

Bruce Ferguson – 22 January 2017

Reference: <http://www.indigenousthoughts.net/student-led-research-project---kwantlen-polytechnic-university.html>

The purpose of this student led research project "Assessing the Relationship of Canadian Academic Philosophy to Indigenous Thought in Canada" is to explore how western philosophy and indigenous thought are or can be in conversation with each other. The project provides a bit of a challenge for me because while I am a 60 year old mature aboriginal student taking philosophy at university, I am learning the courses and developing my questions as I move forward in my studies, so I have experienced delays, restructuring of my questions and orientation and all those things most professionally trained philosophers would welcome in an undergraduate student. This project is a labour of love as are my other projects I am beginning to define in my website www.indigenousthoughts.net – I hope you can find a minute or two to look it over and share any thoughts with me.

The project recognizes the absence of indigenous thought in philosophy departments and/or conversation between academic philosophy and academic Native Studies in Canadian universities; the goal of this project is to try and understand the nature of this absence. About a year ago, I sent an email to all of the philosophy departments in Canadian universities listed by the Canadian Philosophical Association. I wanted to basically survey the department heads so I could start with a scanning of the 'state of indigenous philosophy'. The following are the trends identified;

- The departments for whatever reason (size of department, limited resources, etc.) focused only on traditional western philosophical courses and they develop their students along these lines. Many of these university chairs noted to me that ***the lack of indigenous programs and philosophers is, in itself, a statement that needs to be heard.***
- A number of departments across Canada offer traditional western philosophy courses where they incorporate ***indigenous examples*** in Canada to underline or emphasis a western philosophical concept within the parameters of the specific course.
- At least two or three universities have developed courses and /or local textbooks to teach what the institution felt could be considered as indigenous philosophy
- There is no university philosophy department in Canada that has identified the need for an indigenous philosophy major or minor. Lakehead University had such a course and program but it was discontinued because of lack of resources.
- There is one or two universities that are in the process of ***developing institutes*** where they want to build in indigenous philosophy within the objectives of the overall institutes they are starting.
- In terms of feedback a number of academics wondered about what indigenous philosophy could look like. There is a sense among academics that we are on the cusp of an awareness of importance with regards to the need to think about indigenous thought.

So, this email is to a) introduce professors and students to my "emerging" and non-professional labour of love to look at indigenous philosophy, and b) to broaden the conversation and feedback from Department Heads to professors. I have the following questions for you.

1. Most bio's on your work talk about your areas of interest (specialization) and for most profiles these interests are traditional within western philosophical categories. Do you connect your area of studies to any consideration of indigenous knowledge? And by indigenous knowledge I am not limiting the application of your work to pragmatic issues like political philosophy, or philosophy of poverty, etc., but the nature of indigenous thought as proposed to the discussion by western philosophers in your area of work.
2. A number of areas of philosophy were a bit more general in their application (modern philosophy – which I understand to be the 16-17th centuries in western Europe) and or continental philosophy; are there philosophers in your area of interest that do, or could potentially contribute to the project of understanding the nature of indigenous thought?
3. If you could define any relation between the courses you teach and your area of interest, what would it be that could or does connect it to understanding the nature of indigenous thought?

4. Do you work with any other faculty members in an inter-disciplinary manner who focus on indigenous thoughts or issues (i.e. Native Studies, English, Social Science departments in regards to indigenous issues)?
5. What are some of your own thoughts, ideas, wishes that could contribute towards an idea of the nature of indigenous thinking and your particular work? Or any projects in your university community that you are involved with.
6. I am working on the idea of an Academic Journal (peer reviewed, open sourced) on Indigenous Philosophy and I would like to know if you would be willing to participate in that as an editor, and/or submit articles that I could put together to form an on-line, open access journal.
7. I am also working on the idea of an internet radio station which I like to refer as WTRM (where the rivers meet) as I am Algonquin and the people from different bands always met in places that are joined together by the meeting of two or more rivers. Would you be willing to do a telephone interview with me. I will send you the questions, so that you can be intentional in developing your answers as well as use the interview to talk about your own books, (sales, etc), projects, etc.

These questions are very limited, they are focused on your work as a professor in philosophy not a department head, management or administrative capacities. I appreciate any other thoughts that I have not anticipated. Again, remember as an undergraduate student I am really stumbling through this inquiry myself. I know what it is to be aboriginal I just am not sure what it is to be a western philosopher! At the end of the day I hope to contribute in a small, humble but "good way" to the starting of a more formal process in thinking about how indigenous philosophy can and should be defined and how it can and should relate to other western and non-western philosophical traditions. (Upanishads, Buddhist teaching, etc.)

You can respond to me by phone 604-722-9260 or by email. My address is bruce@indigenousthoughts.net and I look forward to hearing from you, thank you so much for your anticipated support and help.