

## Indigenous Philosophical Conceptions of Pluralizing the Self

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That Eduardo Duarte engages “the movement of liberated thinking,” how “thinking is freed from the sovereignty of the thinker,” and elaborates the need to “pluralize the self” in the context of a footnote in Immanuel Kant’s “Ideal for a Universal History From a Cosmopolitan Perspective” speaks to the breadth of his vision in “Kant, the Nomad, and the Publicity of Thinking.” His creative juxtapositions of and movements between Kant, Socrates, and Hannah Arendt, according to the pedagogical and metaphysical illness of monologism, are challenging and provocative.

He writes that his essay is an attempt to “locate a cure for the silent disease that undermines the good intentions of self-identified dialogic teachers.” Duarte characterizes and elaborates monologism as a silent disease according to Paulo Freire’s notion of narrative sickness and also Arendt’s discussion of an enlarged will and her notion of the disclosure of the “who” within a dialogue. This latter idea provides Duarte the outline of his cure for monologue. More than simply curing monologism with dialogism, Duarte emphasizes the movement of one’s thought apart from the thinker through a public. It is a call for distancing oneself from one’s own thought as it is refracted and mediated through an other and a public. This process he suggests is both indicative of and facilitating to a pluralizing of the self. He writes, “Curing this illness is not simply a matter of speaking, but of disclosing the new through the liberation of thought from the thinker. We might call this the disclosure of plurality: the appearance of uniqueness embodied with each who that is disclosed, not simply as distinct from each other, but as distinct from the self.”

I am interested in hearing Duarte outline any distinctions he has between thought and speech, and the inscription and re-inscription of both on bodies through a publicity, a domain that is never neutral. Likewise I would like to hear how he would characterize the ways he is working with, for, and against certain elements of Western metaphysics. In particular this effort toward freeing and liberating thought speaks not only to a curative effort but also resembles and echoes for me a project of perfecting thought, speech, reflection, and perhaps even being. To be as provocative as Duarte, I might ask how he is engaged not only in the curing of monologism but in a parallel project of perfecting being according to a pluralizing of the self. Like in so much of Duarte’s work, Martin Heidegger is close at hand, and I would enjoy hearing more about this presence and its influences regarding a perfection of dialogical being through the liberation of thought from the thinker. It is hard not to desire such a being, especially in trying to put it to work on behalf of students. Finally, Duarte’s essay also prompts me to consider and inquire about two interrelated questions regarding responsibility: can we still speak of taking responsibility for one’s thoughts, if the highest goal is to liberate thinking apart from the thinker; and, relatedly, how would he describe a discussion in which we maintain a responsibility to the other such that they are not reduced to a sounding board?

In differing ways, each of these questions engages the concerns for plurality and a public at the center of Duarte's discussion. I would like to proceed by taking up these issues according to the intellectual and philosophical traditions of First Nations peoples of North America. In a sense I want to pluralize the idea of plurality by pointing out a set of Indigenous philosophical traditions that have theorized notions of a pluralized self quite differently, and, in the process, articulate an alternative conception for a public.

Plurality in these Indigenous traditions is based on a recognition of the intricate relations between humans and the natural world. "In American Indian philosophy," writes Diné (Navajo) philosopher Brian Yazzie Burkhart, "we must maintain our connectedness, we must maintain our relations (to the lifeworld), and never abandon them in search for understanding, but rather find understanding *through* them."<sup>1</sup> Beyond the tradition that seeks to locate a pluralist self through an exclusively human public, many Indigenous philosophies of relations organize a theory of a pluralized self through their observations of the multifaceted complexity already occurring within the natural world. Indigenous understandings of a pluralized self come through the study of the differing (plural) modes of connectedness between humans and the various elements of a natural world. Thus Indigenous notions of a "public" are significantly broader, as Apache philosopher V.F. Cordova writes: "the Native American has a more inclusive sense of the We than others who share the sense of humans as *social* beings."<sup>2</sup> Sociality in Indigenous intellectual traditions extends well beyond humans; human sociality is just one of a variety of societal relations.

I do not wish to write of Indigenous philosophical and intellectual traditions in too simplistic or celebratory ways; their articulations within native languages are complexly layered, and their maintenance among Native peoples and communities is dynamic, often highly contested and caught within a variety of colonial simulations of the "Indian."<sup>3</sup> That they persist at all is in many ways stunning. I provide here a brief engagement with one aspect of these traditions that elaborates a more complexly organized pluralist self and public based on the relations to the natural world — the clan.

#### INDIGENOUS CONCEPTIONS OF PLURALIZED SELVES: CLANS FOR PEACE

On October 23, 1784, the same year Kant published his "Idea for a Universal History," representatives of the Iroquois Confederacy met with several leaders of the newly formed United States. In the shadow of the colonial outpost of Fort Stanwix, these Indigenous and European American leaders reaffirmed their commitments to peace, the specific territorial integrity of the Oneida and Tuscarora nations, and established new boundary lines between the United States and other aboriginal nations. While not overlooking the intersections of political, territorial, and economic interests in this treaty, I highlight the mutual investment in and affirmation of peace across differing intellectual and philosophical traditions. More specifically, I want to point out that the Indigenous leaders were, and continue today to be, organized according to animal-based clans.

With no easy access to clan identity from outside these communities, I note here that the Haudenosaunee appear to have institutionalized notions of a pluralized self based on inclusion of beings other than humans. Moreover, if Yazzie Burkhart is correct, their understanding of peace emerges from the connectedness to the natural world that clan-based societies maintain. The idea of peace and, by extension, the public, freedom, or liberation is not an exclusively human affair. The pluralist self facilitated by clans is a call for peacefulness in an enlarged public, a public where humans are just one among and between numerous distinct forms of sociality — human, plant, animal, and so on.

#### CONCLUDING COMMENTS: DIALOGUE AS TRANSLATION AND NATURAL RELATION

In speaking of the clan systems of the Haudenosaunee as part of an Indigenous philosophical tradition of pluralizing the self, I am elaborating Duarte's call for the end to another kind of monologism: philosophical provincialism. Invoking the 1748 Treaty of Fort Stanwix, I suggest that peaceful relations can be established between vastly differing philosophical systems without the often-assumed need for universalistic norms. Such a position perhaps runs contrary to the discussions of the cosmopolitan perspectives elaborated by Kant and current neoliberal philosophies. I agree with Sheldon Pollock, Homi Bhaba, Carol Breckenridge, and Dipesh Chkrabarty, who have recently written, "All the derring-do between the local and the global in the dialectic of worldly thinking should not conceal the fact that neoliberal cosmopolitan thought is founded on a conformist sense of what it means to be a 'person' as an abstract unit of cultural exchange."<sup>4</sup>

The Haudenosaunee in 1784 and still today maintain nonconformist ways and understand peace, freedom, and liberation through a clan connectedness to the natural world, not apart from it. The Haudenosaunee philosophical system that undergirds a pluralized clan self offers further points for discussion complementary to the cosmofeminist orientation outlined by Pollock, Bhabha, Breckenridge, and Chkrabarty, the posthumanist discussions within Continental philosophy, and the discussions on sustainability in the sciences and humanities.

Dialogizing the self, as Duarte argues, can be a cure. However, in juxtaposing Indigenous philosophies of natural relations embodied in the clan, I am suggesting that dialogue that is human centered is only a partial cure. Recently my colleagues in the Natural Resources Department have been discussing natural deficiency syndrome. It is hard not to think this a bit of an overstatement, but I assure you that the human and biological ecologists I work with are very serious about what they are declaring to be an illness. Moreover, they speak to me with the particular concerns of how to intervene in such a dis-ease with the natural world through environmental education programs.

This latter point is critical. It is clear from a variety of intellectual domains that something like a dialogical relation with the natural world is increasingly important to Duarte's call for the pluralizing of the modern cosmopolitan self. The intellectual traditions of clan-based societies point to this more encompassing dialogue and curative effort, one that Western-trained ecologists are investing in. The idea of

healthiness, like peace, is still being understood for many Indigenous peoples through their relations to the natural world.

That these communities are still speaking their languages, maintaining their clans, and living on their territories (though much reduced by illegal settler occupation), provides as powerful a philosophical system for philosophers of education to engage as that of Kant. Along with Duarte, I seek a cure in dialogue as a translational project between Aboriginal and Continental philosophies, deliberating on the best of these traditions for an understanding of peace, liberation, and freedom through our relations with the natural world.

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1. Brian Yazzie Burkhart, "What Coyote and Thales Can Teach Us," in *American Indian Thought*, ed. Anne Waters (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2004), 25 (emphasis in original).

2. V.F. Cordova, "Ethics: The We and the I," in *American Indian Thought*, ed. Waters, 177 (emphasis in original).

3. See Gerald Vizenor's *Manifest Manners: Postindian Warriors of Survivance* (Hanover, N.H.: Wesleyan University Press, 1994).

4. Sheldon Pollock, Homi Bhabha, Carol Breckenridge, and Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Cosmopolitanisms," in *Cosmopolitanism*, eds. Pollock, Bhabha, Breckenridge, and Chakrabarty (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002), 5.