A detailed painting of a forest interior. Tall, slender trees with dark trunks rise from a dense undergrowth. Sunlight filters through the canopy, creating a warm, golden glow in the upper right. In the foreground, large, lush green ferns are prominent. The overall atmosphere is serene and naturalistic.

# 3. Animacy, Animal Voices, and Anthropomorphism

## Ojibwe Animal Stories

ENGL133 Imagining Nature

From the *Oxford English Dictionary*

## Animate

1. Endowed with life, living, alive; (esp. in later use) alive and having the power of movement, like an animal.

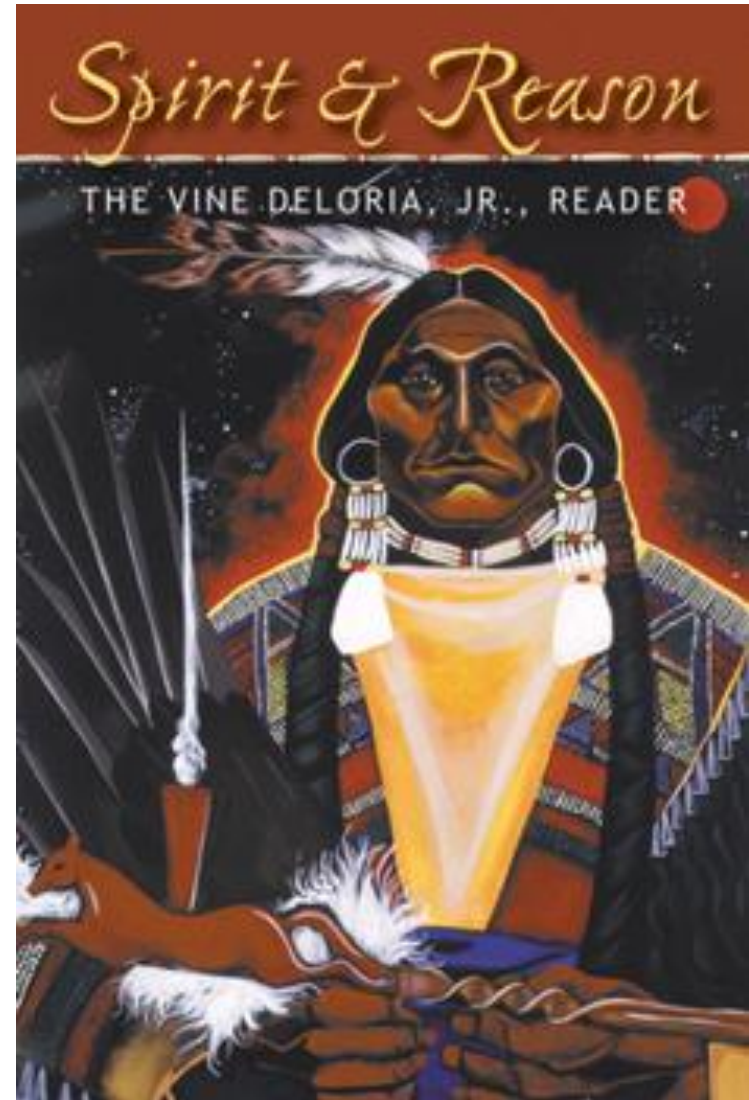
...

4. Lively; with the full activity of life; = *animated* adj.





Vine Deloria Jr. (1933-2005,  
Standing Rock Sioux)



## **Vine Deloria, “Kinship with the World”**

-the modern Western philosophical tradition makes several assumptions about the human and the nonhuman worlds that indigenous communities do not, such as

-There is a spiritual realm that is separated from the world that we see around us (e.g. Platonic thought that posits a more “real” world of forms that is elsewhere or like medieval Neoplatonic Christianity—like Alan of Lille)

-There is a separation between the human and the rest of the nonhuman world (this results in a disciplinary split between sciences (object=the world beyond the human) and social sciences/ humanities (object=the human, whether politics, history, art, psychology, etc))

On the kin relationships between animals and human:

“It is not a relationship of conquest or of imperialism. It is a relationship in which both basic divisions of the world look back to a time when they had to find some means of allocating responsibilities in the world. Kin are extremely important in this view of the universe. There are those animals that approach specific human beings and give them specific powers.”

-Vine Deloria, “Kinship with the World” 227.

To whom does our language extend the grammar of animacy? Naturally, plants and animals are animate, but as I learn, I am discovering that the Potawatomi understanding of what it means to be animate diverges from the list of attributes of living beings we all learned in Biology 101. In Potawatomi 101, rocks are animate, as are mountains and water and fire and places. Beings that are imbued with spirit, our sacred medicines, our songs, drums, and even stories, are all animate. The list of the inanimate seems to be smaller, filled with objects that are made by people [for example, a table]. Of an inanimate being, like a table, we say, “What is it?” And we answer *Dopwen yewe*. Table it is. But of apple, we must say, “Who is that being?” And reply *Mshimin yawe*. Apple that being is. ... The language reminds us, in every sentence, of our kinship with all of the animate world.

-Kimmerer, “Learning the Grammar of Animacy,” 55-56

The arrogance of English is that the only way to be animate, to be worthy of respect and moral concern, is to be a human.

A language teacher I know explained that grammar is just the way we chart relationships in language. Maybe it also reflects our relationships with each other. Maybe a grammar of animacy could lead us to whole new ways of living in the world, other species a sovereign people, a world with a democracy of species, not a tyranny of one. ... Imagine walking through a richly inhabited world of Birch people, Bear people, Rock people, beings we think of and therefore speak of as persons worthy of our respect, of inclusion in a peopled world.

-Kimmerer, “Learning the Grammar of Animacy,” 57-58

**What models of animacy and anthropomorphism do we find in the Ojibwe narratives that we read for today?**





## Ojibwe Stories: Archive

Who wrote it down? Who was their imagined audience? How did this audience shape what got written down?

- narrated by Charles and Charlotte Kawbawgam (Ojibwe) and Charles's brother-in-law Jacques LePique

- all of these stories were told to a Harvard-trained anthropologist Homer H. Kidder

- these stories are not neutral

- they reflect a nostalgia for a lost hunting and fur trapping culture that was ended by the decline of the fur trade and a series of land cession treaties with the US government in the 19<sup>th</sup> c.

# Nanabozho

- an Ojibwe trickster spirit and shape shifter

- the wolf is his “nephew”

Charles Kawbawgam’s “Remarks on Nanabozho” (30):

“[Nanabozho] called the animals his brothers; men he called his uncles; women and trees and all that grows and all that flies he called his brothers and sisters.”

- Deloria’s idea of ‘kinship with the world’



# Nanabozho as Creation Stories



# Nanabozho and Transcorporeality

- Nanabozho's shape shifting: a tree stump and "wearing" the Frog Woman

- a model of transcorporeality

Transcorporeality is the idea that humans are not separate from the natural world, but are instead deeply connected to it. Transcorporeality emphasizes the fluidity between the material and theoretical bodies. It challenges the idea of a "bounded human subject," the idea that humans self-contained are separate from their environment.

- a different model of transcorporeality would be Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*

- cf. Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale" that is not an example of transcorporeality



# The Robin

The next day he said: "Mother, I have fasted too long. I can no longer be a man. I shall become a bird and must leave you.

His face and throat were painted black, with a few white specks, his breast was painted red, and on his back he had a covering of grey. All these marks he kept when he became a bird. He flew out, and perching on the lodge, gave the beautiful call of the robin.

He said: "Whenever you hear me at the top of a tree, you will know spring is coming and will come always to the end of the world. Farewell, mother. I am going to spread throughout the earth."

## **The Beast Men**

So they had another race the next moon. This time the old man and his ring were painted blue. He raced against the winter hawk, and won again, flying through the air after his ring. The brothers had now won the lives of all their enemies, but the old man would not let them kill. He made all the animal party pass before him, one by one. He forbid them ever again to take the form of man, and told each kind how they should live and what they should eat. And that is how the animals got the habits that they have to this day.

# Medieval European Theories of Transcorporeality: the Universe and the Human Body

# The Four Elements and the Four Bodily Humors

## The Four Elements

1. Air
2. Water
3. Fire
4. Earth

Theory of 4 natural humors that make up the human body:

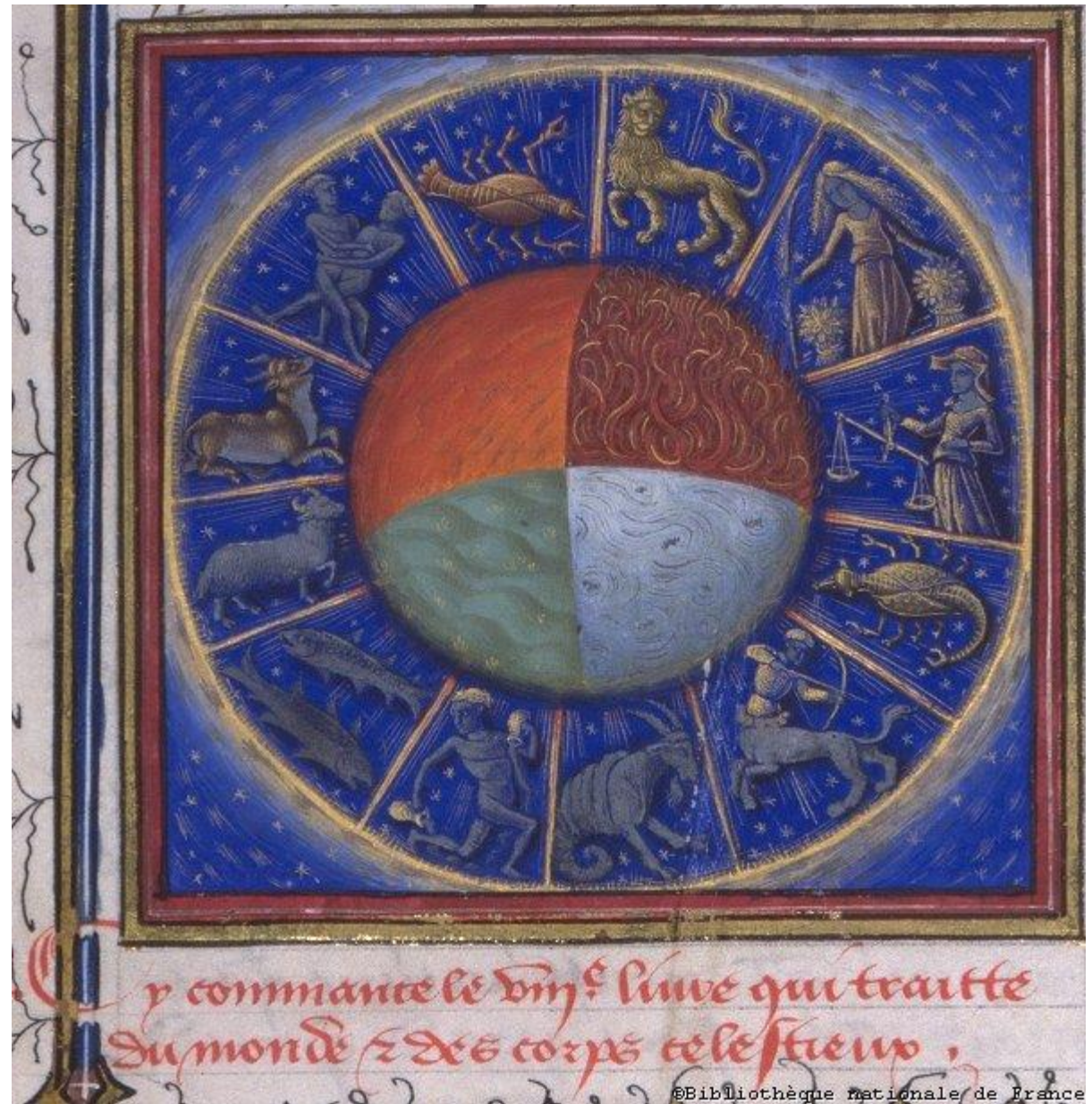
1. blood (hot and moist--air)
2. phlegm (cold and moist--water)
3. choler or yellow bile (hot and dry--fire)
4. melancholy or black bile (cold and dry--earth)

Zodiac in relation to the elements

Bartholomeus Anglicus, *Le Livre des propriétés des choses*

Paris, Bibliothèque nationale

[http://www.bnf.fr/enluminures/images/jpeg/i4\\_0049.jpg](http://www.bnf.fr/enluminures/images/jpeg/i4_0049.jpg)





The human bodily humors related to the elements.

Bartholomeus Anglicus, *Le Livre des propriétés des choses*

Paris, Bibliotheque nationale

[http://www.bnf.fr/enluminures/images/jpeg/i4\\_0057.jpg](http://www.bnf.fr/enluminures/images/jpeg/i4_0057.jpg)





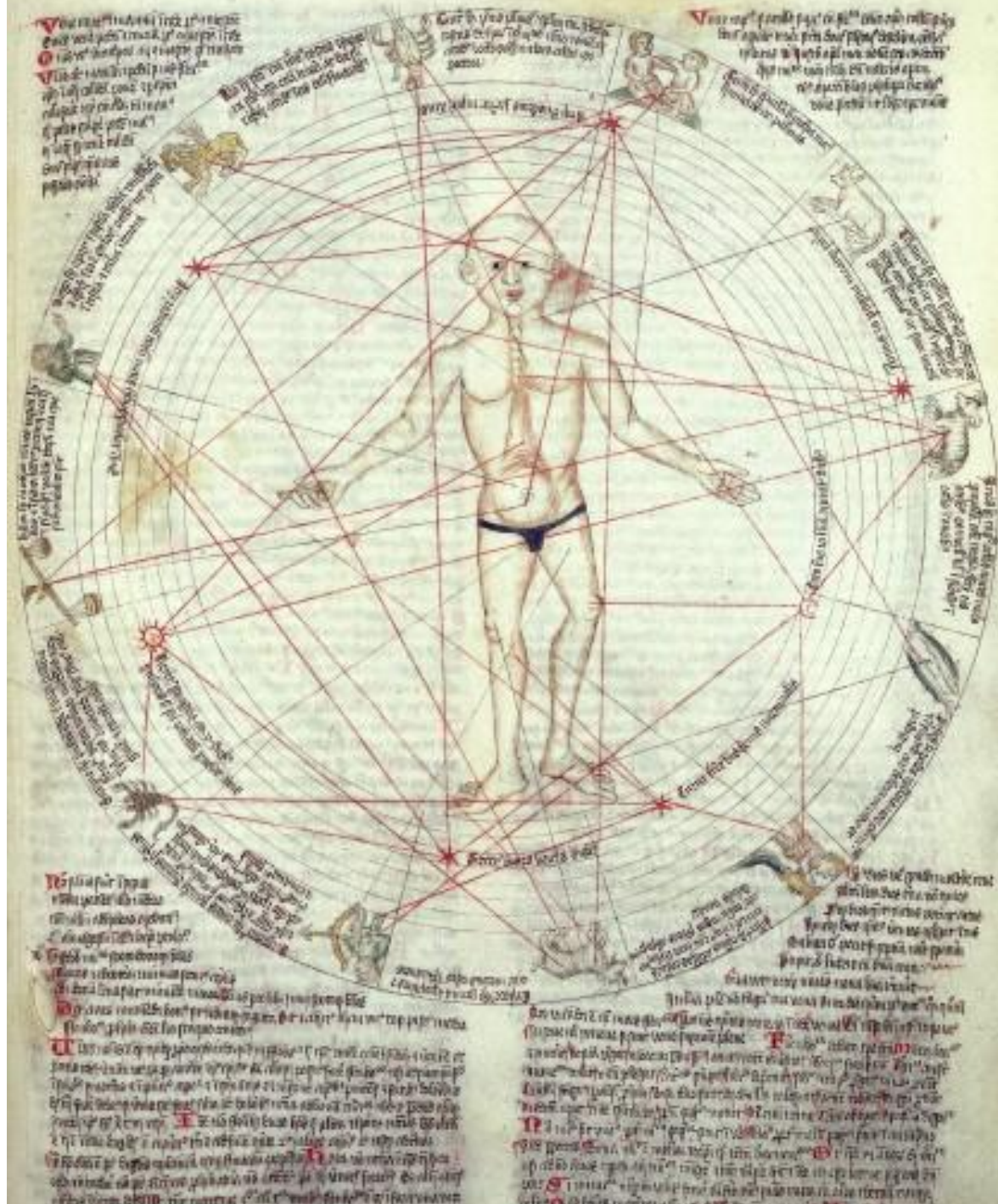
The human body

Bartholomeus Anglicus, Le Livre des  
propriétés des choses

Paris, Bibliothèque nationale







Medieval Zodiac Man

London, Welcome Library

Lost whites come to the West to love the environment, and they end up paving the damn thing and subdividing it. ... You have got to look back into your own culture. Why did people six thousand or seven thousand years ago determine that heaven is good and "down here" is bad? Why did they decide to go out and conquer things? Then why did the Greeks later make that other division between history and nature? And why, after Newton and Darwin, did you grab that one quadrant [i.e. the hard sciences] and say that is what the world is about?

-Vine Deloria, "Kinship with the World," 229.