

Bruce Ferguson - proposal for a philosophy course addressing Indigenous issues – July 31<sup>st</sup>, 2016

The following is an excerpt from an informal email dialogue with Sylvia Berryman, written while Bruce was recovering from surgery.

### **I. Western Analytical Philosophy and Indigenous Thought.**

- Should we validate western philosophy as having any role to play in talking about indigenous realities
- What is the scope of responsibility of western philosophy in setting the stage for imperialism and the colonial relationships
- Why is it important to holistically understand western philosophy in terms of a whole argument (not section of an argument that is selected to make a political or social statement)
- Is truth universal or relative. Does indigenous and western philosopher (thinkers) have common contributions to a life questionable from a different socio-cultural lens

### **II. Survey of North American Indigenous Philosophers and Subject Areas**

- Glen Coulthard, Anne Rice, Lorraine Mayer, Dale Turner, etc.

### **III. Indigenous Metaphysics (common themes) and Ontological Commitment**

- diversity of metaphysics - not a homogeneous body of thought.
- Commonalities: metaphysics are based on earth, place, and not on time, the connection to the earth, the land and our species place within creation.
- what does indigenous thought say about multiple universes, the relationship between what can exist and cultural group development

### **IV. Sympathetic non-indigenous philosophical thought and "allied philosophers".**

Non indigenous thought and its contribution to allied scholarship.

### **V. Indigenous Social Epistemology and Indigenous Relations to the traditional epistemology (Justified True Belief).**

- **How do indigenous people know what they know. Should social epistemology outrank traditional** (individual based epistemology - justified true belief).

- What of the roles of oral tradition (story telling, remembered memories etc., transmitted orally) (Dr. Bruce Miller, UBC Anthropology): the role of ceremony, ritual and cultural traditions as a means of knowing what indigenous people know as a people. (how we know what we know)

## **VI. Indigenous Success in 50 years of Indigenous Struggle (Philosophical focus on nature and direction of the struggle).**

## **VII. Philosophic Reflection on the nature of resistance and the indigenous struggle**

- What can philosophy bring to the discussion on understanding the nature of struggle, resistance, roles of philosophy and ideology, the politics of recognition (reconciliation, etc.), Big Indian Business, land claims and sovereignty.

My evolving thoughts:

I wanted to cut and paste the above material so that I could be more focused on thinking a bit more on this conversation. The first idea is the idea of a "two-stream" course and by that I mean, a strategy of delivering the course to two sets of learner;: aboriginal and mainstream/multicultural learners. My thinking behind this is based on my own experience as an aboriginal learner. Most aboriginal courses designed at universities are set up for the non-aboriginal learner, and so we keep learning about our realities as indigenous people from a non-indigenous perspective and value system that tries to decolonize mainstream and multicultural assumptions about our people. Rarely are we given the opportunity as aboriginal learners to define our own learning needs, i.e. how can western philosophy be of assistance to our struggle (and I believe there is a lot of works by western philosophical writers to look at this). What I mean by "two-stream" course is the option for aboriginal learners to identify themselves as learners and choose whether we want a basic course in philosophy (within the framework of the suggested themes above) and/or dedicate one hour a week to identify our interests as aboriginal learners within the framework of the course. This could be facilitated by a partner teacher in the Indigenous Studies program at UBC as an example, or a self-led seminar of aboriginal students defining what we want to learn - I am not sure of an exact methodology as I am just working on the concept right now.

I think section 3 (Indigenous metaphysics) and section 5 (Indigenous Social Epistemology and Indigenous relations to traditional epistemology - justified true belief) contains a bias of mine as an aboriginal thinker. What I mean by these sections is to look at metaphysics and epistemology (including the new emerging field of social epistemology - which may be more relevant to indigenous thinking) from an aboriginal angle. I suppose the decision to offer this potential course at the 1st /2nd year level and/or the 3rd/4th year would deeply affect this reflection. My original idea was to build on the

basic understanding of what 1st/2nd year courses teach about metaphysics and epistemology - if the course is offered in the last two years of a BA degree as a topics course, then we would build on the basic understanding of metaphysics and epistemology and then expand on those concepts to situate or provide a groundwork for the "possibility" of an indigenous metaphysics and indigenous epistemology reality.

I would be very open to your idea that "*Another approach might be to start from the survey in section two and study a representative Indigenous philosopher who engages with the themes of 3, 5 and maybe even 4, 6 and 7?*" I think this approach would be very helpful to indigenous and non-indigenous students, however, I wonder who these indigenous philosophers are in conversation with; are they deconstructing western philosophy, are they visioning and articulating indigenous knowledge, etc., so I think it is important to situate non-native philosophers in these sections as I don't want to talk about thinking in isolation of the network of philosophical traditions available in global thought.

Bruce Ferguson