

is humility in describing their beginnings and their attachment to their Aboriginal heritage. Hager has captured the underlying aspect that these people are the pride of their respective First Nations and that they do bring *honour* not only to themselves but to their people as well.

As stated earlier, this volume written by Ms Hager who is of Cree-Metis heritage, is a welcome addition to not only my bookshelf but to any person who has an interest in learning about Aboriginal people.

Sylvia O'Meara and Douglas A. West (editors). *From Our Eyes: Learning from Indigenous Peoples*. Toronto: Garamond Press, 1996, 154 pp.

Review by Umek (Dr. E. R. Atleo), First Nations Studies, Malaspina University College.

"Trickster is alive and well!" might be an apt response to this edition of various Indigenous authors who present "Indian" learning and knowledge to the academic community. *From Our Eyes* is a collection of papers that provides an Indigenous orientation to a wide variety of issues, all of which serve to create a "space" for Indigenous academic dialogue. Issues range from philosophy to historiography, scholarship, art education, metaphysics, sharing circles and language education. There is something very fitting about such an edition emerging into the light of academic day near the turn of a new millennium. Essentially the darkness has lasted for 500 years since 1492 and once again the Trickster (Raven in my story) is seeking to capture the day, light, fire, source of understanding and wisdom. The story is still the same but now the community has grown larger to span the world – or did it grow larger? Perhaps the world has always been the stage for Trickster.

As it was in the beginning, before the first light dawned, so the story goes, everyone had an opinion (theoretical stance, philosophy) about how to capture the light from those wolves¹ over there. Eventually, after many blunders, Raven succeeds in capturing the light. Raven always succeeds but Raven always blunders prior to success. O'Meara and West, the editors, take the same stance about life. They, and the authors of *From Our Eyes*, are only "human," subject to many limitations, and this is just a fact of life, a reflection of reality, a statement of the way things are. The rest of the book is a demonstration of that ongoing reality.

Let me set a traditional Indigenous council environment for the discussions found in *From Our Eyes*. A circle is formed. There are serious issues to discuss. In an environment of profound sacred respect where

words are charged with power to do good or evil, to destroy or to create, to heal or to make ill, to make war or to make peace, it is sometimes useful for the "fool"² to speak first and so make way for the others. In the "Prologue," West plays this role by introducing the edition and commenting to some extent about the issues raised by each author. West makes it plain that the English language poses a significant barrier to understanding Indigenous knowledge, not to mention that the English language poses a significant barrier to understanding itself. West states:

The problem with the concept of world-view is that too often we accept that it means we all stand on the same world and view *it* differently, when, in fact what we should learn from this phrase is that there may, indeed, be fundamentally different worlds to view.
[p. 2]

While West may be clear about his meaning the ambiguity remains. Differences in world-views have different interpretations. From a Western perspective these differences may be "fundamentally different worlds to view" while from a holistic perspective these views are different dimensions or aspects of the same whole. The spiritual realm and temporal realm may be different worlds to view, but the former is the source of the latter and therefore indivisible from it. Moreover, from an Indigenous perspective, "tricksterism" (the mysterious art of being human), a major theme or strand of the book, allows for the widest latitude of worlds to view. Each person's view of the world has its own integrity, which may or may not coincide with other world-views. On the other hand, academics, through systematic discourse and dialogue, assume the prerogative to set the record straight by implying that "your perception of 'world-view' is incorrect and my perception is correct." Tricksterism, on the other hand, allows sacred room for the cacophony of divergent views and interpretations, and it is this feature of reality that frustrates those who may have hegemonic tendencies. A blending of the two perspectives is the current reality exemplified by the contents of *From Our Eyes*.

A difficult issue is one of duality, the either-or problem found within the Western thought pattern, which often results in the exclusion of some ideas and the acceptance of others. For example, West takes exception to a statement made by Calvin Martin in *The American Indian and the Problem of History*, where Martin suggests that biological time replace anthropological time as a way of understanding the "Indian" perspective. This is a trap of duality, West claims, since nothing should be discarded; it should not be a case of choosing between anthropological time and

biological time. However, in a discussion of Snider's work West seems to fall into the same trap. He quotes with approval Snider's remark: "Knowledge which does not inform the heart is not knowledge at all." Here, knowledge that informs the head only has been denied reality.

From the first article, "Doing Native American Philosophy," by V. F. Cordova, the problem of duality, identity, perspective, world view, is more exquisitely articulated. Do Native Americans have a philosophy? They do and they do not, and it is in the discussion around philosophy that the first hint comes that the sameness and differentness of Indigenous perspectives as compared to Western thought might put into question the very foundations "of traditional Western knowledge." The active verb *Doing* in the title suggests an essential and foundational difference between Western philosophy and Indigenous "philosophy." The former is purely a cognitive exercise removed from active reality while the latter is predicated upon a physical, mental and spiritual engagement with reality. A sensitive and contemporary example is the issue of blood quantum: identity is not limited to the amount of Indigenous or non-Indigenous blood; it is an issue of human nature and cultural life-ways.

Jace Weaver highlights the importance that historiography plays in the creation of contemporary identity. When history is written primarily from a dominant perspective, this effectively is an identity control mechanism over Indigenous people. Related to these historical considerations that created adverse conditions for Indigenous peoples is the paper by Snider that is about poverty. Writing of his own country, America, he makes this incisive statement: "A country which places profits before human needs cannot hope to eliminate poverty." It is in the context of American Indian poverty that Snider made the comment that "Knowledge which does not inform the 'heart' is not knowledge at all." Academics (social scientists) must imbue their scholarship with "moral responsibility" in order to avoid irrelevance.

Hollowman's article on "Art" and Meyer and Ramirez's article on "Lakota Metaphysics" may be said to have a similar theme. Both deal with the ineffable, inarticulate – mysteries of Native American life-ways, one in artistic expression and the other in the mysteries of the spiritual realm that is often characterized by sacred practitioners through metaphor, allegory or parable. Meyer and Ramirez discuss the "inscrutability" of Lakota metaphysics in terms of incommensurability, dissociation and indeterminacy. These are Western concepts which are answered with *Mitakuye Oyasin!* – "We are all related." From an important Indigenous perspective, how simple and how profound can it get?

"Sharing Circles" by Michael Anthony Hart, a discussion of Trickster by Lola L. Hill in an analysis of Louise Erdrich's novels, the application of the Medicine Wheel to language education by Odgig White, and the concluding "Epilogue" by O'Meara, carry on the age-old tradition of applying an Indigenous perspective to life. The circle has an important connection to life in a spiritual sense and therefore it makes sense to apply the circle to problem solving, to education programs and so on. In the same way, as important as the circle is to Indigenous perspectives, of equal importance is Trickster. Linear logic will dismiss Trickster, but Lola Hill, and many others, do not, because Trickster/Transformer/Coyote/Raven are not who they appear to be, and of course they are exactly who they appear to be as well. What does it all mean? How can any self-respecting academic make sound linear logic from all these discussions? Is a dialogue possible at all? On the ground, O'Meara provides one example of the Indigenous perspective in everyday terms, in everyday life experiences, in her "Epilogue," where she relates what "being Indian" means to her. Can the essence of life really be that mundane? Yes, as Black Elk has said elsewhere: "The chief proposition of the universe is relationality."

1 Westerners, take no offence: wolves are highly respected supernatural beings in my territory.

2 An equivalency in English that misleads as much as it enlightens.