

The text below is an excerpt from an email Bruce wrote to Sylvia Berryman and Alison Wylie, following their talks at an event hosted by Kwantlen Polytechnic University (KPU) in 2018. The title of the event was "Indigenous Thought Systems in Mainstream Philosophy Studies."

Hello again Sylvia and Alison. I have been doing some reflecting on the many things that were touched upon at our presentation-discussion. I am also biased in the sense that I am trying to find a way forward to begin talking about indigenous "philosophy" as opposed to rethinking a philosophical tradition that is not mine. There were a number of things that came up for me that I would like your thoughts on, and Rajdeep, Melinda, Julie and Liam, please feel free from a professional standpoint to offer some thoughts. Seema, I understood that you would of liked to attend. I am copying you cause I know you are doing work on indigenization at KPU so I am sending you these follow up emails from our meeting last Thursday.

UNIVERSALITY (OBJECTIVITY) VS RELATIVISM - is the first piece that has caught my attention. Like I said in the discussion I had defaulted to the universal concept of truth, that concept versus relativism alone could demand a life time of work, but my particular interest in it is one of an "indigenous apologetic" in that if I can show that according to indigenous knowledge and thought systems there is a theme of truth as universal, then it becomes easier to argue for a "network of philosophical traditions" that are unique, distinct, but yet can inform - on an equal basis with analytical or mainstream philosophy - or provide a lens to a certain question in regards to its truth. Equally I have probably undervalued the contributions of ancient skepticism and relativism, so I need to do some work there. I really do think that this issue is the first on a list of issues that requires research and study in order to set the stage for an argument that would validate indigenous thought as philosophy.

ANCIENT PHILOSOPHY - the second piece that caught my attention was the fact that I understand the work of philosophy as that of trying to understand the nature of "a thing". I understand social science as a lens that helps us understand a thing from empirical factors (measurements, properties, substance, etc.) and functions; what "a thing does", "how it works" and "how it inter-relates with other things". I am not sure though where social sciences formulates it basic assumptions, premises, the indivisible foundation from which social science can arise; is that the intersect between philosophy and social science (i.e. anthropology)? Similar to the internal work philosophy is doing in the mainstream analytical tradition I am sensing the same re-thinking in all the disciplines within social science are also self-critical, so it seems again there are two relationships "indigenous thought" needs to relate to the mainstream production of knowledge; (1) linking indigenous thought with emerging self-critical work in the social science as well as create some sort of understanding of why a more established social science knowledge traditions resonates or does not resonate with what is commonly held in indigenous knowledge traditions and (2) the independent development of social science and sciences (I am thinking of Leroy Littlebear and other indigenous academics who speak of indigenous science, etc.) that reflect indigenous experiential knowledge.

So, what has caught my interest in what you had to say Sylvia about ancient philosophy is how the ancient Greeks (and I am not sure if you were talking about the pre-socratic movements or

Socrates himself), but what interested me is how western philosophy had its' original formation through Socrates *question and frustration methodology* as well as the range of questions and issues that could be considered philosophy. In addition to the "nature of a thing", I believe you said that ancient Greeks also pondered the nature of happiness, a life well lived, and so forth. A review of how mainstream developed (and started from) the Greek practice of systematically asking about truth, how this developed in scholastic philosophy is important because it can show a number of things; (1) that the natural process of human thinking, reasoning is not mystical, we can and should de-mystify the Greek tradition to what it was ... a group of people struggling and or journeying to find truth and how that is a similar process to how the great thought traditions of the world in Asia, Africa, pre-Christian Europe etc., also developed their thought traditions; (2) what does systematic development of knowledge mean? A number of professors wrote to me and said that unless I could argue that there was a systematic attempt of reflection a set of ideas in themselves is not philosophy but how those sets of ideas are reflected upon. If this is true, I do believe we can argue that the telling and re-telling of stories, the telling and re-telling of indigenous protocol in regards to the hunt, etc. how the land was shared prior to European settlement, then I do believe an argument for the systematic processing and reflection of ideas has occurred in indigenous and other non-western traditions of thought, hence again we can talk about a legitimate indigenous philosophy in the framework of mainstream analytical philosophies own self-definitions. (3) the limits of truth claims by western (analytical) philosophy; how ancient Greek and scholastic philosophy can inform us on the limits of our truth claims; I had mentioned that I can't understand how mainstream philosophy can make wonderful and global truth claims based on a very limited set of human knowledge (that of the western tradition); this to me seems to be an important question on situating the truth claims that can be made by an "indigenous philosophical" methodology. It also could provide us food for thought in regards to the truth claims values of our own claims as indigenous people.

The Development of Indigenous Philosophy - would be a second chapter in my imaginary book, after making the argument that if there is a universal truth, then it is likely that the diverse traditions of knowledge only represent different paths to affirm the universality of that truth claim, we ought to embrace indigenous and other non-western traditions of thought to create a better chance of doing better philosophy globally. The "second chapter" would then find similarities in the natural process of human thinking, evaluation of human thinking and all the factors that influence this process (i.e. geography, land, survival formats like bands or tribes, conflict, etc. - things that history, anthropology etc., can provide us as reasonable premises to build arguments), the argument could establish the fact that if mainstream, indigenous and other non-western traditions are simply a human construction of survival then that opens the door to the understanding that indigenous philosophy in itself is in fact philosophy, not a subject matter of religion, anthropology or multi-disciplinary fields (although those fields can and do contribute to the articulation of indigenous thought systems.)

FEMINIST-STANDPOINT CRITIQUE OF MAINSTREAM PRODUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE - is the third piece that caught my attention. Alison, you covered a lot of territory in your presentation and I would not pretend to have understood it all, however, the points that caught my attention was your understanding of how mainstream academia (and philosophy is equally guilty) constructs our images and realities in terms that are not ours. I think that more and more mainstream academics are looking at the harm old assumptions have

caused in the long run. However, I am not sure if I am a fan with "throwing out the old" because it is old, as sometimes the old (as in premises) may have been ahead of their time and understated, wisdom comes from all peoples and from all times and I don't think it would be fair to dismiss old ideas cause they are old or they have a location in western thinking. Equally, the areas that you pointed out - including the much welcomed push-back on the idea of "universalism" I think are very relevant to both the re-thinking of philosophy and the violence and hurt it has caused in creating the rationale for imperialism and colonialism. The production of knowledge (academia) is political and it certainly has had political consequences. I think of Locke, Mills, etc., who wrote wonderful stuff yet supported the values of their time and place, so that presents some very interesting dynamics in terms of critique.

The evening accomplished one break-through I thought and that is mainstream philosophy and indigenous philosophy are two distinct things and processes, they are not levels of the other but distinct, separated, unique, yet united in the pursuit of wisdom, knowledge and the good way to live. We bring to the table our metaphysics, our ontological commitments (and turns), and our epistemological approaches (i.e. collective production of knowledge and stories) and those can meet the metaphysics, epistemological frameworks and methodologies of mainstream philosophy. Yet both traditions are - in my mind - required to do two different things; **western(mainstream) philosophy has to decolonize** and **indigenous philosophy has to articulate**, and I am not sure that I understand the weight of that statement but intuition tells me that these two processes need to be informed by the process of the others like I said above that *"linking indigenous thought with emerging self-critical work in the social science [is needed]as well as create some sort of understanding of why a more established social science knowledge traditions resonates or does not resonate with what is commonly held in indigenous knowledge traditions and (2) the independent development of social science and sciences (I am thinking of Leroy Littlebear and other indigenous academics who speak of indigenous science, etc.) that reflect indigenous experiential knowledge."* So in my imaginary book I think a chapter ought to be one on situating indigenous thought in terms of our relational journey with mainstream philosophy. I believe indigenous students of philosophy should be equally capable of discussing western texts and non-western text with an ability to accurately representation of the other and to anchor critique on a well understood text from the other tradition. This means that a non-native and native student of philosophy needs to balance an accurate knowledge of the text of the other and to base critical work on what the other view is saying. What I find particular dangerous in current indigenous rhetoric with non-indigenous peoples and issues is that too many indigenous students get caught up in a rhetoric of ideology in making their point, using too often western political argumentation in order to achieve an indigenous goal, I would like to think that reflective students would look to the nature of our rhetoric as indigenous people as a source of sustaining resistance and resurgence for our peoples' survival.