SITES: NEW SERIES · VOL 6 NO 1 · 2009

– ARTICLE –

INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGES:
CIRCUMSPECTION, METAPHYSICS, AND SCIENTIFIC ONTOLOGIES

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ABSTRACT

Indigenous knowledges do not conform to the scientific model developed during and inherited from the European enlightenment. That model assumes a quasi-technological metaphysics whereby material constitution and material causation by scientifically investigable mechanisms is the norm governing the regime of truth. Indigenous knowledges concern themselves with the meanings of phenomena and their place in a holistic scheme of things that allows an inclusive assessment of the way they should be regarded by human beings who are attempting not only to use them but to have the right attitude and take adequate care of the environment that sustains them. This is far more in keeping with Heidegger's notion of circumspection, a view that allows us to understand ourselves as beings-in-the-world who must conduct ourselves in a fitting way.

INTRODUCTION

In 2000, the New Zealand government appointed a Royal Commission to inquire into the advisability of genetic engineering technology in agriculture and bioscience. Almost immediately that body encountered a serious problem in assessing some of the evidence presented to them in that some parties wanted to introduce indigenous knowledge into the discussion but those of a scientific bent could not find an adequate place for it. The findings of the Commission then attracted criticism from various sources, one of the most interesting of which was from Moana Jackson, an indigenous lawyer. He complained that the Royal Commission had, throughout the discussion, marginalised the knowledge of Maori whose voice ought to be heard in the debate because of their special role in and relation to Aotearoa New Zealand.(Jackson 2001) Maori considered that theirs was a role of guardianship over their homeland and its welfare, a standing that had been vested in them by the gods and their distant ancestors with whom they had to keep faith. His response highlights

a particular problem affecting the epistemic interactions between indigenous knowledges and what is called objective scientific fact. That problem is best investigated by asking the question, 'How exactly should we position indigenous knowledges in a discussion of policy in a post-colonial society?' That question is not easy to answer and raises some foundational issues about objectivity and truth and the nature (traditional or evolving, homogeneous vs heterogeneous, articulate or inchoate, declarative or implicit, 'other' *vs* orthodox) of indigenous knowledges. As a philosophy trained, medical scientist trying to incorporate unsettling philosophical voices so as to understand a position that feels natural (as Barthes might expect it to), I want to take up certain puzzles that problematize accepted understandings of the world evident in the Royal Commission's deliberations and in many contemporary policy debates.[1]

AN EPISTEMIC PUZZLE

The whakapapa of Kumara

The Maori term *whakapapa* is often translated by using the Pakeha terms 'genealogy' or 'genetics' (Roberts *et al* 2004).The Pakeha scientist or thinker then sets about investigating the genesis of the organism (in its current form) by examining the kinds of biological transformation and their mechanisms that are made evident in modernist scientific or technological theories of cause or origin. In such a conception, material or efficient causation and instrumentality (a related concept) rules, and the idea of a (scientifically investigable) means of production of the item of interest is dominant (Heidegger 1977). The relevant questions aim to give an insight into the bringing forth (*poiesis*) by which a thing arises out of natural processes (*physis*) in such a way that we can look for effective interventions which might allow control over the form and occurrence of that thing and an enhanced ability to change our world in ways that suit our purposes. The attitude inherent in such a mode of questioning embeds an assumption that humankind can and should be bringers forth of that which they conceive to be of use in their dealings with the world (for their own ends or in the interest of human beings).[2]

When such thinking engages with the realities of the biological world of which we (as a self consciously scientific society) consider ourselves a part, it naturally tends to focus on genetics (as the material condition which carries the pattern of and influences growth and development). This facilitates an appreciation of the micro-mechanics of living systems and the biochemical and technological manipulation of organisms to suit human purposes as an effective means by which key determinants of the form of living creatures can be

used to serve technological interests. For a Western trained bio-scientist, the genealogy (often identified with that which is important about *whakapapa*) of a living thing is, therefore, a matter of the genetic basis of its development as an organism located in a particular lineage (the effects of which are identified with the information encoded in DNA). The genealogy of an organism and the factors on which it focuses, conceived of in this way, are understood according to conventional scientific (modernist) biology as information which can be unlocked from and manipulated within a biochemical code that is universal for all living things.

That kind of restriction of legitimated knowledge is not, however, totally adequate and self-contained but rather is contentious as it comprises a structure of significations dependent upon a whole series of supporting theories and procedures realising an epistemic regime. We might notice, as a cross current to the technological episteme, an increasing recognition of ecosystem thinking encompassing some of the contextual relations that influence both the composition or membership of the set of organisms contributing to the genome and its expression in a particular bio-historical context. Two features of that strand of thought are historical particularity and a growing awareness of answerability or responsibility even if both are often subsumed under the rubric of a scientific/technological understanding that confines itself to conventionally defined domains of science (so as to exclude, for instance, the politics and economics of harvesting a natural resource) as knowledge related to a biological phenomenon such as population density. The idea that our knowledge of something as a natural phenomenon could tell us something about ourselves as historical beings or about how we *ought* to treat that thing so that it introduces nuances that *ought* to inform our practical dealings with that thing is somewhat foreign to a structure of knowledge regarded as 'normal science' because normative claims tend to be relegated to the domain of humanities and ethics – to do with values – and a matter of attitude and feelings rather than knowledge *per se*. This is, of course, a caricature designed to make vivid a feature of the grand narrative with its 'regime' of truth as a 'system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation, and operation of statements'(Foucault 1984: 74)

The Whakapapa of 'kumara' (or one of its forms [Roberts and Wills 1998]), as judged according to the truths of 'normal biology', is decidedly odd; it mixes 'facts' that can be scientifically investigated about the relations between kumara, taro, yam, and other root vegetables with 'spurious' associations between the kumara and things like the Kiore rat, certain types of caterpillar, the deities of heaven and earth (and other mythical beings), heavenly bodies such as stars,

and elements (such as the wind, rain and earth). As science this looks crazy, or at least sloppy and highly speculative, unthinkable in the objective terms of modern biology. A person with a conventional scientific outlook might entertain some holistic thoughts about the ecosystem and such knowledge may help us understand important aspects of contemporary questions, such as those about the genetic engineering of kumara or other foods. But whakapapa, to a Western scientist, is quaint rather than a serious contribution to knowledge (even though its neglect has arguably led to one of the most devastating agricultural disasters of the late Twentieth century – the 'mad cow' debacle). A scientifically orthodox thinker might try to be culturally appropriate and politically correct by acknowledging such indigenous knowledges but not allow them to interfere with the application of science to husbandry and agriculture or the objective consideration of new technologies (whereas the voices of the quasi-science of economics should be heeded). And here one is not caricaturing but reporting on an ongoing strand in global policy debates.

Further moral puzzles: odd practices

It is evident that, to the orthodox scientist, there are odd ways of looking at things enshrined in indigenous knowledge; a karakia (prayer or respectful address in accordance with tikanga or protocol) to a flax plant before harvesting flax, for instance, just looks as if it is superfluous and of a piece with the Lakota custom of making an offering to a tree before cutting it down. The plant concerned cannot hear and it is going to be damaged (or killed) in any event so why bother? It makes no sense apart from supporting an attitude in the harvester. To perpetuate such a custom and a whole system of associated knowledge that confers spiritual significance on things that have not even got consciousness (as humans know and inhabit it) therefore seems pointless and, even worse, obscurantist and mystifying (which is not to say that many scientists do not have a quasi-religious or explicitly religious attitude to the complex phenomena they are investigating).

A glimpse of the (acknowledged) moral importance of our actions is evident when we consider, for instance, the 'opening of the way' ceremony in the dissection room of a New Zealand medical school. When the students encounter the human bodies that have been donated for education and research, their activities are preceded by a ceremony in which the mana of the individuals and their sacredness as human beings is acknowledged prior to their bodies being dissected. This 'opening of the way' allowing the activity to proceed is a way of recognising the human beings whose bodies are available for the learning of medical students; it sets the activity apart from a merely utilitarian endeavour

and it connects with our intuitions about respecting the dead as those who go before us and to whom we are indebted in many and special ways. These attitudes can, however, seem somewhat 'out of kilter' or look somewhat 'awry' when we view the body as anatomical material, a view nested in the scientific attitude to matter in general[3] such that a 'quasi-mystical' practice of this type could be regarded as emotionally motivated or subjective rather than objective, and, for that reason, not really embodying knowledge, *per se*. But notice the model of knowledge operating in this construction of events and that suspending belief alerts us to a significant question 'How adequate to what is real is a technological conception of reality?'.

The 'odd' practices encountered in an indigenous (or 'other') world raise the question of knowledge and its adequacy to our own adaptation to our world. They make us look awry at the intrinsic order of reality as a domain of being and realize that that order itself is a tool (Heidegger 1977). It problematizes metaphysics and the habitability of the scientific worldview as a framework for our lived knowledge as beings-in-the-world. Metaphysics, a fundamental inquiry into our being-in-the-world as knowing subjects and a basis for our understanding of the nature of reality, seems to require an approach to our context of being that does not see it merely as raw material for our exploitation. (As, in fact, scientists whose inquiries engage with the order of things in its most challenging and intractable guise often are brought to realise.)

UNDERSTANDING, ABSTRACTION, OBJECTIFICATION: THE QUESTION AND THE ANSWER

The underlying philosophical framework for metaphysics (and truth) according to the modernist world view is Descartes' *Res extensa* – the world as sharply distinct from the human mind and therefore objective. This objective world is viewed as a set of interwoven mechanical processes impersonally specifiable and obeying universal mathematical laws. For that reason it is quite other than the *res cogitans* in which the human mind has its being, something apart from the world as it is and from which the subject achieves 'an objective view' of what goes on there so as to discern the regularities and devise laws describing its operations. The laws are constrained in such a way that they must be articulated in terms of the favoured 'objective' descriptions of states of affairs that preserve the separation of mind or spirit and material objects.

This view receives further articulation by the British empiricists, notably Locke and Mill who combine to move philosophical naturalism towards a study of the barely material or 'objective' as absolutized in Cartesian metaphysics. We

should, however, notice Locke's distinction between nomimal and real essence (1689 [1975]). He remarks:

> *nominal Essences* – are made by the Mind, they are *not* yet *made so arbitrarily* … the Mind in making its complex *Ideas* of Substances, only follows Nature; and puts none together, which are not supposed to have an union in Nature.
>
> Though the nominal essences of Substances, are all supposed to be copied from Nature; yet they are all, or most of them, very imperfect. III.VI.28

He contrasts this complex idea with the Real or categorical essence or that which gives rise to and sustains an the integrity of the thing concerned: 'that real constitution of any Thing, which is the foundation of all those Properties that are combined in and constantly found to co-exist with the *nominal Essence*' (III.VI.6)

The Real essence of a thing then becomes constricted, under the influence of the later empiricists such as Mill and those who follow him, to a combination of Primary qualities (spatio-temporal properties conceived as determinate independent of human experience) actually constituting the foundational or intrinsic nature of the type of thing concerned. These are thought to be the basis of reality due to their empirically observable regular co-existence in objects according to the accepted ways of knowing things. The relevant properties, as Mill notes, are thought of as the ultimate properties – 'the properties which are the causes of all phenomena,' definitive of the fundamental or objective reality of the thing concerned (Mill 1874). They are, by nature, conceived of in relation to material or effective causation (thus distilling two of Aristotle's four types of causation into a notion of 'objective' or productive causation by mechanizing Heidegger's *poiesis*). The net effect is to construct the idea of the real or metaphysical essence of any given thing, that which appears in our ultimate conception of that thing, in terms of the instrumental concepts deployed under a quasi-technological imperative. Those concepts have been expressly devised to exclude the meaningful or spiritual connectedness of things (as part of the world of the human spirit or the meanings we find in our lives – *res cogitans* – something metaphysically distinct from the 'unadorned actualities') and to restrict our focus to accessible points of (causal) intervention revealed by the objective sciences with their mechanistic stories of derivation and origin.

THE PROBLEM FOR METAPHYSICS

Modernist metaphysics populates the world with objects, the ultimate nature of which is captured by the descriptions shaping mature science and its epistemic progeny (measuring devices, experimental techniques of investigation, and so on). Maturity is judged according to a technological attitude so that a real understanding of the intrinsic nature of any thing is revealed by objective science – physics, chemistry, biology, or psychology (conceived as universal and not just as products of the Western scientific tradition). This 'fragile, symbolic cobweb that can at any moment be torn aside by an intrusion of the real' (Zizek 1992), is sufficient to trap the fly in the fly-bottle of 'objectivity' where things have a definite form and thinkers are excused from examining their uses of terms, the discourses that give them significance and how they fit into an interconnected raft of human practices sustaining our ongoing existence[4]. But how does a science become mature so that its entities are reckoned to exist in the world?

Sciences reveal what is to be found in nature and the laws that tell us 'the ultimate reality which lies behind that which we confront in sensory experience' (Mautner, 2000: 351). Nancy Cartwright remarks, 'There is a simple straightforward view of the laws of nature which is suggested by scientific realism, the facticity view: laws of nature explain how physical systems behave'. We could add: 'and by so doing tell us what entities and relations make up the actual world we live in'. 'Folk' sciences are to be contrasted with mature science in the sense that they are usually seen as 'primitive' attempts to capture the real nature of things and are surpassed when the natures of things are ultimately revealed by ongoing legitimate scientific investigation. Thus, for instance, species were originally grouped and identified on the basis of phenotypic variation – distinctive appearances and similarities – whereas we now think of them as evolutionary groupings that propagate and configure themselves in ways ultimately explicable by their genetic constitution and their context of adaptation. Thus the science of biology, in its post-Darwinian form, realises Darwin's promise to 'give the plan of creation' but in terms that are 'down to earth'(albeit a cleverly constructed earth).

His view was a classical example of the modernist paradigm according to which genesis from the set of intrinsic properties definitive of a thing (the properties constitutive of its metaphysical essence) is the basis of all adequately scientific knowledge of that thing. Thus, by restricting himself to the stories of genesis and adaptation according to principles of genetic heritability, Darwin could tell the real story of the natural order and spare us the vagaries and su-

pernaturalism of, for example, Creation myths. The gods such as earth mother and sky father, the Titans, the fates, Brahman, and so on could then be seen for what they are – cultural creations answering different needs than those involved in describing and cataloguing the world for productive human understanding according to the objective and rationally based knowledge structure of science and technology.

However, the subordination of metaphysics to 'real science' or mature Western science, its intellectual underpinning notwithstanding,[5] is itself part of an episteme or 'a set of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation, and operation of statements' (Foucault 1984: 74). It is also a political (in the present case, post-colonial) phenomenon, and must be understood as such in that it serves an agenda (related to governmentality) as a complex of interwoven techniques of power including methods, theories, institutions, and organs of self-promotion. This epistemically legitimating politico-technological complex is then 'linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it as a 'regime' of truth.'

The truth that guides bodies such as the Royal Commission in their ethical and policy deliberations, is therefore complex and conditional upon a number of assumptions and restrictions of inquiry, but on the favoured (modernist) framework, is seen as completely adequate and based on impartial considerations even though it is exclusive, competes with alternative constructions of reality, and steadily approximates to a universal ideal of finished or complete knowledge, a knowledge that has progressively triumphed over its competitors as delineations of the fundamental order in nature and the laws which allow us to understand that order.

A WHIGGISH ATTITUDE

The technological bent and the metaphysics it produces is compounded in the post-colonial world by 'a whiggish attitude' which is:

> to emphasize certain principles of progress in the past and to produce a story which is the ratification if not the glorification of the present.

This can be illustrated by whiggish concessions to indigenous Polynesian thought about the world and its origins. The colonist thinkers could concede that the Polynesians almost had ' the right story' about the genesis or coming-

to-be of the world and its inhabitants when compared with the correct view (comprising elements incorporating Christianity and enlightenment humanism). They endorse selected strands of Polynesian creation stories (suitably tidied up to remove some of the more 'fanciful' features), for instance the idea that there emerged, from a period of darkness or void, the earth, sea and land plants and animals, higher creatures, and human-like creatures. Similar sequences can be found in the creation stories of First Nations people of Western Canada and in many different mythologies and are consistent with 'the Truth', fully seen in modernist (scientific or colonial) cosmology and based on a respectable view of the universe or the natural world and the processes governing it (Best 1973).

The origins of knowledge, on the Whiggish view, are experience or, more accurately, the validated experience available within a 'regime of truth', interpreted (in the light of our developed or mature sciences) so as to reveal what is actually or objectively there (the ultimate reality lying behind sensory experience) and described in stark or objective terms without romantic or mystical 'embellishment'. It rests on:

i) logical or deductively grounded theoretical abstractions from experience (as it finds articulate form according to the constraints of scientific realism) and

ii) inference to the best explanation in the light of the whole body of scientific knowledge which then reveal the categorical bases of the phenomena encountered in experience.

This method allows us to emerge with a coherent picture of the world, as revealed by science, to the enlightened. The regime of truth determining what is real knowledge of the world and what is speculation, myth, poetry, fantasy, and so on implicitly defines lesser knowledges (such as indigenous understandings) answering needs other than that of a genuine rationally investigable objective understanding of reality. Indigenous knowledges of all kinds (lumped together as 'other' on this view) can then be thought of as being deficient in various ways – perpetuating superstition, in accordance with outmoded religious beliefs and practices, a cloak for ignorance about the real workings of things and the natural laws governing them, and so forth. Again this is less a caricature than a stance underlying 'an exquisite politeness'.

Indigenous knowledges can also be accommodated a little more generously than in the Whiggish reading by allowing that they might capture hints or

clues to connections and understandings ultimately to be vindicated by real science. In either case a normative judgment is being made aligning the knowledges vying for legitimation according to their 'fit' or otherwise to a grid of concepts and connections configured by causal thinking of the kind found in technologies of production and exploitation. Control in the service of our currently conceived interests and purposes (or a validated subset thereof) is therefore the framing orientation of the modernist or colonial episteme that has industrialized and commodified the world we inhabit.

CHANGING THE FOUNDATIONS

We can, however, shift the starting point for our knowledge of the world with very revealing results. Heidegger's approach to metaphysics and ontology begins at a very different point from the modernist system suggesting an orientation much more congenial to indigenous knowledges (Heidegger, 1953).

At the outset as a system it emphasises *sorge* (care or concern) arising from the fact that a human being cannot disengage from his or her embeddedness, entanglement, or thrown-ness into the world as *dasein* rather than as Cartesian (scopic) subject who stands back from the world and contemplates it. We are entangled with things as one of them and therefore must see ourselves as beings whose association with the world is 'not by mere perceptual cognition but rather, a handling, using and taking care of things' (Heidegger 1953: 67). Notice that the phrase 'affecting and affected by' springs to mind with obvious links to 'affect' and not just cognition.

Circumspection is Heidegger's term for this type of 'knowing' by acquaintance, accommodation, affectation or 'dealings with' that is the dynamic locus of and precedes the abstractions of the Cartesian/empiricist framework (1953: 69). It is based in our activity and the ways in which we are formed by our dealings with the world even as we form the world to suit our purposes. The modes of perception closest to it are smell and taste through which the world enters our body and affects us (being most closely connected with the emotive and memory-related parts of the brain). The engaged nature of circumspection establishes a kind of connectedness between *da-sein* and its life world such that neither can be understood without reference to the whole that is being-in-the-world. We could say that the network or milieu of dealings with the world comprising circumspection brings to us the world-as-it-is-in-itself populated by the concomitants of *da-sein* and these are revealed by the historically and socio-culturally embedded techniques of disclosing and bringing forth that are used by *da-sein* as it adapts to and transforms its situation and, in so doing,

transforms itself (Heidegger 1953: 70).

When we take this transformation of philosophical foundations seriously, we see a convergence between Heidegger and aspects of indigenous knowledges in that the 'Cartesian dichotomy between an observing thinking self and the outside world cannot and does not exist … the route through abstract interpretation is a dead-end'(Marsden 1981). This is not totally surprising as Heidegger tried to ground his philosophy in the knowledge of folk, those quasi-romantic denizens of the land. But we soon notice that an embedded and situated basis for knowledge leads one, relatively directly, to a post-structuralist or *alethic* view of truth (truth as a multiply layered unconcealing of the objects it concerns according to our projects and interests), thereby connecting once more with certain articulations of Maori thought (itself a complex web of signifiers).

In its totality, Maori use of *whakapapa* and narrative creates a metaphysical gestalt or whole integrated pattern for the oral communication of knowledge. (Roberts *et al* 2004: 1)

> In Maori metaphysics then, metaphor along with language creates a '*whakapapa* of the mind,' revealing and concealing the many layers of meaning of *matauranga* and of *wananga*.(Roberts and Wills 1998)

M*atauranga* and *wananga* – everyday and deeper knowledge respectively (Williams 2001) – show themselves to be at once both mundane or ordinary and infinitely extensible taking us in many different directions limited only by the contexts and uses flowing from the interaction of the human embodied subjectivity and the aspects of the world – the co-inhabitants of the ecosphere with which it finds itself engaged. Some of these co-inhabitants have hugely pre-dated our appearance on the scene and some are much younger but in each case that knowledge too is important and not to be reduced to the common currency of physico-chemical (or objective and static) description.

We do not need mysticism and romanticism at this stage despite the fact that talk about the land of our fathers (a Welsh song) may spring to mind. We need only remember that the land which has formed any human being, the cradle of life for a human group, is an important part of understanding who one is in a way that may be reflected in DNA or other biological features of one's being but is not primarily about them at all.

It is no wonder that indigenous knowledges often see the richness inherent in the dynamic relationship between human beings and their environment

expansively rather than reductively and do not happily 'channel' it into objective technological pathways apt for exploitation. The resulting metaphysical orientation resonates in two ways:

i) with certain contemporary analytic writers who emphasise our coming to grips with things through experimentation and dealings with them rather than the ideas or representations we form of things (Hacking 1983); and

ii) with the ancient and mystical writers for whom it was as if the whole universe could be found in a single flower.

REVISITING THE PUZZLES: WHAKAPAPA RECONSIDERED

Maori knowledges, as I have noted, can be seen as 'A metaphysical gestalt – a whole integrated pattern for the oral communication of knowledge'(Roberts *et al*, 2004) in which many layers reveal and conceal the things that are known, and any knowledge is always partial (in both senses of the word), reflecting our interests and techniques of revealing what can be known about and the ways we are affected by the things with which we deal.

Levi-Strauss, exploring the nature of myth and its residue in the contemporary world, notices that in replacing myths by exact, orthodox, and legitimated knowledge of the type found in modernism loses much even as it makes gains.

> People who are without writing have a fantastically precise knowledge of their environment and all their resources. All these things we have lost but we did not lose them for nothing; we are now able to drive an automobile without being crushed at each moment, for example, or in the evening to turn on our television or radio. This implies a training of mental capacities which 'primitive peoples don't have because they don't need them.(Levi-Strauss 1978: 19).

Notice that the world has changed so that our dealings with it have also changed. The engaged, subjective, cognitive beings that we have become in the modern world have been transformed into beings of a slightly different kind with different capacities either from what human beings used to be or from what, under different contingencies, they may have become. Note that we are increasingly realising that things have been lost and starting to mine indigenous knowledges for their treasures. We have gained from the constriction of knowledge because focus enables dissection and the anatomizing of reality to

achieve a mental grasp of aspects not explored by our forebears. But knowing how things come apart only sometimes enables one to put them together and the pulling apart of nature, even at its joints, is not the same as pulling apart a watch. A mechanical spring can be rewound or reproduced but reconstituting the spirit is beyond us.

Mircea Eliade speaks ontologically and existentially when he talks about the role of myth and what can be lost by forgetting it in our modern lives:

> For archaic man, myth is a matter of primary importance … Myth teaches him the primordial stories that have constituted him existentially; and everything connected with his existence and his legitimate mode of existence in the cosmos concerns him directly (Eliade 1963: 12).
>
> Through culture a desacralized religious universe and a demythicized mythology formed and nourished Western civilization – that is the only civilization that has succeeded in becoming exemplary. There is more here than a triumph of *logos* over *mythos*. The victory is that of the book over oral tradition, of the document – especially the written document over a living experience whose only means of expression were preliterary (Eliade 1963: 157).

The dominance of one mode of representation – writing – over another – speech – fixes what is represented; the spirit infusing it is a spirit of capture, fossilization, and rendering lifeless by objectification and exclusive definition so that what is true can be unambiguous and validated according to rules 'for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation, and operation of statements'(Foucault). By this means a story about the way things are 'in Truth' can be canonised and thereafter perform a regulatory role in our system of knowledge leaving outside of 'knowledge' that which lives and in its very essence is not an essence but is a dynamic and changing existence or actuality. The Dionysian reality that energizes us therefore always perpetually escapes our modes of capturing it by description (and therefore analysis and representation/reproduction).

In the face of this loss of life (or spirit as animus) Heidegger urges a destruction (or bracketing) of petrifying knowledge and an openness to encounter with the world through our historical situation replete with the traces and gifts of those who have gone before. Rorty, in distinguishing Heidegger's concern with the ability to hear what being itself is telling us rather than the abstracted

message that we tell ourselves on the basis of our intellectual transformation of our dealings with the world, expresses it thus:

> If one asks what is so important about the ability to hear, the ability to have a sense of the contingency of one's words and practices, and thus of the possibility of alternatives to them [Dewey and Heidegger] both might say that this ability, and only this ability, makes it possible to feel gratitude for and to those words, those practices, and the beings they disclose … Or if you prefer, it means being grateful for the existence of ourselves, for our ability to disclose the beings we have disclosed, or the embodied languages we are (Rorty 1992: 224–5).

Notice that the open-ended view of pragmatists like Rorty, while almost as iconoclastic as Heidegger's in terms of metaphysics as conceived by modernist realists, has less respect for its philosophical whakapapa and the honours due to those who have gone before so as to search their own being and provide us with the gifts of thought that we currently deploy and therefore it can miss a sense of their profundity and proper use. The pragmatist face is turned to the future full of promise rather than seeking a living connection with a past to be cherished and recognised as part of ourselves.

We could express the fuller knowledge and the practices, rituals, and traditions in which it is embedded as (in Heideggerian terms) 'A narrative of circumspection and connectedness'. As such the knowledge involved is not focused, circumscribed and technological but takes account of all the connections between the horizons of being of a thing, the setting of our own lives, and the grounds of our being as human beings who share and are sustained by the world around us in a way that our ancestors also were. One might expect that these precious aspects of knowledge would find their way into indigenous knowledges wherever they are found.

The resulting knowledges (multi-stranded and complex webs of signifiers with different loci and points of interaction) incorporate rather than discard myths and stories of existential (being-in-the-world) significance providing (in their notional totality) a rich understanding of our place in the order of things embodying histories of peoples and places rather than the pared down or programmatic understanding framed by austere or instrumental metaphysics. Of course, a certain gratitude is due to the techno-scientists, as Rorty and Levi-Strauss both remind us, but we should resist the bullish tendency for their type of unconcealing to claim the epistemic high ground and for them to see

themselves as worthy of a privileged position *vis a vis* governmentality (as the dignitaries of a regime of truth). The knowledge obtained by exercising a genuine engagement with and exploration of, rather than just 'exquisite politeness' towards, indigenous knowledges is organically connected to a sense of who we are in a broader view of things and where we have come from, a recognition of our entanglements with brother bear and brother badger. That insight generates ethical guidelines and a sense of what we are dealing with as framed by a scheme of things in which we and everything else has its proper place.

TRUTH

It is instructive to contrast the notions of truth operating in these divergent approaches to ontology and epistemology.

The scientific or technologically informed metaphysic, by its very nature wants to lay bare the world as something to be manipulated according to our supposed needs. To simplify and generalise (thus to lay bare its, quite possibly conflicted, essence or soul) it embraces an austere, competitive, exclusive, and potentially reductive idea of truth and marginalizes unsettling critiques questioning it. As the manservant of govermentality, (a further idealisation) it advances one way of looking at the world, that way most suited to our interventions in the mechanisms of production of the things with which we have to deal. It is concerned, as Heidegger notes in 'The question of technology' with enframing or ordering the world in a way 'that pursues and entraps nature as a calculable coherence of forces'(Heidegger 1977: 21). This conception then forms a validated and valorised meta-narrative of the way the world is (apt for Policy-making) so that other knowledges become seen as less than accurate or primitive approximations to a genuine and mature human understanding of things as they can be calculated to be for the purpose of harnessing of them to our mature purposes (having left aside 'childish' things such as play and joy, the kind of things that 'natives' engage in).

Alethic or circumspective truth is otherwise in that it works with the idea that layers of truth differently reflect our modes of thought and interaction with things. It acknowledges the holistic connections, complementarities and contrasts between our ways of framing things and the resulting types of knowledge involved. It sees every ordering as simultaneously both a revealing and a concealing and is cognisant of the many different ways in which things can become significant for us and affect us. It appropriates and records the traces of things in our lives so that these can be explored and it acknowledges the ways in which we and they are inscribed by our interactions. Of necessity the

truth of circumspection is framed in terms of what is *significant*, whether for an individual or a human group with their own way of ordering things. Every aspect of the practices of a truth user that potentially contributes to the appreciation of the life-related significance of a thing is included. Alethic truth is therefore multi-layered in such a way that, and on any occasion, the form it takes is engaged with one of a series of life-worlds some of which have to do with working on something and configuring it for some particular purpose and some of which have to do with witnessing to a connection or set of connections between what we are concerned with and ourselves. As such it reveals our position in the scheme of things, and the different positions of other things and it teaches us to recognise and respect those other ways of being before we take on the responsibility (or karma) of altering and appropriating a bit of the world for our own sake. The mining of indigenous knowledges instrumentalizes this relationship.

RESPECT

On this account of truth there is a connection between truth and respect requiring us to recognize that we are in a world among other beings, as for instance, when we realise that we are in the domain of the whale, the shark, the wolf or the *sequoia*. The many worlds that we are in may be apprehended only dimly and by invoking somewhat whimsical, mystical, or awful images and stories. One individual may notice the presence of fairies in the forest and their orientation toward members of the party, another may find that by standing in the forest, perhaps in the presence of a great Kauri tree such as *Tane Mahuta,* one becomes aware of an order of being not subject to our purposes and their implicit calculation of potentialities (and ego-possibilities). The apprehensions are part of an understanding of the thing concerned that may have a place in the relevant *whakapapa* and the *wananga* associated with it. That kind of recognition is reflected in *tapus* (recognitions of sacredness) and *tikanga* (protocols) or when a *karakia* (sacred invocation or prayer) is directed at the creature whose integrity we recognise but may be about to violate, reminding ourselves of our dependence and powerlessness in the face of the contingencies of what the Greeks called *physis* but that could also be called creation, nature, Being, the *dao,* or the order of things so as not to reduce *physis* to an eviscerated and domesticated version of what it actually is. The knowledges embedded in such rituals and forms of address to the world of which we are a part and with whose fate our own is inextricably bound are often ancient and tend to be anti-reductive or holistic. That is not to say that every ancient or preliterate society had a comprehensive (and articulated) understanding of the implications and content of their dealings with the world because such knowledge is no more

static than the knowledge we generate in our own episteme. Therefore, traditional knowledges are hard for a modernist metaphysician to understand, part of the *more* that is in heaven and earth than is dreamed of in his philosophy.

The case is stated succintly and well by a mythical denizen of the old world as it appears in the writings of one of our contemporary wise women.

> It is hard for a dragon to speak plainly. They do not have plain minds. And even when one of them would speak the truth to a man, which is seldom he does not know how the truth looks to a man (Le Guin 1993: 438).

We could put the matter less mythically but no less respectfully by quoting a well known adage, 'Tread softly because you tread on my dreams' but, so as to remove it from the realm of fiction, wish fulfilment, and materialistic fantasy, we should rephrase it as 'Tread carefully because you don't know how to walk in my life-world.'

NOTES

1. Notice that this does not imply that all members of an indigenous group hold the same view nor that it is in some sense a canonical or legitimated view for people of a certain indigenous identity to hold.

2. Recall Wittgenstein's remark that: 'Concepts lead us to make investigations; are the expression of our interest, and direct our interest.' (1953).

3. The term comes from Slavoj Zizek (1992); the particular problem has been discussed by Gareth Jones (2000).

4. The aim of philosophy, according to Wittgenstein (1953) is 'to show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle.'

5. This is a legacy of Russell but now widely accepted among the current critical scientific realists of the Anglo-American Analytic tradition.

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