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# Pathways of Human Understanding: An Inquiry into Western and North American Indian Worldview Structures

**LEO SCHELBERT**

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Human societies, large and small, in the past and in the present, were shaped by worldviews that not only gave shelter, but also led the individual and collective mind into captivity. Efforts to secure sustenance, to maintain bonds between peoples, to shape religious, technical, and artistic practice, such strivings have all been ‘in-formed,’ that is, have been shaped by worldviews that underlie systems of thought claiming intrinsic validity and normative meaning and show the imprint of mostly hidden structures.<sup>1</sup>

## THE MEANING OF WORLDVIEW STRUCTURE

How may a worldview structure be understood? One must grasp what it is not. It is less than a worldview, although it shapes the arrangement of its contents. It is less than religion, although it forms its core, its rituals, theologies, and codes. It is less than ideology, understood as an ordered system of thought taken as normative and based on claimed self-evidence; although a worldview structure represents simultaneously its internal force and its distillation. A worldview structure is less than philosophy, understood as an interpretative system of what is, of how humans understand, and of what humans ought to do and what not; yet it hides behind the numerous interpretative systems, often formed in the solitude of a self, but within thought styles dominant at a given time and place.

How do worldview structures differ from religions, philosophies, and ideologies? They are less a content than a form, less a visible entity than a hidden system, less a positive claim than a template employed as a matter of course.

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A worldview structure lies buried behind the textured forms, like a skeleton composed of interrelated elements. Worldviews as structures mostly remain hidden, unseen, unperceived and rarely emerge into the field of vision of a seeker's vision quest. They are taken for granted as the roads to be traveled and often escape the processes of questioning. Thus the realm of worldview structures is neither sacred practice nor embraced doctrine of what is true and normative, but the frame, the pattern, the paradigm that shapes understanding similar to language, explored as a system of signs.<sup>2</sup>

Two major forms of worldview structures shall be sketched here in order to illuminate their hidden forms and interpretative power: that of Western culture and that of the indigenous peoples of the pre-conquest northern western hemisphere.

## THE WESTERN WORLDVIEW STRUCTURE

### Tripartite and Dual Domains

The worldview structure that informs Western culture postulates fundamentally three domains, heaven, earth, and hell. Heaven is viewed as the realm of an ultimate reality, often perceived as a place, as that which is beyond the earth. The Copernican replacement of the Ptolemaic system has nearly dislodged this view in theoretical understanding, if not in everyday experience and among certain groups of faith.<sup>3</sup> The earth, and within it most radically the world of humans, is reduced to spatial and temporal irrelevance. Hell, originally too a specific place as the abode of a personal power of evil, has also largely receded into a mere metaphor of a person's mental state.<sup>4</sup>

If that tripartite worldview geography—heaven, earth, and hell—has gradually disappeared from many circles, and if religious traditions strive hard at meaning-restoring reformulations, some even by simply brushing aside the view of astrophysics as the very invention of the devil, another aspect of the Western worldview structure has remained firmly in place throughout the Western cultural tradition, the foundational dichotomy between 'nature' and 'humans.' Nature is viewed as a threefold entity: the world of inanimate forces of wind and rock and earth; the world of organic life, from micro-organisms such as viruses and bacteria to grasses, flowers, trees, and plants; the world of animals, those beings with *anima*, yet not a soul, and radically positioned below humans. In contrast to this tripartite 'nature,' humans, it is claimed, are radically different: they are animate beings endowed with reason, with self-consciousness, and with genuine decision-making power. Although the indisputable closeness between humans and animals especially within the mammalian species entails at times serious discomfort, since the proclaimed gap seems to be dangerously narrow, the special position of humans is firmly defended as unquestionable.<sup>5</sup>

In this duality, nature exists for humans who are charged to make use of it to maximize their food and energy supply and to realize their full potential as unique beings. Nature is to be used, if not abused; it is to be shaped and to be made subject in three powerful ways: in the inanimate world by technolo-

gy, in the plant world by agriculture, from seed manipulation of some ten thousand years ago to today's genetic engineering; in the world of animals by animal husbandry, that is, the religiously and philosophically sanctioned keeping of animals in captivity, mainly as a supply of meat and milk for humans. If the tripartite structure of heaven, earth, and hell has faded into the background, the two-part assumption that the world of humans is to be sharply distinguished from that of nature has become ever more enhanced by the increase of human manipulatory power derived from science, although concerned challenges have also emerged. Yet most do not question the dichotomy 'humans–nature,' but focus primarily on a specific reformulation of the relationship.

### Traits of the Western Worldview

The Western worldview structure 'Heaven–Earth–Hell,' and within it 'humans–nature' has several unique features. Four shall be mentioned. First, ultimate reality is viewed personalistically and predominantly in male terms. It is a He who is the creator, guide, judge of all that is; it is He—in some traditions of the West perceived tri-personally but in one essence—from which all ultimately derives and into whose radiant presence all returns. This personalism has been radicalized in Western culture by insisting that monotheism is a mark of unquestioned cultural superiority.<sup>6</sup>

Second, in the Western worldview structure the world is understood as hierarchically ordered: Ultimate reality is perceived as wholly separate from all else that is and in unlimited control; human reality is seen as separate from anything else within the earth; the reality of nature is understood as holistically gifted to humans by ultimate divine decree. This hierarchical worldview structure organically translates into economic, social, and political orders: the rule of the haves over the have-nots, men over women, the strong over the weak, the learned over the ignorant, the priesthood over the laity.<sup>7</sup>

Besides being personalistically and hierarchically oriented, the Western worldview claims, third, a radical historicity of the created world: "*En arche en ho logos*, in the beginning was the Word": It is all movement from a defined start to a defined finish when all the endless becoming and decaying will end in favor of eternal being-ness.<sup>8</sup> All except ultimate reality is historical and, often adding a unique twist, is claimed to be in an ascent, if not without fall-backs and retrogression. Human history is declared to be a history of progress, to be upward-bound, ever more increasing human skill, knowledge, and, hopefully, also wisdom.<sup>9</sup>

To the claim of historicity a fourth trait is to be added, a mind-set of dualism which claims an all pervasive polarity of what is: the duality of positive and negative, of human and divine, of humans and nature, of right and wrong, of virtue and sin, of salvation and damnation. The duality is perhaps most decisively practiced in epistemology: by constructing the duality of subject and object, the latter assumed to be observable, measurable, and to be numerically weighted with reliable exactitude.<sup>10</sup>

### Origins of the Western Worldview Structure

Where does this worldview structure come from? Its origins are clearly non “Western.” The West’s main cultural tradition is “derived”—it is not original to Europe. The indigenous traditions of European peoples such as the Celtic, Germanic, Slavic, and Etruscan have vanished or have survived only in a fragmentary and submerged form which today some hope to revive in the so-called Wiccan movement.<sup>11</sup> Since the Roman invasions Western Europe’s indigenous traditions have been replaced with Middle Eastern traditions by violence or in a process of gradual persuasion. Some claim that the first recognizable formulation of the tripartite and dualistic view of reality which so decisively marks Western culture reaches back some 3200 years when Zarathustra first formulated his creed in the southern Asian steppe lands: He proclaimed the heavens as Ahura Mazda’s abode and that of the angels, the earth as the domain of humans and of their flocks, and hell as the place of Angra Mainyu and the devas. The Zoroastrian vision was gradually reformulated by Hebrew tribes and crystallized into Judaism, which in turn became reformulated into Christianity and then both, Judaism and Christianity, into the faith of Islam.<sup>12</sup>

This is not to make light of the profound differences between these traditions, which evolved over three millennia, or to deny autonomous elements in each, but only to point to the sameness of their fundamental structure. These Middle Eastern traditions, which have shaped Western culture, view reality as composed—though in varying ways—of heaven, earth, and hell; all understand ultimate reality in personalist terms: Zarathustra as Ahura Mazda, Moses as Jahwe, Jesus as Abba (Father), Muhammad as Allah, all opposed by the antagonists of the divine, by Angra Mainyu, Satan, Belzebub, or Iblis with their evil forces of varied names. All Middle Eastern traditions, furthermore, know of a central formulator, anchored in a particular historical moment: Zarathustra, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad. In all of these traditions and their numerous derivatives also the dualism ‘nature–humans’ remains untouched as a reflection of the more radical duality ‘created–uncreated,’ from which derive the dualities virtue versus sin, good versus bad, what is of the spirit versus what is of the flesh.

Finally, directional historicity rules supreme: The events of the world, human and non-human, all move from a defined beginning to a cataclysmic end that includes not only a postulated eternal bliss for the saved—a beatitude sometimes expressed as pure beatific vision or in terms of sensual joy—but also an eternal world of excruciating torment for the damned.

These basic structural elements seem to lead to another shared trait, the stance of exclusivity. Except perhaps for the Baha’i, a creed derived from the Shi’ite Muslim tradition, the mainstream of the faithful is comforted by their respective faith’s claim of exclusive validity: Zarathustra does not accommodate Moses, Moses does not accommodate Jesus, Jesus does not accommodate Muhammad.<sup>13</sup> Hostile incompatibility, furthermore, is intensified by textualization. The making of texts is indeed a magnificent gift to human memory: How rewarding to read in the Avesta, to savor David’s Psalms of praise or the prophets’ invectives against a stubborn people, to ponder the claims of the

Sermon of the Mount, or to study a Sura of the Holy Qur'an. Yet texts ossify what has been said or what has occurred: Gone (or perceivable from a faint distance only) is the vibrancy of the moment, the power of intonation, the subtlety of body language, and the mood pervading a given situation. But more importantly, texts fixate: If a statement is attributed to an ultimate authoritative voice—if a text pronounces in the name of Ahura Mazda or of Jahwe or of Abba or of Allah, if it is textualized as the authentic voice of Zarathustra or Moses or Jesus or Muhammad, then there is no recourse. Truth stands against falsehood and struggle emerges within a tradition over meaning: literal meaning, allegoric meaning, and spiritual meaning.

Is it too devious to view in these structural patterns a deep-seated pathology of the Middle Eastern and, by derivation, also of the Western mind, having emerged most powerfully after 1500 C.E. when Europeans and their descendants embarked on their partly successful world conquest? Although it seems that in all human societies religion and politics intertwined and on occasion entered each other's service, in the Middle Eastern and by derivation in the Western cultural traditions, exclusivity, hostility, and persecution have remained endemic.<sup>14</sup> The West in its European as well as in its neo-European core that emerged since the sixteenth century, to use a Western chronological system, has been wedded to the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio*, that is, in whose region (I live), in whose religion or ideology (I need to dwell).

How foreign is to the Middle Eastern and, by derivation, the Western tradition the spirit of the Twelfth Rock Edict of the Buddhist Emperor Ashoka, who had ruled large parts of India in the third century B.C.E. (265–238 or 273–232). He had this message carved in stone, which reads in part: "His Majesty ... gives praise to all religious teachers. ... Other people's teachers should be given praise in every way. By doing so one profits one's own religion and benefits the other's religion. By doing otherwise one damages one's own religion and does harm to the other person's."<sup>15</sup>

To summarize: The Western worldview structure, which hides behind the numerous ideologies, religious persuasions, and philosophies of the West, is a derivative of Middle Eastern traditions. Although between them exist trenchant differences, they reflect a unity of a worldview structure that is rooted in rival authoritative texts of revelational claim that derived from mutually exclusive authoritative founders, but defined the structure of reality in similar terms.

## THE WORLDVIEW STRUCTURE OF THE PEOPLES OF THE NORTHERN WESTERN HEMISPHERE

### The Great Difference

If one enters the pre-conquest religio-philosophical world of the indigenous peoples of the northern western hemisphere as it has survived to this day, one faces not only numerous forms of alien rituals, sacred songs, and religio-philosophical expressions, but also a basic worldview structure that is radical-

ly different from that of the conquerors from across the Atlantic whose religio-philosophical outlook had been shaped by the traditions of the Middle East. Around 1600 C.E. the some seven to nine million indigenous peoples were organized into over one hundred different nations which followed their unique religious practice, shaped their own set of sacred symbols, and devised their own rituals enveloping their economic seasonal activities as well as the stages of their personal lives.<sup>16</sup> Like the traditions of other peoples, theirs too have evolved, although since the conquest, under trying conditions of an all-encompassing alien domination. Among these peoples one searches in vain for canonical sacred texts,<sup>17</sup> for exclusive authoritative formulators, for a dualist division of the world that opposes the natural world to the human one, for a directional view of time, and for a personalistically conceived ultimate reality. To describe the indigenous worldview structure proves difficult. From the start Euro-American justification of conquest transformed the radical difference between the cultures of the invaders and those of the invaded into a claimed primitivity and savagery. Although today explicit savagist or primitivist views have nearly vanished, reductionist descriptions that view American Indian religions as devoid of a complex religio-philosophical foundation are still firmly in place.

What the invader peoples saw was indeed shocking to their sensibility: a buffalo bladder as a sacred ritual's centerpiece;<sup>18</sup> a first salmon caught in the spawning journey upriver brought to the expectant assembled people in a sacred manner, whose skeleton is given back to the river after ritual consumption to prove to all the salmon that they will be treated with the proper reverence and gratitude;<sup>19</sup> the leaving behind of half the kill in a harsh winter's hunt so that the other meat-eating beings such as the wolves and coyotes suffering from hunger might also find some relief, at the very time when the hunter's people faced famine due to white incursions and the concomitant destruction of the basis of their sustenance;<sup>20</sup> or, finally, after a successful hunt the giving of "thanks by offering tobacco to the thunders, trees, stars, and moon, thus nurturing these beings in return for their gift of meat" and thus acknowledging the animals' spiritual "masters."<sup>21</sup>

It is understandable that the conqueror peoples thought they had met up with incomprehensible primitivity. The indigenous peoples seemed not to grasp a most basic "fact" of reality, the duality 'humans–nature,' and especially the difference between humans and the animal world, those central features of the Middle East-derived Euro-American worldview structure. Furthermore, there was the absence of the duality 'God' and 'Satan' as well as the consequent duality of the 'good' and the 'sinful.' The indigenous peoples' religio-philosophical outlook seemed to know neither divine transcendence nor a personalistically perceived absolute power, nor a need for salvation. Their invocation of sacred powers was (and remains) this-worldly, an activation of supportive mutuality since for them "the spirits are relatives rather than despots."<sup>22</sup>

### **The American Indian Worldview Structure**

What kind of worldview structure hides behind such inconceivable unorthodoxy and its consequent religious practice as followed by peoples such as the

Pequot, Narrangansett, Iroquois, the Menominee, Anishinaabeg, Osakiwug, the Creek, Cherokee, Choctaw, the Lakota, Pueblo, or Tlingit? Some scholars claim that it is absurd to search for a common core in the numerous religious practices of the indigenous peoples of the northern western hemisphere. The forms were too different, they assert, and the various peoples had nothing substantive in common. Yet others disagree, and it seems possible to distill in the numerous externally different traditions a common worldview structure which has remained basic and may be sketched as follows:<sup>23</sup>

At the center of whatever is or was lies an ineffable mystery named differently by different peoples with words such as Orenda, Manitou, Wakan Tanka, or Maek Awaetok. It is a view that has been pressed into the Middle East-derived mistranslation “Great Spirit” and has been misdirected by the talk of “animism,” the supposed indigenous view that everything had a “spirit” as something personalistic, separate, and independent from its manifestation.<sup>24</sup> Yet the personalism that marks Western thought and is so central to Indo-European languages such as English is absent in the indigenous thought of the peoples of the northern western hemisphere. In their perception all that is represents interdependent formations of sacred forces which are in constant and complex interaction; some of these formations are viewed as immense power such as the sun, storms, and rains; others are delicate such as the butterflies and the ants, or humble as the moles underground, yet knowledgeable of the world below that of humans.<sup>25</sup>

The indigenous mind perceives this all-encompassing set of formations of sacred forces as people—as four-legged people, as two-legged people, as crawling, swimming or winged people; as people that are green, or stony, or soft. Trees are called standing people and their bark or sap, if collected for human use, are approached in a sense of ritually enhanced gratitude. Thus in the indigenous worldview there is no such entity as ‘nature’; all forms of being are on a similar plane, are interdependent, are ‘peoples,’ surely different, yet not hierarchically ordered in the Middle East-derived Western cultural sense. Neither is there a supreme creator being, although missionary and anthropological efforts as well as those of a respectful, but Western-shaped mentality have tried to press indigenous thought into such categories.<sup>26</sup> Not that the indigenous mind is not keenly aware of difference: The ant people are certainly different from the wolf people, or the “standing people,” the trees, from the two-legged people, yet it is a difference of degree in representing the primal force, not of essence. The two-legged people appear to the indigenous understanding as the most problematic because they seem to be the least attuned to the great interdependent play of forces, yet at the same time ritually charged to safeguard the interplay of cosmic energies from destructive disharmony for the benefit of all ‘peoples.’<sup>27</sup>

### **Traits of the Indigenous Worldview Structure**

Several features of the indigenous worldview structure may be touched upon. First, the indigenous view of the sacred does not root its religiosity in the postulate of a supreme transcendent being who is ontologically wholly different



from all else that is. Terms such as theism, pantheism, or polytheism, therefore, have no place in an analysis of the indigenous worldview structure. Sacredness means radical kinship and interdependence, an ongoing “cosmic give-and-take”<sup>28</sup> among beings large and small, creative and destructive, visible, invisible, or dimly perceived, beneficent and dangerous, all interacting on a spectral scale of mutuality rather than in a dualistic opposition. The invocation of sacred power is “a call to friends rather than a supplication,” and in the various ceremonies the “spirit peoples” are fed in reciprocity.<sup>29</sup> The earth is thus not perceived as the playground of good and evil, humankind is not seen as embedded in a divine plan, and no deity bestows its blessing or curse, its eternal reward or damnation. Instead numerous names such as the “thunder beings” or “the grandfathers” or the “corn mother” point to the great primal force that forms, permeates, and is the universe. Such names are powerful visualizations of what might best be named “the Ineffable Mystery.”

As in other traditions, one also meets in American Indian visualizations of the sacred the ambivalent figure of the trickster, a being imagined as at once sacred, creative, mischievous, ingenious, funny, bawdy, and lazy. Often clothed in the garb of the coyote, yet capable of numerous impersonations and transformations at will, the trickster not only mirrors the radical ambivalence of all that is, but also highlights the two-legged peoples’ propensity to foul up the this-worldly sacred order, and he metaphorically unmask their all too easy ability to be out of tune with the great cosmic song.<sup>30</sup>

Second, the indigenous worldview structure postulates a radical immanent alertness. Although there is no divine sovereign, nor sin, nor a devil such as Angra Mainyu or Satan or Iblis as a divinity’s antipode, there is the constant awareness of the danger of disjuncture and thus of the effort needed to safeguard and promote the interdependent harmony of all that is. Especially the guardians of the sacred, that is those charged with the welfare of their communities, constantly need to face impending trouble that is experienced by individuals, the human community, or the world. By ritually harnessing creative power, their “central object of work and prayer” becomes “the people’s immortality on earth.”<sup>31</sup>

The indigenous worldview perceives all beings enmeshed in a cosmic dance. This perception of the world is echoed in modern science. Has not quantum physics led the Western mind in a roundabout way towards a parallel understanding of the universe in which myriad forms of energy formations exist and act in a complex interplay of creativity and destruction? The physicist Werner Heisenberg declared: Western “science [now] classifies the world ... not into different groups of objects but into different groups of connections. ... The world thus appears to be a complicated tissue of events, in which connections of different kinds alternate or overlap or combine and thereby determine the texture of the whole.”<sup>32</sup> In the indigenous worldview structure then the central dualisms of object and subject, of good and evil, and of redemptive suffering as payment for trespasses of the divine will are absent in favor of a view that reality needs a constant “re-tuning,” necessary especially for the two-legged people in their dealings with all their relations, the other ‘peoples.’

Third, absent in the indigenous worldview structure is directionality, the assumption of a linear flow of the world's history from a defined start to a defined finish. Human beginnings are certainly interpreted in numerous emergence (not creation) stories, but their intent is not to present events-bound facticity, but to reveal the inner workings of the world. For the mind of the indigenous peoples of the northern western hemisphere human perception is radically metaphorical and "The Metaphor Is the Message."<sup>33</sup> The history of the world and within it that of humans is neither linear nor moving towards a divinely set end, but circular, a flow of becoming, blossoming, withering, and re-becoming. As Chief Seattle (1788–1866) declared: "Tribe follows tribe, nation follows nation, like the waves of the sea."<sup>34</sup> History is symbolized in the rhythm of the seasons, labeled not in abstract names of lunar months, but in terms of recurring events surrounding the green peoples and the four-legged peoples. The world is understood in a rhythmic space-time continuum that is defined by the coordinates above and below, and especially east and west, north and south, and rooted in the landscape where a particular people belongs.<sup>35</sup>

Fourth, the indigenous people are not tied to orthodoxies, to patterns of correct thinking and believing in indisputable and divinely sanctioned claims, but are engaged in orthopraxis or ortho-ritualism, that is, the proper use of sacred items and the proper performance of sacred rites as the activation of life-preserving spiritual energies so that all 'peoples' might live. Interacting with the 'relatives,' that is, all the 'peoples' that exist, has to occur in a ritual manner in order to assure the proper interplay of creative forces and to ward off those that harm and destroy. Acquisitive agriculture, dominating animal husbandry, and a power-seeking technology were thus tamed by the assumption of a sacred interdependence of all beings that demands proper reverential distance.<sup>36</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In order to put further relief into this comparative sketch, an outline of the worldview structure underlying the traditions of India or of the African Yoruba or Pacific Island peoples would be telling.<sup>37</sup> Yet the above given comparison perhaps demonstrates sufficiently the challenge of an attempt to historicize religious-philosophical traditions not in the richness of their outward and spiritual expressions, but in their underlying structure. One view claims that such efforts severely diminish the authoritative orienting power of the varied forms of creeds such as Judaism, Christianity, or Islam. Diminished, too, is the authority of secular forms derived from traditions rooted in the Enlightenment of the West such as the rationalism of Locke, the philosophical idealism of Hegel, the materialism of Marx, or of other play forms of Western thought systems proclaimed as philosophical truth. These traditions are unmasked as sharing the same structures, if in different outward garbs. The boat of human understanding, to shift metaphors, is thus being pushed out from the safe harbor of a given religious or philosophical tradition into the ocean of numerous ideological possibilities as pathways of human understanding of the world.

However, if historicizing worldview structures means losing the claimed self-evidence of the foundation of the various dominant systems of thought devised by humans, such an effort may also liberate. Wilhelm Dilthey observed joyfully: "These are the last consequences of historical consciousness. It breaks the last chains which philosophy and natural science have sustained. It wholly liberates the human being. But at the same time it gives this liberated person an immeasurable wealth and saves the soul's unity. Because now she may, comforted, venerate in every one of these worldviews a part of the total truth."<sup>38</sup> The radical Other comes into view as neither inferior, nor underdeveloped, nor savage. The stance of the Other becomes understood not as a wayward variation of the phenomenon of human culture, but as a structural Other whose traditions are not *equal* in the sense of sameness, but *equivalent* in their interpretative power and sophistication. That process demands a divesting of one's mind from conquest-derived ideologies such as explicit or implied primitivism and animism, as well as from well-meant but distorting attempts of reading the structural Other in terms of the Middle East-derived patterns that dominate the mind of the West.

An examination of the various worldview traditions may lead to several possible answers. Some will embrace their "cradle worldview," as one student aptly referred to the tradition one has been born into without choice, with ever greater appreciation as their proper way of understanding the world and its mysteries, and they will remain firmly rooted in what it has to offer to human understanding. If for others the cradle worldview should have ceased to be a useful guide to an understanding of the mysteries of life and death, of joy and pain, of the rise and fall of cultures and peoples, they may follow the Hindu path of *ishtadevata*. In the Hindu Bhakti tradition a person is encouraged to discover her or his very own *ishta*, the representation of sacred ultimate reality that seems to a person to be existentially right, be it the in-figuration of Kali, or Krishna, or Vishnu, or a non-personal Ultimate named Brahman. The choices of others are thereby neither denied nor slighted nor attacked, but given silent inner recognition. In exploring the pathways of human understanding one may, regardless of one's cradle worldview, similarly encounter a worldview that represents one's existentially proper *ishta* which may serve as a guide in the brief journey through life. Thus also the indigenous pre-conquest religio-philosophical traditions of the northern western hemisphere that today have gained renewed vitality may offer to many a powerful interpretation of the world and of the beings that people it, although that understanding is not easily grasped in its inherent interpretative power and even less easily properly practiced.

Finally, in contemplating different worldviews some may, instead of making a particular choice, opt to remain at sea, viewing with awe the numerous pathways of understanding human ingenuity has designed over the millennia. They may be nourished by the very plurality of worldviews they encounter in the global village. This does not mean indifferent relativism, but to remain suspended in inquiring effort and to live "in the question" rather than in a specific answer.

After the fall of cultural walls in the present age, all need to become aware of their radical *Ortung*, their bondage into a specific place and time by birth,

or by their *ishta*, their existentially embraced choice. The immense landscapes of other traditions need not only to be recognized, but also to be given respectful contemplation. Perhaps recognizing this great challenge may be an integral part in the search for peace on the planet earth, a peace to which a conscious pluralistic effort that equivalently includes the traditions of the "Other" may significantly contribute.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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#### NOTES

1. A pioneering work on worldviews is Wilhelm Dilthey, *Weltanschauungslehre: Abhandlungen zur Philosophie der Philosophie. Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 8 (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1931); pages 75–118 of this work are translated into English in H. P. Rickman, ed. and transl., *W. Dilthey: Selected Writings* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 133–154. Studies that address the aspect of Dilthey's wide-ranging ideas include: Michael Ermath, *Wilhelm Dilthey: The Critique of Historical Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 323–338; H. P. Rickman, *Wilhelm Dilthey: Pioneer of Human Studies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 47–51; and Theodore Plantinga, *Historical Understanding in the Thought of Wilhelm Dilthey* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 139–143. A concise overview of Dilthey's thought is Rudolf A. Makkreel, "Dilthey, Wilhelm, 1833–1911," *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward Craig (London: Routledge, 1998), 3: 77–83; also see Rudolf A. Makkreel and Frithjof Rodi, eds., *Selected Works/Dilthey*, 5 vols. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985). Rickman aptly summarizes Dilthey's position: "The human metaphysical impulse craves a *Weltanschauung* (a world-view) which combines a coherent picture of reality with an ideal of life and principles of conduct," 47. Although Dilthey's suggestive *Weltanschauungslehre* is advanced for its time, the comment of Vine Deloria, Jr., applies: A major task is "to understand man's experiences ... from a world viewpoint, not simply a Western one," *God Is Red* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1973), 123. A valuable guide to such a task is Heinz Kimmerle, *Interkulturelle Philosophie: Zur Einführung* (Hamburg: Verlag Junius, 2002), with an international bibliography, 157–166. Quotations from foreign language sources are given in my translation.

2. In the section "The Structure of Worldview," in *Weltanschauungslehre*, Dilthey does not sharply distinguish between the content and the structure of a worldview, yet states suggestively: "Each life-condition (*Lebensverhältnis*) evolves into a system (*Gefüge*) in which the same forms of approach are structurally related. And thus also worldviews are ordered structures (*regelmässige Gebilde*)," 83. He declares, "The ultimate root of a worldview is life," *ibid.*, 78.

3. The interpretative religio-philosophical struggles that the triumph of the Copernican system unleashed in Western Christendom are impressively documented in Dava Sobel, *Galileo's Daughter: A Historical Memoir of Science, Faith, and Love* (New York: Walker, 1999).

4. Markwart Herzog states: “In the mainline churches hell does not play a foundational (tragende) role anymore”; see *Metzler Lexikon Religion* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1999), 64. The influential theologian Karl Rahner interprets hell as “a definitive state which man himself has achieved on his own behalf” and he dismisses Jesus’ “images (fire, worm, darkness, etc.)” as part of “the mental furniture of [his] contemporary apocalyptic” tradition; see *Encyclopedia of Theology* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), 602–604, quotation 604, 603. Fundamentalist groups, in contrast, insist that hell is a place and an eternal state of torment for the damned; see the numerous doctrinal statements in *The Encyclopedia of American Religions: Religious Creeds*, eds. J. Gordon Melton and James Sauer, vol. 2 (Detroit: Gale Research, 1994), esp. 251–394.

5. These complex issues are discussed by Gary L. Francione, *Rain Without Thunder: The Ideology of the Animal Rights Movement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996). The study contrasts the “Animal Rights and Animal Welfare” ideologies and concludes, “the animal protection movement will continue to march in one direction—backwards,” 230. See also Erica Fudge, *Perceiving Animals: Humans and Beasts in Early Modern English Culture* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000). In what Richard Ryder called ‘speciesism’ in 1971, three claims of Western ideology are at issue: the Jewish and Christian view that humans are created in God’s image (a position anathema to Islam); the Aristotelian view that only humans are endowed with rationality; and the Augustinian position that original sin meant the descent of humans to the level of animals, especially as expressed in sexuality.

6. Stanley Walens formulates: “anthropologists ... have been forced to revise their ideas about the course of human intellectual history ... as a gradual progress from fantasy to rationality,” that is “from animal worship, through a number of stages, to the worship of an anthropomorphic but invisible deity.” He claims that “many of the spurious facts and interpretations of these schemes remain unquestioned”; see “Animals,” in *The Encyclopedia of Religions*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 1: 291–296; quotation, 292.

7. Joseph Bruchac III observes succinctly, “the Western view of the world ... remains shaped by linear thinking, straight lines, and hierarchies”; see “The Circle of Stories,” in *Buried Roots and Indestructible Seeds: The Survival of American Indian Life in Story, History, and Spirit* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), 14; Vine Deloria, Jr., *Singing for a Spirit: A Portrait of the Dakota Sioux* (Santa Fe: Clear Light Publishers, 1999), “They always camped in a circle ... so that they could remember that they were all equals,” 155.

8. Western ideas about history as a directional flow are sketched by Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949); however, see also the unique study of Michael Murray, *Modern Philosophy of History: Its Origin and Destination* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970). The study traces the main positions from Martin Heidegger over Hegel and Joachim of Flora to Augustine and it critically complements Löwith’s book.

9. A keen critique is offered by Ali A. Mazrui, “‘Progress’: Illegitimate Child of Judeo-Christian Universalism and Western Ethnocentrism—A Third World Critique,” in *Progress: Fact or Illusion?* eds. Leo Marx and Bruce Mazlish (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 153–174; Mazrui claims, “The Jews taught the world about one universal God—and then identified *themselves* as the chosen people. Similarly the West told the world about the universalism of both science and the gospel of Jesus—and then the white man of the West put himself forward as ... the role model of humanity,” 154.

10. See Ugo Bianchi, "Dualism," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 4: 506–512, a summary of his *Dualismo Religioso: Saggio Storico e Etnologico*, 2nd. rev. ed. (Roma: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1952); Bianchi applies the term "to those religions, to those ideological systems whose mythology implies an original and substantial dichotomy in relation to superhuman and pre-human beings who rule the world ... [and] who are viewed as antagonistic and evil on the basis of intrinsic nature," 7.

11. See Melton and Sauer, eds. *Religious Creeds*, 2:447–451, for neo-pagan and Wiccan statements of faith.

12. Mary Boyce, *Zoroastrianism: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), 1, views "Zoroastrianism as the oldest of the revealed world religions" and claims that "it probably had more influence on mankind, directly and indirectly, than any other single faith ... and some of its leading doctrines were adopted by Judaism, Christianity, and Islam." See also her *Zoroastrianism: Its Antiquity and Constant Vigor* (Costa Mesa, CA: Biblioteca Persica, 1992), 62–82. Her observation resonates also for the later Middle Eastern traditions: "Zoroaster ... concentrated his thoughts and devotion on Mazda himself, the mightiest of Beings, whose Holy Spirit yet enters into everyone who is worthy to receive it," 71.

13. For the relationship of Islam to Moses see Brannon M. Wheeler, *Moses in the Qur'an and Islamic Exegesis* (London: Routledge Courzon, 2002); for Islam's view of Jesus, see Tarif Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001). Although Khalidi observes "certain broad atmospheric continuities between the Qur'an and certain books of the Old and New Testaments, canonical and apocryphal," he finds that "The Quranic Jesus ... has little in common with the Jesus of the Gospel," 16. See also Roger Arnaldez, "Three Messengers and Three Messages," in *Three Messengers for One God*, trans. Gerald W. Schlabach with Mary Louise Gude and David B. Burrell (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 1–55.

14. Dilthey, *Weltanschauungslehre*, laments "the familiar, yet vexing fact that world-views vary so widely and conflict so sharply" and seem to be "at war with each other," 47.

15. Quoted by L. S. Cousins, "Buddhism," in *A New Handbook of Living Religions*, ed. John R. Hinnells (London: Penguin Books, 1997), 379.

16. Several encyclopedic works may be mentioned: Duane Champagne, ed., *The Native North American Almanac* (Detroit: Gale Research, 1994); Frederick R. Hoxie, ed., *Encyclopedia of North American Indians* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1996); Sharon Malinowski and Anna Sheets, eds., *The Gale Encyclopedia of Native American Tribes*, 4 vols. (Detroit: Gale, 1998); and Rayna Green, ed., *The British Museum Encyclopedia of Native North America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999); this volume, designed for the general reader, combines impressively explanatory texts, primary sources, and pictorial materials.

17. Vine Deloria, Jr., however, observes: "Neihardt's *Black Elk* and *When the Tree Flowered*, and *The Sacred Pipe* by Joseph Epes Brown, the basic works of the Black Elk theological tradition, now bid fair to become the canon or at least the central core of a North American theological canon which will someday challenge the Eastern and Western traditions as a way of looking at the world"; see the foreword to John G. Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks*, Twenty-First Century Edition (Lincoln: University of

Nebraska Press, 2000), xvi. See, however, the incisive critique by Julian Rice, *Black Elk's Story: Distinguishing Its Lakota Purpose* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1991), esp. 15-35; the author stresses the importance of the transcripts, published as *The Sixth Grandfather: Black Elk's Teachings Given to John G. Neihardt*, ed. Raymond J. DeMallie (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984).

18. *The Sacred Pipe: Black Elk's Account of the Seven Rites of the Oglala Sioux*, recorded and edited by Joseph Epes Brown (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989), 106-107.

19. See George M. Guilmet and David Lloyd Whited, "American Indian and Non-Indian Philosophies of Technology and Their Differential Impact on the Environment of the Southern Puget Sound," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 26, 1 (2002): 36-41.

20. *Black Elk Speaks*, 49-50.

21. Kenneth M. Morrison, "Native American Religions: Creating Through Cosmic Give-and-Take," in *Native North American Almanac*, ed. Champagne, 639; also see James Wilson, *The Earth Shall Weep: A History of Native America* (New York: Grove Press, 1998), 25-26.

22. Rice, *Black Elk's Story*, 25.

23. Among numerous other valuable titles see Deloria, *God Is Red*; Jamake Highwater, *The Primal Mind: Vision and Reality in American Indian America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981); Joseph Epes Brown, *The Spiritual Legacy of the American Indian* (New York: Crossroads, 1982); Arthur Versluis, *The Elements of Native American Traditions* (Rockport, MA: Element, 1993); J. Donald Hughes, *American Indian Ecology* (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1983; 1996).

24. Rice, *Black Elk's Story*, seems to suggest that "spirit" should be understood as a metaphor pointing to the process of activating power; he observes, "Embodiment is the culmination of the spiritual process," 28.

25. Rice, *Black Elk's Story*, 68-69, 71, 93-94.

26. The term "spirit," especially as used in the term "Great Spirit," is misleading, not the least on a linguistic basis since the English language seems to lack a proper word for the reality toward which indigenous terms point. Concerning the thought-shaping force of language see Benjamin Lee Whorf, "An American Indian Model of the Universe," in *Language, Thought, and Reality: Selected Writings*, ed. John B. Carroll (New York: Technology Press of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and John Wiley and Sons, 1956), 57-86.

27. Rice, *Black Elk's Story*, formulates it concisely: "Lakota religion enhances life on earth through ritual disciplines," 65, and "The ritualizing of physical necessity helps to create an existence of joy and meaning," 67, a principle that seems to apply also to other indigenous religio-philosophical traditions. Consequently, "neglecting or improperly performing rituals" was a major trespass, 65.

28. Morrison, "Native American Religions," 633.

29. Rice, *Black Elk's Story*, 28.

30. See Kimberly Blaeser, "Trickster: A Compendium," in *Buried Roots*, 47-66, with pertinent bibliographical titles.

31. Rice, *Black Elk's Story*, 39.

32. Quoted by Peter Matthiessen in *The Snow Leopard* (New York: Penguin, 1987), 64; an attempt to locate the passage in Heisenberg's publications remained unsuccessful.

33. Rice, *Black Elk's Story*, 148, title of "Conclusion."
34. Quoted in Deloria, *God Is Red*, 115; see the whole chapter "The Concept of History," 111–117. Deloria suggests a view that parallels the traditions of India.
35. Deloria, *God Is Red*, 75; and Arthur Versluis, *Earth: The Spiritual Landscape of Native America* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 1992), 102–112. John Loftin, "Traditional Practices Among Contemporary Indians," in *The Native North American Almanac*, ed. Duane Champagne (Detroit: Gale Research Inc., 1994), 649, states succinctly: ". . . space always has a sacred center."
36. William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), describes in detail the incompatibility of the economic ideals and resulting economic systems of the indigenous peoples with those of the invader peoples, yet without probing the underlying divergent religio-philosophical positions. He shows that both peoples were shapers of their environments, but in radically different ways. Whereas the indigenous world approached their surroundings from the perspective of symbiosis, the Euro-Americans understood their task in the light of the biblical command to make the earth subject to them, if in proper stewardship. The article by Guilmet and Whited, "American Indian and Non-Indian Philosophies of Technology" relating to the Puget Sound is a superb case study of the issues involved (*American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 26 [2002], 36–41).
37. See, for instance, Heinrich Zimmer, *Philosophies of India*, ed. Joseph Campbell (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969); on the Yoruba, see E. Thomas Lawson, *Religions of Africa* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1985), 50–76; Michael Kioni Dudley, *Man, God, and Nature* (Honolulu: NaKane oka Malo Press, 1990), 9–29.
38. "Handschriftliche Zusätze ... Zur Weltanschauungslehre," vol. 8, 218–224. Dilthey wrote the passage for an address titled "Traum" [Dream] which he gave on the occasion of his seventieth birthday, but did not use this passage.