

FINAL REPORT

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To: Office of Research and Scholarship

Kwantlen Polytechnic University

"Surveying the Relationship of Indigenous Thought (Philosophy) and Mainstream Academic Philosophy in Canada"

INTRODUCTION

The goal of this project is to explore how mainstream philosophy and indigenous thought are in conversation with each other in a university setting. The project is not a research paper in the academic sense, rather, it is an exploration of the thoughts of philosophers in philosophy departments across Canada about Indigenous philosophy. This paper, as an open ended and unstructured survey of thinking, will share the thoughts imparted by philosophers engaged in the academic community. I do not intend to be making any conclusions, although I will offer some basic ideas in the form of recommendations. I am simply (as an undergraduate student) trying to draw some basic ideas, perceptions, innovations and other factors that contribute to the development of survey questions and thinking around the relative absence of indigenous philosophy in Canadian philosophical departments. The survey is done to the best of my ability and I hope that the ideas generated in this report will serve as focus or starting point for academic work on indigenous philosophy for professional philosophers (or graduate students) around the intersection between indigenous thought and mainstream Canadian philosophy.

SURVEY OBJECTIVE 1

Identify courses, programs and other academic and/or community-partner initiatives of post-secondary institutions across Canada that look at how philosophy and indigenous studies inter-relate.

Courses, programs and other academic/community partner initiatives identified in this survey focus on indigenous examples used to illustrate mainstream philosophical concepts, ground program development and inform academic/community partnerships (including research institutes). With respect to the application of indigenous examples in mainstream philosophy courses, I have collected examples that show specific ways in which the use of indigenous examples has served the purpose of many courses in philosophy. The report on the above survey objective is limited to two areas : Indigenous Knowledge and Courses and Program Development and Academic/Community Partnership (research Institutes, etc.)

INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AND APPLICATION TO COURSES AND PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

The use of indigenous examples to explore philosophical concepts in mainstream philosophical courses is the most common intersection between indigenous thought and mainstream Canadian philosophy. A quick reading of my "Application of Indigenous Examples in Mainstream Philosophy" (unpub.) will show the remarkable diverse and creative ways in which philosophers have utilized indigenous concepts in the teaching of philosophy. In contrast to the use of indigenous knowledge to ground mainstream philosophy courses and indigenous philosophy program development, the email discussions with many philosophers

highlighted some challenges to the approaches outlined elsewhere (“Application of Indigenous Examples in Mainstream Philosophy”). The following challenges apply to courses, program development and community-academic survey partnerships:

- **Recognizing the limits** of using indigenous examples to explain mainstream concepts. Does this approach do justice to either indigenous thought and/or a mainstream philosophical course? The cultural context behind an indigenous example may not correspond directly to a similar concept in a mainstream philosophical course. Working closely with Indigenous thinkers, elders or teaching partners would minimize this potential gap.
- **Grounding indigenous programs** in the application of indigenous metaphysics, epistemology, value theory and methodology seems to be a core requirement in indigenous philosophy courses and programs. In developing or systemizing (formalizing) indigenous thought there may be other means of analyzing the value of indigenous thought that is not yet done in mainstream Canadian philosophy. Many of the methods developed by indigenous academia should be incorporated.
- **Recognize the challenge of diversification** in mainstream philosophy was expressed by a number of Canadian philosophers. Very little exists at Canadian universities in regards to Indigenous philosophy, a reality known and lamented by most Canadian philosophers who responded; this sensitivity is connected to the desire to diversify the discipline, to be more inclusive of non-mainstream philosophical traditions and so forth. *“Mainstream philosophy itself in the 90s became self-aware of the violence of some of our habitual language of ‘tearing apart’ and combative argumentation, and self-consciously tried to modify these to more cooperative and constructive language. It still allows the same level of criticism, but can make for a more inclusive framing, that helps avoid gendered [and other?] stereotypes. I personally see philosophical argument as allowing for a variety of rhetorical styles, including anecdote, story-telling (look at our sci-fi counter-examples!), witnessing, as well as more lawyer-like marshalling of arguments”.* (a Canadian philosopher).
- **Political Tension** factored in as a considerable worry of non-indigenous philosophers. Their concern, about who gets to teach indigenous philosophy courses, the “indigenous only” push-back from indigenous scholars seems to have caused much tension. There were a couple of examples where professors were not allowed to teach non-mainstream philosophy because, these examples include situations where:
 - Administration stated a particular philosophy department was supposed to be mainstream;
 - Indigenous academics opposed courses dealing with indigenous content by non-indigenous professors resulting in the courses not being offered;
 - Instructors raised concerns about professional authenticity (teaching in an area of one’s expertise);
 - Non-native philosophers had a sense that there may be some degree of appropriation which they did not want to do.

I am Indigenous and this political tension *potentially denies me the means to develop my own thoughts in a way that I choose, not what professors or departments would like me to reflect in my thinking!* It is important to support courses taught by non-indigenous philosophers on emerging indigenous paradigms and truth claims; all claimed truths need to be studied even those that study indigenous knowledge from an external place. There is also the ethical question: do both indigenous academics and philosophers remain in their academic corners denying perhaps one or two generations of indigenous students (who just might become great philosophers) the opportunity to learn, or do we find middle ground (and perhaps “band-aid” transitional strategies) to ensure these generations can be taught?

- We need to do more thinking about how one thought tradition of systemized reflection is in conversation with another: can they be “translated”, can there be enough commonalities to build a hybrid philosophy that accounts for bi-multi cultural thought experiences or can we work towards what Rabb calls an ethno-metaphysics or my concept of a network model? A network model could work out ways of embracing and recognizing the value and distinctness of “the other” tradition(s) within a “network of philosophical traditions” model. One philosopher expanded on the idea of a network

model as an underlining approach to have conversation together AND as foundational to building an Indigenous Philosophy Program. He said “*networks interconnect different elements each of which, in becoming part of the network, influences the whole, without losing its unique and particular function. In the case of knowledge networks, since that which is brought into networked connection are reflective individuals, any genuine network would promote learning and change in all the parties. I suppose that if indigenous thought is to remain living it cannot simply [be] about the past and present, but will also grow and develop, in complex and critical interaction with European and North American traditions and disciplines. Those traditions too can learn about their own partiality and blind-spots through real dialogue with indigenous thought, but also, learn something new about the world it sometimes claims to have already mastered. Beyond mutual learning, one can see the possibility of new forms of hybrid thought develop which (perhaps) eventually grow beyond their particularist cultural origins towards a new human comprehensiveness.*”

- In terms of setting boundaries around indigenous philosophy, we ought not to assume what areas of indigenous philosophy would be related to in mainstream philosophy or vice-versa. This could be counter-productive and blind us to the process of discovery. What would “ancient philosophy” have to do with Indigenous philosophy, we should not assume that there is no relation. A Canadian philosopher talks about a relationship between the two traditions within the area of ancient philosophy. “*I think the question of indigenous knowledge, as you contrast it to pragmatic issues, might best fit in my own work in the context of what is sometimes characterized as ‘ancient’ philosophy. ... ‘Ancient’ isn’t the right word here, but the idea was that schools of thought that are independent of (prior to, separate from or not shaped by) the ‘modern’ scientific tradition might be good conversationalists. ... The notion that ‘academic’ philosophy as a critical, literary and institutionally based tradition, departing in style from traditional or ‘mythological’ ways of looking at the world, is one that has been questioned and examined by scholars of early Greek thought. Indigenous philosophy and ancient philosophy share a common characteristic of developing outside of the Enlightenment and modern science.*”

Academic/Community Partnerships (Survey Institutes)

The “good news” is the emergence of think-tanks, survey institutes and so forth that employ indigenous scholars and calls into service contributions that are made or can be made from indigenous philosophy. The inter-disciplinary nature of these institutions is consistent with a holistic and cohesive system of indigenous knowledge and therein lies the promise of these institutes. Canadian philosophers find employment in contributing to this cross-disciplinary approach and through these institutes there is a more direct link between indigenous thought and mainstream philosophy.

Institute for Critical Indigenous Studies, University of British Columbia
<http://fnis.arts.ubc.ca/community/institute-for-critical-indigenous-studies/>

The Institute for Critical Indigenous Studies (CIS) is an interdisciplinary survey unit for Indigenous critical theory and politics, arts survey, and applied social practice within the humanities and social sciences at UBC. It hosts First Nations and Indigenous Studies (FNIS) and the [First Nations and Endangered Languages Program](#) (FNEL). In addition to providing institutional support for undergraduate and graduate education and a home for visiting scholars in the field and Indigenous artists, CIS fosters ethical survey practices and meaningful partnerships with communities that further the social and political health, capacity, and self-determination of Indigenous peoples locally and globally.

Institute on Ethics of Survey with Indigenous People, Carleton University
<https://carleton.ca/indigenoussurveyethics/>

The Vision: A world in which survey involving Indigenous peoples begins always with respectful community engagement and proceeds in accordance with the highest ethical principles, fostering the growth of mutually beneficial partnerships that, in the spirit of reciprocity, benefit communities,

participants, surveyers and society. Reconciliation focuses on how we can live well together and that means building relationships based on trust and respect.

The Mission: The Carleton University Institute on the Ethics of Survey with Indigenous Peoples is an ethical and safe space that builds bridges among scholars, communities and their Survey Ethics Boards and others. It is a dynamic hub of collaboration and awareness that provides training for the responsible conduct of survey, with particular focus and responsiveness to the needs of First Nations, Métis and Inuit Peoples in Canada. The Carleton University Institute on the Ethics of Survey with Indigenous Peoples is an important manifestation of the spirit and content of [Carleton University's Strategic Integrated Plan](#) and [Indigenous Coordinated Strategy](#).

Centre for World Indigenous Knowledge and Survey

<http://indigenous.athabascau.ca/>

Social Justice and Peace Studies, Kings University and College

<http://www.kings.uwo.ca/academics/social-justice-and-peace-studies/>

SURVEY OBJECTIVE 2

Obtain information about the research Canadian philosophers and other academics are working on that is most directly connected to philosophical questions arising from within an indigenous context, by examining publicly available reports of research interests and other documents, and following up with further inquiry if needed.

There is relatively little indigenous oriented research done in Canadian philosophy in part because there are only a few indigenous academics and students of philosophy. The progress in Indigenous people talking about a systemized form of reflection is coming from multi-disciplinary Indigenous Studies programs which reflect the approaches of social science. In terms of the humanities, literary criticism (English) and interpretation theory (History) contribute towards the articulation of systemized philosophical thought in the indigenous community. Non-indigenous philosophers are also thinking about indigenous systems of thought and these projects are done mostly with the inclusion of indigenous thinkers ; other research and writing projects are done independently by non-indigenous philosophers. Paul Herman, a retired philosophy professor spent several sabbaticals in creating an annotated bibliography in which he tried to select indigenous works that can be thought of as philosophy.

I made a number of erroneous assumptions which were corrected via email conversations with Canadian philosophers : (1) I assumed that the status of indigenous philosophy as a survey object of mainstream philosophers was more advanced than I found it to be when I searched for general research on the relationships between indigenous and mainstream philosophy ; (2) I learned that much of the work being done on indigenous thought is being done by Indigenous Studies departments without communicating with mainstream philosophy, hence no conversation ; (3) I found that internet search tools were fragmented and a simplified source is needed.

The lack of research projects that focus on indigenous thought is the lack of indigenous students and philosophers. In addition, two other influences were discussed : (1) there are no programs that can train indigenous scholars (the history of the Lakehead Program is relevant here) and (2) finding indigenous research through internet search seems to be problematic.

The Canadian Philosophy Association (CPA) is the main source I drew from with regards to the status of Indigenous philosophy in Canada. Relying on reports from the CPA's Equity Committee the profile of indigenous philosophers becomes evident; there is a shortage!

The case of the philosophy department of Lakehead University is telling. Here it is, as told by the chair: "We had the world's only 'Native Phil' grad program. So we sought the best candidates in Indigenous thought & philosophy. This was very, very hard. We attracted few applicants at all, let alone ones that were Indigenous. We assumed that the best Indigenous scholars were scooped up elsewhere. (The same happened with the students: very, very few Native students were qualified for entry, even fewer cared about philosophy, and among those few that cared and were marginally qualified, well they had a tough time completing.) The grad program is now defunct."

A few words about the M.A. Program at Lakehead in regards to indigenous philosophy is needed to get a sense of the challenges before us all. The reports generated by the Equity Committee at the Canadian Philosophy Association states that the major reason for Lakehead University in closing down the program was that the program could not recruit enough indigenous students in philosophy to merit the program.

So, what is going on there? The stated reason (lack of applicants) provides the Canadian philosophical community an opportunity to assess and improve (not repeal and replace). Was the Lakehead MA program before its time (which I think it was)? Was it a recruitment problem? How were the students recruited? Recruitment strategies speaks to the fact that the recruitment process needs to be internal to the indigenous community; ***it takes indigenous people who recognize the importance of indigenous and mainstream philosophy to encourage students*** – through their education authorities, counselors, etc., to direct students into undergraduate philosophy. From there, a process of students becoming interested in philosophy at a graduate level may occur as an organic dynamic. In trying to identify indigenous research and/or mainstream research that tackles indigenous issues, the lack of a central place or "tag" to look up things forced me to re-think how I can make some statements about the status of indigenous philosophy in regards to finding authoritative sources which meant thinking on my own. I began to think about how to make accessing these databases simpler and up to date which led me to thinking about a concept of a clearinghouse idea that could function like the NACADA Clearing House <http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/> for the purposes of an on-line highlighting website that keeps everyone up to speed on indigenous philosophy research in an open source fashion. This also contributes to the needs of professors, students and others who are studying indigenous thought

One of the indicators of what Indigenous philosophy looks like already exists in the book shelves of our libraries, in academic and other journals, in fiction stories, movie scripts and so forth. Published material and the emergence of digital publishing, open source and polycentric approaches are an exciting avenue into the world of indigenous thinking as philosophy. Professor Paul Herman (retired philosopher) spent a couple of sabbaticals surveying sources for indigenous philosophy. The annotated bibliography which found at <http://www.indigenousthoughts.net/prof.-herman-s-bibliograhpy.html> below touches not only academic sources but all other sources, his approach is as a professor of philosophy.

Recommendation #1: a clearinghouse idea that could function similar to the NACADA Clearing House <http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/> for the purposes of an on-line highlighting website that keeps everyone up to speed on indigenous philosophy research in an open source fashion. This also contributes to the needs of professors, students and others who are studying indigenous thought

Recommendation #2: A further step in a future survey project can use these questions but aim it at indigenous students in philosophy across the country, we can use it to see how philosophy or indigenous courses on thought are being "marketed" to indigenous students and other indigenous communities.

Recommendation #3 – A review of the types of research done by the institutions done that engage or contribute towards the articulation of indigenous philosophy. How can we encourage partnerships with the institutions to think this through with us?

Recommendation #4 - This need and resource though pointed out a greater need to create resources for all students of indigenous philosophy whether they be professors or first year students.

SURVEY OBJECTIVE 3

Examine in a preliminary way the case for the claim that there are benefits for more indigenous involvement in philosophical research, assuming there is currently an under-representation of indigenous thinkers in the humanities generally and philosophy in particular. How might indigenous student participation in the humanities compare to its participation in the social sciences, law, sciences or health fields?

It is said that sometimes “non-answers” or the lack of thinking in an area is the answer itself; the message that we need to look for is why the lack of answers? Certainly “non-answers” is the answer to survey question 3. The survey objective was created to ask philosophers how they saw the expansion and inclusion of indigenous thinkers in mainstream philosophy and thinking about why indigenous students study science and social sciences in higher numbers than philosophy. The answer that came from philosophers is that, given the very low numbers of indigenous philosophers and students of philosophy, this question was pre mature. The field of philosophy in regards to the inclusion of indigenous thinking was supportive but that the field does not know where to start in thinking about the questions needed to build an understanding of the nature of indigenous thinking, how it then relates to mainstream philosophy and the development of strategies to expand philosophy in to be inclusive of indigenous philosophical scholars in a representative manner.

Thus, I am not reporting on the above objective directly, but rather, am pushing the spirit of the objective forward; nothing needs to be proven with regards to the benefit of inclusion. The question morphs into one of **how do we do this?** The low participation rates of indigenous students in the philosophy fields as opposed to social science, etc., is one focus of thinking about the relative non-presence of indigenous students in philosophy and the implied need for an indigenous process of inviting indigenous students to our field.

- Indigenous students are choosing social sciences, apprentice training and sciences because, like many students, **education is an investment** and one hopes to ensure that the education is related to building a career, investments and life. Education as an investment needs to produce results.
- Indigenous students want to find ways to **help their communities** and contribute to the Indigenous struggle overall. This desire on the part of a demographically young population is to contribute to their people. Science and social science are both seen by indigenous students AND their counselors as being more action oriented, these social sciences teach our kids how to do things, not necessarily about why they are doing those things.

Recommendation # 1 – to facilitate indigenous people OURSELVES to take the leadership in research, teaching, administration, etc. without excluding non-indigenous initiatives.

Recommendation # 2 - We need, therefore, to create an internal process within the indigenous community re-focusing education on the formation of the full human being via such philosophical activity as critical self-reflection.. This is best accomplished by creating a national partnership of Philosophy Departments via the Canadian Philosophy Association with the Assembly of First Nations, Congress of Indigenous Peoples, the Metis National Council, First Nations Education Steering Committee and so forth.

Recommendation # 3 – Explore the idea of an Indigenous Research Center on Thought - Note the points on research centers, think tanks, etc....this is an excellent starting point...review all the indigenous related institutions, survey centers, etc.

Recommendation # 4 – Review accessibility and maintenance issues for indigenous students studying philosophy. This includes the creation or identification of grants and scholarship opportunities for emerging indigenous philosophers.

Recommendation # 5 Look at the strength of Indigenous Outreach Programs and apply them to a strategy to introduce indigenous students to indigenous and mainstream philosophy. Think Fun Camps organized by Susan Gardner of the Philosophy Department at Capilano University would be an example.

Recommendation # 6 – Points of Entry Ideas

- School Districts and First Nations Education Authorities
- Indigenous Youth Organizations and Programming (i.e. Urban Native Youth Association)
- Indigenous Studies Programs in universities, Indigenous Education Centers, community run education initiatives.
- Youth at Risk – Homelessness Programs (Street Philosophy Projects/Programs)
- Development of the Arts (creative, written, sculptured, performing, etc.) and the role of philosophy in the creative process of story telling)
- University entrance or transfer philosophy programs that are indigenous in focus while solid on mainstream concepts in philosophy.

Recommendation # 7- Indigenous philosophy mentor program - a program that matches philosophers (retired or active) with indigenous students of philosophy. Re-create the relationship Socrates had with many of his students. This is also reflective of an elder talking or working with people to help them identify their own wisdom and gifts in life. While there is a broad consensus that indigenous thought needs to be articulated, the mentor and fields of study programs encourage indigenous scholarship at the B.A. level. While it can be done in the framework of the Honors Program, can we not be more creative, i.e. community based programming (e.g. Indigenous Studies at UBC).

Recommendation # 8 – Co-education learning – creating opportunities for graduate students and others to work side by side with indigenous programs and approaches to indigenous thought.

CONCLUSION

My own assumptions, as an indigenous undergraduate philosophy student, were out of touch with the reality expressed by Canadian philosophers. The idea of inclusivity in the mainstream field of philosophy is a notion that has wide acceptance among Canadian philosophers. The need to show that the field was not inclusive in regards to indigenous people and thought, why we should strive for inclusivity is a non-issue ; we are there in the field. What needs to happen in this regard is to figure out a vision that would outline a path towards realizing the increased participation of indigenous communities to become engaged in philosophy. Because of this basic message from Canadian philosophers, this survey paper became also an actionoriented research piece in the form of providing recommendations in each area of the survey.

How indigenous thought relates to western concepts being taught in mainstream philosophy courses has been the primary mover and shaker in creating a bond between indigenous and mainstream thought. There are problems and shortcomings with this approach but those can be fixed over time; what is exciting about this trend in philosophy is to see the creativity and diversity I which this approach has employed. Secondly, in relation to program development, there is a need again for the Lakehead M.A. program as indigenous philosophers could benefit from these types of programs as a starting point in their philosophy careers. These programs need to be built in such a way that from the beginning the native experience is relevant. Otherwise we are trying to fit the circle of indigenous thought into the square format of mainstream thinking. There is a network of philosophical traditions; let's strengthen the ties between indigenous traditions and mainstream philosophy. McNabb and McPherson in their book "Indian from the Inside" talk about an ethno-metaphysics which is also an approach worth looking at in developing education programs in this regard. I discussed the increased role of inter-disciplinary academic/community research institutes, think-tanks, etc. I in terms of the promising roles they play in

pulling mainstream philosophy closer to indigenous thought. Relationships between the academy and indigenous community need to be worked on in two directions: (1) we need to clarify the role of non-native instructors in teaching indigenous thought, and (2) the increased role of the indigenous community to take leadership in encouraging their own people, bands and constituency to re-think assumptions about philosophy and consider taking at least one course in the field. Finally, included in this report are 12 recommendations which may or may not provide a starting point for an inclusive field of philosophy. These recommendations speak to the need to study in more depth the issues and barriers that exist, the need for resources and supports for indigenous students to take philosophy, and supporting Indigenous leadership in defining their role and engagement in mainstream philosophy including initiatives around "recruitment", think tanks, lobbying and so forth. In any case the underlining recommendation is that we need to pull the philosophy and indigenous communities together to contribute to the collective process of building new pathways through philosophy.