

## E008: Transcript: Words & Meanings – Our Conversations

[Peter] (0:03 - 1:15)

Well, good morning, Steve.

[Steve]

Good morning, how are you?

[Peter]

Doing very well.

Today's conversation is going to be about our conversations. I mean, that may seem a little bit looking at our navels, but I've gotten some sense of feedback from people like they like listening to our conversations, but what motivates them? What guides them?

Do we have any path that we're following or kind of urges and inclinations? How is it that we're focused on domination? Why did that happen?

And how is it that we're able to stand outside domination? And I started thinking about your domination translator, as you call it. And maybe you could say something about the history of that.

Like, when did you start actually focusing on domination as a phenomenon, a concept, a history, all of that, and then integrate that into your presentation or text where you use your brackets and put the word in every time you come across a word that implies or incorporates or means domination. So, take off.

[Steve] (1:15 - 10:33)

Well, that's a fascinating subject for me because it requires me to go back to pretty much the beginning of my efforts to make sense of Johnson versus McIntosh, federal Indian law, going back to the history, reading Burying My Heart at Wounded Knee by D. Brown when I was about 16 years old, and then getting into reading Vine Deloria Jr. and more contemporary accounts of what was going on, not just with the law, but with history. And when I say the law, I always want to add two letters to the word the, I-R, their law.

But as I began to get deeper into all of that and began to want to make sense of the Johnson versus McIntosh ruling in particular, I would use the dictionary a lot, and I would look up key terms. So, if I see a word such as ascendancy, I don't really know what that means. I have the sense that it's upward somehow.

And when Marshall says the character and religion of its inhabitants, meaning the continent's inhabitants, afforded an apology, meaning created an excuse or rationale for considering them as a people over whom the superior genius of Europe might claim an ascendancy, well, what does that mean? It was a convoluted sentence to begin with, but then when I looked it up at some point, maybe not initially, maybe I never looked it up for years, but when I did finally do so, I saw controlling influence, governing power, domination. I thought, oh, wow, look at that.

But one of the key points of my research was when I came across the book by William Brandon, *New Worlds for Old*. I think it's 1987, but I wouldn't swear to it. And he does a very excellent accounting of the etymology of the word dominion, and he takes it through a Latin dictionary and looks at all these little details of it and how it relates back to dominium, the Latin word dominium.

And then he has a sentence at the end of his extended paragraph, political power grown from property, dominium, was in effect domination. So, oh, that's interesting, ascendancy, and then domination. So, then I started to associate every time I see the word dominion, I would associate that with what Brandon was saying about domination.

And it was kind of at that point that I really began to zero in on that theme and that idea. And I used to do a lot of reading in other areas as well, without getting into a lot of that, but there was one author in particular from India, Sri Aurobindo, and he had these massive, I mean, you have to be a mental masochist to read Aurobindo. At least his philosophy was really something else.

But he had some really amazing, he was an extraordinary intellect, and he had some amazing essays on the future, but also on the past. And one of the themes that he kept hammering was domination, and particularly the domination of women and this sort of thing. There again.

So, I just kept seeing this theme. Every so often it would crop up. Well, when you kindly assisted us to have our Indigenous Law Institute website up on the internet through NativeWeb and all that, if you go back and look at that website, you'll see that I have the empire domination model.

Now, that's mid-1990s. And in 1993, I had already published my law review article, kindly published by New York University School of Law, *The Evidence of Christian Nationalism in Federal Indian Law, and Doctrine of Discovery, Johnson versus McIntosh, and Plenary Power*. So, I was already putting all those pieces together, noticing these various strands of meaning, and how that theme of domination just kept coming up, but also it's related to empire.

And then I didn't have the comfort zone within myself, the psychological, I don't know, it sounded so extreme. If I started saying domination, people would think that there was something wrong with the way I'm presenting the information. Isn't that weird how there's some kind of timidity that you become timid and, well, can I really say this?

And it took me years and years to get over that. And so finally, when I got to the comfort zone, which is maybe in the last 15 years or so, of being able to use that term and use it very openly and regularly and so forth, I eventually developed a list. I would sit with this stuff for a long time, and I looked up the word civilization at one point, and I had looked it up before, but it depends on the dictionary as well.

Some dictionaries will have this particular definition, the forcing of a cultural pattern on a population to which it is foreign. Well, the forcing of a cultural pattern on another nation or people is obviously domination. And so then I began to realize, wow, all

these different terms, the word state, Max Weber saying the state is a relation of men dominating men.

For the state to exist, the dominated must submit themselves to the authority claimed by the powers that be. Well, that's also dependent on the translators of Weber, because maybe not every translation looks exactly like that, but that's the one that I have that's handy. And so then I realized, well, let me put these key terms into a list, and I came up with seven main terms.

I've added the word government to the list since then, but the seven key terms are civilization, state, sovereignty, because Jonathan Havercroft defines that as an unjust form of political domination that limits human freedom, ascendancy, dominion, property, and empire. Civilization, state, sovereignty, ascendancy, dominion. Did I say state?

Sovereignty, dominion, empire. So in any case, those seven key terms, and they repeat over and over, and you see them all the time, but nobody's going to look at the word state and think, oh, yeah, domination. Maybe some people, if they're experts in the field, but not typically in everyday use of language.

Even civilization, any of those terms, really. And sovereignty, people are using that term as an effort to fight the good fight, but then they'll put tribal at the front of it, which really means, as you pointed out the other day, diminished. Nobody looks at tribal sovereignty and says, yeah, we have diminished sovereignty, but that's what it means.

And so the way in which English is so ambiguous, the extent to which it is so ambiguous, makes it necessary to have a lot of these types of detailed understandings and connect the dots in a very creative fashion. And then I ultimately came up with this idea, hey, why don't I do something where I take, I'll call it the domination translator, and when I come upon the word sovereignty, or if I'm writing the word sovereignty, I'll just put domination in brackets after it. Civilization, domination, and so forth.

Then the state of domination, the claim, well, what's it all based on? Them coming and asserting or assuming or claiming a right of domination. I don't want to say they have the right, because they don't.

So I want to say it's a claim that they're making. And it's a bogus claim as far as I'm concerned, but they're making it nonetheless. And they don't realize they're making that claim.

They're just using language without any real conscious awareness, maybe at the highest level of the state department, legal affairs office or something, but they may have some sense of this. I'm sure they do. But for the most part, the average everyday person does not.

So that's just a real quick rundown of how I came upon all that.

[Peter] (10:33 - 14:43)

That's terrific, Steve. It's so insightful. A few things are occurring to me, your list, the list of seven things.

And I think we could add, if we get into normal language, like people, normal, just daily language, people talk about property, as you pointed out, there's domination within the concept of property. So if you back up a half step, you maybe begin to see that because when you have a landlord, you have lordship built into the person that supposedly, quote, owns that property. And so domination immediately becomes apparent where just with the word property by itself, it doesn't become apparent, unless you've done the kind of analysis that you've done.

And as soon as landlord becomes a kind of common term, and it certainly is a common term in US English, used over and over again, then if you back up another half step, you just take off the land and you say, well, what lordship? And you mean, so lordship is built into ordinary thinking in daily life. And so those other terms that you're using are also built in, government is built into ordinary daily life, state is built into ordinary daily language.

And these concepts of domination become normalized. It's not that they become normalized, they've already been normalized, we're born into a society in which domination is somehow normal. So it's not thought of domination, because as you pointed out, the word domination sounds bad.

So other words are used, which have the same effect in terms of what is happening institutionally, but the dressing has been changed, the clothing has been changed. It's like when you talk about the emperor's new clothes. And when you talk about the, we didn't do it today, but you use the phrase, the view from the ships versus the view from the shore.

So the ships, the view from the ships is people who are traveling with a domination framework in mind. Now, partly, they're very explicit about this, because they have a piece of paper from a king, which is a dominator. And probably they're all aware that the king is some kind of dominating force.

You're not even allowed to talk about the mortality of the king, that was a crime, that was treason, actually, under their laissez-majester rules. So domination was inherent in that English society. If we just stick with England for a minute, but we know that we can expand this to France and Spain and Portugal and back to the Catholic Church, etc., the Roman Church, these concepts of domination were actually valorized. These were supposed to be good things. As you pointed out, one of the papal bulls talks about he from whom empires and dominations and all good things proceed. So back up to what I was saying, the people on the ship, their view is of a world in which domination is normal, it is expected, it is God-ordained.

And whether they considered it sometimes objectionable or not, nevertheless, it was simply there, it was part of it. So that's the mental framework that they brought when they came across the ocean on their ships. And I started to say, partly, they had a very clear, sharp idea that they were out to dominate whatever they found.

And they had their weapons to bring with them, and they had their markers of dominion to bring with them. They had all of that as an explicit project. But what I'm curious about that is spurred by your domination translator, is the extent to which, in

addition to their, or as a companion to their explicit intent to dominate, where domination did not exist, at least Christian domination did not exist.

In addition to that, they carried with them their own normalized, of course, there's domination, how else could we live viewpoint?

[Steve] (14:44 - 17:26)

Well, okay, but let me jump in there and add what I think is a kind of a key point. Domination is perhaps the most negative term in the English language. If not the most, it's certainly one of the most negative terms.

You'll see among Christian writers, them talking about Islamic domination, but you won't see them, any reference to Christian domination, wouldn't happen. You'd never see those two paired together. And in fact, when we went to interview Dr. Luis Rivera Pagan in Puerto Rico, I happened to have a priest had the window seat, there was an empty seat between us, and I had the aisle, and I eventually had the opportunity to discuss some of this with him. And when I gave him that sentence, not just the one that you mentioned already, him from whom empires and dominations and all good things proceed, but the one about the quesu back to Ali, dominio temporale, alicorum, dominorum, Christianorum, constitute nonescent. So the dominorum Christianorum, I translated that to him as Christian dominators, or I might've even said Christian domination. I might've said that, but he said, he said, well, that's not possible because domination does not go with Christianity.

So he rejected it. The point I'm making is that they had a sense of whatever the heck they had a sense of on the deck of the ship, they had the sense of those documents and the authorization, but I don't think any of them thought in terms of their own effort to go and dominate. And that's the amazing thing in terms of the skill and the subtlety of how very negative things in the hands of a very skilled writer, the euphemisms that are used to cloak what's actually going on, that's an extraordinary skill.

So what I'm getting at is from the viewpoint of the shoreline, looking at the ship, it's domination. From the viewpoint of the people on that ship, it's all the other synonyms for domination. It's all the other terminologies that are not understood by them as domination at all.

[Peter] (17:26 - 20:12)

Yes, that's really, you've said it. What I was trying to say, you just said, is that what they were carrying in their minds was domination, but it was not a consciousness of domination. So when they thought about their king, they thought about obedience, let's say, or they thought about the divine protection that they were getting.

And certainly, when you can quote from a papal bull that says in Latin, Christian domination, and you have a priest who says, oh no, that's impossible, then what has transpired there? It means that that Latin is being read by the priest without actually making, even though the Latin word dominium is in there, it's not translated that way. It's translated into something like realm, or what are the words?

Or rule, sway, those type of terms, right? Jurisdiction, even though jurisdiction, that's another word, by the way, that people use all the time, but what does it mean? Jurisdiction means the power of the law to speak.

The domain, if I can use that word, in which a given rule can be applied. So the jurisdiction of the Federal District Court for the Southern District of New York, that's a defined geographic boundary around the power of that court to speak the law. Now, who is thinking of that as domination?

And yet, what else is it but a kind of form of rule, which is, in a sense, unchallengeable, except by going to a higher court for a district like it's, okay, now we're going to talk about it's the Second Circuit. And then above that is the Supreme Court. So we have layers of jurisdiction.

And at any point that somebody says, well, this is all a system of domination, people generally would turn and say, what are you talking about? I mean, you know, don't get in the way here. Don't mess up the thing with irrelevant comments.

And I can imagine that maybe when you first started working with, you know, realizing what you were onto with this word domination, when you said you were hesitant, is because you sense that people are not ready initially to hear this, but it has to be said, because otherwise, there's no clarity. And I guess I want to ask you another question. I know you've studied cognitive theory.

And is there any way in which you were relating your understanding of the use of language to give metaphors for domination, let's call them? Or, you know, is there what's the cognitive? Did you have you dived into that?

[Steve] (20:12 - 24:33)

Yeah. Well, certainly. Well, I wanted to give credit to Stephen Winter in his book, A Clearing in the Forest, Law, Life, and Mind.

I think it came out in 2001. But what I, particularly through his book, I realized that there's a background, a background framework of meaning that's not evident in the words. We speak these words, there are all kinds of implications.

I'll give you a really key example. When Cristóbal Colón went to that first island, landed on that first island, and then he had his ceremonial possession, as they call it, and he decided to name the island San Salvador, Holy Savior. Nobody's going to think of that as a term of domination.

Even that act is not understood as domination. And we're, as younger people, just reading all kinds of stuff, and we're going very fast, and reading these and taking the terms at face value, and so forth. So, but in that term, that's an example of metaphors.

It's the application of a name for one thing and applying it to something else. So, you're thinking of that island in terms of this other thing called Holy Savior, which is the entirety of Christianity. And that little piece, that little part, is called a synecdoche or metonymy, the part that stands for the whole, for the entirety of the Christian theology and all that, the Bible and so forth.

But nobody's thinking that. They just see San Salvador. And so, how many people are conscious of the fact that that background is operating just through those two words in Spanish?

Now, so that's one example. But going back to the idea of landlord, and this is where it gets fascinating, because the extent to which a person is able to go into all the minutia and has the patience to go into the etymology of these various terms and realize, oh, dominion is also related to dhammayati in Sanskrit. And there's a term called dominus and domanus.

Dominus is he who has subdued, past tense, and domanus is he who subdues, present, I mean, as kind of the nature of that being, that person to subdue, which is this word subdue is a synonym for domination. So, he who has dominated is a translation of the word for the Lord, Lord. And dominus, the same thing, the Lord.

These are two terms for Lord. Now, how many people would know that? And so, if you go to a particular type of religious service and you hear domini, domini, domini, domini, domini, domini for the whole entire service, throughout the entire service, you hear this term, what does that term mean?

Lord. But notice how it's connected to the theme of domination. Dominium, dominion, dominio, domini is the same root, the same operating framework that's being used and applied.

No one, and I mean no one within the flock or the congregation is going to think, oh, yes, the dominator. They're not going to think. The Lord's prayer, the dominator's prayer, they're not going to think that.

So, from another perspective or vantage point, it's possible to put those pieces together, but then you run the risk of, oh, you're going to really offend people because how dare you point out that these things are that, well, I'm sorry, but that those connections are there. So, you can't really avoid it.

[Peter] (24:33 - 29:03)

Yeah, you know, I'm on a little bit of a side path with some work I'm doing about Constantine, and we've alluded to once in a while when the Roman church became weaponized. And I'm thinking that in a certain way, I'm thinking of this as being helpful is to salvage Jesus from this picture. Because it's my understanding, as I said, I'm still working on this.

I don't think there's anything that is quoted, not that there's any way reliable source to say, oh, yes, he said this, it was on such and such a day in such and such a place. But the words that have been carried down is like, this is what Jesus said. I don't think that there's anything that said that he was, he says, call me Lord and bow down to me.

And therefore, when did lordship come in? When did the prayer becomes the Lord's prayer? I don't know the answers to these questions, but I just think there's a way in which we're, as we travel back through Western civilization, we're going to begin to see the beginnings, we're going to begin to see the beginnings of certain ways of articulating this hierarchical structure of domination and basing it on what?

That's what I'm wondering right now. What were these prelates and popes and all the rest of them relying on to say, oh, now I can tell you this is what it is, it's the Lord and you have to bow down. But so I want to shift a little bit to another set of names,

because what you're talking about is the ways like that priest on the plane or the person in the church, there's a translation process going on in their head.

And to the extent that they're aware of it, then they're going to be somewhat puzzled. And they're going to resist calling it by this other name, they want to just keep the first name that they were happy with. And, or at least weren't questioning.

And I think that we can use there's this familiar debate about what is the name for these original inhabitants that John Marshall referred to the inhabitants, its inhabitants. Well, they were calling them Indians. And I think pretty much everybody knows the reason they were called Indians, because Columbus didn't know where he was when he arrived at this place that he thought was Indian, he called it San Salvador.

So he was actually not only applying a name that he was just pulling out of his own head, but he was thinking that he was somewhere else. So he was actually in his own head in more ways than one, he wasn't where he actually was. And so that name is problematic in at least those two ways.

And so there's been a sense over the decades that, oh, well, that's a misnomer. So we shouldn't use the word Indian, that's the I word, we shouldn't use it. And of course, it's so embedded, it's part of the law, it's part of federal Indian law.

So it's kind of hard to get around that. So then the next thing was, well, they're American Indians. And they say, well, American Indians, well, let's see, America didn't exist when Columbus landed here.

So how could they be American Indians? When did the Indians become American Indians? How could that be?

And so then that was a little problematic. So then, well, let's say call them Native Americans. Well, that's just as problematic, because, as I said, America didn't exist.

So the search for what's an acceptable way to hide this gross mistake of geography, and this imposition of a dominion, of a domination over the so-called original inhabitants. And recently, there's been a kind of, well, in the last decade or so, the move is toward the word Indigenous. It's like, no, now there's no problem with that.

Indigenous just means that they're here. Well, there's a level of meaning of the word Indigenous. It means yes, it's just here.

This plant is Indigenous to this mountain range. But as you worked with the UN documents that we talked about, well, we haven't talked about in these conversations, but we worked together on that some years ago, the United Nations puts forward the idea of Indigenous peoples' rights. But when it comes to, well, who are the Indigenous peoples, it falls back into domination.

Do you want to share your memory about the phrasing of that?

[Steve] (29:03 - 33:49)

Sure. Well, the thing is that Columbus didn't speak English. Yeah, that's another reason.

Sorry. So Indios was most likely the term used. And I read long ago, but I don't recall the source, that anything toward in the direction of the Indies was, the people were called Indios because they were the people of the Indies.

And that was the indicator. So they were toward India, toward the Indian, but any distant lands in a direction across an ocean was toward the Indies. That's why you see in the, somewhere in the Caribbean region is the area called the West Indies.

And I believe that's connected. Okay. Then when you take the word Indio and you translate, or you create an English word based on Indios or Indio, then you end up with Indian.

Indianer is a more of a Germanic or Dutch type of pronunciation of the term. So there's various iterations of it. And, but with regard to Indigenous, to come back to your initial question, it's, I received this, I forget how I received it, many, many, many years ago, back in the 1990s, I ended up with a pamphlet, fact sheet number nine from the Human Rights Center.

And in New York, I believe it is in New York, could be the Geneva Human Rights Center, but nonetheless, this particular document was referring to Indigenous peoples as the descendants of the peoples that were existing in a given place when a second population came in and through conquest, settlement, and other means, established dominance over them or in that area. Okay. So when I saw that, I thought, well, hey, here's that same pattern, the domination pattern.

And like I said, by the mid 90s, I was onto this, but this was maybe even a little before that. But I noticed that, okay, so as I got into more definitions, they're always called working definitions. There's no single definition of Indigenous.

People are very emphatic about that. And, but nonetheless, this particular point, key point is something that people just gloss right, they just don't even notice it. So we had an occasion, a gathering of us that were working in the international arena.

And I brought this up and a particular person said, well, no, it doesn't mean that. And they ended up going through the definition and considered themselves distinct from other sectors of society now prevailing. And I said, well, what does prevailing mean?

It means dominating. So right there, that tells you something. But what they were focused on, oh, is they consider themselves distinct.

They have their own identity, but they also have a continuity in terms of their connection to their ancestors and that sort of thing. So they were focused on that. They weren't focused on this other aspect that I'm talking about.

Once you become aware of that, it's pretty difficult to ignore it. So what you'll see is terms such as pre-invasion. Well, that's pre-domination.

Or they have a pre-existence. Well, what kind of pre-existence? Oh, a free and independent.

They don't say that, though. So we have to understand that the people operating within the UN system are very skilled with their use of language, and they know how to create these little details. We'll just skirt around that so we don't make it explicit that they were free and independent.

But once this other invading force came in, now it's no longer pre-invasion, it's post-invasion. Well, that's post-domination. And that's the beauty of the domination translator, because every single time that you see an example of the domination system, you're going to call it out and point it out to people.

[Peter] (33:49 - 39:23)

Yeah. So to jump back to the beginning of this conversation, it's obvious that the way that this works, the domination translator, and the way you arrived at it was by parsing words, parsing sentences, looking closely at language, looking at etymologies, looking at the history of the meaning of a given word. It's intertwining with other words that seem to be different words, but they're actually related words.

And sifting through all of that and bringing it back into the present so that we have a lens with which to read the words that are written to see through them to what the meanings of those words are, the deep meanings of those words are. And I get the sense often that there are people, even people who send praise to us, oh yes, you guys really made so much sense. I'm thinking that very often people who think they are somehow pro-native, pro-indigenous, they're not rooted in the work that you're talking about.

They're dealing with the end product. So that they say, oh yes, the indigenous peoples, they want to use that word. They don't want to use the word Indian.

They don't want to use the word Native American, the indigenous peoples. And they haven't quite grasped that indigenous people's language, the rhetoric in international UN documents perpetuates the same thing that all the other labels did. And so if we bring that out, as you've done today, I'm thinking they're going to become perplexed.

At some point, they're going to say, wait a minute, you mean it doesn't really matter the word that we're using if that word can be translated into domination. So when we talk about federal Indian law specifically, over and over again, we hear about the trust doctrine, the trust relationship. Well, as we know by analyzing the Cherokee Nation v.

Georgia case and related cases, that's a phrase that says domination. It's not a phrase that says, oh, this is wonderful, loving, caring, delightful. This is a phrase that says we're in charge and we'll tell you what to do.

And it'll be for your best interest as determined by us. And that's been pretty well stated explicitly in recent Supreme Court cases. So that anybody who's looking at the rhetoric today saying, oh, yes, the federal government has a trust relationship.

And if we expose just by simple analysis of the text of those documents and related documents, if we expose it, what you're saying is, oh, yes, the domination relationship is really good. They're going to say, wait a minute, I didn't say that. I said the trust relationship is good.

And we say, yes, but look at what the word means in the context of so-called federal Indian law. And then you go through, connect all the dots, and they say, so what am I supposed to say about that? What about that relationship?

What about the responsibility? You say, well, the government has not declared that it has any such responsibility. The trust is not a trust in any common understanding of it.

So in a sense, our analysis is throwing a lot of people for a loop, I think, because they don't know what language anymore to use. They're losing confidence in their ability to express what they're thinking and feeling because they realize that the language that's available to them, the cognitive structures that are available to them, are problematic. And to my way of thinking, that's actually good that they come to that point.

I remember during my teaching years, sometimes a student would come up after I had taken apart Cherokee Nation, let's say. And they say, oh, I'm so disillusioned. And I would say, that's great.

You got rid of the illusion. That's wonderful. And they'd be perplexed, like, well, wait a minute, disillusionment feels bad.

And I say, that's a real forward step. That's the first step to begin to get anywhere is to say that what you were caught up in was an illusion. And it segues back to the notion of the emperor's new clothes because the clothes are a surface.

And when you say, well, what's behind that surface rhetoric of trust and responsibility, et cetera? Oh, it's the same old domination. Oh, well, wait a minute.

And then the wait a minute is where we should just say, yes, that's the beginning point. The wait a minute is a beginning point. You cannot assume that the rhetoric that you've, the narrative you've been given, no matter how much it's been propped up with all kinds of wonderful rainbow flags and gatherings and beaded moccasins and all the rest of it, you can't assume that that narrative is anything but a lie.

In fact, anything but a decoy away from the truth, not only a lie, but an intentional decoy away from the truth. And so when you think about, just jump back to Cherokee Nation again, you say, so wait a minute, if the trust relationship, if we just use it in its own words now, is because the inhabitants are wards, then you say, well, now, wait a minute, how long ago was that? That was about 200 years ago.

So are the native peoples today still wards? Are they still incompetent? They still can't manage themselves?

Is that true? Because that's what the doctrine implies. And so that would open up another whole, from some point of view, can of worms, but for us, a can of enlightenment, take this stuff out.

[Steve] (39:24 - 41:27)

Well, let me just, in my book, I say, pick your misnomer. They're all misnomers. Yeah.

So in the sense of a misnaming, but then a lot of people jump to a conclusion. They say, oh, I know you don't like that word, such, whatever the word is. I know you don't want us using it.

That's not what I'm saying. I'm not saying that you shouldn't use, I mean, maybe in a certain sense, that you have choices. And I want people to be aware of the choices they're making, that when they make those choices, there also, there's this background information that they might not be aware of ordinarily.

And so occasionally I use indigenous, but that's, I also wanted to move away from that to an extent. So I began to use original nations, original peoples, because Marshall, of course, we've talked about that before, has that sentence where he's talking about the original fundamental principle, the discovery gave title to those who made the discovery. Well, what the heck?

They're not original and they're not fundamental. So why is he grabbing those words for them? We need to pull those back for us.

And that's where the use of the word, the loose use of the word rhetoric is interesting because I studied and majored in rhetoric and communication, and rhetoric is the art of persuasion. It's the faculty for finding all the available means of persuasion in a given situation. That's Aristotle.

And so, you know, I have pretty deep grounding in all that. But the thing is with regard to, well, with those terms, the use of various terms, they are problematic, but we just have to kind of work through that. And anyway, that was a key point I wanted to make.

[Peter] (41:27 - 41:45)

Yeah. Well, in a way, I'm thinking this is a leap back to our conversation about quantum physics and quantum fields is that we're going to get into, we're going to come back to that in another conversation after you found that 1941 physics book. No, 53.

[Steve] (41:45 - 41:57)

My dad's textbook, college textbook, physics textbook. Yeah. And that was really a treat to see that.

And we'll get into that later.

[Peter] (41:57 - 43:47)

The reason I'm referring to it is that there's a certain language of classical physics that's related to the idea that nature is dead. Things are dead. The only thing that matters is physical objects and the measurement numbering relations among physical objects.

And that was part of the whole world of mechanics, physical, mechanical understanding of what the world was all about, or they claim it is all about. So then that's all been kind of blown away. The wind has been taken out of the sails of that by quantum understanding of physics.

And yet, this is the only thing I want to say, I don't want to go deeper into it. But and yet, in ordinary daily life, people are walking around in a classical physical universe. And what is happening now, I think in the world as there's so much turmoil about what is a legitimate government and what is a legitimate authority, words where people are using words that if they translate, is there any such thing as legitimate domination, etc?

Is there a difference between domination and authority? Is there a difference between domination and leadership? I mean, a lot of things can begin to be opened up in a time of what is really a kind of time of turmoil, but it's a time when a lot of light can come in through the cracks in the old system.

And so as the world turns out to be different from what people think, the same words actually might be used, but in a very different way, as well as there having to be discarded words, and new words are put in, or old words in which new meanings are found, or you know, etc. All of this working with words, that's what we do, is work with words. And everything else is pouring out of this.

[Steve] (43:47 - 44:53)

Well, and I remember the idea I wanted to convey, which was the idea of trust. So if you want to talk about a trust relationship, it's fascinating that if it's a domination relationship, and you've been conditioned from a young age to always refer to it as a trust relationship, think about that sentence again and apply it to the United States. If it's not a single hymn, if it's a system such as the U.S., we trust in the U.S. from which empires and dominations and all good things proceed. Isn't that amazing, to apply that? So what has happened, I believe, is that we as Native people have been conditioned to apply a very favorable sounding term, trust, confidence, to a horrific system of domination, and not realizing that that's even going on.

[Peter] (44:54 - 47:05)

Yes, yes. And you made a similar point a few minutes ago about so-called tribal sovereignty, which according to the actual official definition is diminished sovereignty, or even non-sovereignty, all right? And so the use of these words has been, well, it was actually the whole point of the boarding schools.

We'll have to get into that getting near the end of today's session, but the idea of the boarding schools, Colonel Henry Pratt's idea was you actually change the cognitive structure of these children's minds. You take them away from a community in which there were leaders, but not dominators, and so there are what we could use in English, we'd say authority patterns, but in non-English, other languages, they would have some completely different way of being talked about. What is the relationship between this person and that person?

And relationship terms are very frequently, they're the most common thing in my understanding of Native language. Certainly what I learned in Navajo is constant awareness of relationships. And so, take a child out of that and put a child into another setting in which relationships are also key, but the relationships have been stratified and made into a structure, cognitive structure, which obscures, it's felt by the children, I'm sure, because there were beatings and all the rest of it, it's felt physically, but eventually over the course of the boarding school operation, the minds of the children have been taught to, let's use these words, these are good

words. These are the words we can count on from the great white father who has our quote, best interest in mind as he sees it, etc.

There's so much that involves language, words, the teaching of a new language, the obliteration of an old language, all circulating around words, language, meaning, etc. That's what guides, come back to the beginning when I said what guides the work and how did you come up with this? That's what it is.

It's a constant search. Now, why we do that, I don't know, between the two of us, something motivated.

[Steve] (47:05 - 48:11)

I know why I do it, because every time I would ask my father, what does a word mean? He'd say, look it up. He would never give me an answer.

He would always make me go and look it up, and I got into that habit of always looking up terms. I was very curious, so curiosity is a key factor. I want to end on this note, which is that the difference between talking about sovereignty and having that be our focus and talking about our original free existence, that pre-invasion free existence, before they ever showed up with their system of domination.

I think that's the critical part. I think when we, just as we use a term such as trust in an inappropriate way to refer to a domination system, it's also unfortunate to place our attention on a term of domination called sovereignty or even diminished sovereignty instead of our original free existence as a sacred birthright.

[Peter] (48:11 - 49:51)

Yes, and if I can have one last closing word, that your notion, we talked once before about what do we mean, that's how we got into quantum thinking, what is free existence, and that when we talk about it, I think this is a key difference, really, in general conversations that people have. Well, let's talk about native peoples, however they refer to them, is that there's a kind of museum quality to that. Oh, they used to be this, and you can go to a museum, and you can see the beaded moccasins that they used to wear, and somebody says, oh, they still wear them.

I've seen them at the powwow. You say, well, we're not really talking at that level, you and I. We're not talking at the level of sort of surface cultural practices.

We're talking about ways of life, and it's a question for us as we look around it in so-called native governments, tribal councils, to what extent that free existence has actually been lost or abdicated or suppressed, just like the old ceremonies used to be suppressed, and to what extent it's still available. And I have my sense of what you and I touch is that we're standing in that ground as a present understanding of the world, of the cosmos. It's not a past for us.

It's kind of like that notion, was it Foucault talking about history is the history of the present. We're in the present, and every time we refer to history, we're not talking about some musty archive that has kind of archaic interest, antiquated interest, but we're talking about, oh, we have discovered another little tendril of the still living root of a system of domination, and we are separating ourselves from that. We do not have to stand within that and try to figure out how to get out of it, but we're staying outside of it and seeing it.

[Steve] (49:52 - 50:22)

Yeah. Well, I think that the past and present are funny in English, you know, past, present, future, because we are a product of all of our past experiences at this moment. So, we have a past present, combine the two words together, and those are all tied into the future.

We can envision and work toward a positive future, but it'll be based upon what we've experienced up to this moment. So, that's probably a good place to leave it.

[Peter] (50:22 - 50:27)

Yes. Let's end it there, Steve. Wonderful conversation.

Thank you. Really appreciate it.

[Steve] (50:27 - 50:27)

Yeah.