizing that circles and cycles are central to the world and that all things are related within the universe. For Indian people who are close to their tribal traditions and native values, they think within a native reality consisting

of a physical and metaphysical world. Full bloods and people raised in the traditional ways of their peoples see things in this combined manner.

Seeing things in this special way is thinking like an Indian who has been raised in a tribal community operating according to tribal beliefs. This point of view is a different perspective from that of the American mainstream, based on the Western mind believing in empirical evidence. "Seeing" is visualizing the connection between two or more entities or beings, and trying to understand the relationship between them within the full context of things identified within a culturally based system. It is like seeing the molecule first instead of seeing the atom and all of the atoms that make up the molecule. This holistic perception is the indigenous ethos of American Indians and how they understand their environment, the world, and the universe.

Perception is nature's way in which humans and animals see things. Although we all see things differently from various perspectives based on different cultures and different personal experiences even within our own families, it is suggested that Native Americans, who are knowledgeable of their cultures, see things in more than a human-to-human context. It is a perspective that involves human beings, animals, plants, the natural environment, and the metaphysical world of visions and dreams. This broader context of perception involves more accountability and responsibility on the part of native people for taking care of and respecting their relationships with all things. Like the creation story of the Muscogee, the people established their relationships with each kind of animal and plant with the help of *He-sa-ke-tv-me-se,* the Giver of Breath or Life. This system of relations set the kinship of community for all beings, and with other peoples or tribes.

This inclusive kinship conflicts with the mainstream linear way of seeing things in the world where everything is based on a human-to-human relationship. The late Muscogee elder Jean Hill Chaudhuri and her husband, Joyotpaul Chaudhuri, observed the Muscogee tradition of thinking and how it differed from the linear way of thought. "For instance, mainstream Christian thinking conceives of a bracketed, reified, individual self and soul. Fundamental Creek thought also eschews the existence of atomistic permanent souls, selves, and entities. The Creek entities—'all my relations'—male, female, human and nonhuman, known and unknown, are all part of a continuum of energy that is at the heart of the universe. The continuum of energy and spirit, *boea fikcha/puyvfekcv,* and the ever-present principles of transformation and synergy illuminate the meaning of all-important entities in the Creek world."[4] Due to the spiritual energy within all things, all things should be respected for their potential. In this way of understanding, the totality that the Muscogee Creeks call *Ibofanga,* is the existence of all things and energy within all things. In this belief, all things are capable of possessing spiritual energy.

"Seeing" in the traditional perspective is understanding the totality of one's universe. But, such an understanding does not occur immediately with realizations. Patience is a part of the "seeing" or the way in which Indian people think about such things. The point of knowledge or an idea may not be apparent at the moment of its introduction, but, with patience, the message becomes clear. Sometimes, this realization takes several minutes, days, or even years. Its importance or relevance derives from the realization or with the help of a wiser person or special person who is gifted to interpret insightful experiences such as dreams and visions. Among the Muscogee Creeks, a *Kerrata* (key-tha) is a gifted person like an interpreter with special insight to help people understand a vision, dream, or an unusual experience. Many tribes have such a person whose role is that of a metaphysical interpreter or translator. A well-known example is Black Elk, the holy man of the Oglalas. Black Elk described his personal vision as a young boy, saying, "It was the pictures I remembered and the words that went with them; for nothing I have ever seen with my eyes was so clear and bright as what my vision showed me; and no words that I have ever heard with my ears were like the words I heard. I did not have to remember these things; they have remembered themselves all these years. . . That evening of the day when I came back, Whirlwind Chaser, who had got a great name and a good horse for curing me, came over to our teepee. He sat down and looked at me a long time in a strange way, and then he said to my father: 'Your boy there is sitting in a sacred manner. I do not know what it is, but there is something special for him to do, for just as I came in I could see a power like a light all through his body.'"[5] Like a *Kerrata* among the Muscogee Creeks, Whirlwind Chaser of the Oglalas could tell that Black Elk could "see" into the future as a prophet, and that he was sensitive to all things in his understanding of the universe. His role in life became that of a cultural interloper or interpreter. His gifted powers to see things connected with the metaphysical world made him valuable to his people as a mediator between the two realities of the physical and metaphysical.

"Seeing" involves mentally experiencing the relationships between tangible and nontangible things in the world and in the universe. It is like living one's dream that seems so real while you are sleeping. It is acceptance of fact that a relationship exists between a tangible item like a mountain and a dream. In his visionary experience, Black Elk

spoke of "seeing." As he stood on a high mountain [Harney Peak], he recalled, "Then I was standing on the highest mountain of them all, and round about beneath me was the whole hoop of the world. And while I stood there I saw more than I can tell and I understood more than I saw; for I was seeing in a sacred manner the shapes of all things in the spirit, and the shape of all shapes as they must live together like one being. And I saw that the sacred hoop of my people was one of many hoops that made one circle, wide as daylight and as starlight, and in the center grew one mighty flowering tree to shelter all the children of one mother and one father. And I saw that it was holy."[6]

Many Indian people have had such experiences as Black Elk in an actual vision or a dream or both. They seldom talk about it for fear of others not believing them, or perhaps they do not take their dreams very seriously as signs and messages connecting them with the metaphysical world. Such fear and the thought of being ridiculed by one's peers causes a suppression of such metaphysical opportunities to learn more about things beyond the limitation of the physical world. The interface between the physical and the metaphysical (the conscious and subconscious mind) is of the traditional American Indian mind.

"Indian Thinking" is "seeing" and "listening." Listening for sounds of what is most relevant about the interaction between two things is a part of the realization of relationships and learning their importance about life. Listening does not necessarily involve only hearing sounds. Actually, listening involves hearing and realizing as a receiver while understanding the objective of seeing. It is the counterpart to Indian "seeing." Perhaps, it bears repeating that "seeing" in this way involves trying to understand the significance of relationships. Without listening, seeing only provides images to the mind with limited information and hearing sounds adds substance or more pertinent knowledge to the visual experience. In this light, it is imperative for traditionalist and linear thinkers to look around themselves while trying to understand the natural and man-made environments.

All of the interrelationships is a system called the Natural Order of Life for the American Indian who knows his or her traditional beliefs. Their perception is defined and determined by their natural environment in a type of Natural Democracy, for they treat all things with respect. This democracy is based on respect. In this belief, all things are equally important. Where a native person grows up is relevant to how one understands all things around him or her. One's natural environment is pertinent to how things are perceived, and this set of surroundings become fixed in the mind like reference points for later in

life, especially as one travels to distant places away from one's home space or homeland.

Understanding relationships has developed from the Indian thinker "seeing" connections by becoming familiar with his or her natural environment which might be called a homeland. In fact, this situation typifies the American Indian mind in the traditional sense. One's natural surroundings aid the Indian thinker, as thoughts are based on understanding relationships within the environment called the homeland. It is being familiar with the Earth while possessing local knowledge about the streams, creeks, rivers, valleys, deserts, meadows, woods, hills, mountains, and knowing all of the names of plants and animals that are also a part of one's homeland. It is knowing the smells and aromas like the Earth when rain falls lightly, the smell of a meadow of grass or bountiful flowers, and realizing the beauty of life like seeing a newborn kitten.

Listening as a part of oral tradition is essential for understanding relationships and their multiple meanings. Elders tell stories in the oral tradition of tribes, where it was equally important to listen to the story as well as tell the story. Both storyteller and listener engage in reviving an experience of the past that becomes alive again, thereby transcending time from the past to the present. Both tenses of time blur, becoming one and the same. More of this discussion is covered in the next chapter, but the salient point here is that listening is a part of "seeing" the world in the mind of the American Indian.

A part of patience to the path of knowledge is silence and learning to accept the significance of quiet in our lives. Silence is imperative in listening for reflection and self-examination as information is related to the seer. At the beginning of this chapter, the Muscogee creation story related a difficult situation, for the people had to listen and tried to understand the strange new sounds that bewildered them as they later saw the various species of animals that became the clans in their society. Originally, Creek elders said that there were twelve clans of animals and plants in the Muscogee world view, although more clans developed to accommodate the expanding Creek universe as all things are a part of the Natural Order of things.

Silence is the test for patience. In silence, two people are still engaged in the same experience of concentrating on the same item or piece of knowledge. In this way, learning to deal and function with silence is a means for securing one's thoughts and confirming one's beliefs. In this way silence is an opportunity, not a negative. Such silence is uncomfortable to the mainstream person whose world is filled with

many man-made noises. This opportunity is for self-reflection and introspection in the process of understanding one's own mind, and finding balance within oneself. Personality is shaped, changed, and refined. Character is built.

For what all of us see, we must relate carefully to how it is related to other things or how it is related to us. For Indian people who are close to their traditional way of life, "thinking" is seeing visions and dreams in a visual reality, unlike seeing things in a linear manner. Seeing and understanding things in a visual context is the basis of receiving information or the processing of information. As a result, a story can be told, thereby providing information as a means of sharing via the oral tradition of the community or tribe. The process is re-creating a vision of the experience via a story in the minds of the listeners.

Seeing involves observing for signs to learn about life with an open mind, so that a full context of information can be absorbed. As a result, one must be an acute observer and be receiving of all things without doubt that might provide relevant information to one's concerns. Native people acutely observe nature and watch for the instincts of plants and animals in action. Developed over centuries, plants and animals act in concert with the Earth via circular rotations, migrations, and seasonal changes. By observing a single act or unusual act of nature, we can tell what is not right about a course of events that is supposed to ensue, according to regularity. These clues are the signs of nature, such as the coat of a horse will develop thicker for a hard winter that is coming. Other animals will respond in the same manner as nature has helped to prepare them with instincts in this way for survival.

Native elder Ed McGaa observed that "each animal has its own power or gift to convey because they were so endowed by *Wakan Tanka*. Does not a mountain lion tell us that we can become independent and walk those lonely chasms of change undauntedly? Doesn't a portrait of the owl, the eagle of the night, tell us not to fear the dark or mysterious places? Surely the beaver conveys a serene security and peace brought forth by a steady endeavor if we can be so fortunate to find our own bliss. And yes, we all need endless scenes of the freedom of hawks, eagles, wolves and the great orcas of the seas to forever implant a resolve that we must never lose our connection with the vast soothing solitude of Nature. Each winged, four-legged and finned [animal] has a meaning to convey that can be beneficial to our intricate two legged lives. Yes, even a common field mouse or a disciplined, dedicated badland ant has a message to convey if we will stoop to study and look for it."[7] All animals have special talents and certain roles in the living world. The way of the traditionalist is to understand these special talents and roles of his or her brethren. Generations of survival among animals have instilled in them keen instincts and certain qualities have evolved in them that have been helpful as ways of knowledge to the American Indian.

Indian thinking is inquiry into relationships and community, and it bears reminding us that community extends beyond human relationships. How all of us as individuals place ourselves within a system of relationships is very important for understanding our own thinking about achieving balance within oneself and within the community. Seeking balance between one's aggressive and peaceful emotions, between one's evil and good thoughts, and between one's negative and positive relationships with others is a continual struggle that has been deemed by the Creator of All Things so that a balance is sought within one's self and within one's community consisting of the family or extended family, clan or society, community, and/or tribe. It is understanding one's relationships that is paramount to living a life in the beauty of balance and harmony.

Seeing, *hecvs* (in the Muscogee Creek language), is cultural awareness of all relations to the seer. To see properly, one must be aware of all surrounding things, including those that might not be in a physical sense, but choose to exist in the metaphysical sense. This type of perception calls for an open-mindedness and sensitivity. Many native people see visions, ghosts, and spirits, but this is not unlike biblical characters who saw angels and Jesus. Angels mostly appeared in the Old Testament of the Bible; one source of the Church doctrine claimed the number of angels on Earth was fixed at the time of creation at 301,655,722, according to fourteenth-century cabalists, and this is a modest estimate.[8] In the linear world of Catholicism or Judaism, or any other mainstream religion of the Western world, such spiritual aberrations enlightened hungry souls desiring to know more about the afterlife.

Religious believers who are willing to risk the limitations of western beliefs defined by scientific empiricism become increasingly likely to see like traditional American Indians. By following the religious tenets for believing, the linear mind and the American Indian mind decrease the vast gap that polarizes them. This compromise of the linear mind enables non-Indians to have a better chance to experience the metaphysical. The biases of the linear mind become obstacles unto the linear person who wishes to think like the American Indian.

Can non-Indians "see" in an Indian way like a traditionalist? This perplexing question of the 1980s and 1990s has continued into the

twenty-first century as indigenous knowledge and the academic writings of indigenous scholars have received increasing respect from the mainstream academy. The answer is affirmative, if the non-Indian learns the traditional ways of an Indian community and accepts the values and beliefs of the indigenous culture. Seeing and learning is accepting that you will be enlightened by listening and witnessing the signs. Non-Indians can "see" in this manner, if they believe in the same ethos of the native community or tribe.

For the present, the indigenous way of seeing things like traditional Indians is becoming increasingly incongruent with the linear world. The linear mind looks for cause and effect, and the Indian mind seeks to comprehend relationships. Hence, mental perception is relevant to both the Indian mind and linear mind seeing the world in their own ways.[9] But how are the Indian mind and linear mind different, and why are they different?

Too often, studies about American Indians have been produced from the non-Indian point of view. In the history of Indian–white relations, understanding the native perspective or comprehending the Indian point of view can be referred to as the three dimensions of constructing new American Indian history (which are basically the First Dimension of general narrative description "about" Indian history, The Second Dimension of historical analysis of the dynamics of Indian–white relations, and the Third Dimension consisting of historical analysis of the Indian point of view). The First Dimension is like a door or window, and it is basically the linear mainstream's interpretation or perspective "about" American Indian history. Written from an external point of view, these works can only best describe American Indians.

The Second Dimension is the two-way door like a mirror effect, which allows a common subject like treaties or war between Indians and whites to be viewed by both sides. Contact literature including both the perspectives of the colonizer and colonized is a part of this Second Dimension, in which the scholarly studies involve speeches and quotes from native leaders to help balance the perspectives on a particular battle, treaty, or issue that involved both Indians and whites. Theoretically this type of historical analysis renders equal partnership to the role of Indians in the history of Indian–white relations.

The Third Dimension is actually the native perspective about an issue, a battle, an event, or about an entire history. From the true Indian point of view, this Third Door is actually the First Dimension to the indigenous person. Respectively, from right to life, it is the Third Dimension in the proposed equation of Indian–white relations. Specifically, this view of the traditional American Indian mind originates from the other side of the bridge or from the Indian side of the Indian–white equation. In the course of scholarly investigation and literature on the subject, most of the literature is on the first approach. In the 1990s, scholars have been working on the second approach, in the application of ethnohistory, and only a few have been able to adequately produce studies on the third approach. This Indian–white equation of the three dimensions, especially the Third Door addresses the Indian point of view in relationship to traditional knowledge and developing an Indian intellectualism.

Due to cultural differences, everyone perceives everything differently. It may even be said that individuals of the same culture perceived everything differently, according to their personal point of view as dictated by their personality. However, it is maintained here that persons of the same culture will likely perceive an idea, point of discussion, or solution to a problem in a similar general way. These categorical perceptions are governed by their cultural influences and changes with the development or regression of the basic culture.

From this premise, we can assume that persons of a tribal culture of American Indians perceive subjects differently from those of a nontribal culture like the American mainstream. Hence, there is a fundamental difference of perception between Indians and white Americans. They understand things differently and accept truth and facts differently. Whereas the Indian mind is more accepting of the truth and facts, the Western linear mind must pursue empirical evidence to prove something is true so that it can become factual in the scientific sense.

But what about the extraordinary—the unexplainable? A gifted mind in mainstream America might be called a genius. If a person scores above ninety-eight percent of the general population on a recognized standard IQ test, then this person would qualify to be a member of Mensa, (Latin for "table"), an organization for extraintelligent people. Founded in 1945 by Roland Berrill and Dr. L.L. Ware in London, Mensa expanded to several other countries with American Mensa established in 1961. With 70,000 members world wide, about 48,000 people classified as being in the top two percent of intelligent people, belong to more than 120 chapters of American Mensa.[10]

In observing American Indians researching at the National Archives, a mainstream scholar disclosed that "when the American Indian scholars come to the National Archives and read the histories from those sources, their interpretation of the action of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, for instance, is quite different from mine. Sometimes

the interpretation is parallel, but sometimes it is exactly opposite from mine."[11]

This observation would seem logical along the premise that has been established, but it also notes two polarized perceptions. Why they are of opposites is clear, but how they came about invites suppositions about their origins. Because they are opposing points of view and both are products of their cultures, then they would have to be exemplary of their cultures. It can be assumed the situation of one person as a member of an Indian tribal culture and the other person as a member of the American mainstream hold opposite views, or different views on a point or subject of discussion. Theoretically they are different, but realistically they are not equal in their degrees of retention of cultural backgrounds. If we assume that a person who is also a member of the same tribal cultural background, but is less traditional than a traditionalist, then the second person is more likely to have a similar perception of the mainstream individual. In other words, the diminishing of a culture from traditionalism in the direction of less traditionalism would have a decreasing traditional point of view of that tribal background. Evidence of this occurrence is the changed point of view of the traditional full blood of a tribe who has become educated in the white man's school, and this person may have a different view of his perception. Or a mixed blood who is both from a tribal background and a mainstream background may have a combination of both polarized perceptions.[12] This decrease in traditionalism is discussed in chapter 8.

How humans perceive is through sight performed by the eyes. Unfortunately, we depend too heavily on this physical gift, and do not pay as much attention to the feedbacks of our other senses, both physical and innate senses, so that physical sight is the immediate detector for perception, which influences our perspective. It is maintained here that perception is not perspective but helps to determine it.

Sight also reveals to all of us color, shape, quality, and unusualness of a subject to our mind. Because human minds are also products of culture, we quickly categorize the "seen" subject into our memory banks of knowledge, and all too often form immediate opinions. In ethnocentric cultures, judgments are quickly formed, as linear thinkers naturally learn by comparisons. Relatively, the Western mind compares other things to what it has experienced, and other people to itself, and other cultures to Western culture.[13] The result is Amerocentricism.

Cultural influences act as governors of the way all people think and how the mind responds to what is seen and heard. The retention of

culture involving beliefs, philosophy, and values dictates thoughts and therefore forms opinions and determines points of view for both the American Indian mind and the linear mind. These cultural influences are fundamental, but they interact with the present state of mind, which may be involved in emotional stress, anger, happiness, or some other emotion.

There are fundamental foci that perception engages: time, mass, space, and sound. In the Muscogee Creek way of thinking, this type of "seeing" is understanding and accepting the totality of *Ibofanga*—that all things have a spiritual energy. These elemental qualities make up the whole order of the universe. How people perceive them through their cultural lens reflects linear or Indian perspectives and possibly other human perspectives. Normally, a person overly depends on sight, and is not aware of the other senses that are possessed, that is, smell, taste, hearing, and touch. A wiser individual takes into account all of his or her human senses in order to understand what he or she has seen. Indian people have learned to do this, especially by observing and understanding how animals see the world around them. In the linear mainstream, a good hunter would practice the same way of seeing things. To be a good hunter is to hunt like an animal such as a wolf who relies upon all senses for its survival.

In this vast world of diversity, we are of many types of humans, animals, and plants. Former Navajo Tribal Chairman Peter MacDonald observed the Navajo way in his words. "We Navajo call ourselves the Diné, which means 'the only human beings in the world.' That sounds arrogant to those who do not understand our culture and history, and it has caused us to experience great hatred and violence. Yet the concept developed from our efforts to understand our place in the world at large and was our way of determining how we differ from the birds, the animals, and the other creatures with whom we share the earth."[14] The Navajos look at the world in a special way of kinship. This communal sense is common to Native Americans who believe that traditionally the community includes animals and plants. We forget the fact that historically animals and plants were much more a part of our natural environment in colonial America and in Indian Country.

The late Tewa anthropologist Alfonso Ortiz observed the same sense of totality as he noted, "but what would be some of the constituent parts or categories of a world view? Space and time are, of course, the obvious initial candidates, if only for the reason that phenomenologists—including anthropologists, philosophers, and historians of religion—have compiled an impressive record of evidence that space and time do provide man with his primary level of orientation

to reality." Ortiz also held that, "this is true enough if we but add the cavil that none of the pueblos, to the best of my knowledge, has abstract terms for space and time; space is only meaningful as the distance between two points, and time cannot be understood apart from the forces and changes in nature which give it relevance and meaning. It is precisely when time becomes cut up into arbitrarily abstract units (weeks, hours, minutes, seconds) that tribal peoples lose all similarity in their time-reckoning customs with those of Western peoples. And these smaller units of time-reckoning are precisely the ones which concern Western minds the most."[15]

Such deep observations have sustained the chasm between the traditional American Indian mind and the mind of the linear world. Cultural stereotypes negatively portraying other cultures hinders the process of learning and education. Academia allows the participation of minds from various cultures and backgrounds. But, a comparison of the performance of minority groups with the mainstream has produced some interesting results. Minority scholars—African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Asian Americans—have been surveyed for their academic performances. Concerning young minority intellectuals, Sanford M. Dornbusch, professor of sociology at Stanford, while surveying 7,000 high school students in the six schools in San Francisco, discovered that Asian Americans consistently earned better grades than any other group of students, regardless of their parents' level of education or their families' social and economic status, the ususal predictors of success. In fact, in Asian American homes where English is spoken often, or whose families lived longer in the United States, the students did slightly less well.[16] The Asian American students have evaluated their academic situations and opportunities with the help in many cases of their parents, and they have applied the effort of working hard with an attitude of determination. Hard work and determination are not solely Asian American cultural habits, but they are becoming typical to those Asian American students who succeed, and the mainstream has mistakenly presumed that Asian American students being brilliant is a cultural trait. This is not traditional knowledge, as it actually derives from culture over time.

The basis of traditional knowledge derives from identification of identity and culture. Through centuries, generations of people practiced ways of doing things and emphasize the importance of certain items that are concrete and abstract. Much of this traditional knowledge originated from the practicalities of life on a daily basis in relationship to an environment and its climate. As people have made these

adjustments, cultural identities have developed and evolved from the peoples' actions within a group that is generally called a nation.

Simultaneously, much of traditional knowledge comes from mundane daily living, thereby establishing cultural norms that may be called an order to life. Tribal elders have taught this observation for generations. By maintaining order in life, a balance occurs and decreases the chance for confusion and chaos. Hence, it is the role of the elders to maintain peace and order, to supply advice, teach, and to advise, and it is the role of the younger to hunt, to fight in war, and to protect the people. They are also to listen to the elders for advice on how to regain the balance between peace and war, between good and evil. This respect for elders is valued by many tribal cultures around the world.

It can be assumed that in life people are "doers" and "reactors"—people who act and people who react or respond. For example, to acquire knowledge, Creek and Seminole traditionalists learn by first waiting and listening and watching for signs. For instance, much can be learned from the larger order of life—the universe. Humans can learn more from the Natural Order of things than from the order that man has established.

The traditional educational system is to learn by two methods. The first is to listen, observe, be patient for a sign (which has caused others to call traditional Indians passive), and lessons are learned by receiving or taking in this information. An important point may be that it may not be most effective to try to deliberately obtain knowledge, as only information would be gained (not knowledge) and frustration usually happens in this acquisitive process.

After receiving knowledge, which may not always be understood at first, then a person reacts by imitating the elder who might be a teacher, or reacting to the instruction learned from nature, and knowledge is learned in this way like the mainstream by doing—the practical experience and this knowledge of doing one's job, taking an exam, hunting, and so forth is application of knowledge received by using this knowledge.[17]

Philosophical differences between American Indian intellectualism and mainstream intellectualism are actually based on the differences among the various tribal cultures. Hence, the difference is not accurately between "Indian intellectualism and mainstream intellectualism" but between mainstream intellectualism and the different tribes' intellectualism. This may seem obvious, but stereotypes negate the multiple differences between the various tribal nations and their cultures and promote a generic "Indianness," which is categorically convenient for discussing American Indians as a group.

The abstract of nativism versus the concreteness of mainstream academics is an ongoing incongruence. It is a noticeable characteristic of tribal elders (traditionalists) who frequently have a tendency to generalize rather than supplying a direct answer or specific detail. This indirectness means that they communicate in a more abstract way so as not to decrease the opportunity for further information that might cause confrontation or rejection of what they said, for example, suggestions or advice. This makes it difficult to understand elders sometimes, as they expect the younger ones to understand, so other examples are often given to help illustrate what they mean.

In addition, by being general, with the responsibility placed on the listener to learn, the possible ill reaction is not necessarily placed on the speaker, who might use the pronoun "we," or the "tribe." It has always been important to promote harmony in the tribal community. Because the mainstream is more detail oriented, it must have concrete details to work with for understanding.

The abstract also involves another reality of life—the afterlife. Life on Earth is only a segment of time and life here is obviously a struggle. Hence, the tribal individual entertains thoughts about the reality of the afterlife, and strives to communicate with that world, especially through holy men, priests, or prophets. A story of the oral tradition provides clues about the spiritual world around us and helps to comfort the living. Hence, effective communication is very important.

Language has not always been the expression of traditional knowledge. In some languages like one of my peoples, the Muscogee Creeks, it is simpler than English as it has a smaller vocabulary. It is simple to prevent misunderstanding, but takes longer to speak. When elders speak, they converse for hours, and often they sit outside on a porch to visit, and may use the ground to draw to convey their meanings and explain points of interest. One example is the word or explanation of "treaty." In the Muscogee Creek language, it is described as *patvkva*, meaning blanket or top covering of the Earth. Words were described to be placed on the blanket, and to be moved around like putting words down on paper. This was the explanation of the concept of "treaty" among the Muscogees and Seminoles.

It has been theorized that American Indians biologically function from the right hemispheric side of their brain. Although some scholars say that this has been debated and it has been proven that there is not a hemispheric difference, it is apparent that some people are more musically and visually inclined than their opposite colleagues, who are more mathematical and uncompromising in a scientific way of wanting empirical evidence.

This contrasts with members of the American mainstream, who operate from the left hemispheric side. Whether this hypothesis is true or not, it offers some intriguing ideas as to why Indians may approach scholastic endeavors differently from that of the mainstream, which is responsible for course curriculum and instruction. It should be noted here that some readers will say that this hemispheric theory had been disproved, whereas others will continue to ask why there remains such a dissimilarity between Indian/artist thinking and linear thinking. Supposedly, people (and some mainstream individuals function in thought from the right side) of the right hemisphere are said to be oriented toward philosophy and art. People of the left side are inclined toward science and mathematics. What is most important to realize is that native people have a wider perspective due to a holistic approach in seeing the world and accepting truth instead of trying to prove it on every occasion when there is doubt.

Due to this difference in perspective, class instructors (who are mostly from the mainstream, thus from the left hemisphere), should, nevertheless, respect the perspective of the American Indian student. To discriminate against a differing point of view, especially from the instructor, or even harboring prejudice against another viewpoint, is biased and disallows academic freedom. Furthermore, it is a negation of the cultural existence of the Indian intellectual.[18]

America has been criticized by global communities for its ethnocentricism, and it is important to hear different cultural perspectives for the sake of academic freedom. By continuing to hear only the same school of thought from one culture, then the opportunity to learn progressively is obstructed. This is regression in the American mainstream, especially for a society consisting of various ethnic peoples of diverse cultures.

The wars fought between Indians and whites were more than just over land—they were wars of the minds. The American mainstream thinks in a linear fashion, which is very different from the circular fashion of traditionalists. These two are at odds when both are not realized, as by one not knowing the other one. This neglect presumes that there is only one correct way of thought—the linear way.

Basically, linear thought is rationalizing how something originates at point A, is affected by some force or influence and transforms into point B, to point C, and so forth. Intuitiveness is less relevant to the linear mind of problem solving and philosophy. The problem for the linear mind is dealing with the abstract.

The circular method is a circular philosophy focusing on a single point and using familiar examples to illustrate or explain the point of

discussion. The circular approach assures that everyone understands, and that all is considered, thereby increasing the chance for harmony and balance in the community and with everything else. As each person or being relates to the focal point, and if lines were drawn to indicate this relatedness, then the results would be the spokes of a wheel, and all the participants are encircled by the unity of this experience. This might be called an "Internal Model."

The community is a product of the culture, which consists of several important elements that can be theorized as the "Internal Model." The internal consists of the person, families, societies like clans, or councils, and all these units are related by kinship and interrelated. This network or system makes up the tribal village or towns, or possibly a band, and these units make up the tribal nation. Hence, identity of the tribal nation derives from the community of internalness, the keeper of traditional knowledge. The identification of tribal nation is more identified with the modern era of American Indian history, especially in the twentieth century, whereas before 1900, tribes more likely viewed themselves as communities in their tribal languages.

The Internal Model frequently comes into conflict with external forces deriving from another community, nation, culture or civilization. The obvious example is the confrontation of the tribal communities or nations like the Muscogee Creeks and the white American mainstream. There are three experiences that occur in this arrangement: (1) the existence or evolution of the tribal community, (2) the existence or evolution of the other (external) community, and (3) the interchange or dynamics of exchange between the two spheres of cultures.

In modern society, American Indians of traditional thought are functioning outside of their cultural worlds for a large percentage of their life. Furthermore, they are products of two educational means and two cultures. Initially, this is difficult as the traditional person strives to learn in the non-Indian educational system. But, once this is achieved, then this individual can draw upon the traditional knowledge and mainstream knowledge to put forth a modern Indian intellectualism.

The importance of Indian intellectualism is contributing answers to difficult questions today. It is very possible that many answers can come from tribal cultures and be applied to mainstream problems. How would this happen? If order exists in a traditional perspective, how can traditional knowledge of a tribal culture be applied to a problematic condition of the mainstream?

Hypothetically, the problem has to exist in an order of things or systems. The first task is to learn all the factors involved, to research for

all the items influencing possible cause of the problem. This would involve studying and determining which items are directly or internally involved, and which are indirectly or externally influential. Beyond observing and studying, the next step is finding out how all the internal and external factors are involved, as it may be that the problem is caused by another problem. Hence, the problem has to be understood before it can be permanently solved (thus avoiding temporary solutions and quick results that permit the problem to occur again). It may also be determined that the problem is unsolvable and this is a part of accepting the Natural Order of things.[19]

Next, what are the possible sources to use to solve the problem? The best of all worlds would be to apply something that is familiar, but this may not be possible. It has to be determined what the possible resources are for the solution. In fact, this situation may present a problem. If the resources are not accessible for a proposed solution, then one must be patient for indicators, probably while studying the situation, for ideas, and perhaps a vision of the whole matter, which would likely put everything—the problem, solution, and human relationships—into the context of the vision, which may be called a mental image.

An Indian way of "seeing" exists, according to a native perspective about all things. It is a cooperative effort between the subconscious and conscious mind and influenced by one's tribal culture and personal experiences. As a result, dreams, daydreaming, imagining, and visions are pertinent to "Indian thinking" and this realization becomes a part of the logic and decision-making process of thought. In every dream and vision are clues of knowledge and/or revelations about what all people seek to understand. Although the conscious mind is the rational part of thinking, native people have learned to consider carefully what the subconscious part of the brain has to offer. "Seeing" in the Indian way is how traditionalists of indigenous cultures understand life, and it is the basis of their indigenous logic. Although many Native Americans have been educated in mainstream public schools, American Indians who are close to their traditions still "see" things from an indigenous perspective. This logic derives from their natural ethos as a people whose communities still believe in the old ways of life, and they remain viable in the twenty-first century.

NOTES

1. Angie Debo, *The Road to Disappearance: A History of the Creek Indians* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1941), 15.

2. For the origin of the Muscogee Creeks, see John R. Swanton, *Early History of the Creek Indians and Their Neighbors*, Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin 73 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1922) and John R. Swanton, "The Social History and Usages of the Creek Confederacy," *Forty-Second Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1928), 1–900.
3. For discussion of Muscogee Creek traditions and other members of the Five Civilized Tribes in the late nineteenth century, see Theda Perdue, *Nations Remembered, An Oral History of the Five Civilized Tribes, 1865–1907* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980), 87–115. For history and cultural information about the Creeks, see Angie Debo, *The Road to Disappearance*, 3–399; Michael Green, *The Politics of Indian Removal: Creek Government and Society* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 1–237; J. Leitch Wright, Jr., *Creeks and Seminoles, The Destruction and Regeneration of the Muscogulgee People* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 1–382. For cultural information on the Seminoles of Oklahoma, refer to James H. Howard in collaboration with Willie Lena, *Oklahoma Seminoles, Medicine, Magic and Religion* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990), 1–279.
4. Jean Chaudhuri and Joyotpaul Chaudhuri, *A Sacred Path: The Way of the Muscogee Creeks* (Los Angeles: UCLA American Indian Studies Center, 2001), 2.
5. John Neihardt, ed., *Black Elk Speaks: Being the Life Story of a Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux* (New York: Pocket Books, 1973), seventh printing, 41.
6. Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks*, 36.
7. Ed McGaa, *Native Wisdom: Perceptions of the Natural Way* (Minneapolis: Four Directions Publishing, 1995), 36–37.
8. Gustav Davidson, *A Dictionary of Angels: Including the Fallen Angels* (New York: The Free Press, 1967), xviii.
9. Jamake Highwater's *The Primal Mind* (New York: Harper and Row, 1981) is a philosophical study of the American Indian, and the author demonstrates how Indians differ in their thinking from the dominant society.
10. Marvin Grosswirth, Abbie F. Salny, Alan Stillson, and members of the American Mensa, Ltd., *Match Wits with Mensa* (Cambridge, MA: Perseus Books, 1981), xiii–xiv.
11. Floyd O'Neil, "Commentary" on "Perspectives on The Writing of Indian History from the Indian Point of View," *Breaking Barriers*, edited by David L. Beaulieu, "Occasional Paper Series," No. 1, December 1974, 38.
12. Studies that point out the different perspective of Indians from the mainstream include Robert C. Breuing, "Hopi Perspectives on Formal Education" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Kansas, 1973) and Laura M. Lowry, "Differences in Visual Perception and Auditory Discrimination Between American Indian and White Kindergarten Children," *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, Vol. 3, No. 4, July 1970, 359–363.
13. Some years ago, Judith Kleinfield, an anthropologist, observed that children of the Tlingit Indian village of Angoon frequently crowded the local cinema and could recall minute details of the films they had watched. This extraordinary visual ability is applied as a learning technique among American Indian groups. See Estelle Fuchs and Robert Havighurst, *To Live on This Earth: American Indian Education* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1973), 122.
14. Peter MacDonald with Ted Schwarz, *The Last Warrior: Peter MacDonald and the Navajo Nation* (New York: Orion Books, 1993), 4.
15. Alfonso Ortiz, "Ritual Drama and the Pueblo World View," in Alfonso Ortiz, ed., *New Perspectives on the Pueblos* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1972), 137.
16. Fox Butterfield, "Why They Excel," *Parade* magazine, *South Bend Tribune*, January 21, 1990, 1.

17. Some insight into traditional Indian learning methods is in J.A. Fitzgerald and W.W. Ludeman, "The Intelligence of Indian Children," *Journal of Comparative Psychology*, Vol. 6, No. 4, August 1926, 319–328.
18. See Robert Berkhofer, *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indians from Columbus to the Present* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), 1–261.
19. See Benjamin Lee Whorf, "An American Indian Model of the Universe," in Dennis and Barbara Tedlock, *Teaching From the American Earth; Indian Religion and Philosophy* (New York: Liveright, 1975), 121–129.