

# Relations

BEYOND ANTHROPOCENTRISM

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*Decolonial Animal Ethics and Indigenous Philosophies*

Edited by Francesco Allegri

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# Non-anthropocentrism as Participation alongside Perspective

## Indigenous Philosophers and Dynamics of Inter-species Kinship

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### ABSTRACT

*Contemporary Western alternatives to anthropocentrism – such as sentientism or biocentrism – rely on the scope of human knowledge exceeding its realistic limitations. As a corollary, although these models continue to be helpful in discerning ethical conduct, additional resources are going to be required. Initially arguing from within a representationalist paradigm, this paper shows that besides our inability reliably to assess the capacities of non-human species, we have also yet to learn what other factors, besides capacity, may be relevant to a non-human's moral considerability. Subsequently arguing from within a participationalist paradigm, this paper shows that we cannot preconceive all we may be in the process of co-creating. This leaves any model grounded solely in the already existing open to finding itself incapable of relating to the new. It is in the co-creativity of the latter that a potential starting point for resolution begins to emerge: drawing upon Indigenous conceptions of performative knowledge processes in non-objectifying relationality, this paper shows dynamics of inter-species kinship, at times partially traceable through evolutionary relationship, to be a source of non-propositional learning relevant to ethical concerns.*

**Keywords:** American pragmatism; environmental ethics; evolutionary relationship; indigenous philosophies; inter-species kinship; non-anthropocentrism; non-propositional knowledge; participationalist paradigm; performative knowledge processes; phenomenology.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

If anthropocentrism is to be transcended, we may be required to consider alternatives to conceiving philosophy as an exclusively human activity. Provocative as this may sound, it is already through our assumption of

humans being in a position to ascribe moral considerability to others that humans tacitly take on a central role (Burkhart 2019, xxxiv).

This paper is going to argue that while contemporary Western ethical positions such as rationalism, sentientism, biocentrism, and ecocentrism have much to offer to the philosophical discipline of environmental ethics, none of these can successfully stand alone as a universally applicable moral precept. A range of reasons is going to be given for this, all of which, in their different ways, relate to the necessity of our understanding remaining incomplete (for example Polkinghorne 2002, 84). A first, relatable cluster of such reasons is accessible to argument from within a contemporary Western, largely representationalist paradigm. This is going to be discussed in section 2. Complexities then arise once the issue is considered from within a participationalist paradigm: we cannot anticipate all that we may be in the process of co-creating – but it is at the same time from within this co-creative activity that viable ways forward may emerge. Some dynamics relevant to this are going to be discussed in section 3. Overall, it is going to become clear that any environmental ethic solely relying on our perspectival learning *about* ourselves and others cannot help but reflect the gaps necessarily present in our understanding of the world.

If we no longer draw boundaries to delimit our moral community, however, how can we then justify picking the strawberry we may be about to eat?

As part of section 3's engagement with the complexities introduced through a participationalist paradigm, this paper is going to discuss an Indigenous approach to resolving the above conundrum. Initially approached with the help of contemporary Western stepping stones, but then left to speak on their own terms, Indigenous philosophers are going to be shown to offer a relational alternative to Enlightenment Western understandings of environmental ethics. Two considerations are going to be particularly relevant here. Firstly, the inevitable incompleteness of our understanding already entails the wisdom of giving any "other" the benefit of the doubt. Secondly, the contemporary Western approaches to Environmental Ethics referenced at the beginning of this paper – for example, sentientism – hinge on moral considerability of an entity being tied to its capacities, which are in turn frequently understood to be a function of its species membership. It is, however, going to become clear that not all our moral reasons are going to be able to relate to the perceived capacities of the individuals present in a case: rather, some moral reasons are capable of emerging from relationship as relationship

co-creatively evolves once we allow it to. Indigenous story is going to reveal itself as a pathway here.

A further question relates to why, if the above rationale is sound, the contemporary Western mainstream does not appear to be engaging with it consistently. A possible answer, again, may sound provocative at first: our Enlightenment quest for unilateral human control has arguably habituated us to an approach to enquiry which favours some forms of evidence while encouraging us to discard others. This should by no means be taken to imply that it is contemporary Western science per se which is at fault. It is not the fact of our practice of science in laboratories which is getting us into difficulty, nor is it our practice of analytic philosophy and its discussion of possible moral precepts. It is when we allow ourselves to treat our models thus created as explanatory of reality in its entirety, and when we forget that, being models, these are bound only to be explanatory of a subset of our world that problems arise (for example Deloria and Wildcat 2001, 2-6).

It is for this reason that Daniel Wildcat, Indigenous academic and activist, calls for Enlightenment Western science to be treated as one strand of evidence feeding into Indigenous forms of enquiry, as opposed to Indigenous observations being relegated to treatment as mere data within an Enlightenment Western scientific paradigm (Wildcat 2009, 15 and 52). It is also for this reason that we in contemporary Europe may wish to take a closer look when Louise Westling, in her transdisciplinary exploration of shared ground between Maurice Merleau-Ponty's later work and the fast-developing discipline of ethology, points out that we used to have our very own, pre-Enlightenment, Western stories of engagement in inter-species relationships involving shared meaning-making alongside the ever-present possibility of causing one another's deaths (Westling 2013, 49-60).

If we dare to embrace these intertwined rationales for our knowing less than we tend to assume, and of at least some aspects of ontology and epistemology only being able to arise from – potentially inter-species – non-objectifying engagement, the benefits are threefold. First, to give any “other” the benefit of the doubt is a matter of non-discrimination, and thus a matter of the “other's” inherent dignity and of our decency (for example Gaita 2017, 193). Secondly, to give any “other” the benefit of the doubt is a matter of academic rigour in relation to the already existing: Miranda Fricker, arguing from within a representationalist paradigm, points out that epistemic injustice corrupts the knowledge base (Fricker 2015). Thirdly, and often overlooked, the representationalist paradigm

assumed so far need not be all that there is: whenever we engage in any form of innovation, or indeed plant a garden, we do so from a sense that our world is still becoming. A participationalist paradigm, underlying the Indigenous understandings of inter-species relationship about to be discussed, is able to accommodate the intertwining of ontology and epistemology involved in such shared becoming. As a corollary, an additional, procedural form of epistemic injustice (and, conversely, of ontological and epistemological opportunity) comes into play. Where knowledge is no longer exclusively the thing known, but also process as new realities emerge through shared learning and creation, exclusion of any “other” means loss of its unique contribution to processes of co-creation, and we cannot know in advance all that is going to be lost (for example Barad 2012, 31-32). Conversely, empowerment of any “other” to offer its unique contribution – due to the very uniqueness of its potential contribution, and due to our inability to preconceive the precise ways in which it may play out in relationship – opens the door to opportunities for shared learning and creation otherwise beyond our reach.

It is particularly through the work of Indigenous philosophers that this third point is going to be explored. With regards to our above strawberry, the news in the West, as we grapple with our dilemma of whether or not to eat it, is likely to be both good and bad: we may choose to pick it and to eat it, but we are likely to find that we are going to wish to treat it with respect both before and as we do (Cordova 2007, 173). It is going to become clear that our process of discernment of what this respect may involve can be a complex one.

## 2. VERISIMILITUDE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS IN A REPRESENTATIONALIST PARADIGM

Contemporary Western attempts to create non-anthropocentric approaches to Environmental Ethics tend to work on the assumption that we are able to know our own capacities and those of others. Sentientism relies on our having knowledge of others’ capacity to feel; biocentrism relies on our having knowledge of others’ capacity to have their own good (for example Attfield 2014, 12-13). Faced with evidence suggesting that we cannot reliably have this knowledge, we may argue for a precautionary principle to be applied in case we have underestimated anyone (Bekoff 2007, 137).

To further complicate the issue, we may also have little idea of what capacities besides our own may be relevant to the question of moral considerability we are asking. This is before we even think about whether capacity is the only factor relevant here.

With regards to our knowledge of our own capacities being present in others, Frans de Waal draws our attention to a first stumbling block: wasps' capacity for facial recognition relies on different physiological processes from humans', because it developed from an entirely different evolutionary pathway (de Waal 2017, 71-73). This means that we cannot reliably infer the absence of a particular capacity from the absence of a particular physiological pathway: analogy, not homology, may be at play, and the organism may simply have evolved to achieve the same outcome differently.

Beyond our own, human range of capacities, additional complexity arises because we are potentially unaware of some capacities which may be relevant to our questions – for example, to our above questions of sentience, or of an organism having their own good. Marc Bekoff, for example, makes a credible case, argued from the discipline of zoology, for non-human animals' emotions overlapping with ours as opposed to simply forming a subset: while Bekoff concedes that some human emotions may not be present in some animals, he also states that specifically non-human emotions may exist which humans simply do not know how to relate to, and will thus struggle to perceive and to take into account (Bekoff 2007, 6-7). Arguing from the discipline of philosophy, in the same vein, Bruce Wilshire offers an initially amusing (and, at second glance, serious) thought experiment of extraterrestrials arriving on earth, whose capacities may simply be too alien for us earthlings to perceive (Wilshire 2000, 76). With Bekoff and with Wilshire, for all we know, de Waal's wasps may be doing much more than recognising faces using a different physiological pathway from ours: they may be exercising capacities to achieve outcomes entirely beyond our own physical, intellectual, and emotional comfort zone. True transcendence of anthropocentrism would have to involve relinquishment of our perception that our own, human capacities are automatically (let alone exclusively) central to this enquiry.

This begs a follow-up question of how we may relate to those capacities which we are (at least initially) unable to imagine and to perceive, so that these can claim their rightful place as part of the debate. In a further step, we may then challenge the perceived sole centrality of capacity to the issue at stake – which returns us to the above question of what else, besides capacity, may be relevant to ethical consideration.

These latter questions are intertwined, as both are going to require relationship to enter into the equation. The discussion above shows that “knowing about” has only been able to take us so far. Verisimilitude is not only all that we have for the moment – as, for example, pointed out by Maurice Merleau-Ponty in the context of new discoveries continuously superseding what was previously known about the already existing (Merleau-Ponty 2003, 95). Verisimilitude is also all that we can hope to achieve in the future: the above discussion has demonstrated that there are things so far beyond our ken that we may simply not think to enquire about them. The above examples from contemporary zoology and philosophy confirm what the complexity of Spinoza’s network (for example Cordova 1992 below), and William James’s thoughts on the necessity of there being a gap in our understanding (James [1902] 1985, 205-210), have been telling us all along.

Since the distancing of “knowing about” another, on its own, has only been able to take us so far, it stands to reason that, in addition to enquiry about another entity, we may wish to allow ourselves to be open to non-propositional learning in relationship. Martin Buber, for one, sees the importance of both: at the same time as acknowledging the role of *I-It* (in other words, of knowing about another) in our making sense of the world, Buber asserts that *I-It* must remain open to being tempered by the *I-thou* of our empathising in relationship (Buber [1923] 2013, 24). When David Cockburn develops empathy with a squid and reminds us of Wittgenstein’s attitude towards a soul (Cockburn 1994), he is aware that he cannot tell us *how* the squid claims his attentiveness and his empathy: he can only tell us *that* it does. The squid is likely to be in its own world of participation with its surroundings, so different from ours as to be all but inaccessible to us (for example Midgley 2002, 346) – but for a doorway which only appears once we acknowledge the squid’s inherent dignity as a potential partner in relationship. I am reminded of Raimond Gaita’s thinking: it is only once the inherent dignity of the “other” has been honoured by allowing it to become a starting point for relationship that its unique contribution is going to be empowered to follow (Gaita 2002, 2-3 and 104).

Gaita’s thinking about relationship gestures towards, and thus forms a Western stepping stone to, Indigenous conceptions of ontology and epistemology intertwining as knowledge becomes shared process. The “other’s” unique contribution discussed by Gaita, in the passage referenced, remains the contributor’s: it does not explicitly arise from relationship itself (although, between the lines, Gaita’s welcoming the necessary unpredictability of outcomes thus achieved arguably hints at it: Gaita 2002, 106).



It is thus left to the Indigenous philosophers in the following section to cast light on the procedural type of epistemic injustice (and, conversely, of ontological and epistemological potential) sketched in the introduction. In doing so, they are also going to open up an opportunity for a more comprehensive discussion of alternatives to contemporary Western conceptions of Environmental Ethics.

3. VERISIMILITUDE IN A PARTICIPATIONALIST PARADIGM:  
INDIGENOUS CONCEPTIONS OF TRUTH RINGING TRUE  
IN CO-CREATION AS MUCH AS IT MAY REFLECT THE EXISTING

“Knowing about” does not have to be the only conception of knowledge even in the West: our habit of prioritising it is a mere few centuries old (for example Daston 2005).

For Indigenous philosophers, once Buber’s *I-thou* has been re-admitted into the equation of our inter-species relationships (for example Burkhart 2019, 105), the absence of unilateral control exercised by one partner (and its dovetailed relinquishment of the other partner’s objectification) results in agency being able to move into relationship itself, alongside residing separately with the individuals involved (for example Apffel-Marglin 2011, 134). Once it is relationship where agency resides, knowledge can no longer remain knowledge solely about the already existing, because relationship is dynamic: while Newton’s apple will reliably continue to submit to causality and fall, acausal dynamics of shared learning and creation will now begin to appear alongside it. The dignity of non-objectification, however, is a prerequisite to this (Welch 2019, 45): with Gaita above, *unique* contribution can only emerge where those involved are liberated from the requirement of having to fit into categories imposed by an existing mainstream as a condition of engagement, and Welch extends this requirement into the dynamics of a participationalist paradigm.

3.1. *Performative knowledge processes, and the interwovenness  
of manifesting and manifest*

Indigenous conceptions of performative knowledge processes have been expressed in a variety of ways.

Leroy Little Bear, for the purposes of initial knowledge transfer in the context of a series of transdisciplinary, cross-cultural academic conferences now known as the Dialogues, asserted a cluster of three elements of philosophical unity in diversity between Indigenous worldviews: firstly, of the universe being alive and imbued with spirit; secondly, of humans being co-participants in a nature which shows patterns as opposed to obeying laws; thirdly, of there being a *manifesting*, as well as a *manifest*, in this world, with the *manifest* roughly mapping to the physical and the *manifesting* roughly mapping to the spiritual (Parry 2008, 89). Little Bear's model has since been taken up and refined by others (for example Norton-Smith 2010, 1, and McPherson and Rabb 2011, 12). The ample shared ground between the different authors' interpretations is best appreciated against a background of Little Bear's own, later work discussing his above three elements of unity in diversity as the one dynamic he conceives them to be: the above division into three elements helps with initial knowledge transfer, and is not intended as any commitment to treatment of the three elements as inherently separate issues (for example Little Bear 2000).

Bearing in mind that the three are intertwined, a key aspect of Little Bear's thought, in relation to this paper's question regarding the extent of the moral community, is his conception of the sacredness of our shared becoming. If the universe is alive and imbued with spirit, if we are co-participants in its continuing creation, and if it is in the verb-based<sup>1</sup> dynamics of the *manifesting* more than it is in the *manifest* that we interact with the spiritual, then the interwovenness of these concepts moves us closer to appreciating what Anne Waters may be describing when she refers to the sacredness of our maturing in relationship (Waters 2021, 13-14). In the first instance, our attentiveness in *I-thou* relationship here and now is required in order for processes of shared learning and creation to emerge. Over time, our instances of mutually responsive interaction with those around us in the great, spiritual at the same time as material network of the universe accumulate into our and its interwoven thriving in inter-species kinship. Conversely, our failure to interact responsively

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<sup>1</sup> A discussion of the significance of Indigenous languages, in contrast to (for example) the language of English, tending to be verb-based and placing emphasis on dynamics more than they do on perceived stasis, is available, for example, in Henderson 2000, 262-264. The relevance of this to Indigenous conceptions of story is going to be discussed below.

with those around us severs connections within the network and has the power to prevent their contribution in relationship.

Western stepping stones to understanding are available, but they can only carry us part of the way. Viola Cordova draws parallels between Spinoza and her native, Navajo variations on Little Bear's themes, focusing on the complexity of Spinoza's sacred and simultaneously material network, and on his relationship of mutual support between the *conatus* of the individual acting from reason and the *conatus* of the whole (Cordova 1992). Vine Deloria and Daniel Wildcat draw upon Jacques Ellul's work (Deloria and Wildcat 2001, 163), pointing out the losses incurred when we prioritise the objectification entailed by an uncurbed spread of categorisation and standardisation over responsiveness. Martin Buber locates spirit "between the I and thou" (Buber [1923] 2013, 28) in a conception of mutual responsiveness as a vital constituent of our humanity (*ibid.*, 24). American Pragmatist and European phenomenological thought provide further resources: both William James (for example James [1902] 1985, 41) and John Dewey (for example Dewey [1934] 2005, 40) characterise our moral involvement as a necessarily qualitative more than quantitative endeavour, requiring our emotional as much as our intellectual engagement. Their thinking shows kinship with Merleau-Ponty's subject weaving the network that carries its existence (Merleau-Ponty 2003, 176-178) and potentially creating the as yet uncategorised, untreatable solely by means of pre-existing precepts. In Merleau-Ponty's conception of – albeit not entirely event-based – freedom in our participation in potentially acausal as well as causal dynamics, at least occasional production of the unpredictable becomes inevitable (*ibid.*, 240-251).

It is Henry Bugbee, then, who provides the Western stepping stone which carries us closest to Indigenous conceptions of shared learning and creation. Bugbee's protagonists in his wartime experiences do not find certainty with regards to what they must do through application of pre-existing moral precepts alone, although Bugbee does not exclude the possibility of precepts playing a part. The decisive factor, in Bugbee's account, is his protagonists' emotional and embodied as well as intellectual commitment to a situation (Bugbee [1958] 1999, 187-193), and it is from their commitment as what Dewey would have referred to as entire live creatures (for example Dewey [1934] 2005, 206) that their initially non-verbal, embodied moral certainty arises.

What even Bugbee stops short of, however, is engagement with the full extent of Indigenous forms of commitment to the co-creativity of the interaction in question. Western sensibilities – my own included –

tend to be enculturated to conceptions of interaction whereby individual participants take turns at exercising individual agency. Even Karen Barad's agential realism (Barad 1996), although committed to agency arising from interaction in relationship, involves our "providing" opportunities for another, potentially non-human organism to respond (Barad 2012, 38), with the verb "provide" leaving it in our human gift to choose when and in what form these windows of opportunity are going to be opened up.

Viola Cordova's pond analogy, conversely, conceives our actions as pebbles being dropped into a pond, and she does away from the very beginning with any notion of their ripples moving outwards in neat, predictable, causal concentric circles: our responsibility is not that of a billiard player required to preconceive their causal impact alone. Rather, our responsibility is one of experience intertwined with responsiveness as our ripples interact with everyone else's: the pond features a criss-cross of waves more than it does individual ripples (Moore 2007, xiii-xiv). When Cordova talks about our human responsibility to contribute to there being balance in the world, she does not conceive balance as a predictable state of equilibrium with a fulcrum in the middle, whereby we might be able to preconceive a defined resting place to be aimed at. Balance, rather, is a dynamic of our balancing on a board placed across a barrel which is *not* resting as it lurches along on ever-shifting sand (Cordova 1992, 99). It is only at second glance that my Western sensibilities notice the co-creative dynamic of the shift making itself felt through the soles of my feet as my feet simultaneously contribute to creating the shift. It is in mutual responsiveness that Cordova's analogies are able to operate. Failure in responsiveness brings their processes of shared learning and creation to a halt.

It is at this point that Indigenous conceptions of story as verb, and of story as sacred, living dynamic (for example Sinclair 2013), with arguably greater affinity to Little Bear's manifesting than to his manifest, may appear in the outer reaches of our contemporary Western comfort zone. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson makes reference to two types of story forming part of her Anishinaabeg understanding, with permeable boundaries between the two: on the one hand, sacred stories relate to timeless dynamics; on the other, ordinary stories relate to our time-bound interaction in the here and now (Simpson and Manitowabi 2013). It is from the verb-based former that instruction for the latter is derived. It is not the case that the latter, through its time-bound players, let alone by means of players conceived as objects, provides categories of precedent

to determine what is to be done. Rather, a story is a gift which entails the recipient's responsibility to interact with its dynamic as we relate to our own surroundings and learn to feel our way (for example Welch 2019, 170).

Where personality is conceived as interplay of power and place, with power being the living energy that comprises the universe, and place the relationships in a particular location (Deloria and Wildcat 2001, 22-23), it becomes apparent that we are going to lack understanding to categorise in advance and to derive from our categorisation alone what our moral course of action in relation to another entity should be. Rather, it is further engagement with Simpson's and Sinclair's conceptions of story which is going to provide clarity here: in a context where philosophy is conceived to consist not only in minded activity, but where it involves emotional, embodied, and spiritual alongside minded endeavour (Simpson 2013, 290), there is nothing utopian or romantic about a conception of the co-creative dynamic of story as becoming and then of becoming, in turn, as love (Sinclair 2013, 96). Sinclair makes clear that "love" is here conceived as the hard work of mutual attentiveness as opposed to an empty phrase absolving us from responsibility. The unique contribution of Indigenous philosophers to this debate is not that responsibility has been abolished: their unique contribution is that responsibility abolishes unilateral human control.

Brian Burkhart illustrates the above concepts in his jazz analogy. For Burkhart, our ethical action is about finding forms of mutually responsive interaction whereby the individual player contributes to the harmony of the band while simultaneously being buoyed by the band's play (Burkhart 2019, 292). Shared ground with Cordova's (1992) above discussion of the relevance of Spinoza's thought regarding the mutually supportive relationship between the individual's *conatus* and that of the whole is evident.

In Burkhart's conception, it is not the case that correct action can solely be derived from categorisation of the entities involved (Burkhart 2019, 226). Knowledge of the already existing does play a part – through tradition, and through experience – but its part is not one of rendering interaction static by pre-determining what must be done. It is, rather, one of shaping what can be done, as Burkhart's jazz band would allow an existing score to shape its skillful, ever-responsive improvisation.

### 3.2. *Indigenous conceptions of performative knowledge processes and ethics: a case study*

What has been emerging from the above is a dynamic whereby propositional knowledge of the already existing may well play a part in our ethical judgements, but where this is not all. Pre-emptive forms of legislation in relation to non-humans as well as to humans can act as a safety net where relationships have not yet developed, or where these may have failed. Indigenous philosophers have explicitly endorsed this (for example Turner 2004). Some have lived their endorsement by qualifying as legal professionals<sup>2</sup>. What is at stake in this paper is not a call to abandon any form of categorisation or standardisation: rather, it is a call to allow these to remain open to being tempered by mutually responsive, co-creative interaction in processes of shared learning and creation as conceived by Indigenous philosophers. We need not do away with current animal rights legislation based on what we know “about” animals through the findings of contemporary Western science. What this paper suggests, rather, is that we should treat such knowledge as one piece in an ever-growing, co-creative mosaic of shared becoming in relationship, where unexpected understandings may arise from *I-thou*.

Robin Wall Kimmerer relates a story of a postgraduate student’s work with Indigenous harvesters of sweetgrass, as well as with the plant itself, inadvertently uncovering an ancient evolutionary relationship between migratory buffalo and grass, which is likely to have been at the root of present-day honourable harvest stories in their region (Kimmerer 2020, 156-166).

The evolutionary relationship is now traceable through the evolved biochemical interplay between buffalo saliva and grass growth (*ibid.*, 164). At no time does Kimmerer suggest that biochemistry is *all* that it is. Rather, much as we nowadays develop shared practices in our relationships with the family dog (Gaita 2017, 49-50), the basket-makers’ ancestors may well have gleaned the wisdom of their practices of honourable harvest, now encoded in story, through attitudes and behaviours of atten-

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<sup>2</sup> Examples of authors cited in this paper include Anne Waters (<https://philpeople.org/profiles/anne-schulherr-waters-j-d-ph-d/publications?order=added>), Vine Deloria (University of Colorado Boulder, *Vine Deloria Jr.*, <https://www.colorado.edu/law/vine-deloria-jr>), Leroy Little Bear (<https://www.ulethbridge.ca/alumni/awards/2003/leroy-little-bear>) and Sa’ke’j Henderson (<https://www.cigionline.org/people/james-sakej-youngblood-henderson/> [all accessed 03/09/2024]).

tiveness in their lives spent in close proximity to buffalo and grass. In other words, the case study may well exemplify an observation made by Bekoff (2007, 31): what we tend to categorise as non-humans' "instinct", and to place in opposition to human rationality, may in fact be constitutive of the very rationality we like to claim as exclusively our own.

Considered from within Little Bear's above understandings of philosophical unity in diversity between Indigenous worldviews, the time-bound, manifest grass, and its manifest harvesters, are inextricably intertwined with the timeless dynamic of inter-species, mutual responsiveness of honourable harvesting shared through their story. What is more, honourable harvest stories may involve a variety of species depending on location. It is thus an attitude of humility in simultaneously spiritual and embodied inter-species kinship which is at stake here, although known characteristics of a particular species may be taken into account (for example Cajete 2000, 73 and 161).

Three aspects of the case study will immediately catch our attention in the context of this discussion. There may well be more. Firstly, as already stated, the ethical issue at stake has shown itself incapable of being comprehensively captured by considerations relating to the characteristics of the species involved alone. Relationships of honourable harvest may develop in inter-species scenarios where at least one participant does not meet the criteria considered in the contemporary Western models referenced at the beginning of this paper.

Secondly, Kimmerer's account shows that in the initial conception of the project referenced, Kimmerer and the postgraduate student could not have known what they were going to find: the project was designed and approved to correlate plant growth with different methods of harvesting. It was through the postgraduate's humility of allowing relationships both with harvesters and with patches of sweetgrass to unfold that the remainder of the story revealed itself, and the remainder of the story, as pointed out by Bekoff, had non-human instinct honing human rationality. The honourable harvest stories (and along with these, rudimentary, related understandings now encoded in contemporary Western Environmental Science textbooks) are unlikely to have originated in the human mind: they are likely to have originated in the embodied. The embodied, in the location concerned, took place between buffalo and grass.

With Raimond Gaita above, and with the Indigenous authors cited in the same vein since, any perceived divide between ethics and scientific rigour has here collapsed into the simultaneous decency *and* rigour of giving space to the "other" to contribute on its own terms – terms which

may well lie on the far side of what we may think of, let alone know how to categorise, from the beginning.

Thirdly, the remainder of the story as it did reveal itself cannot be conceived to be entirely propositional, nor can it be conceived to be entirely static: the involvement of relationship, both evolutionary and beyond, has seen to that. It is the *dynamic* of honourable harvest which may form a timeless pattern in Little Bear's manifesting. Any particular expressions of it in the manifest – percentages of plants taken from a patch, quotas of animals to be hunted allotted to an Indigenous community based on nutritional requirements – are likely to become subject to change as relationships continue to be co-created. Buffalo saliva may increase its effectiveness at supporting grass growth. Communities' nutritional requirements may change, as may nutrient content of animals hunted. This is before we even consider those aspects of the relationships involved which may not be accessible through biochemistry alone. Sinclair, for one, cautions that story as verb must be kept alive, and co-creative, through continuing interaction in and with the living world (Sinclair 2013, 83). Welch's above understanding of story as requiring unique engagement in unique circumstance (Welch 2019, 170) has revealed itself to be bi-directional: it is in and through its regeneration in unique engagement that story resists becoming ossified. Pre-emptive forms of legislation grounded in the already manifest continue to form a valuable piece in the ever-growing mosaic of our learning to relate ethically to those around us. At the same time, much of the reason why they cannot be all relates to the fact of this "all" remaining forever unfinished.

If the question were to arise of whether to uproot the plants in Kimmerer's postgraduate's project to make room for, say, a community cultural centre, any process of discernment would be infinitely more complex than consideration of the capacities of the individuals affected alone, much as these will deserve to play a part.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This paper argued that our human assumption of being in a position to ascribe moral considerability to others in itself already constitutes a form of anthropocentrism, as it treats our own perspective as the central one.

Blind spots were shown necessarily to result from this, first when argued from within a representationalist paradigm, and subsequently



when argued from within a participationalist one. Examples of the former included our inability reliably to identify absence of a particular capacity in members of another species, as well as our inability to know the full range of capacities which might be relevant to the debate. In addition, the question was raised of other factors besides capacity requiring consideration.

With regards to the latter, participationalist paradigm, it was shown that its interwovenness of ontology and epistemology entailed the possibility of our co-creating circumstances as yet uncategorisable, and thus necessarily incapable of being comprehensively addressed by pre-existing ethical precepts grounded in the already manifest.

It thus became clear that contemporary Western approaches to transcending anthropocentrism (such as, for example, sentientism or biocentrism), while remaining helpful to the debate, were incapable, at least on their own, of conclusively resolving questions of ethical inter-species conduct. This was due firstly to their reliance on knowledge about the already existing which turned out to be insufficiently available to them, and secondly to their insufficient ability to accommodate the relationality and co-creation inherent in a participationalist paradigm.

The very relationality and co-creation which were thus identified to be problematic, however, simultaneously revealed themselves also to be capable of acting as a path to potential resolution. Initially approached with the help of contemporary Western stepping stones such as Martin Buber's and Raimond Gaita's philosophy, alongside aspects of American Pragmatism and European phenomenological thought, before being left to speak on their own terms, Indigenous philosophers' conceptions of our co-creative relationality were introduced. Leroy Little Bear's elements of philosophical unity in diversity, Viola Cordova's shared ground with Spinoza's thought, and Brian Burkhart's jazz analogy converged to reveal balance, and with it ethical conduct, as an ever-shifting dynamic in search of mutually supportive forms of interaction between the individual and the whole.

In relation to this search for mutually supportive balance, it was shown that it may only be once the dignity of a perceived "other" has been acknowledged, and has been granted space to grow into unique contribution, that both pre-existing capacity and co-creative agency in – potentially inter-species – relationship become empowered to unfold. Our non-objectifying engagement with any "other" (from what may, initially, appear to be the furthest reaches of our shared network too complex for any of us to grasp), thus turns out to be crucial if ethical choices

are to result. Its exclusion, and the resulting prevention of its ontological and epistemic contribution, was shown to be unethical because it is counterproductive and counterproductive because it is unethical under a conception of balance as mutual responsiveness between the individual and the whole. Knowledge “about” another, while remaining helpful, was shown to require continuing openness to being tempered in processes of learning “from” and learning “with”.

A case study of what tends to be referred to as non-human instinct, and placed in opposition to human rationality, in fact having been a source of wisdom now shared and continuously regenerated in the form of Indigenous stories of honourable harvest, was provided to illustrate these points.

Both through the concepts discussed and through the practicalities presented in the case study, our moral task was shown to be more complex than any theory solely grounded in the already manifest can resolve: it is once we allow the relational dynamics of the manifesting to enter into the equation that co-creative paths to sustainable balances are likely to emerge.

We may well find ourselves still choosing to pick and to eat our strawberry introduced at the beginning of this paper – but if our aim is to eat it ethically, nothing can spare us the intellectual, emotional, embodied, and potentially spiritual effort of feeling our way in shared learning and creation, informed but never determined by propositional knowledge about the already existing previously claimed as our own.

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